chapter 4 Contexts of gender construction in school: Analysis of the hidden curriculum

This chapter presents the analysis of the data obtained through ethnographic fieldwork. The texts generated from the observations, interviews and interactions were 'taken apart' and analysed on the basis of codes developed. The principal steps in coding for the analysis are shown in Chapter 3, Figures 3.3 and 3.4. After the final coding stage, significant themes were identified. Clusters of these themes pertaining to distinct analytical areas were classified into domains. Episodes from observations relating to these themes were grouped together. Episodes which emerged as most representative on each theme will be used in this chapter. The interview data was also grouped by themes; where these overlap/supplement/contradict observational data was noted. Data from other sources were treated in a similar manner. This marked the final stage of triangulation.

There is extensive citing from fieldnotes throughout these descriptions – these are marked with fieldnote tags indicating the episode number, the date and the space where the observation/interaction occurred For example (ep7/8.9/4a) indicates that the citation is from episode 7, on 8 September, in Class 4a.(PO is used for principal's office, PG for playground) In later sections of the chapter, analytic schema developed to demonstrate the various interconnections between the themes are used as a basis for discussion.

The chapter has been organised around two distinct areas. Elaboration of these areas rest on a combination of description and analysis. The first has to do with the experience of doing ethnographic fieldwork and the positioning of the researcher in school settings. These experiences are described in the first section of this chapter.

The second area of analytical significance is the placing of gender construction within the holistic contexts—the 'larger picture'– of interaction within the school. Here observational data of teachers' beliefs and practices are used to identify contexts and domains of

construction within these contexts. Description of contexts is crucial to understand the emergence of the themes, and the second section attempts to do this. It is hoped that these 'thick descriptions' will give a sense of how particular patterns emerged in the data. These descriptions are based on observations in the classroom and other spaces of the school, like the playground, corridor, children's interactions among themselves, teachers' interactions during recess, etc. Interwoven in the descriptions are reflections on my role as the 'outsider' in these spaces, which are crucial to a holistic understanding of the contexts.

It is not possible to understand the meaning children give to symbolic constructions of gender within the school contexts which constitute the hidden curriculum without examining their social worlds outside the school and how these articulate with their school experience. This helps to unravel the logic by which they arrive at understanding their gendered identities in school, as well as construct gender themselves through interactional practices. In Chapter 5, children's responses to the hidden curriculum are examined through analysis of interviews conducted with them.

4.1 Unfolding

The metaphor of travel is an anthropological trope which effectively describes the researcher's journey through an ethnographic study of people's experiences - the rituals, practices and beliefs which characterise their culture . The ethnographer is always 'within and without' this culture, attempting to understand and record, but without the conviction of an insider (Geertz:1973). The journey, as it unfolds, becomes more complex and intellectually challenging, and therefore more difficult to describe. The following section attempts to describe the beginning of the ethnographic journey to understand the constructions of gender in school culture.

4.1.1 Finding a field site

Knowing little about the realities of schooling for poor children, I needed to spend some time in such a school and gain some preliminary understanding of this experience, what it meant for both children and teachers. I also needed exposure to doing ethnography – how to build competency in seeing, understanding and knowing, being able to communicate in different contexts, building self-confidence in my ability to be 'systematic' and 'authentic'

in my observations. The third reason was that I needed to know how I would be received as an outsider to the setting. I was handicapped by my lack of knowledge of Gujarati, and therefore had to choose a Hindi-medium school. Although my Hindi was clearly not good, a working knowledge – enough to understand the nuances of speech – was, I felt, enough.

Navjivan, the school that I found best suited these criteria,was a private, trust-run primary school in the middle of a main vegetable market of the city. The sounds, smells and sights of the market breathed an air of reality into this school. Such proximity to reality is rare in elite private schools, which are often physically cut off from the flow of everyday life. The school itself was around 50 metres long, partitioned into five small cubicles – four served as classrooms, and the fifth as the principal's office. There were two batches of classes – the senior classes (Classes 5-7) were held in the morning, and the junior classes (Classes 1-4) in the afternoon.

Working in a Hindi medium school meant that the children were distinctively placed in the urban context. They were children of migrants to the city, mainly from the Hindi-speaking states, and often first generation learners. I learned from the principal and teachers that most of these children's fathers were vegetable vendors in the market: the North India Association which ran the school had representatives of the more prosperous wholesale vegetable business of the city. A few children had fathers working in the joint sector petrochemicals industry and had got transferred here from other states. The principal said she would allow me to do my study in the school only on condition that I wrote a positive report about the school – that if the 'Trust people' came on inspection, I should tell them that I am from the university and that the teaching is good in the school.

The teachers in the school – three women, in particular – all came from middle-class families. Their children had all been, or were still in, convent schools. Although they received very low salaries, it was common to give high donations for the teaching jobs in the school. Nonetheless, since the 'work was not difficult' and they liked doing 'social service', they preferred teaching here. (I also learned during the course of my study that they gave private tuition to the children to supplement their income from teaching.) Many

of the teachers in the past had joined corporation schools after having taught here, which, as the teachers pointed out, meant higher salaries, more perks, and less to do.

The principal and teachers – one of whom was doing a diploma in the university and was my primary 'gatekeeper' – were derisive of the idea that research could be done on these 'no background' children. What could one hope to learn from them? Their parents were not interested in education – just wanted them out of the way. School did some good to them, however: one of the teachers told me that when they start school they are ' dirty and use bad words all the time'.

The principal on my very first visit told me : 'only "Class Four" children come here', meaning, ostensibly, children of low social and caste background. Such connotations of class and caste were also evident in appellations like 'no background children' and those 'bhangis' and 'Adivasis'. When a girl in Class 4 pointed out a mistake the teacher had made on the board, she later remarked to me: 'They are like 'this' [no background, low caste] but ready to point out mistakes!'[ep 3/4.4/ Navjivan].

Several questions arose as I observed classes in my short period of study in the school. Girls were consistently being referred to as 'bechari' and 'bholi' – strange but telling terms to use, suggesting helplessness and a surrender to realities. The principal told me that their parents did not value education and would take them out of school after Class 7 to get them married. She and the teachers often pointed out how the girls were more serious. Was it this mixture of condescension and empathy that made them say that the boys were more interested in studies? Although I did get some understanding about how these various subjective positions connected with gender, there was not enough time to go more deeply into the study, because the principal informed me that from the following academic session it would not be possible for me to continue working here. The teachers felt uncomfortable with me in those small rooms. I had also begun reconsidering the idea of doing the entire study in this school, seeing that the shortage of space would not allow for freer interaction with children, and agreed. I did stay in touch with Mrs Batra, the principal, and it was she who helped me find another, more 'appropriate' school in which to carry out my work.

She directed me to Mrs S, an ex-teacher of the school, who was now at a corporation school, 'No. 62', in Chiragnagar.

4.1.2 Initial interactions

After three days of running around for permission to carry out my research in this school, I finally arrived for what I had hoped would be my first day of fieldwork in this school. The school building is well-designed; a large brick one-storey structure, with two wings, a large portico downstairs, with a corresponding semi-open porch upstairs. There are about eight rooms to a floor, some of which were closed over the period of my visit. On the ground floor are two balwadis. The school runs in two shifts – the Hindi-medium section is held in the morning and the Gujarati medium section in the afternoon. The principal's room is also on the ground floor, next to the staircase leading to the first floor. Adjoining the principal's office is the locker room which opens on to an open space at the back in one corner of which the toilets are housed. To the right of the principal's room are the first and second standard classrooms, and a large room which is, the principal tells me, the "lab" for the higher classes. During the one year of my study, the room was kept locked.

Upstairs are the classrooms of Classes 3-7. While I was at the school, there was a shortage of teachers: Class 3 had only one division, as did Class 1. Class 4 had two sections. Up to September – well into the academic year – teachers for these sections had not been finalised yet.

There is a large playground in front of the school building. In a garage to one side of he ground, a van was kept parked, which was the official vehicle of the secretary of the School Board. There are trees along the school wall. A large gate opens on to the main road; the children come in through a smaller one at the side which leads directly into the building. Opposite the school is a large missionary hospital. The area is an upper middle-class residential locality. Down the road, nearly opposite the school, is a well-known convent school for girls.

The ambience of this school is radically different from that of the earlier one. The only background 'noise' is from within the school - children's voices, not altogether unpleasant. There are also the occasional sounds of the street: horns, speeding bikes, etc.

Across the street, about 200 m away, is the secondary section of a private, government-aided Hindi-medium school. Primary education is up to Class 7 in Gujarat. The children who graduate from corporation schools, all of which are primary schools, and free, have to go to fee-taking private aided secondary schools after they complete Class 7. Most of the children from Hindi-medium primary schools go to this school for secondary education. The proximity of this school to No. 62, turned out to be of some significance to my study, which I will discuss in a later section.

My first meeting with the principal of School No. 62 was spent discussing the problems of teachers in government schools. I attempted to 'justify' my study to her – although my intentions were not completely revealed. My experience during the pilot study was that when told that the study aimed at examining gender issues in schooling, there were some attempts by teachers to say and do things they thought I would want to hear – such as 'girls can be doctors, one of our students is a doctor' and so on. I had taken the decision to postpone the details of my research to all informants until there was some understanding between us about my role in the school.

The principal, Mrs Nadkarni, had a daughter teaching in the University's Child Development Department, and so was quite familiar with 'research on children'. This was a positive turn in my entry to the school. She did not think it strange that I would want to do observations and interviews over a year, and promised to extend all help to me throughout the study. As long as the 'official' permission letter was in her file, she would see that I got all cooperation from the teachers.

On the first day (29 July 1994), Mrs Nadkarni introduced me to the teachers of her school. They were all having tea during the recess, at about 9 am, in her cramped office. The room has a table and chair, a cupboard, shelves in a wall-niche, two benches against the walls. On one wall is a big blackboard with the teacher's names, dates of birth, year of

joining the school (when they were transferred here), class taught, number of children in the class. Qualifications of teachers were also put up on the board. All ten teachers had done their Primary Teacher's Certificate(PTC); the principal, in addition had a BA, and another teacher, Mrs Gandhi, had an MA. Nine of the teachers were women, two were men. One woman was due to retire at the end of the year – the others were in their late 30s or mid-40s. The teachers were curious about my intentions. They were used to having researchers in the school (I had seen one myself on my first day – a postgraduate field work student). But the stated period of my study, as well as the ostensible objective of my research – to understand the different learning experiences of girls and boys – made them ask many questions.

I could sense their curiosity was directed more at me than the study per se, and for the first few weeks at the school I made efforts to see that they knew about me as a person rather than as a researcher. Being able to place the researcher in a particular social context helps to break the ice. What made me marginally less of an 'outsider' was that I was married and had a child. The fact that I had a husband in the university and a child in a well-known public school created a difference –in terms of cultural capital – but it also created a sense of recognition. Community affiliations appeared significant to my acceptance in the setting.[1]

Initial encounters

In my second meeting with Mrs Nadkarni, she discussed the problems of the corporation schools to me. Since the school year had just begun, central distribution of textbooks, notebooks and unifroms were being undertaken. A limited number of notebooks are distributed free to primary school children from these schools. They were found to be of inferior quality, the children could hardly use them. Uniforms - which are also given free – are invariably too small, so that children often have to buy them from outside. She pointed to the problems of corruption in government-run institutions.

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[1] The principal and four other teachers were Maharashtrian. The fact of my own Maharashtrian last name earned me recognition among them, and the affectionate appellation of 'vahini'(sister-in-law) Ethnographers have pointed to the gender dimensions of researching – these were my first lessons in these aspects.

Some teachers were called by the School Board to assist in the central distribution of books. Also, a few teachers had to leave early, after the recess, for doing house-to-house surveys for preparation of the voters' lists for the coming census, also on orders from the School Board. The teachers who were not deputed for these activities had to manage the classes in double strength. There were only three teachers in the school to manage around 600 children.

Discussions were going on about involving the municipal schools in the total literacy campaign in the district later in the year. Mrs Nadkarni thought it was extremely likely that this would be done. The following day (Saturday) the children were to be taken on a 'literacy march' in a nearby slum. The teachers were to be asked to 'cover' slums in the vicinity of the school. She felt that the teachers may also be roped in to the Literacy Campaign eventually. She was extremely critical of this, saying that most teachers lived far away from the school and it was ridiculous to expect them to come back to teach in the slums in the evenings. She remembered their involvement in the National Adult Education Programme when they used to teach in municipal schools close to their homes every evening. This, according to her, made better sense.

Mrs Nadkarni's comments highlighted the ways in which gender is implicated in perceptions of teacher's work. 'They are far away from their children the whole day... Will the Collector cook our dinners? Or are our husbands expected to do it after returning tired from work?... This is the problem of being a woman teacher. [ep3/29.7/PO].

While we were talking, several children came in with sundry problems. She tells me that many parents are eager to send their children to school before they are five years old, and even produce birth certificates, but she used her own judgement and sent them to the balwadi . 'The mothers want them away from home where they do mischief.. The school inspectors [although they should check] when they come on their rounds are only interested in *dhatin*.. the cleanliness, state of the classrooms... they aren't interested in how *padhai* takes place here.'[ep10/29.7/PO].

The term *dhatin*, which I heard often in my interactions with teachers (the principal in Navjivan used the word *drama*) is evocative of the administrative cultures of schools.[2] *Dhatin* connotes the superficiality of regulatory norms, the 'props' which are set up to give a veneer of good functioning.

The principal told me that 'all sort of children come here - the poor from slums, and also those from 'good' families, IPCL, Refineries...' [ep9/29.7/PO]. She also told me that since the school was a Hindi-medium one, most of the children came from urban migrant backgrounds, and there are very few from Gujarati families, only those who could not get admission anywhere else. Remembering the comment of the Navjivan principal about the 'no background' children of her school, I was struck by Mrs Nadkarni's differentiating slum children from those whose fathers worked in 'higher status' occupations. I was to hear such commentaries on children's 'backgrounds' throughout the period of my study. As I shall attempt to show at a later stage, they had a crucial bearing on the ways in which the construction of gender took place in the school.

At subsequent meetings, Mrs Nadkarni shared details of her school experiences with me. She had taught for several years in Madhya Pradesh before coming to Baroda. Schooling was different for her children, who went to an elite private English-medium school of the city. There was serious *padhai* in their school and much less *dhatin*; they taught students how to be serious about life, they instilled good values in students. Her daughter was planning to emigrate to Australia later that year.

I enquired with Mrs Nadkarni about timetables since I would need these to plan my observations. She said that it would not be a problem, the teachers would teach whichever subject I wanted to observe. She would instruct them accordingly.

After a week I made fewer visits to the principal's office. It was necessary to maintain some distance from her authority to be better accepted by the other teachers, with whom I would

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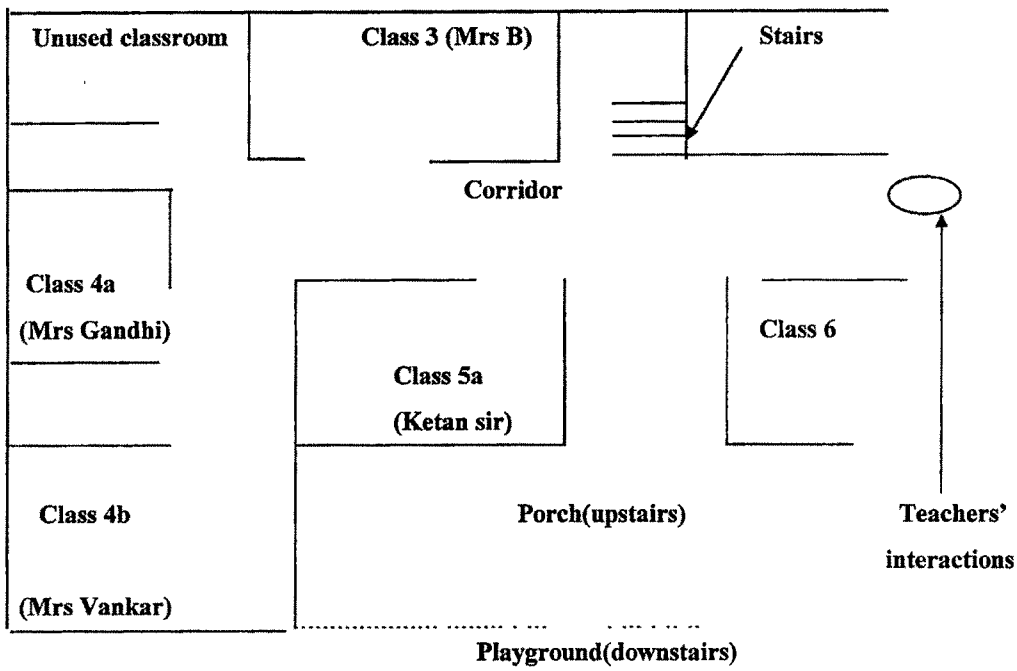
[2] The idea has a parallel in the notion of a 'charter' in elite public schools which is a proclamation of intent, as well as an attribute of the school's relation to and its position within the social structure (Meyer (1970), cited in Ray .1997:156)

be interacting more closely over the year. Although I had planned to observe only both sections of Class 4, I spent time with the other teachers whenever I could. The Class I room was on the ground floor near the office, and whenever I visited the principal I stopped by there. There were 70 children in Class I, both sections were combined since there was no teacher for the second section. It was evident that this was a crucial year for teachers as well as children. As the teacher told me in those first weeks of the school year, 'The entire year is spent teaching them manners. It is more important that they learn manners - how to sit still, how to raise hands when a teacher enters... than learning numbers up to 100.' [ep3/3.8/1].I was curious about the mid-day meal scheme. She informed me that only 150 of the 689 children in the school avail of the scheme, the rest bring 'tiffin' from home; because the quality was poor 'only the neediest eat it'. She felt that it had helped retention, by at least keeping the poorest coming. As I was to discover during my study, the fact that lunch was free, in addition to schooling, created social divisions among children.

4.1.3 Getting to know 4a and 4b: Teachers

Both Class 4 rooms are on the first floor of the building , in the left wing. At the end of the corridor, the wing is T-shaped, with the 4b classroom to the left, and the 4a classroom towards the centre, close to 4b, so that the doors diagonally face each other, and one cannot look in from one in to the other. At the other arm of the T is a classroom which was closed for most of the year, and only opened once for a rehearsal, and for my interviews with the children. In the corridor to the right is the door to the Class 3 room; a little way down on the left, at the top of the flight of stairs, is the Class 5 room. One of the male teachers, was the class teacher of Class 5. Given below is a schematic diagram of the first floor of the school and the placement of the classrooms.

Figure 4.1 Scheme of left wing, 1st Floor, Classes 3,4,5



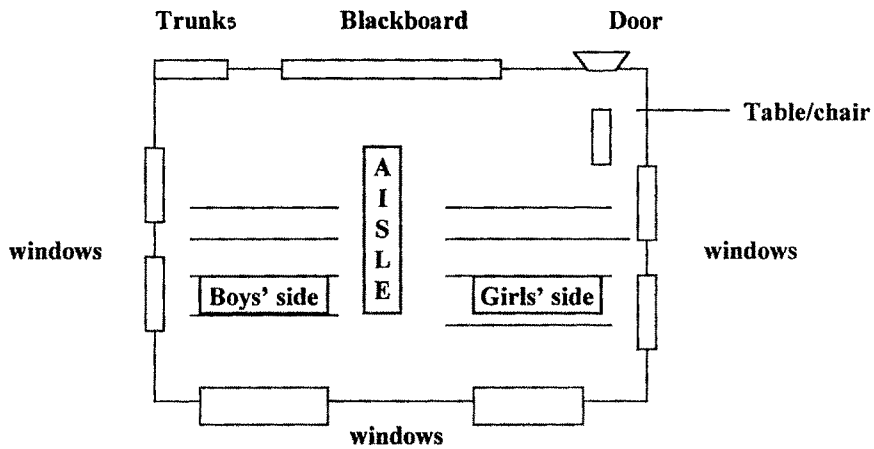
The spatial location of these classrooms was extremely significant to the everyday experiences of children - as they went in and out of classrooms, came up from recess, looked out of the classroom doors, etc. Their classrooms being where they were in a sense defined what they observed and how they reacted and responded to these observations.
Since several of the teachers were out on 'deputation' at the beginning of the school year, not all the classes functioned properly. This went on for around a month, by the end of which they were all back in school. I first made acquaintance with the teacher and children of 4b. There was a standby teacher managing 4a, whom I met only on the third or fourth day.

The 4b classroom was fairly large and airy, with large windows; six of them, two on every side. On the fourth side was the 'blackboard' (a 4 x 3 section of the wall painted with blackboard paint), on the same side as the door. The teacher's table was placed in front of the door, towards the wall. Two trunks against the wall near the blackboard housed the

classroom paraphernalia : teacher's registers, textbooks, dusters, and the floor-mats the children sit on.

Two windows overlook the playground and porch downstairs. It is here that the children are served their mid-day meal, and eat the snacks they bring for recess. The two windows at the back and to the right overlook the main road; the ones to the right look out on to the hospital opposite the school.

Figure 4.2 Scheme of Class 4b



The children sat at low desks on the floor. Girls and boys sat separately, with an aisle between them. The fact that the children sat on the floor and the only chair was the teacher's made my position awkward, since the teacher insisted that I too sit on one. She sent a boy for a chair, and I asked to sit at the back of the class. This was not an ideal position, since I couldn't see the children's faces, unless they turned around to look at me – which they did fairly frequently in the first few days. After a few days in the classroom, I shifted my position to the first desk on the girls' side, next to the teacher's table. From here I could see the children, and also hear the teacher's conversations with them. It would have been ideal to shift my location in the classroom over the year to participate in the children's interactions. However, the fact that the children sat on the floor and it was not acceptable to them that I, a 'Madam', sit with them, unfortunately ruled out this possibility.

Mrs Vankar, the 4b teacher, had been teaching in this school for eighteen years. Initially she taught for six years in a private school which she did not really enjoy. Her three children went to Marathi-medium schools in the older part of the city, where she lived. Her husband worked for the Municipal Corporation.

Sitting on a chair at the back of the class positioned me as a supervisor, and Mrs Vankar kept coming up to me to ask if her teaching was alright, to please point out errors, etc. I had to constantly reassure her that I was there to observe the children and not the teachers. At the end of the school day, I asked her if she would share the timetable with me. I pointed to the piece of cardboard hung on a nail near the blackboard with the timetable on it. She told me that the timetable is not strictly followed; they all make sure that two subjects are taught everyday. If I let her know in advance she would organise the periods accordingly, even PT periods. The teachers have to maintain a lesson plan book which has to be signed by the principal each day. Sensing some insecurity, I reassured her that I was interested in the children and that she could teach as if I was not present in the room. It took around a week for these insecurities to be allayed, as my presence came to be accepted as sufficiently unobtrusive.

The standby teacher in 4a was an elderly woman due to retire at the end of the year. On the third day of the study I went to her class. A Maths lesson was in progress. Children were being asked to come to the board to solve addition problems. There was a great deal of participation from the children: girls asking to be called, boys being asked to 'give' the answers. Noticing that she did not have the textbook on her table, I asked her whether she often encouraged children to participate in this manner without relying on the book. She obviously felt that this was not the right thing to do, and told me she always used the textbook, today she'd forgotten the keys and so could not get it out from the locker downstairs. Once again I had been identified as a 'supervisor'!

Mrs Dabholkar had worked in the corporation schools for thirty-five years. She enjoyed teaching, especially the younger children of Classes 1 and 2, whom she had taught for a good part of her twenty years of teaching in this school. Her husband worked in the administration of the University, and her son was a musician who often travelled, even

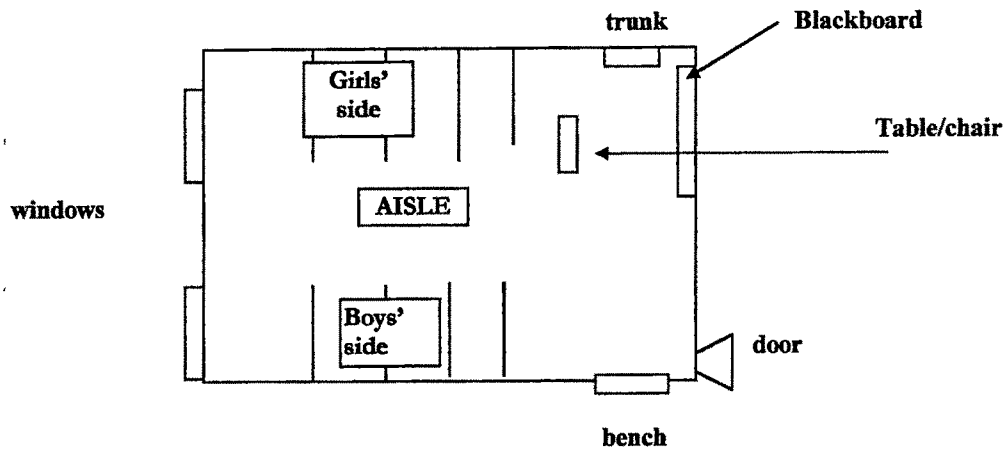
abroad. Her interest in music made her the principal organiser of performances in the school, which she enjoyed tremendously.

By the second week of school, a teacher was officially assigned to teach 4a. This was Mrs Gandhi, whom I'd met on an earlier visit teaching the children of Class 2a downstairs. There were 35 children seated on the floor in single lines. At that meeting she had complained: 'Look at these children!! The *badi-madam*[principal] has given me this class this year. Look at them![ep1/4.8/2a].I noticed that she shouted at them to keep quiet, and while our conversation was going on, went over to a few children and hit them with the ruler she kept on the table.

The principal told me she had shifted this teacher to 4a since her Hindi was not good enough for teaching in the lower classes. Now in her mid-40s, she had started her teaching career as a balwadi teacher in a school on the outskirts of the city when she was just out of high chool. As the eldest in the family she had to supplement the income of her father who was a government school teacher. She remembered those as the best years of her teaching career, 'I was young, unmarried...'[ep16/11.8/4a]. After getting her PTC she shifted to the corporation schools, studying for her BA and MA through correspondence. She was proud to have settled her family – her sister was in the U.S., her brother was a doctor. About her children, she said, 'I send them to 'private' so that they will do something, get a good job.'[ep16/11.8/4a]. She did not want them to join her husband in running his small saree store, and sent them to tuitions –she wanted them to be 'engineer, doctor'. The children went to a coeducational convent school.

For the first few days I sat on a chair at the back of the classroom; later, like in 4b, I shifted to the lone bench at the front of the room. This class had no desks, the children had to place their books on the floor in front of them to write. Like 4a, the children sat in two sections – a girls' side and a boys' side. The children in this class could see the children of 4a when they were out in the corridor, which was the case if their teacher was not in class.

Figure 4.3 Scheme of Class 4a



4.1.4 Direct observation: Researcher as 'outsider'

My physical position in both classrooms as an 'outsider' underpinned various symbolic constructions. Firstly, I had the symbolic status of a 'madam', which conferred authority. This authority extended to teachers as well, since their experience suggested that 'madams' came to supervise their teaching. I also wanted to avoid being seen by the children as an authority figure, since this would come in the way of my interactions with them. Nonetheless, it was impossible to avoid being called 'madam', and to that extent they did perceive me – at least in the first few weeks – as another teacher. Ideally I should have sat with the children on the floor. However my suggestion to this effect was met with a great deal of resistance from both teachers and children, who found it unthinkable.

These consternations were part of being an 'adult outsider' in what is essentially a society of children. Just being physically larger meant that I would be in the way of their participation in the classroom. I chose to maintain an impassive and non-judgmental air throughout the study. This strategy helped to maintain a degree of symbolic invisibility.

For the children there was a great deal of curiosity and excitement about what I was doing in the classrooms. In the first few weeks, I faced many questions from them like: What are you writing? Are you going to teach us? Are you from the '*bada* college'? I told the

children that I was going to write about them. There was interest in my notes, and the fact that they were in English. Books were brought to me to show well they had written, would I correct them; and most importantly, would I teach them English? As I shall attempt to show in later sections, these were significant themes in the positioning of children as 'learners' and the sub-texts of gender were prominently prefigured in these themes.

These issues became more important as I was interested in looking at gender construction. As can be seen in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, there was a strict physical division between girls and boys in the classrooms. The 'frame of vision' for observations would be determined by my physical location. In 4b I finally sat on the first bench on the girls' side, and whenever possible shifted my location to other benches. In 4a, which was a smaller room, I sat for the first few weeks towards the back of the class at an angle to the children's rows, shifting the chair to be able to see both 'sides'. Later I shifted to the bench at the front of the class. Sitting at approximately the same level as the children eased some of the problems in being perceived as an authority figure.

Differences in social class between me and the other social actors – both teachers and children – were also underlined in these initial interactions. Coming from the university, I was the only one in the school who had such a 'background' inscribed in what Bourdieu calls 'habitus' – demeanour, speech, the fact that I was from a metropolitan background and not fluent in Hindi. The teachers were interested in how much I earned- why I was on a fellowship, would this research help to get me a job in the university, whether research is all that I wanted to do. One teacher told me: 'Why are you doing all this? You should have been a doctor instead'[ep2/5.8/3b].

4.1.5 Reflections on initial observations

The contrast between the two classes – in terms of the ways in which teachers related to the children – was seen to provide greater validity to the observational data. However, observations over the first few weeks also raised possibilities for framing questions about the hidden curriculum of gender. Some of these were: How do teachers' practices and the belief-structures underlying them contribute to the construction of gender in pedagogic contexts? Does greater regulation of behaviour enforce gender distinctions in the

classroom? How authentic was the observational data, given the diversity of behavioural repertoires of children in their engagement with the gender code of the classroom/school? How did these children themselves construct and maintain gender distinctions and boundaries within the classroom? What place did their social experiences outside school have in these constructions? Would it be possible to look for both continuities and contradictions in the way the school constructed gender and the social experiences involved in being a girl or a boy?

4.2 Dramatic interludes

An academic year in a school comprises of several events which have symbolic significance to the social actors involved. The beginning of the year is full of excitement, apprehension and hope – children wonder about their new teacher, and teachers hope that this year their class will be a 'better' one from last year's. For children, there is a sense of novelty about getting new books and filling up the first few pages. For teachers there is repitition over the years, but the novelty is not entirely absent – getting to know the new class, planning seating arrangements, appointing monitors, identifying the bright and promising ones in the class, and being apprehensive about those who have stayed back from last year. There is a dramatic element about the new academic year.

With time, however, there is a levelling off, as both teachers and children come to understand each others' positions in areas of mutual interaction. By the end of the academic year, both are ready to move on to the next year.

The period of observation in the school lasted for one academic year. Interactions were observed over the entire year – settling down to the new class, teaching, play, tests, examinations. There were celebrations in the school, like flag hoisting ceremonies on January 26 and August 15; Teacher's Day; *Rakshabandhan*; the school picnic. However two dramatic events punctuated this 'normal' cycle of events, both of which had implications for the research. From November 1994, teachers of municipal schools in the city were officially recruited into the district's literacy campaign. School timings were decreased to two hours a day, after which teachers were sent to teach adults—primarily women –in nearby slum areas. There were three reasons why this was significant to the

research. Firstly, my own involvement in the campaign cast me in a different light in the teachers' eyes. Discussions of their experiences in the campaign formed a basis for bonding between me and them, and our social interactions became less formal and more frequent. (The latter included accompanying the class 4 teachers Mrs Vankar and Mrs Gandhi to Harijanvas, a slum near the school for several days. At the literacy march organised by the Municipal Corporation with the corporation school children, I was the school's official photographer.) Another reason the literacy campaign assumed importance was because it gave me an insight into the teachers' perceptions of schooling for the poor. These perceptions were translated in the classroom by way of motivating the children – many of whose mothers were learners in the campaign. Thirdly, the frequent absence of teachers meant that there was greater facility to observe children's non-directed social interactions and their constructions of gender in the classroom.

Another event that took place in the first week in the first week of January 1995, significantly altered discourses of gender in the classroom and the school. This tragic event had to do with two ex-students of the school who were studying in the secondary school across the road. In a day-time fight over a girl, they stabbed one of their classmates to death. The incident occurred just outside the gates of No.62, in front of the wall of the convent school opposite the school. The incident understandably generated a great deal of concern over the safety of girls in the school: the main gate was kept locked, and only the small side gate was kept open; recess-time forays to the small snack-stall outside the school were strictly monitored; and boys, in particular, were singled out for doing *dhamaal* outside the school and severely punished if found outside the gates.

In addition to the cycle of teaching and examinations, these events had their impact on classroom discourse, and in that sense provided yet another context within which to place the observations. Their use as referents is found throughout the analysis of classroom observation.

4.3 The children of 4a and 4b

The class-wise break up of the children in 4a and 4b is given in Table 4.1.

There were a few children who had failed the year before and were older than the rest. (This was the first year in the primary school in which students were promoted to the next class on the basis of examination –up to Class 3 there is what is called 'automatic promotion' in municipal schools.)

Table 4.1 Number, age of children in 4a and 4b

Class	No. of girls	No. of boys	Total	Mean Age: Girls	Mean age: Boys
4a	35	28	63	10	9
4b	32	28	60	9	10
Total	67	56	123	Mean age of children:	9.5 years

The caste-wise break-up of children is presented in Table 4.2. This is based on data from the class register, wherein the caste categories entered on school admission forms are used as a basis for classification. One notices that community names are used as declared caste categories. On the rolls there were just four scheduled caste children, although whether there were in actuality more than that number is difficult to gauge because of the slippage between caste and community.

The children were from varied regional and occupational backgrounds. Most of them came from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab; the others were from Maharashtra and Gujarat, and five were Nepali. These children were from the same or proximate neighbourhoods and walked together to school and back home with their siblings who also studied in the same school. They were first generation migrants to the city –most of them had had some experience of schooling in their villages. The occupational backgrounds of these children also varied (Table 4.3). Their educational backgrounds were difficult to ascertain, although a rough estimate (based on children's responses) is provided in Table 4.4. Children either said they did not know till when their parents had studied; or that they thought their mothers had studied up to Class 1 or 2; many said their fathers, and also mothers 'knew everything' (*sab aata hai* ('all comes') or *poori class* ('had been to all classes').

Table 4.2 Children: Caste Background

Declared Caste	4a girls	4a boys	4b girls	4b boys	Total
Rajput	3	5	3	1	12
Thakur		1		1	2
Maratha	8	2	1	1	12
Vaishya	2	2	1	4	9
Brahmin	3	3	3		9
Sikh	5	1	4	2	12
Mistri	2	2	1		5
Mallah		1	1		2
Jadhav/Yadav	1	2	3		6
Muslim		3	2	2	7
Surraiya				3	3
Garwali			1		1
Marwah	2				2
Sahni				1	1
Passi	2		1		3
Nepali	1	2	2		5
Baniya			1	2	3
Suthar	2		1		3
Dhobi	1		1		2
Kumbhar			1	1	2
Marwari				2	2
Christian		1	1		2
Chaudhuri			1		1
Kahar			1	1	2
Vishwakarma		1			1
Kshatriya			1		1
Ravatik		1			1
Paphi				1	1
Suger				1	1
Maurya				1	1
Agrawal				1	1
Darbari				1	1
Chamar	2				2
Kori	1			1	2
Uncertain		1	1	1	3
Total	35	28	32	28	123

It appeared that in the majority of cases the parents seem to have had a few years' of schooling. All the children said their mothers did housework. In fact their incredulity with the notion of 'work' in their mother's case was very revealing: most said 'nothing' or she

'just sits' (*baithi rahti hai*). It took a bit of prodding to find out what constituted 'housework'. A few mothers sat in home-based shops after housework(5), and some stitched /knitted at home(4); 11 were domestic workers. Only those responses which were reliable(confirmed from various sources) are presented in the tables below.

Table 4. 3 Children's Fathers' Occupations

Occupation	Boys		Girls	
	4a	4b	4a	4b
Carpenter	3	2	8	3
Tiles	1	3		
Veg Vendor	3	2		3
Police/ Watchman	2	2		1
Factory Worker	4	7	6	2
Driver	4	1	5	6
Others*	1	7	13	11

- Others includes services such as peons in companies/banks, dhobis, wood polishing, self-employed such as small home-based shops, etc. 5 mothers stitched at home, 11 were domestic workers; the rest were employed in housework.

Table 4.4 Parents' Education

		Mothers' Education				Fathers' Education			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Boys	**4a**	2	4	4	2	2	2	1	3
	4b	7	3	3	5	2	5	1	2
Girls	**4a**	1	6		4		4		3
	4b	1	3	2	3	4	7	6	2

1- Up to primary
2- Up to secondary
3- >Secondary
4- Never been to school

Social class was clearly marked by physical appearance. Poorer children wore tattered uniforms and clothes, with buttons missing, tears stitched up crudely, and faded. Many of

them wore rubber slippers stitched up for re-use. Their torn bags barely kept their books from falling out. The relatively better off children had clean uniforms, hair well-oiled and combed back. They wore shoes or relatively new slippers. Their bags were of better quality, and their possessions included fancy pencils, colour markers, ballpoint pens, stickers. Although these small acoutrements may seem trivial to adults, for children they have symbolic value: symbolic of parents' economic capacity to indulge in their children and therefore markers of social status. These children came to school in *rikshas*, unlike the ones who walked or were dropped off on cycles, generally by fathers or elder brothers. The Sikh children, whose fathers were all tanker drivers, stood out for their relatively higher social and economic status.

These aspects – trivial as they appear – significantly contributed to the child's position in the school. At the school assembly every morning, it was the better-dressed children who were more visible – either as those leading the prayers (who were all girls), or those minding the rows of children (who were all boys). The monitors in both classes – both girls and boys – were clearly marked as coming from this class of relative socio-economic privilege. (The word 'relative' is important here, because all children in the school came from a class position which was clearly low down on what is traditionally considered a 'socio-economic scale'.) Only the poorest children ate the mid-day meal provided by the authorities everyday. These often minute distinctions of social class and 'habitus' determined the dynamics of power in the children's relationship with adult authority as well as among themselves. (In pedagogic contexts, for example, poor children who performed well had an edge over those who came from better off backgrounds but did not do as well.)They were observed to provide the matrix within which symbolic constructions of gender – both femininity and masculinity – occurred in everyday school life, through patterns of teachers' labelling, systems of rewards and punishments and pedagogic practices. In other words, both social class and gender simultaneously provided the context for the construction of the dominant gender code of the school, which children read and negotiated in their everyday school life.

4.4 Everyday contexts of gender separation and differentiation: Routines, rituals and practices

This section attempts to describe the various patterns in the school and classroom which form the child's epistemological frame of reference with respect to 'learning' gender. These contexts are in the realm of the everyday experience and constitute a landscape of social interactions which pattern the child's understanding of gendered identity within the school through seeing and participating in everyday routines, rituals and practices – all of which have an underlying narrative of gender.

4.4.1 The social structure of the school

Scholars have pointed out how the gender code of a school also encompasses the relationship between the various adults in the school setting. What do children see as feminine and masculine areas of roles and responsibilities? Were their experiences of women and men in school different, and how? What was their experience of 'authority' and how does this tie up with their perceptions about gender? For this we need to examine the patterns of relationships among the teachers and other adults in the school setting.

There were eleven teachers (including the principal), nine of whom were women. In addition to these persons, there was a woman who served water (she was referred to as the '*paniwallah-bai*', and a male part-time sweeper. Since municipal schools are not given office staff, the teachers had to share all administrative work between them. Letters were written by the principal along with the more senior teachers, and the other teachers had to fill in their own registers –giving caste-wise, sex-wise and other daily and cumulative figures for inspection to the School Board. The male teachers --Ketan Sir and Sunil Sir -- as they were called, were in charge of liaison with the School Board. While the former prepared monthly salary bills and got these processed, the latter was in charge of collecting and following up on circulars, looking after deputation of teachers, etc.

These administrative duties were time-consuming and very visible to children: teachers would constantly be moving around the school to meet with the others regarding some

details about filling up registers, or figures demanded by the Board. Most of this work was done in the classrooms. Also there was a clear gender divide in the teachers' work, with the male teachers assigned to do 'outside' work. Although the principal was a woman, and therefore there was potential to examine children's relationships with her authority in great detail, unfortunately she was very sick during the year and was frequently absent. Nonetheless, she was clearly seen as an authority figure, and her presence evoked fear.

Interactions among the women teachers centred around issues like going shopping, buying vegetables, cooking, an upcoming marriage, etc. I observed 19 such episodes, all of which took place either in the corridor after the recess (in 5 of which the male teachers were also present) or when the teacher was in the classroom with the children. Evaluative statements would often be made in the presence of the children, which is illustrated by the following episode.

In the 4a classroom, just before recess-time, Mrs Gandhi and another teacher were discussing the shopping trip they had made the the day before. On this trip, Mrs Vankar had bought sarees for her daughter who was getting married shortly.

> Mrs Gandhi (to other teacher): Did you see the colour[of the saree]? It won't suit her daughter at all...*She's too dark.* (emphasis added.)
> [ep2/3.2/4a]

Such evaluative judgements not only serve to strengthen dominant stereotypes about skin colour and feminine beauty, they are occasionally deployed in practice as well. An example from the preparations in the school for the literacy campaign in November '94 may indicate this. To flag off the campaign, schools under the Municipal Corporation were asked to prepare the children for various song and dance performances on the value of literacy to be put up at a literacy march and a public function. While selections the girls for the programme, some girls in 4b bitterly complained to me: Madam, *sirf gori ladki ko le rahe hai!* ('only fair girls are being taken!') [ep21/18.11/4b]

During the literacy campaign, Mrs Gandhi and Mrs Vankar were assigned to teach the adult learners in a low-caste slum colony near the school. They would often have loud discussions on how filthy the people were, how they could not bear to be among those

bhangi women, and complain about how the School Board could not send its teachers, who came from 'good backgrounds' to such a place. After all, the women were not even interested in studying. [eps 3-9/5.12/4a].

The predominance of women teachers had two effects. One is that it clearly established a benign maternalism in the environment. All the women (and those in the earlier school as well) told me that they 'hit and scold the children, but also love them, like mothers'. Secondly, through exposure to their interactions, children were exposed to their personal belief systems and ways of life in a distinctive way. These teachers would often get the girls to carry out small domestic errands for them, like bringing vegetables from home, and sorting them out, or taking flowers to other teachers. The teachers' 'femininity' thus was conveyed to children.

The experience of the children with male teachers was one of fearful respect. I observed three classes where Sunil Sir, a tall and imposing man with a good command over English, came to teach 4b in Mrs Vankar's absence. The classroom transformed with his entry: from chaos to utter silence. He had a stick prominently positioned on the table, and spared none of the boys who could not answer. Interestingly, his behaviour towards the girls was conciliatory. (This experience of girls with male teachers has been documented in other studies, but since I did not observe many classes which he taught I can only make the subjective judgement that his attitude appeared to be related to my presence in the room.) Ketan Sir would often be seen hitting children with a cane as the children passed his classroom on the way to the staircase. The teacher in 4b would often threaten the children with calling these male teachers to keep them in control. Experiences with these teachers were similar to those of children who had been to village schools where there 'no teachers, only sirs', and the 'sirs were very *kadak* (tough)' [from interviews with children].

4.4.2 Organisational arrangements

A typical school day commenced with the morning assembly which was held on the playground. Girls and boys stood in separate rows facing the open portico on the ground floor on which six or seven girls of Class 7 sang 'patriotic songs'. A few boys of Class 6 and 7 'minded' the rows at the back. The teachers also stood on the portico, talking among

themselves; one or two would occasionally break off from the group to preside over the assembly of children. After assembly, they went, still in line, past the principal and the teachers, to their classrooms. I often observed the lines –especially the boys' lines – rapidly disintegrate when the teachers were out of view; although children whose classrooms were on the first floor had to encounter a male teacher (Sunil Sir) on the landing, ready with a stick to ensure a resumption of order.

'Settling down' before the teachers arrived in the classroom followed different patterns in 4a and 4b. In both classes, the girls who were monitors got the teachers' 'tools of trade' out of the trunk or the locker downstairs and arranged these on the teacher' table. These included a diary for 'lesson plans', attendance registers, duster and chalk-pieces. Mats were arranged on the floor by all the children. In 4a this was done under the watchful eye of the girl monitor who ensured that children were in their 'proper places' before the teacher came in; in 4b, there was a lot of playing with the mats - sliding, hitting, swirling - before the entry of the teacher.

As mentioned earlier, in both classrooms, girls and boys sat separately, an aisle acting as both a physical and symbolic divide between them - a 'gender boundary' as it were. Incursions across this boundary were rare, and when they did occur, inevitably based on confrontation : either playful, as when personal belongings were to be reclaimed or to 'hit back' when provoked; or serious, as when a monitor 'crossed over' to chastise an errant child on the other 'side'. As I will show later, the children viewed these interactions as part of cross-sex 'talk' and 'play'. The motif of 'gendered spaces' within the classroom (and playground) pervaded all my observations, as well as children's interpretations of cross-sex interactions.

A particularly significant arrangement was the listing of girls and boys separately on the class attendance register. This was a pragmatic means to compile the mandatory sex-wise monthly attendance statistics for the School Board. However, this also meant that all routines associated with the list of names on the register were likewise done on sex-segregated lines, such as distributing examination papers and report cards, oral examinations, etc. Each of these mundane, commonplace events of everyday classroom life

reinforced the sexual division of labour in the classroom : girls did the girls' 'side', boys did the boys' 'side'. We thus see how physical and organisational arrangements as commonplace and seemingly innocuous as those described above served to heighten gender distinctions in the classroom. During roll call, for example, girls and boys accounted for absentees from their own gender category. Patterns of communication in the classroom established through these everyday routines thus acquired a highly gendered character.

> Teacher (facing boys) : Which boys are absent ?
> (A girl stands up and starts calling out the names of the absent girls. The girls who sit near her pull her down).
> Girl's partner : Not us. The boys.
> (...)
> Teacher : OK. Now the girls.
> [ep11/12.9/4b]

4.4.3 Different tasks for different children

Yet another mode of legitimation of gender distinctions within the school was the sex-differentiated system of task assignation by teachers. The practice of sex-differentiated task assignation has been referred to by several authors as the sexual division of labour in school life (Deem: 1978; Clarricoates: 1981). This forms the scaffold of the hidden curriculum of gender – the ideological 'rules' which inform the normative interpretations of gender, and the codes of 'appropriate' gender behaviour.

Most of these tasks were assigned to, and carried out, by the more vocal and visible children. These children almost invariably came from relatively better-off backgrounds, as coded by their appearance, and 'seriousness' about studies – possibly because of this they were viewed by teachers as being more 'responsible'. They were also children who had been in the school for one or two years; the teachers therefore were aware of their 'capabilities'.

Table 4.5 Tasks assigned by teachers

	Boys		Girls
-	mind the boys (monitors)	-	mind the girls (monitors)
-	run errands outside the school (bring snacks for teachers, things from their houses)	-	clean the classroom, sweep, clean the teacher's table, blackboard
-	carry furniture	-	carry teacher's registers, etc. to the lockers (entrusted with keys)
-	serve lunch during mid-day meal	-	take back teacher's teacups after recess
		-	teach both in teacher's absence and when she's 'busy'
		-	read aloud lessons
		-	write questions and answers on the board

Doing work assigned by teachers gave children a sense of public recognition and power. Children frequently called upon to do work usually sat in the front rows – rarely did children from the back and middle sections get tasks assigned to them. The tasks they were given were usually of less public significance, like doing small errands in the school, such as taking back teacups (girls), and bringing in chairs/benches(boys). Tasks of more public significance like minding and teaching were given to monitors. Although at times this caused anguish among some – I noticed this particularly in 4b – by and large these sections of both classrooms were content to leave spheres of responsibility to the chosen few.

Their non-overlapping spaces of power within the classroom were closely guarded by both girls and boys. Although most teacher-assigned tasks were done by a few of the dependable' children, there appeared to be a commonsense understanding that these are spaces shared by all members of each gender category. Children's perceptions of these distinct gendered spaces were reinforced by the verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of teachers in the classroom which signified the gender divide.

4.4.4 Physical space and gender : Play

Gender separation of children extended to the playground as well. Children were taken or sent to the playground when the teachers were busy with some work or, in winter, when it

was too cold to sit on the bare floors in the classrooms. Both 4a and 4b would get taken/sent down together. Boys and girls would be made to play separately, even if they were playing the same game. The teachers would divide responsibility for looking after each game, and this would be decided in the presence of children:

> Mrs Vankar: Come, let us take the children downstairs to play.
> Mrs Gandhi: OK. You take the girls. I'll take the boys.
> [ep 1/7.12/4b]

In the absence of the teacher, the respective monitors would assume this role. The teachers told me that this is the way children played; in fact, they did not question segregation in play. The children, too, kept their areas of play distinct in the school, in the games they played and the physical spaces they occupied on the playground.

In the games periods, girls and boys were made to play separate games, on two distinct sides. The teachers would manage these sides separately. My observations of children on the playground confirmed that strict gender divisions were maintained by the children themselves --both in the kinds of games they played, as well as the spaces they occupied on the playground. Whereas the boys were usually spread out all over the field, in small groups or singly, the girls played in tightly-packed groups in what seemed to be a far more 'orderly' manner. They would often stick to the portico playing skipping rope or hopscotch. The boys on the other hand would play games like catching cook, or *kabaddi*, or sit on the school wall and jump over it to leave the ground altogether.

Spaces occupied by girls and boys were held to be sacrosanct, and tolerance for violation of boundaries was low. The girls, especially, would dismiss boys who strayed into their spaces with admonitions like: '*ladki ke khel mein tera kya kam hai*?' ('what is your business in girls' play?') or with disgusted expressions move away. The boys too would not tolerate girls coming into their play. Statements like: '*Nikal ja, lag jayega to nahi bolna*!' ('move away, if you get hurt don't complain!') and an aggressive: '*Kya chahiye yanha?*' ('what do you want here?') would often be directed towards girls.

Random observations in this school would suggest that patterns of play between girls and boys was 'natural'. It was only with more focussed observation and interviews that the

reality emerged as being more complex. While it was interesting to observe these differences, it turned out that divisions were not as clearly demarcated in the neighbourhoods they lived in. Often the boys and girls played the same game in their immediate neighbourhoods, with classmates, but they did not do this in school.

The construction of 'sides' was underpinned by a rationale of discipline. Instantiated by teachers with the commonsensical logic of separation for easier control, 'sides' played a significant role in colouring the perceptions of children with regard to their own gender identity in school. The idea of 'a girls' side' and 'a boys' side' was invoked repeatedly by teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication patterns in the classroom, and was evident in their pedagogic practices as well.

Children on their own, too, maintained gender divisions in their choices of friends and playmates. In the recess time, I would often see groups of children sharing snacks they had brought from home. The only girls and boys sitting together and eating together would be siblings. On the playground, even in the absence of teachers, there would be a 'girls' side' and a 'boys' side'. Boys who would be loitering about girls' games would be brushed off by one of the more outspoken ones.

In the classroom, there was 'boundary crossing' when girls and boys interacted with each other across the physical gender divide, the aisle. This was more among children who knew each other from the neighbourhood, as I found out in the course of the study. Other incursions were rare, mainly during examinations, and among the monitors. There was strict self-regulation among both girls and boys. However, in the classroom, whatever little cross-sex interaction did occur was usually in the absence of the teacher. Gender boundaries were clearly maintained by the children in everyday life, but legitimated by school practices as well. Shaming, by breaking taboos of cross-sex interaction, was one technique to maintain divisions. Teachers told me how making the boys and girls sit alternately so that the children would be too ashamed to talk or play in the class was an effective form of 'punishment'.

The routines and practices discussed above, innocuous as they appear, underlined the gender dichotomy in everyday school life. Their symbolic position in the hidden curriculum of gender, however, was found to be in the context of indiscipline, or *dhamaal*, the term used in the school.

4.4.5 In/discipline: *Dhamaal*

From the observational data, it was clear that classroom discipline connoted a range of expected behaviours. The most salient feature was maintenance of the spatial equilibrium of the classroom: neat rows of boys and girls attending to their class work, without turning to neighbours, talking or getting up. This entailed strict maintenance of the distinct 'sides'. *Dhamaal* , a colourful term in the lexicon of the school culture, denoted disruption and transgression of this disciplinary code. It connoted a state of chaos in which teaching and learning could not take place.

Teachers' conceptualisations of *dhamaal* were filtered through their values about gender and social class. Although patterns of children's behaviour varied significantly in both classrooms, due to the different personalities of the teachers and their beliefs about disciplining children, both of them – and indeed the teachers in the school – viewed boys as the main perpetrators of *dhamaal.* The ways in which children interpret this situation and the manner in which *dhamaal* patterned social interactions in the classroom among and between girls and boys are discussed in Chapter 5.

This section examined the ways in which gender appears as a significant element of social organisation in the classroom and school. These aspects were seen to provide the contexts for the construction of gender in everyday school experiences of children. The discussion so far would tend to suggest that gender is constructed through processes which are primarily teacher-directed. The reality was, in fact, far more complex. Children's interpretations, their 'reading' of these messages of the hidden agenda of gender separation, often deviating from those of teachers, nonetheless echoed teachers' views on ideal norms of behaviour, and therefore teachers' practices in everyday classroom life were significant in symbolic constructions around gender.

4.5 Everyday contexts II: Classroom discourse

In section 4. 4, I described the various ways in which gender is used as a category for differential organisational arrangements in the school. These arrangements formed part of children's everyday school experiences, which influenced they way they made 'meaning' of gender roles and divisions. Classroom management was directed towards controlling indiscipline. This invoked gender distinctions in evaluative, comparative and normative stances of teachers, which were translated in pedagogic contexts in both obvious and subtle ways. These interactional contexts in the classroom are described in the following section.

***Sabhyata, vinay, vivek*: Social class, gender and classroom 'management'**

The first few weeks of observations and interactions revealed teachers' constructions of 'learning' and education. These initial observations helped in developing an analysis of how these perceptions were symbolically articulated in their everyday classroom and curricular practices.

Mrs Vankar, the class teacher of 4b, told me how she 'felt pity' for the poor children in her class. She did not believe in hitting them, since she believed that hitting 'makes children go bad' [ep5/3.8/4a]. Although the principal had given instructions that children who came late to school would be kept standing outside the classroom, she believed that it was not right to do this to the girls, since many of them 'went to *bunglas* with their mothers and she felt sorry for them' [ep 24/12.8/4b] (*Bungley pe jaana* was a commonly used phrase to denote doing domestic work in others' – middle- and upper-class - houses.) Indiscipline in the classroom was attributed mainly to the boys, whose parents 'sent them to school to stay away from mischief'[ep 8/3.8/4b]

Mrs Dabholkar echoed this view: 'Poor children are always misbehaved, they don't get proper *guidance* [English] at home. Many of these children's fathers are in the services... they are away, and if their fathers don't discipline them...When the children misbehave, I discipline the *boys* by making them sit in their rows...'.[ep12/1.8/4a] The reasons, she felt, that girls do better in primary school than secondary school lay outside, were not connected with the education system. 'When they are younger, the girls can manage both household

duties and schoolwork, but as they get older they are expected to take on more domestic responsibility and their studies suffer. Girls rarely speak out and when they do, they are unsure of themselves...even in 'Samiti'[School Board] meetings the women rarely express their opinion, but the 'gents' never have hesitation: only those who speak out, achieve! Third, girls are not exposed to the world, they are kept sheltered.'[ep14/1.8/4a]

Mrs Gandhi strongly believed that the only way to make 'these children' learn was through harsh physical discipline. My first few days of observation in her classroom demanded a great deal of personal distancing: she hit the children if they could not give answers, or read, even if they looked into their neighbour's books. Initially I felt that my presence heightened her need to be seen as 'effective'; with increased exposure to her practices in the classroom as well as greater personal contact with her, I came to see that she believed in these methods of 'ideal' teaching. She felt that her relatively 'superior' education gave her the ability to teach more effectively. In the very first class I observed (which was one of first interactions with this class as well) she laid out her expectations from the children. Straightening out the rows of boys, she said: 'I want manners first, then studies...*sabhyata, vinay, vivek*'[ep5/5.8/4a].

The 'civilising mission' was a recurrent theme in all my observations and interactions with teachers throughout the year, but Mrs Gandhi was an ardent believer in upholding a 'charter' – that of effective learning through physical discipline. This belief enabled a degree of egalitarianism in the manner in which she distinguished between boys and girls in her classroom. Although social stereotypes and negative labelling were very much in evidence in her everyday interactions with them, she did believe that it was background and not gender which was the defining characteristic of the 'good student'. An excerpt from the first day of observations in her classroom may illuminate her position:

> A lesson in Environment Science [*Paryavaran*] is in progress. Mrs Gandhi asks a question. Before she is through, a boy interrupts her with an answer.
> Mrs G: Just like all of you! I teach properly to all of you...some will learn more, some less, some talk, don't listen...
> [She notices a Sikh boy at the back, who's smiling ...shouts loudly] Jagdeep!! All these Sardarjis are the same, in every class, do nothing![bends down and hits him with a stick.]
> [ep9/9.8/4a]

Interestingly, her favourite student, who was entrusted with all duties(including teaching), the monitor of the class, was a Sikh girl.

Although the other teachers did not admit to physical punishment, it was a norm in the school. As children clambered up the stairs after recess, Sunil Sir, one of the male teachers, stood at the landing with a cane and hit all those who did not make lines. In my first few days I witnessed harsh physical beating, primarily of boys, in several classrooms, including the two (3a and 5a) in the same wing as the Class 4 rooms. Obviously children were witness to these forms of punishment every day. In my discussions with teachers it was clear that all of them subscribed to hitting as an effective form of discipline, and since it was the boys who transgressed discipline, they were hit more.

In 4b, the teacher told me that she would not even keep a stick or ruler in the classroom, and on several occasions I saw her physically intervening when a child was being hit by monitors. Later in the year there was a shift in her approach, but over the entire academic year I never saw her meting out harsh physical treatment to the children. However, stereotypes of the children as being 'dirty', 'uncivilised' and disinterested in studies were evident in both classrooms, even in the initial period of the study. These were inevitably articulated within the context of discipline, which emerged as a recurrent theme in all pedagogic and social- interactional classroom contexts. As I will attempt to show in a later section, gender construction was at its most evident in the context of classroom discipline.

Observations indicated the 'climate' in both classrooms to be distinctly different. In 4a, there was far more regulation of behaviour and little tolerance of violation of discipline. The children were expected to pay attention, and do the work assigned to them. In 4b, there was far less regulation, and far more noise. However, it was clear that both classrooms were highly differentiated social spaces. Children in both classes had different strategies to cope with expected norms. The 'front', 'back' and 'middle' of classrooms presented different patterns of coping, and these were further dependent on the contexts of interaction in the classroom. Initial observations showed that the children in the 'front' – both girls and boys – accommodated to the behaviour expected of them: writing, giving

answers, sitting properly, etc.; responses would be more varied for children who were not under the direct gaze of the teacher.

Classroom culture

Observations in the two classrooms 4a and 4b were very different experiences. Their 'cultures' were a study in contrast. Although there were convergences in the ways in which the two teachers positioned the children in terms of ideal norms, their manner of dealing with the children were distinctly different. In 4a, Mrs Gandhi insisted on children being in their places and doing the assigned work. A combination of sarcasm, negative labelling and physical punishment accompanied her attempts to the children to get the 'right' answers. In 4b, there was a constant state of chaos, with children talking, playing and engaging in a lot of body-play. Again here, too, there was a distinction between the boys and the girls. While most of the girls kept themselves busy with activities like knitting, drawing on their hands, origami, colouring pictures and talking, most of the boys would be talking or having physical fights. The teacher, Mrs Vankar, would also reprimand through name-calling and labelling, but the children perceived her to be mild and did not take her seriously.

As difficult as it was to sit through the Dickensian world of 4a, without intervening in the humiliation of the children, it was equally disturbing to observe 4b, with its constant swirl of activity and unstimulating atmosphere for children. It was a tortuous dilemma as can be gauged from the following extract from my fieldnotes:

> If the experience of observing 4a with its totalitarian ethos of submission and fear is immensely disquieting, sitting in 4b surrounded by a constant whirl of activity and deafening noise is no less disturbing. In both situations, maintaining the stoic distance of the (un)involved observer creates an empty feeling of helplessness.... Shouldn't I be trying to make learning enjoyable and meaningful for these children instead of arduously taking notes about the physical and symbolic violence they are subjected to day after day in school ?
> (Fieldnotes, 14.10.94)

In 4a, there was far stricter regulation of disciplinary norms. Children were always in their places, on their respective 'sides'; any transgression was met with harsh punishment. The

teacher's table was in the front of the class, at a short distance from the rows of children. There were 63 children in her class and she complained about having been given this class:

> *Badi*-madam (the principal) purposely gave me this class. She always does this to me, shifting me around. I don't feel like teaching at all...So many children, what can one teach?
> [ep1/6.8/4a]

and in 4b,

> I try...whatever little I can do. But these children come from backgrounds where...no-one is interested. If they paid attention they would learn, but look at them...[she turns to some boys] Hey! This madam is here and you are still making noise. *Nalayak* (useless)!!
> [ep8/12.9/4b]

The two classrooms, with their very different cultures, offer strong validation of the pervasiveness of the gender 'regime' of the school and in social interactions among the children. In 4b, where social interaction was more spontaneous and less teacher-controlled, it was somewhat easier to observe the underlying dynamics of gender. Interestingly in 4a, although children were far more straitjacketed in their gendered spaces, patterns of interaction and indeed children's perceptions of interactional contexts did not differ from those in 4b.

Monitors

The physical division in the classrooms into distinctly gendered spaces had an association with the division of tasks. There were 'girl monitors' and 'boy monitors', assigned to look after their respective 'sides'. They were 'in charge' of these sections for all classroom routines, like making children read, collecting their books, examination papers, etc. Most importantly, however, they were responsible for maintaining discipline and for teaching when the teacher was out of the room. Regulation of class behaviour was vested in them; and classes acquired the reputation of being good or bad depending on the calibre of monitors.

Principally, it was the girl monitors who were entrusted with the task of teaching. Since the teachers were frequently out of the classroom – either in the corridor talking, or on

deputation with other work – being good at studies, having good handwriting , and most importantly being able to 'manage' and 'control' were constitutive qualities for being an effective girl monitor. Both in 4a and 4b, the two main girl monitors were a little older than the rest of the class and physically bigger than them as well. This gave them authority over the class; the children called them '*didi*' (elder sister). Both had co-monitors who were 'good at studies' to help them out in carrying out their duties.

The boy monitors in 4a had more power than the ones in 4b, whereas the girls were entrusted far more with disciplinary regulation. In 4a, under Mrs Gandhi's instructions, all monitors had the authority to hit the children if there was any violation of discipline. The teacher's sanction – and active encouragement – of physical punishment meant that gender boundaries could be crossed while minding. In 4b, too, girl monitors minded the boys' side, but far more tentatively, since there was no legitimation of their role by the teacher. In many observations the boys would threaten them and their complaints to the teacher went ignored. They were even more circumspect with the girls, who were their playmates and friends. In any case, these girls were seen as ineffective by their classmates: the class had the dubious distinction of being the most indisciplined in the entire school.

Monitors occupied a curious position in the power structure of the classroom. They were key intermediaries between the teacher and the children, seen as her deputies, and under the constant gaze of the children's critical scrutiny. The boys particularly, who were seen as instrumental in creating indiscipline in the classroom, did not seem to have the legitimacy from either teachers or the children. In fact, towards the end of the school year, the boy monitors had dropped off from sight.

In both classes, as in the school itself, there was a great deal of reliance on monitors for teaching. Through the school year, the teachers were often out on various duties, and the literacy campaign only added to the long list. Records for the individual sites where the teachers were assigned to work were filled by them in the classroom, in addition to the mandatory records for their classes in the school. This left little time for teaching. The reliance on monitors for teaching stemmed in part from their frequent absences from the

room. These absences were also symbolic: while the teacher filled up the numerous daily and monthly registers, they would assign some work to the children and ask the monitors to take care that it was done. One boy explained to me what the monitor's work was: 'minding the children, and letting the teacher do her work *aaram se* (with ease), by teaching'.[Int/20.3/4b] This, then, formed the context of symbolic constructions in everyday classroom life. The manner in which teachers' normative positions mediated this context is of interest to the construction of gender. Of particular significance was the way patterns of communication reflected these positions.

4.6 Contexts of gender construction: Identification of themes

Certain themes emerged out of observations in the school and classroom which were seen to constitute the hidden curriculum of gender:

1) There appeared to be strict maintenance of gender distinctions in everyday routines and practices;

2) Teachers' normative interpretations of education and the 'ideal learner' found expression in their verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the classroom, which as directed at the children, had both gender and social class dimensions;

3) Classroom 'discipline' was woven into all contexts of social interaction in the classroom;

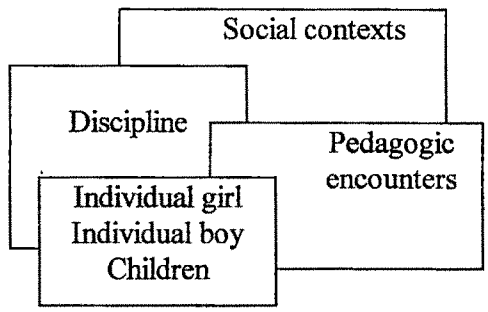
4) Children participated in the construction of gender in everyday classroom life;

5) All these aspects were reflected in patterns of language used in the classroom by teachers and children; and

6) There was a complex interplay between these themes in pedagogic contexts.

From the discussion of classroom culture, discipline emerges as a strong theme in the regulation of gender behaviour. In/discipline also forms an important context within which other social-interactional contexts, including those related to curricular transaction, are embedded. A schematic representation of the embedded contexts is presented in Figure 4. 4.

Figure 4.4 Gender construction: Embedded contexts



4.7 Classroom interaction: Towards an analysis of the hidden curriculum of gender

As discussed in earlier sections, there were discernible gender sub-texts in the teachers' verbal and non-verbal language in the classroom. I have indicated how these focussed around certain themes in which gender and social class interweave. These patterns of communication reflect the teachers' belief structures, and perceptions of their role in the school; for children, they constitute a lens to understand their own gender identity through situations which are unique to a formal education setting. These patterns embody implicit ideological 'rules' about ideal gender behaviour in the particular social context of the classroom and the school; they also signify the 'naturalisation' of behaviour beyond the school context.

Two lines of inquiry are presented in the following sub-sections. The first presents an analysis of interactions between the teacher and the children in the classroom. In this analysis, interactional contexts within which curricular transactions occur are detailed. The second sub-section discusses specific curricular contexts in greater depth.

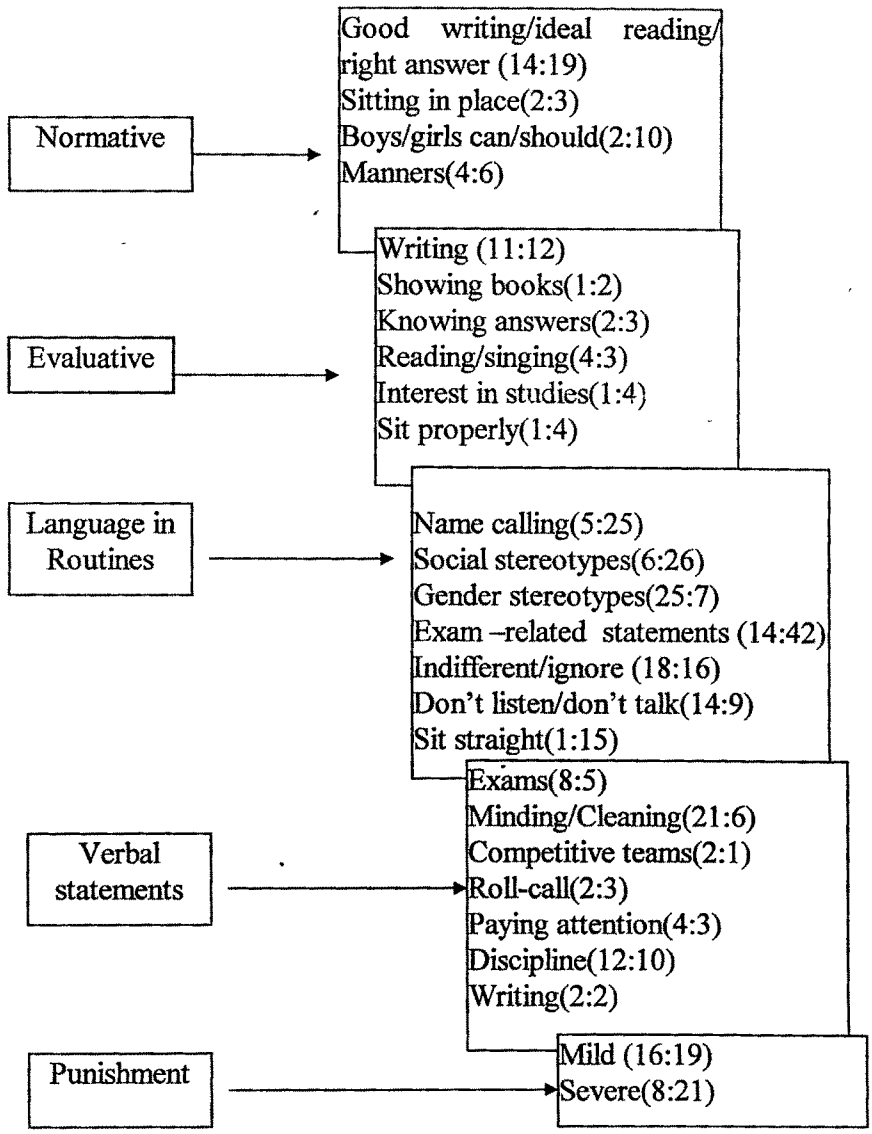
4.7.1 Teachers and children: Interactional contexts in the classroom

In attempting to analyse the data, the 'texts' constituting observational notes were successively deconstructed to identify domains –or major clusters of themes–which appeared significant to the construction of gender in everyday social interactions in the classroom. What emerged were several overlapping and nested domains rather than discrete areas of concurring themes. These domains are schematically presented in Figure 4.5.

The ratios in brackets indicate how many times girls were addressed over boys. A caveat is in place here. Since the study did not use methods of structured observation, the figure represents a schema developed to understand data from direct observation. It only provides a *situational landscape*, rather than a causative model, of social interactions between the teachers and the children. Further, the domains and the clusters of themes are overlapping and dovetailed, not discrete; the ratios are not absolute indicators of occurrences. The figure therefore only represents a heuristic to identify trends in the communication patterns of teachers in the classrooms.

In the following sections the themes encompassed in these domains are discussed. Although these domains were clustered around themes related to teacher-directed talk, they set up categories of meaning which the children also share. This was evident in the manner in which children appropriated from the language of the teacher to explain their own position in everyday classroom discourse. Using data from interviews with children, I also attempt to show how classroom discourse patterns children's perceptions of these themes.

Figure 4.5 Domains of Interaction



Observations in the classroom revealed that interactions between teachers and children routines, teachers' labelling practices and punishments. Although these domains encompass verbal statements, the non-verbal element, particularly in relation to gender, is seen in a certain assumption of *audience* which is clear from their mode of address, i.e, when they are specifically addressed to boys and girls. This is more observable because of the gender separation in the classroom.

Normative discourses

Interactions on norms in the classroom are reflective of teachers' perceptions of what constitutes an ideal education— signifying the ideal teacher and ideal pupil— and through what processes this is to be achieved. Often, I observed that norms are also indicative of the regulatory nature of formalised learning situations; that teachers would often communicate to the children that there were surveillance mechanisms which could put the 'good name' of the class in jeopardy. 'When the *badi*-madam comes, or the inspector comes, they should see an ideal classroom' was a concern communicated frequently to the children. (The other recurrent theme in normative discourses was the nature of free government education. The children were always being reminded that they were being given free lunch, uniforms and books. If they did not writethey were told that their books would get taken back.)

What constituted 'good *padhai*' (learning) was integral to normative discourses on education, which centred on the ways this could be achieved –through good writing, ideal reading, thinking, and giving the right answer; sitting in place, good manners, and paying attention. Writing and reading, which many of the children had genuine difficulties with, was of prime importance. Children were often asked to read from the lesson, especially in the Hindi and Environment Science classes. Most, even the monitors, had difficulty reading with fluency, and the teachers would often take over and read themselves. Children were often told to go home and read a few pages every day to improve their reading. In 4a, children were called to read '*bari-bari*' (in turns) –row-wise, first girls and then boys – and either the teacher or the monitors, usually the girl monitors, would 'take' the reading. In 4b, the girls in the front benches would clamour for the teacher's attention to be asked to read, and only one or two would eventually be called. Often teachers would take over from the children called to read, and display '*aadarsh vachna*' (ideal reading).

Writing was another key issue in pedagogic discourse. In my interactions with the children, including the biographical notes I asked them to write for me, I found that even those children who were considered to be more competent by teachers had severe difficulties with writing. Indeed some of their writing was simply indecipherable. Most

children told me they could 'write from the board and the book, but not the mind'. However, the normative discourse on writing had little to do with writing for self-expression, focussing more on presentation – neatly marked books, lines drawn after answers in red, and 'good handwriting'.

For doing good *'padhai'* there were definite requirements, according to both teachers. Although their strategies for communicating ideals and norms were different, there were distinctly identifiable themes in their interactions on expected norms. Firstly, children were in school to study, and it was their duty to do so. For good 'padhai' there was a need to pay attention, not talk or do *dhamaal*. In 4a, Mrs Gandhi relied on adherence to what she considered sound pedagogic principles. In one class, a boy in her class could not answer a question from the lesson. She hit him with a stick, saying: 'what do you come to school for? When you get hit you'll know. *Soti padti dham dham, vidya aayegi jham jham.*' (More the stick, more the knowledge) [ep 5/10.8/4a]. When the school bell rang at the end of the school day, her class was the last to leave. The children in 4a would see and hear the commotion of the other classes breaking up and rushing down the corridor and get restless. They would instead be asked to fold their hands and close their eyes: 'You will go last. Fold your hands and pray to God to make your minds better.'[ep 25/6.1/4a].

Talking was a violation of expected norms of behaviour in the classroom, and tied up with *'good padhai'*. While teaching the children on how to write an essay, she outlined the 'rules' by putting up the skeleton of the essay 'my family' on the board. (One of the rules was that the essay had to end with 'Our small family is a happy family'—quite a deviation from the reality of these children's experiences.) After writing on the board, she sat down with her 'work' at the table. Noticing some exchange between two boys at the back, she abruptly rose and went over to hit them. 'Why are you talking? If I ask you about your essay you won't be able to [say] and I'll hit you. You must pay attention to what I say or you won't be able to [write]. We must pay attention to studies just like we say prayers. That's why we say prayers.'[ep19/20.8/4a]. During the oral examination in January, Mrs Gandhi told the children: 'Many children don't read correctly. I will show you how to do *'adarsh vachan'*. If any of the boys talk, I'll hit them. You know how I hate noise. There should be pindrop silence as I read' [ep1/23.1/4a].

In 4b there was not much recourse to physical punishment when normative discourse was transgressed or violated by the children. (This was particularly true for the first few months of the academic year; later, when indiscipline in her class became an issue in the school, the teacher did resort to punitive actions.) In addition to the value of good handwriting and paying attention, there was a great deal of sermonising about the value of education, and how it gave one a sense of cleanliness and manners.

During the teachers' involvement in the literacy campaign, there was a great deal of talk in the classroom about the value of education. As Mrs Vankar explained to the class: 'We go to teach *bade log* (adults) and they all feel ashamed...If you are asked to read a letter and you can't, won't you be ashamed, being in the 4th?'[ep 8/6.1/4b]. The literacy campaign also fuelled a great interest in the teachers for identifying which children in their classes could not read and write. The 'better' children were asked to help these children learn, and the teachers decided to change the seating arrangements in the classroom to aid child 'mentoring'. Although their attempts were well-meaning, the system generated a situation where children were singled out for their weakness in studies. The system of labelling these efforts engendered was insidious rather than overt. By enlisting the entire class in identifying children who could not read and write, the teachers created social divisions among the children in the classroom. Although inspirational statements were made about how *even* these children could learn, they would often end up reinforcing the image of those who did not do 'good *padhai*'.

> Mrs Gandhi: See, these three boys have improved. But if you don't do *padhai*, what can I do? And those two, they take notes, have attendance, but they are zero, I won't pass them. Those girls there, can't read and write, answer. Stay at the back always!
> [ep5/6.1/4a]

The teacher asks the girls to read. The girl monitors tell her to ask Pramila, who had been earlier identified as one of those who could not write/read. Pramila looks down, refuses to get up.

> Teacher: How can she come? They keep their bags in a corner when they go home, pick it up next morning. *Padhai karte hain kya?* (Do they study?) Kusum studies, doesn't she? You go to tuitions? How many of you go to tuitions? You don't need to if you study in the class. Reading is easy, I'll show you how...
> [ep1/15.12/4b]

The other normative discourse in 4b focussed on discipline. Two or three boys in the class were particularly at the centre of *dhamaal* in the class and would often get told that they were a shame to the whole class. On one occasion, Mrs Vankar called three boys and told them:

> You must have baths and wear clean clothes...You come here to study, not to take each other' lives. I feel bad when I see my class dirty or doing bad things. So two things: bathe and wear clean clothes and stay disciplined.' [ep16/22.11/4b]

Norms of ideal gender behaviour were particularly evident after the stabbing incident outside the school in late December '94. The incident quite understandably shocked both teachers and children in the school. Even three months after it had occurred, the children in their interviews narrated versions of it in their interviews with me. In the classroom, however, the children were reminded of 'good behaviour' to avert possibilties of such incidents happening in the future. In her New Year session with the children, Mrs Vankar told her class:

> You must listen to the monitors. Chandana, Geeta among the girls, Vasu among the boys. You must listen to them. You must stay as brothers and sisters...Tell yourselves that this year you will study hard, help those children who don't know, won't do *goonda-gardi* (lumpen behaviour), take each others' lives with shoes and blades...
> [ep1/2.1/4b]

The relevance of these normative discourses to gender lies in the non-verbal behaviours of the teachers in addressing girls and boys separately on different themes, and their relation to the construction of the 'ideal pupil'. The processes involved in this construction were found to be contradictory. Observations in the classrooms corroborate the finding from other studies that boys receive much more of the teacher's attention than girls: they occupy a far more visible position in the classroom and take up much more classroom time, largely because of their perceived disruptive role in the production of *dhamaal*.

In the present study, one significant finding in relation to normative discourses was the attention given to boys on examination-related themes – passing/failing, the design of 'exam papers', calling fathers to meet the teachers about academic performance, etc. This was quite a contradiction to the other findings discussed below, wherein girls were

constructed as 'ideal pupils' by their adherence to norms of discipline. Unlike in other dimensions, this normative theme was far more subtle. It was largely due to the long period of observation through the cycle of examinations and results that this phenomenon was observed. The following episodes describe situations in which the contradictory position of addressing boys on exam-related issues stands in relation to other normative discourses.

> The teacher is writing problems on the board in a Maths class. She turns around and says: Girls, get ready to come and do these. Who'll come?
> [Chandana, the girl monitor, goes up and solves the problem.]
> Teacher: OK, it's correct. Who'll come next from the girls? Kusum? [Kusum looks down. Sunita says: Madam, me! The teacher ignores her, looks around at the boys' side.]
> Teacher: Can any of the boys do it?
> [None of the boys volunteer. Kaushal, a girl, goes up to the board and solves it.]
> [Teacher addresses boys and discusses what kinds of problems will come in the upcoming mathematics examination. The bell rings.]
> Teacher: Girls! Keep everything away!!
> [ep10/10.1/4b]

A class in Hindi where some girls are asked to come to the front of the class and sing the patriotic poem in the book. The girls sing. Some boys are talking at the back.

> Teacher[addresses boys]: They're singing, and you're talking. See the picture in the book, how nicely the boys are standing. Do you all have such discipline?! Fold your hands...Have you taken the exam time-table down? Show it at home.
> [ep34/29.1/4b]

After the unit tests in early February, the teacher discussed the results with the children.

> Teacher[addresses boys]: Work on mathematics. [Looks to the girls' side.]Girls!! Many of you have done badly in Mathematics. Even when you have done well in other subjects, you have done badly in it.
> [Addresses boys]: Imran Khan. He had failed. Now he does Mathematics on his own. You shouldn't be discouraged if you fail. [Calls out to two boys, Gururam and Prakash, who failed the last year.] You can also pass.
> [Kiran, a girl, asks when they will get the results.]
> Teacher: You've passed, I told you. Why're you asking? I'll get it signed by the principal and give it to you.
> Vasu: Madamji, when will we get them?
> Teacher: I won't give you the report card, because you eat on it.[Peals of laughter.]You have to take it down and show it to your father. Gururam, Sunil [names some other boys], call your father to come and meet me about your results.
> [ep 3/14.2/4b]

The teachers would insist that fathers came to collect reports. Mrs Vankar told her class: 'If your fathers are busy then your mothers can come.'[ep3/2.1/4b]. The assumption was that mothers were illiterate and that it was the fathers' responsibility to look after the education of their children, particularly that of their sons.

One episode involved a mother who came to sign her son's report card. The children had made lines outside the 4a classroom after recess. The mother squatted on the floor next to the children's lines and was signing the card, when Mrs Gandhi passed on the way to class. She asked her why she was sitting like that breaking up the children's lines, and then looked down, and asked: *Kya? Anghoota chhaap? Nahin, sahi...theek hai* (So, illiterate? No. right, good). Later in the day, a girl's father came and signed his daughter's card in the 4a classroom, did not engage in any discussion with the teacher about her marks, and left. A boy's father came in shortly after. The teacher said: 'He's alright in studies.' The father said he was busy and did not have time for him. The teacher replied, 'It is good if you get his older brother to teach him.'[eps1-2/5.10/4a]

Mrs Gandhi took great pains to write remarks on the children's report cards, pointing out to specific areas where each child could improve. There were no observable gender differences in the pattern of comments. Yet, in the classroom, boys were clearly the focus of exam-related 'talk'.

> Some boys are at the teacher's table getting their books corrected.
> Teacher: Sardar and Mohammed won't pass. Zero in everything. [She hits them; they wince.]
> ...See Rakesh, how nicely he writes now! How much did you get in your exam? [Turns to the boys at her table.] See how you'll do in your exam, these four boys are all going to fail.
> [ep7/29.12/4a]

These patterns of communication, although grounded in a sense of reality—the children's narratives do suggest that fathers were stricter with their sons on matters relating to education—nonetheless established a shared meaning about the value of education and the attributes of the learner. Girls and boys are more directly called on to make meaning of this discourse when evaluative statements are made in the classroom.

Evaluative statements

Statements which specifically point towards the behaviour of girls and boys in the classroom in terms of evaluation were observed. The themes which fall in this domain relate to children's everyday interactions with teachers: writing in books, showing books to teachers, knowing answers to questions, reading lessons, singing in the music class. Evaluative statements were consistently made using the gender division in the class. In both classes, the girls were told that they talked too much – while boys did *dhamaal.*

> In 4a, the teacher is shouting at some boys who have been fighting. She says to them: The boys... they're forced to come to school [otherwise] they'd be happier doing mischief...The girls are honest and sincere.
> [ep10/18.8/4b]

Girls' handwriting was better than that of the boys, they sat in their places and paid attention while the teacher taught. The ideal norm of good handwriting was a wedge in the gender divide :

> Mrs Vankar (faces boys) : See how nicely the girls have written. Why can't you !
> [ep 8/18.10/4b]

Good handwriting forms an important element of the hidden curriculum in all schools. In these classes, however, where teachers were frequently absent from the room and books were not consistently corrected, there was a reliance on those who had good handwriting to write on the board. These, inevitably, were girls. All the children told me how the girls are asked to write on the board because their writing was good (the theme of girls as 'neat'). I asked Vasu, the boy monitor of 4b what his 'work' was:

> V : My work is to keep the boys quiet. Neeta and Chandana do the writing work, and Reena minds the girls...
> (You don't write on the board ?)
> V : No. The girls make us write in our books.
> (Why ?)
> V : They don't let us know (what the teacher has asked them to write.) They tell us to keep the boys quiet...Teacher says their writing is good.
> [Int/20.3]

The significance of normative-evaluative statements lies in their 'normalising' of gender, i.e., assigning characteristics to girls and boys which are then held as the norm against which to judge their behaviour. Good handwriting and talking lead, within the specific context of the classroom, to the generation of a stereotype associated with girls; doing *dhamaal* becomes a characteristic of the boys. The children's narratives are laced with such meanings.

Associated with good writing was good teaching, '*accha padhana*'. The teachers relied heavily on delegating the responsibility of teaching to children in the class. Most of this classroom 'work' was done by the monitors, more specifically the girl monitors. In 4a, the girl monitor would have discussions with the teacher about what had to be taught (*kya kya padhana*) the next day or the coming week. In 4b, Mrs Vankar told the class: 'There's a girl in the 6th. She's so good at teaching. When the teacher's not there, she teaches. No-one is like that here, but these two girls (she points to the two girl monitors) will be like that.'[ep2/2.1/4b] Boys of 4b told me that although they were good at studies they were not called to teach because they did *dhamaal* and their writing was not good.

Language in routines

The strict divisions of labour maintained in everyday routines meant that teachers were constantly deploying gender to get work done. A predominant theme was that of minding and cleaning. As can be seen in Figure 4.6, the ratio of girls addressed to boys is extremely high. In most cases these statements would be directed at the girls to mind while the teacher had to attend to some other work. Although they would also tell the boy monitors to mind the boys, the boys would never get told to clean up the floor, even when they had dirtied it. On several occasions, Mrs Vankar would go down the aisle and point to some torn paper on the floor, and ask the girl nearest it to clean up. Once she happened to find some scraps of paper near Raju, a particularly visible boy in the class on account of his being frequently called up as a troublemaker. Raju looked at the teacher and pointed to Prabha, a girl on the other side of the aisle. She denied having done it, and Krishna, a mentally handicapped girl, went up and cleaned the floor.[ep2/9.10/4b]

Children's perceptions of these distinct gendered spaces were reinforced by the verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of teachers in the classroom which signify the gender divide in tasks such as cleaning. The girls in both classes would always sweep the rooms after recess. Once the 4b teacher came in late after recess and looked down at the floor which was littered with paper and scraps of food left over from recess-time.

> Mrs V : I came late to the class so you would clean it up. (Faces girls). Why haven't you cleaned it up ?
> [ep 3/29.12/4b]

Evaluations were constantly made with regard to adherence to norms, such as sitting properly in the classroom.

> The teacher is writing Gujarati questions and answers on the board. She turns around, goes and straightens out a few lines.
> [To the boys] The boys don't have any lines! Look at the girls! They all have proper lines!
> She goes over and hits a few boys, sets their line straight. '*Ghane*!' (Filthy!)
> [ep 5/4.10/4b]

Labelling practices

One domain of interactional discourse where gender is at its most perceptible is that of verbal statements made by the teacher in the classroom. Here the social characteristics of the interactional situation are at their most striking. The assumption that the middle-class teacher and the working class student have a shared landscape of meaning – in terms of the aims of education – is at its most contentious here. In a sense, ethnographic observations which led to the identification of this domain validated the hypothesis that gender and social class are both –in contradictory and convergent ways—determining factors in the construction of gender in schools.

Labelling statements were identified as direct communication made with children in specific contexts. The principal themes in this domain were : name calling/abuse, social stereotypes and gender stereotypes. The findings were that these were curiously related: name calling and social stereotyping was primarily directed at the boys, and gender stereotypes at girls. Name calling included a range of abusive terms for boys like shameless, useless, *goondas* (lumpens), etc.

The generation of social stereotypes grew out of teachers' beliefs that the boys were not interested in studies and just came to school to do mischief. They associated a string of adjunct social characteristics like poor people are like that, their fathers don't discipline them, etc. Gender stereotypes, on the other hand, were generated from within the school and classroom contexts – like girls talk, boys do *dhamaal*, etc. Like all stereotypes, these negative statements tended towards becoming self-fulfilling prophecies, as children appropriated them in their self-definitions and definitions of others –often from the other gender category. As I will show in the next chapter, the children's narratives resonate with teachers' perceptions.

A few episodes should indicate the extent to which labelling proceeds in the classrooms. In 4a, in a language (Hindi) class, the teacher was explaining meanings of 'difficult' words.

> Teacher (to a boy) : What is the meaning of *nikamma* ?
> B : *Bekar* (useless).
> T : Yes, we say, don't we, this boy is absolutely *nikamma,* or this thing is absolutely *nikamma....*
> [...a short while later, she spots a boy at the back talking, calls to him.] *Bekar*!
> [ep15/6.12/4a]

The girls were singled out for talking, and this was a predominant stereotype constantly underlined in interactions.

> Teacher[to girls at the back] See how much they talk. This is their habit from childhood. What do you have so much to talk about?!
> [ep 17/24.1/4b]

In 4b there were some boys who clearly were particularly noisy, getting into fights particularly when the teacher was not in the room. These boys were singled out by Mrs Vankar for being, as one boy later told me, 'bad fish in a good pond'. On one occasion, she sent two of these boys out of the classroom. They stood in the small passage outside the room, talking. As I came past them to go to the room, they greeted me with wide grins. The teacher told me: 'I sent them out. They were taking the *jaan* (life) of one of the boys.' Later when the teacher left for some work, one of the boys, Sunil, walked into the room, picked up his bag and left. In the teacher's absence, all the children's attention was focussed on how the girl monitors were managing to keep the boys out of the room, as the

boys outside teased them by shutting and opening the door. The teacher came back later and addressed the boys:

> See all of you!! Not even writing!! What do you come to school for? All those who don't want to write can take their bags and go home...These *jhopad-pattiwallahs* (slum-people) will never improve, however much you try.
> [ep5/6.4/4b]

At the time of the literacy campaign, Mrs Vankar tried to motivate her students to take studies seriously. Everyday there would be slogans from the literacy campaign up on the board. On one such day, there was a slogan: *Khud pado aur doosron ko padao* (learn and teach others). In a travesty of all that had gone into her attempts to inspire the children, she said to the monitor who was teaching about one of the boys: 'Send him out. He'll take someone's life someday.' She then went and settled some girls at the back: 'Don't talk.' Turned to the boys: 'You only come here to do *dhamaal*'. Later she looks up from her work and addresses the class:

> (To girls at the back) Hey, you finished talking?
> (To the boys) *Nalayak*. You, Suresh, get out. You boys only come for lunch...You will all get bad certificates and your names will come on the illiteracy list.
> [ep1/10.1/4b]

At one time when the teacher in 4b was out on some literacy campaign-related work, there was chaos growing in the classroom. A fight between two boys was getting so vicious that I had to abandon my neutrality and intervene as unobtrusively as I could. The 4a teacher Mrs Gandhi, hearing the noise from her class, came in, and ordered the 'new' girl monitor, Rani, to mind the class. (This girl was appointed in consultation with the 4a teacher, because she was perceived to be more '*kadak*' than the earlier ones). Rani refused to get up.

> Mrs Gandhi: Look at that. Vasu [the boy monitor] is worst. Everyone is supposed to listen to Rani.
> [She starts talking to me about how 'these children' need to be beaten to get them to behave; noticing Kishan in the corner of the room fighting with Raju, she rushes over to them and kicks them.] Donkeys! All of you are donkeys!!
> [ep18/5.1/4b]

Mocking was another strategy used by teachers in labelling. In one fight in 4b, Kishan kicked Gururam in the course of a fight.

> Teacher[to me]: You see? *Nalayak*! Where do these people come from? Don't want to study. Why do you come when you don't learn anything? Should I give you rice in a silver bowl to get you to come everyday? [she goes over and hits Vijay, another boy in the middle of an altercation with a neighbour] This one, he only comes to eat.
> [ep6/8.12/4b]

Another area of labelling which fell in the region of overlap between normative and evaluative discourse in the classroom was related to the fact of boys working. Several boys assisted their fathers in their occupations or did work like ironing, painting houses and gardening work. Attention focussed on these boys for not being interested in studies. The teachers would frequently comment on this in connection with *dhamaal* in the classroom.

> Mrs Vankar[to Mrs Gandhi, both standing near the former's table in the classroom]: See those boys. They are not bothered. Go to work, so why should they? [Calls to two of them.] Hey! Look at you! So dirty! You still go to work at that nursery?
> Mrs Gandhi: And those *sabziwallahs* (vegetable-people) in my class. They make more money than us, send their sons to work, don't bother about studies...
> [ep 12/22.11/4b]

Punishments

Physical punishment was more visible in 4a, but both classes had an ambience of symbolic violence not only through hitting, but also through adverse statements directed at the children. Much of this was directed towards the boys. Classifying the data in terms of mild and severe punishment, it was seen that boys faced much more of the latter. The teachers often invoked the family's positions on punishing boys.In one incident, a boy's father brought him into 4a, telling the teacher that he found his son roaming (*rakhadte huwe*) on the road. The father himself was a teacher in Sriram Hindi School(a secondary school to which many of these children also went after Class 7). He knew Mrs Gandhi from having taught in the municipal schools. He told her: 'He's useless. Hit him a lot (*bahut peeto*)—that's the only way he'll learn.' (The boy, Suraj, was a particularly quiet boy. It was touching to see how some of the boys were affectionate towards him after the incident.) Obviously there was parental sanction for hitting boys, and this was continuously brought up in classroom interactions.

> Teacher[to boys]: I'm teaching here and no-one is paying attention. [To Dilip] Your family people say hit him a lot, hit him a lot, only then he'll improve. I don't hit,

> because I think children become wayward[*natkhat*] with hitting. Just because I don't hit, you think you can do whatever you like?
> [ep3/29.12/4b]

A particularly demeaning form of punishment was making the children become '*murgas*'. Becoming a '*murga*', which literally means 'chicken', meant bending down, putting one's hands between the knees and holding one's ankles from the outer side, like a Moebius strip. It was possibly the most humiliating (and inhumane) of punishments in the repertoire of teachers and held in the greatest fear by the children. In most cases, it was held out as a threat – far more often it was actually carried out. And although girls would be threatened with it, in my observations I never actually saw a girl being subject to this punishment.

> Mrs Gandhi is going around the boys' side, threatening them with punishments if they don't complete writing. She makes three boys *murgas*. She then turns to the girls and starts their side: *Chalo* (come). Let's see which of the girls I will make *murgais* (hens).
> [ep24/18.11/4a]

Although these forms of punishment were directed at specific children, there was another mode of calling attention to classroom discipline, and this was through what Avalos(1986) has called 'gymnastics'. This would be resorted to whenever there was a perceived need to call the children to attention, which would be done by ordering them to sit in their places, put their hands up, down,on their heads, folded, etc.

4.7.2 Gender and/in curricular contexts

The teachers' normative and evaluative positions and the ways in which these coloured their differential statements directed at girls and boys was the 'backdrop' to interactions in the classroom in particular subject periods. There were nine subjects taught in Class 4: Hindi, English, Environment Science(ES), Mathematics, Gujarati, Socially Useful Productive Work(SUPW), Music, Art and Physical Education (PE). Interactions in different subjects positioned children in different ways in terms of gender. The cultural forms varied, but in each case there was a 'gendering' of the subjects concerned. These were not conscious attempts at stereotyping children; curricular transactions were observed to be scaffolded by teachers' belief structures and evaluative stances in the classroom.

As mentioned in Section 4.1.2, timetables were not strictly followed in these classes. There was greater impetus to deal with subjects for which the mid-year and annual examination papers came from the School Board, such as Hindi, ES and Mathematics. Declaration of a music or games period would be met with shouts of joy, although these were not held as frequently. Teachers focussed on completing the course in the other subjects, and since time was short (the school timings had been cut down to two and a half hours a day after the declaration of the district literacy campaign) these 'subjects' claimed the teachers' attention a great deal more. Indeed, 'examinations' in these subjects were merely a ritual. In Music, children were asked to recite a song (usually a *bhajan* or pledge sung in the school assembly); in PE they were made to 'perform' sitting in their places, or called individually and asked what their favourite game was. Here there was caution exercised in mentioning the games they played in school with members of their own gender category. One boy, Dilip, mentioned *langdi* (hopping) in a unit test and was teased thereafter by his friends.

The pattern of asking questions and eliciting answers in the different subjects, i.e. eliciting participation from the children, was very distinct in the classes observed. The teacher would either ask: Who will answer this/ write on the board/ read/sing? And children would either volunteer, or the teacher would call on a particular child. This would either be followed by prompting, or 'taking over' by other children. Since the teacher called on girls to carry out tasks in some areas and boys in others, there was a close guarding of 'territories'. Differential pedagogic tasks instantiated a certain dialectics of power which underlined these interactions in the class.

Writing on the board was done exclusively by the girls, because their writing was considered better. Boys, when asked, were usually sent back by the girls or the teacher. Sometimes boys were asked to read, although a few girls often edged them out of the way. One incident involved a boy, Vasu. In Hindi periods, Vasu often tried to get the teacher's permission to read the lessons aloud to the children. The following is an episode from one of these days:

> Teacher [after introducing a lesson] OK, Chandana, you read.
> Vasu : Teacher, may I read ?
> [Teacher ignores him, goes back to her 'work'. Chandana is barely audible above the noise. The boys are playing and talking among themselves; girls are talking in their 'places'].

Teacher [looks up from her work, at the boys. To Raju, who's sitting on his bench, facing the back of the class]: You've become impossible.... Sunita, come here. [She gives Sunita some roses she's brought from home for another teacher.]
Teacher [facing girls] : She's reading, and you're talking...Mahesh, you read.
[Mahesh is caught unawares in the middle of a conversation.]
Teacher [to Vasu] : You wanted to read ?
[Vasu comes to the front and starts reading. Not a single child is paying attention...Sunita returns from her 'errand'. She stands near Vasu and peers into his textbook, goes to her own place, brings her own book and opens it to the right page, peers once again to see where he has 'reached'. She edges him out both physically and by reading louder than him. Teacher looks up.]
Teacher : Sunita, you read. [Gestures Vasu to return to his place].
[ep23/18.11/4b]

In Music periods, girls were asked to come up and sing, and I did not once observe the boys asking the teacher to let them sing. The girls would usually be asked to lead a chorus in a prayer song, and be prompted by the boys in the front who would accompany them by playing the beat on their desks. The teachers would tell the boys: 'You can sing too, can't boys sing?' In all public functions in the school, starting with the morning assembly, it was the girls who sang, so perhaps the boys' not singing was in keeping with the norms of school culture. The only times the boys would sing, and this was what usually happened in the music classes I observed, was when they were made into a 'team' opposite to a girls 'team' in the popular singing game based on Hindi film songs, *'antakshri'*. Here again, competition was set up between the boys and the girls. In any case, the girls would be called to sing because their 'voices were good.'

As described in Section 4.4.4, there was strict boundary maintenance between girls' and boys' games. These were self-enforced, rather than teacher-directed. However, in formal 'games' periods, teachers quite consciously maintained gender separation. Since the school did not have any sports equipment, there were limits placed on what games children could play. Observations of the games periods showed that the teachers' presence ensured surveillance, especially over the boys who would jump over the school wall, or get into fights among themselves, or rush into the girls' side. Teachers maintained that children *wanted* to play separately, which was true, but they did not actually organise games which could be played together either. In fact, interviews with children revealed that cross-gender games were more common in neighbourhoods, even among classmates. In school,

however, they were simply not acceptable, and even considered taboo. One incident, when marbles were found in the pockets of a girl, led to considerable consternation among the children, both girls and boys, some of whom brought this to the attention of the teacher. The girl involved, Pramila, was one among the two girls who had failed the year before, both of whom were the only ones to play with the boys in the classroom. The teacher said: '*Uski to aisi hi aadaten hain*' (this is her habit), indicating that since she had violated other norms of gender-appropriate behaviour, it was not surprising that she could break the gender taboo in games.

Mathematics was the most interesting period to observe the hidden curriculum of gender. One gender stereotype established in the class was that girls are all 'zero/*kacchi* (weak) in mathematics'. Yet it was always some among the girls who solved problems on the board, whether asked to by the teacher or not. One girl in 4b, in particular, who sat at the back and rarely involved herself in the interactions going on in the front and middle sections of the classroom, literally came alive in the Mathematics classes. A few of the boys would also be asked to come and 'do' the sums on the board, but would inevitably get prompted, and finally edged out by a group of girls. To lend credence to these observations, focussed observations were carried out for around seven weeks from December to February 1998. Girls were found to participate (in terms of giving/solving answers) more than twice as often as boys. Yet, in their interviews all the children repeated what the teachers' classroom position, that the girls were 'weaker' than boys in Mathematics.

Like Music, SUPW was yet another subject distinctly focussed on the female learner. Ostensibly to 'channelise children's energies in socially positive directions' –as stated in the preamble to the textbooks used in the class—the teachers interpreted its agenda to mean teaching children how to learn to make objects out of inexpensive items which they could sell, decorating the house, etc. In fact, the textbooks, as well as what was taught in the class, seemed to have a positively 'home science' orientation. In 4b, I observed several classes (even other than SUPW) spent on teaching the girls how to make garlands out of puffed rice, plastic bags, etc. On a few occasions, the boys would be told by a smiling teacher: 'You can also make garlands, does it mean that only girls have to?' Once a boy

replied to this by saying: 'Yes, they can make them and we can eat'[the puffed rice].[ep 3-4/22.11/4b].

Other things like house decoration, making tomato juice, lemon juice, etc. were always 'taught' to the whole class, but clearly directed at the girls. In 4a, during an SUPW examination, a boy was asked what *rangolis* were made of. Deepu, one of the 'good' boys, mumbled: 'colour, water, *gobar* (dung)...' to which the girls went into peals of laughter. When the teacher asked him to repeat, he looked down and refused to say anything. One of his friends said: 'Teacher, he's feeling shy.'[ep4/23.1/4a]. Such incidents occurred repeatedly in these classes. Again here the teacher was not consciously transmitting a gendered message; rather, the hidden assumptions embodied in the SUPW syllabus—focussing on 'work' that was traditionally considered within the female domain, found expression in positioning girls and boys differently in the classroom context. Had teachers ensured that the boys were also made to participate in the interactions the subject would not have been constructed as a 'feminine' subject. Interestingly, in situations where they were specifically calling attention to the boys, they would tell them how their own sons knew how to do the tasks in the book, like preparing tea, making *torans*, etc.

In school textbooks, gender forms one element of an extensive system of social stereotyping of people. In ES, for example, there are, apart from discussions on the topography of different regions of India, descriptions of the people of these regions. Generalisations are made about the food, clothes and occupations of these people. Children are not invited to engage with actual realities, which could be done, given the range of regions they represented. (The few occasions when children were allowed to discuss their own experiences in the ES classes in both 4a and 4b, there was a marked change in the patterns of interaction, with even the so-called troublemakers among the boys –especially in 4b—participating avidly.) Instead, these generalisations are the focus of transmission in the classroom. In a topic on the people of the plains, the teacher in 4a asked the children a question from the textbook: What are people of Bengal called? The children chorus the answer: *Bangali babu*!! The teacher then turned from the board and faced them: 'This is an important question. It always comes in the exams'.[ep8/9.8/4a].

On topics of Hygiene, Health and Cleanliness, whether in ES, Hindi or SUPW, social and gender labelling was most evident. This topic was taught in 4a just before the Diwali holidays. The teacher told the class: 'During Diwali, all of you will be cleaning your houses. *Clean corners like us, not like* bais [women domestic workers], *because it's our own house.*'(emphasis added)[ep6/5.10/4a]. An ES lesson on Hygiene was dealt with in the following manner: The teacher read out the lesson, which talked of the dangers of stagnant water and open garbage. The lesson advises children to ensure that pools of water and open garbage pits near their houses are filled up with mud to prevent the spread of disease. The teacher explains the importance of doing this and tells the class: 'Especially *jhopdiwallays, na,* (slum-people) they have these dirty habits ...and leave their areas filthy.'[ep5/1.8/4b]. What could clearly have been an engrossing session on local-level initiatives in public sanitation was turned into a shrill statement against the backgrounds these children came from.

Another episode from a lesson in ES highlights this even more clearly. Two boys were doing some *dhamaal* in 4b. The teacher picked up the newly-acquired stick from the monitor and went over to hit them. From the back of the class, she addressed me: 'These boys like *kuccha* houses—I asked them in ES. They say they're cool. That is they want to live in *jhopdis* all their lives. Do you still go to polish tiles with your father? If there were only *kaccha* houses, how would you find work?'[ep1/20.3/4b]

In all these subjects, the distinction between the 'private' domestic sphere (associated with women) and the 'public' domain (associated with men) was emphasised. The textbooks did the same, and so the shift to the interactional context, in the absence of pedagogic reflection, was almost a 'natural' corollary. In several lessons in textbooks, daughters would be shown helping their mothers in (albeit very middle-class) kitchens. In conjunction with gender stereotyping of boys as being noisy, the disjuncture is stark:

> Teacher[to boys] Shameless! Making noise while I'm teaching!
> [To girls]: You should also learn to be like Sarita. Help your mother, cut vegetables, sweep...
> [ep16/3.8/4b]

On another occasion, Mrs Vankar was telling the children how they could fruitfully spend the coming week of holidays for *Makarsankranti.*

> [Faces boys] You can help in the morning. Suppose your mother is cleaning the rice. You can take a few and give it to the birds...Girls can help mothers in the house...boys can also help by buying things from the shop... Girls can help in sweeping, cleaning...
> [ep6/22.11/4b]

The underlying assumption of the teacher was that girls work within the home and boys do 'outside' work. This dichotomy between the 'private' and the 'public' is often invoked in normalising gender roles.

The Hindi periods were particularly relevant to the construction of gender in the classroom, and indicative of the manner in which re-contextualisation of gender occurs through curricular transaction. Although the present study does not attempt 'textbook analysis', it was found necessary to examine the books for their content after observing interactions in the classroom. This was also pertinent since all the children told me that they liked reading the Hindi textbook because it had 'nice stories'. The analysis of the Hindi textbook ratified the findings of other studies on gender bias in language textbooks. There was a predominance of male-centred stories, stereotyped behaviours (boys as adventurous, girls as submissive and home-centred) and all persons in positions of authority were male ('leaders', scientists, teachers—often referred to as *mahapurush* (great men) in the class). Adult women, when they appeared, were mothers—and visually represented as caring and nurturant. When they spoke, which was rare, they were highly infantilised—child-like and ignorant of the world.

Three lessons

Curricular contexts provide a meeting ground for representations of gender in textbooks and gender ideologies underpinning the hidden curriculum. Textbook representations are reinforced by patterns of curricular transaction, which reflects the situated nature of the curriculum. Three such contexts are described in the following sections. In each of these curricular contexts, the opportunity to engage the children in reflective discussion on gender roles was missed, in favour of the standard practice of eliciting answers to the 'given' questions. In the following sections, two lessons from the Hindi language textbook are described. Curricular transaction and context of another lesson, *Kaun Kya Banega,*

will be described in some detail, since it synecdochically represents much of the foregoing discussion, and leads on to questions which shall be discussed in the next chapter.

1. One of the Hindi lessons was a narrative by Bacchendri Pal, on her attempts to overcome social taboos and achieve her ambitions in climbing the Himalayas. In 4b, the teacher introduced the lesson with: '*Dekho, aadmi to ja sakte hain, lekin yeh aurat huye bhi gayee.*'(See, men can certainly go, but she went despite being a woman) [ep5/1.8/4b]. This was not the tenor of the narrative, in which Pal emerges as a strong, self-willed woman. The teacher then turned to the boys and said, 'Bacchendri Pal was a woman. Do you also want to do such brave things?' Two girls raised their hands but are ignored by the teacher. The teacher continued: ' She had to fight society—she didn't want to get married and couldn't find work...She upset her family by wanting to climb the mountains...this shows that we have to fight [odds] to achieve what we want.' The rest of the class proceeded as follows:

> A girl is called to read the lesson. A boy puts up his hand, asking to be allowed to read; the teacher ignores him. The boys in the first two rows keep prompting the girl. The boy who had put up his hand continues to plead: Madam! Me, me!! The teacher calls him to read. [To the girls]: Be ready. The boy reads two lines and is asked to sit down.
>
> Only the first row of boys and girls are reading from their textbook; the others are drawing, or playing in their places. Another girl is called to read.
>
> Teacher: Now the questions. What studies did Bacchendri do?
>
> A girl: She practised on smaller peaks.
>
> Teacher: No. She did her M.A. in Sanskrit and B.Ed.
>
> [The teacher leaves for some work downstairs; when she returns, she continues from where she left off. Looks into the book.]
>
> Teacher[to the girl who had answered]: Yes, you're right. Not M.A., B.Ed. Now the next question: What should we do to achieve success? Learn this answer, it always comes in the exam.
>
> Chorus from children: We should do hard work[*kadi mehnat*] to achieve success!
>
> [ep5-8/1.8/4b]

2. Classroom discussion of a lesson titled '*Rubber ka Ped*' revealed the ways in which stereotypes of women are reinforced through transaction. The central character of the story is a young boy who is interested in where rubber comes from and asks his mother. The structure of the story positions his mother in a curious manner. Firstly, *she* is the immediate source of knowledge,telling her son that rubber comes from a tree. Thereafter, with the entry of the father who proceeds to describe the process of rubber tapping and the production of rubber goods, not only is she silenced by the writer, signifiers position her as a child along with her son through sentences like: *Is batcheet mein Ma ko bhi maza aa raha tha* (Mother was enjoying the conversation.) Continuing in the persona of the child, she asks the father: 'Why are all these things made out of rubber?' His authoritative voice resumes, until the end of the story, when she asks him to get rubber bangles from the market for her the next day. The theme of infantilisation of the mother in the story was carried on in the discussion that followed in 4b:

> Teacher: See how many things Kamal's father bought for him made out of rubber! Can you think of rubber things you all have? [Chorus answers.] ...What did Kamal's mother want from the market?[This was a question from the textbook.]
> A girl: Bangles.[she turns to her neighbour.] You can have bangles made of rubber?
> Teacher: Yes. It's in the lesson... See how Kamal wants to show off his new things? Women are also like that, his mother also wants new things...we like to show off our new things...[turns to girls] You like it when your friends notice your new dresses? Women also like ...
> [ep5/18.8/4b]

4.7.3 *Kaun kya banega*: Gender and the hidden curriculum of 'work'

As the foregoing discussions indicate, 'work' is a multi-layered category in school discourse. Several meanings were attached to the idea of work. The 'official knowledge' of work was that which was 'expected' of social actors in the school setting. There was the work of teachers: teaching, completing the syllabus, correcting books and examination papers; and administrative work. Monitors' work was minding the children, helping the teacher, and teaching. The work of the children was to behave decorously, read and write well, study and attempt to pass in all subjects.

However there was also more 'hidden' meanings to work. Teachers were expected to instil 'manners' and 'discipline' in the children, and the children were expected to do '*kadi mehnat*' (hard work) to achieve success. Male teachers did different work from female teachers; girl monitors were assigned work of one kind and boy monitors of another. Fathers were asked to come to collect and sign report cards; if they 'didn't have the time' mothers could come. Unpaid work of mothers—'housework'—was not regarded as 'productive' work. The children in their interviews all had difficulty with the question 'what work does your mother do?', leading to answers like : Nothing, she just sits – *baithi rahti hai.*

Another layer of complexity to the idea of 'work' is more directly within the terrain of gender and formal education. While education for women is of crucial significance to their development and self-realisation, the perception of education as a lever to paid work outside the home is a largely middle-class conception. All the women teachers in the school took to financial employment to supplement family incomes, but by virtue of their class (and caste—they were all upper- and middle-caste) they possessed a degree of cultural capital which these children did not possess. When women teachers assume that a child with financial difficulties will be in a better position if her mother works outside the home, they clearly mean well, but do not realise that they are speaking from a position of relative privilege. Often in teachers' interactions with children such assumptions of 'gender equality' would co-exist quite unproblematically with other, regressive, notions about gender. As an illustrative example, I will describe one episode which involved Nayantara, a girl in 4b, who was doing rather badly in all examinations that year. One day, as I sat on the portico during a games period talking to Mrs Vankar and the Class 1 teacher, the teachers as the children played all around us, the episode described below occurred.

> Class I teacher: Nayantara doesn't do well in studies. I told her mother why don't you get out of the house. She doesn't want to. Husband died three years back,[she] lives off her husband's pension. I told her see, we are women and we work outside. But she doesn't want to.
> [to Nayantara, whom she calls] Why don't you study? We'll tell your mamaji to get you married and send you to a Nepali village.
> Mrs Vankar: Yes, send us necklaces from there, you get good ones...
> Class 1 teacher: This one looks like her father. Her mother is *acchi, gori* (nice and fair)... [To Nayantara] OK, go.
> [ep3/21.11/PG]

Lalsingh, Nayantara's brother in 4a, told me that although the teachers told them that they should tell their mother to work, there was 'no use'. I asked him why. He said '*Angoota chaap ko kaun kam dega*?' (Who will give an illiterate work?) [Int/Lalsingh/12.2/4a].

The official curriculum repeatedly stressed that work should be aimed towards selfless service, such as working for the community and the nation. Working for economic gain was not acceptable to normative discourse within the formal education setting. Children are not expected to be economic agents (except that in the Indian context, we have more than 50 million of them). Yet, the reality was that many of these children *had* to work to supplement family incomes. Here there was a contradiction between the official and the hidden meanings of 'work' in the school context.

The one acceptable way in which economic work can be discussed within official curriculum is to place it within the context of adult occupations. The belief (and official rhetoric) of formal education being a guarantor of upward social and economic mobility and that all that was necessary to achieve this was *kadi mehnat* (hard labour) was brought out in a lesson in Hindi titled '*Kaun kya banega?*'' (Who will become what?) The story embodies dynamics of gender and social class; moreover, within the curricular context, the underlying narratives of gender were brought to the surface in a dramatic manner. Since 'work' emerged as a critical interpretative category in the analysis of data, the contexts of curricular transaction of this particular lesson are discussed here in certain detail.

Kaun kya banega is a story set in a classroom, where the teacher (*Guruji*) is telling the children about the achievements of *mahapurushon* –scientists, scholars and leaders.

In the lesson, the *guruji* asks the children what they will be when they grow up. Six children –five boys and one girl–state what they want to be. Table 4.6 presents the structure of the lesson.

Table 4. 6 Structure of the lesson *Kaun Kya Banega*

Name of the child/gender	Career aspiration	Rationale	Guruji's remarks
Mohan;boy	Doctor	Free medical treatment to poor villagers	Your thoughts are lofty. You will definitely help the nation
Salim;boy	Engineer	Father says the country needs factories; I'll make/design new machines. Production will go up, the country will prosper.	Good! You will be a clever engineer. You should pay attention to your studies.
Saraswati; girl	Teacher	Teach illiterate people	The country needs teachers and (woman teachers), By teaching illiterate people you can make them into good citizens.
Pratap;boy	Soldier	Will defeat aggressors	You will be a patriot and a brave soldier.
Anand;boy	A 'good' farmer	Study in agricultural college. Use new technologies to increase yields, so that our villages are self-sufficient.	Our country needs educated farmers.
Chandu;boy	Leader	Serve people	You will definitely be a leader and help to get rid of the evils of our society

Gender stereotyping in occupations is fairly obvious from the story. This, however, needs to be seen in conjunction with other aspects of the story: 1) the illustrations accompanying the text which portray all characters as distinctly belonging to the middle-class, except the farmer (who is shown with his two bullocks on a field); 2) Adult occupations as being linked to the idea of 'national progress' and 3) the *Guruji's* closing remarks: 'Those who

do *kadi mehnat* (hard work), achieve success; you will all definitely be successful if you work hard'.

De-contextualisation of the idea of 'work' from the social worlds of these children was evident in the transaction of this particular lesson in the classroom. The teachers had been telling the children for days that they would be doing an interesting lesson in Hindi, one they would all enjoy. The structure of the lesson was such that it invited participation from students in the classroom, and the children greatly enjoyed the lesson in both classes. (For the first time in the year, all the children got a chance to speak and be heard.)

In 4b, the teacher told the children to first see the pictures (while she attended to some work). I heard Neeta, a girl in the second row, telling her partner: 'See, that's you (the teacher), that's your brother(engineer), that's your father(farmer).'[ep3/27.1/4b] The teacher then read the lesson aloud, sitting on the trunk facing the boys. As she read, she addressed the boys.

> See, Salim wants to be an engineer. Have to know Mathematics, English and Science well to become engineers...all teachers want their students to do well. [ep7/29.1/4b]

> See Pratap. He's not a coward, he wants to be a soldier...Those who are lazy, they only dream. What do we need to achieve [what we want]?
> A girl: Work hard.
> Teacher[continues]: Sunil, if you don't work hard in the exams how will you pass? Teachers want their students to be good at studies...[She narrates the case of one of her former students who works in a bank.]...OK, now I'll ask you one by one what you want to be. Should we start with the girls, or the boys? Girls? OK? Say whatever you want, don't be scared. Nurse, even engineer. *Old views are gone. Nowadays girls can also work. They bring their fathers, later husbands, money*...(emphasis added).
> [ep23/28.1/4b]

The girls then took turns to state what they wanted to be. Apart from the four who said 'doctor', and the three who said 'police', all the girls said 'teacher' or 'sister'(nurse). The boys likewise stated their ambitions: all said doctor, engineer, police (at which the teacher interrupted: Officer, no?). One said 'farmer', and another '*sarkari afsar*' (government officer); the latter evoking a response from the teacher: Why? *Aaram hai, na, is liye?* (Because there is luxury in it?)[ep 24/28.1/4b].

All the children were expected to provide rationales for their choice of future career: this appeared to be one way for them to learn the lesson. Although the teacher drew their attention to the gendered nature of the boys' responses, it was subsumed within the culture of gender divisions which was competitive and oppositional.

> Not one of the boys want to be teachers. How many of the girls want to be teachers...None from the boys?
> [ep26/28.1/4b]

The transaction of *Kaun kya banega* followed a similar pattern in 4a: the children were not only concerned about stating the appropriate career, they were anxious about giving the 'right answer' as well. All the girls stated stereotyped professions (teacher, sister) except two, who said they wanted to be police, and one who said 'engineer'. One boy, a bright and sincere child, said 'teacher'. One boy said 'carpenter', at which the teacher turned around to me and remarked, 'that's his home culture' [ep1/1.2/4a] Some of the boys the teacher had condemned to fail since the beginning of the year said 'doctor' and 'engineer'. The teacher's long commentary after hearing the children summed up the social possibilities she envisaged for them. It is cited here in full because of its significance to the construction of the learner as a learner in the particular social context of the school.

> OK. Now pay attention here... Everyone has said what they want to be...[Shouts to some girls at the back who are discussing the lesson.] Hands folded, everybody...But we have to work hard, decide with our minds that we want to work [hard]. See Jagdeep, Aman, Mohammed, they say they want to be doctors...but for doing that they'll have to work hard. I'm not saying they can't be. Anyone in the world can...but see these boys don't work...Aman, he's always absent but...says he wants to be a doctor. *With zeroes in the 4th can you be a doctor?* Whatever you want to be you have to start from now. If you want to be a soldier, build up strength, learn to face troubles...you shouldn't cry for small things...
> [faces girls] If you say you want to be a teacher, you have to learn properly, learn to speak in public... You have to have general knowledge, be modest, compassionate...if you want to teach illiterate people[as in the text] start teaching your illiterate mother at home...those who want to be nurses start looking after ill people at home, press feet, give water...
> [Faces boys] For doctor, you have to start now, getting good marks, writing well, fast, in good handwriting...don't throw your books into the corner when you get home... There's a proverb that when a mother looks at her son, she knows what he'll be when he grows up...(emphasis added).
> [ep4/2.1/4a]

In both classes, the teachers attempted to transmit the '*kadi mehnat*' ideology; in both cases, gender separation came into play, and the episodes which followed in both classes fell into the patterns described in earlier sections—punishing, social labelling, etc. What emerged was the overwhelmingly stereotyped responses of the children which appeared to be patterned on the 'logic' of the lesson, a ritual performance (McLaren: 1986) devoid of real engagement. This deconstruction of the classroom interactions does not imply that these children will not be able to fight social barriers to 'achieve success' in such occupations (however gender stereotyped and differentially valued they may be), or that teachers are cynical in their statements about 'hard work to achieve success'. The question that arises has more to do with the particular teleologies set into motion by the positioning of children as future productive agents in the national economy (where only the teacher and leader have a directly social role to play) in the 'official' curriculum, and the recontextualisation of these teleologies within the particular situated context of curriculum transaction where gender roles and divisions are distinctly established.

Perhaps an implicit rationale for addressing boys, for instance, was the knowledge that the social investment in boys' education was higher for the parents of these children. The contradictory stance of teachers by which, on one hand, oppositional categories were generated in the classroom, with girls as 'manageable' and boys as 'unmanageable', and on the other, paying greater attention to the boys about norms of 'school success' is indicative of the ideologies which guide formal education for the poor. I will discuss children's interpretations of these ideologies in the next chapter.

In summary

The analysis presented in this chapter focuses on the ways contexts and processes within the school and classroom–including curricular contexts and transactions–set up themes in the construction of gender in school. In Figure 4.7, a synoptic representation of these themes is forwarded based on the analysis. The themes represent areas of shared meaning between teachers and children. How do the contexts identified in the analysis mediate children's understanding of appropriate gender behaviour in the school? How do they interpret these contexts and their positions within them? Where do these normative

interpretations 'fit' within their larger social worlds? These questions are pertinent to understand the contextualised nature of knowledge embodied in the hidden curriculum of gender, and will taken up for discussion in the next chapter.

Figure 4.6 Gender construction in school