chapter 5 Children's narratives of gender: Social worlds and school contexts

The analysis in Chapter 4 primarily focused on the contexts and processes within the school and classroom which construct gender in everyday life. In these descriptions, the hidden curriculum appears to be primarily constructed by adult participants in the school setting, namely, the teachers. Observations, however, revealed that children not only responded to the contexts of gender construction by adhering to its implicit rules governing appropriate behaviour, they also, both within this process and through participation in other contexts of their own making, constructed gender on their own terms. This is not surprising, since children enter school with a fairly strong sense of gender identity.

It is difficult to understand the 'logic' by which children interpret school contexts without first understanding the social experiences they bring to the school and classroom setting. This chapter examines the 'data' from children's interviews. The introductory section deals with certain methodological issues in interviewing the children. The second section (5.1) discusses two broad areas: social experience outside the school, which reflect on processes of primary socialisation into gender roles; and children's ideas about education and their futures. The third section looks at children's responses to gender constructions within the school based on this analysis. While acknowledging my role as an adult interlocutor, the attempt has been to focus on the child as the learner in, and interpreter of, the hidden curriculum of gender in the school setting.

On interviewing children

One advantage of interviewing the children after the observational phase of the study was that I had got to know them by name, and had some idea of where they 'fitted' in the social structure of the classrooms. This was important, because there were chances of focussing only on those children who were more physically visible and vocal in the classroom, as well as those who were more articulate. Having some knowledge of the social structure of the

classrooms, these children were most likely to have come from the front sections of the classrooms, in the physical 'space' denoting relative power and privilege.

The interviews were loosely structured, following a natural rather than an 'enforced' logic. As far as possible, children were encouraged to speak about themselves and their lives. 'Rapport' was attempted to be established through a subtle signifying of friendship, which necessarily, given the symbolic and real differences between us, had to be based on conveying of affection. These differences arose from the realities that I was 1)signified as a 'Madam*ji*' who had been observing them for most of the year; 2) an adult; and 3) an English-knowing person who came from the university, so there was a clear-cut differential of cultural capital between us. It is important to register and acknowledge these differences, since children's responses were mediated by the knowledge that they existed. Moreover, these differences were likely to position me in an *evaluative* role vis-à-vis their statements. Attempts were made to avoid such a situation, since this would not only colour their narratives, but also lead me to make unwarranted interpretations.

Affection was attempted to be extended both physically and symbolically. The interviews were held in an unused classroom, with a lone bench placed in the centre of the room. The children would come into the room in order of their seating (making gender divisions unavoidable). Although initially the monitors would help in identifying which child was to come in next , after the first few interviews, I ensured that the child after 'finishing' would call her/his immediate neighbour. Given the nature of socially determined (and 'embodied') rules of deference, the children would almost automatically sit on the floor in front of me. Physical gestures such as making them sit next to me on the small bench, putting my arm around them, etc. cast me in a 'maternal' frame, which helped to signify affection. Symbolically, too, there was an attempt to break barriers in communication by sharing experiences, rather than merely listening; taking an interest in the small events of their lives and following up on these outside the interview sessions –How's your baby brother feeling today? Did you find your pen? Did the police come and catch the thief?

This leads to another aspect of the interviews. All attempts were made to focus on themes of interest, but without stymieing the basic propensity of children to talk about small events

in their lives. In a situation where self-expression is denied, the children seemed to enjoy talking freely about themselves. However, I was constantly aware that their narratives were infused with a sense of the 'present'. If I asked about friends, there were chances that the list would probably exclude those they had had a fight with recently; likewise with subjects they liked—if they had got good marks in a subject in the recently-concluded tests, they were likely to mention that subject. The immediacy that children live in does colour their responses; nonetheless, the 'abundant present' also forms a part of the reality of their socially-constructed knowledge and must be acknowledged and respected. This also has important consequences in a study of curriculum—for if it is not known how children interpret social knowledge, pedagogy and curriculum will continue to be based on adult ways of knowing.

On issues concerning their futures and the place of education in their lives, however, the children displayed a great deal of 'maturity'. As I will discuss in the following sections, their responses offer a mirror to the rhetoric of equal opportunity through education. Social conditions were grasped with a mature knowledge of 'how things are'.

5.1 The gendered social worlds of children

In this section I will discuss the major themes which emerged from the discussions I had with the children during the interviews conducted with them. Reference will also be made to interactions outside the formal interview setting when these are pertinent to a given theme. To understand how children interpret the hidden curriculum of gender in school, we need to understand the categories which frame these interpretations: categories of thought and action which are used in the home and community and recontextualised through experiences in the school setting. To understand the *logic* by which children come to interpret the cues of the hidden curriculum, a holistic understanding of children's social experiences is essential.

Two broad inter-related themes emerged from the interviews. One related to the experience of community life and the rules of gender-appropriate behaviour therein. These rules extended to ideologies governing the education of girls and boys. The second significant

theme which emerged related to children's views on gender separation in areas of work and play.

5.1.1 Community and school

The majority of children came from families who were either second or first generation migrants to the city. (There were a few exceptions, notably among the Maharashtrian students whose families were from Baroda.) This influenced their identity in a significant manner. There were close linkages with extended families in the native villages, and the children often went there in the holidays. The few children whose fathers had transferrable jobs had experienced other regions of the country, but also had experiences of living in their villages when their fathers were between postings.

The children expressed nostalgia for village life, and all of them told me how they enjoyed the '*khuli hawa*'(open air) of their '*desh*' (village), how there was so much more space to play. The boys, in particular, displayed knowledge about the conditions which brought them to the city—dispossession of land, mounting debts, and drought. There were discussions at home about life in the '*desh*', how they needed to save money to re-purchase mortgaged land, or build a house, or install a hand-pump. (Undoubtedly these discussions must have had a mythologised element for the children, which influenced what I identified as nostalgia for the village.) For the boys, these were more immediate issues in the sense that they were expected to shoulder economic responsibility. Most of the boys worked at piece-rate jobs, or assisted their fathers in their work, from which they were allowed to keep small amounts of money. The marriage of girls was a more distinct focus within community life. All the children with elder sisters, as well as many of the girls, told me how the extended village family (in particular, the paternal grandmother) played a role in deciding when girls' marriages were to take place. Children were exposed to these discussions on their visits to the *desh*.

Knowledge about social relations within the community were kept alive through these discussions, as also through networks of interaction among members of the same community living in the neighbourhood. This was one distinguishing feature of these children—that most of them came from contiguous neighbourhoods, which were clustered

around community and caste. Indeed, interactions within neighbourhoods and within the same community in the neighbourhood seem to have played a regulatory function in controlling children's interactions, particularly those with children of the opposite gender (as also of different *jat*). Direct control seemed to be one aspect of regulation; cultural barriers such as ethnic stereotyping, and purity-pollution taboos also played a prominent part.

The social position of children in the classroom appears to have some relationship with the position of their family in the community. School events were carried back to neighbourhood life, and family members—usually fathers or older brothers-- were called in to settle disputes, especially those among boys. These exercises of power, in turn, had their resonances in the patterns of interaction within the school. Physical fights in school were settled in the *basti*, or in the evening *sabzi mandi* where many of the boys helped in selling vegetables or ran small stalls. For the girls, retribution was not as much an issue as for boys, but there were far greater controls on their choice of friends –of both genders, but particularly with boys. Children's narratives indicate that interactions did take place between girls and boys, but fell within accepted norms of age, and caste/community. Girls played with younger boys, siblings of friends, or their own brothers. The boys did likewise, but appeared less tolerant of girls, especially younger siblings who would restrict their mobility.

5.1.2 Social and gender relations

As discussed above, children had a fairly clear idea of their social position through interactions in their own families, communities and the neighbourhoods they lived in. Knowledge of differences—whether of caste, class (as in economic status), and gender—were fairly well-entrenched through these practices. There was a conflation of social categories like caste, community and religion in their interpretations of 'difference' and the definition of the 'other'. Caste is a case in point. Children brought up issues of *jat* in many contexts. Children were aware of *jat* through occupational differentiation along caste lines, food habits, roles in different rituals, etc. Religious differences were subsumed within this

context. Hence '*hamare jat mein ladke kaam pe nahin jate hain*', '*brahmin-log bhagwan jaisa hai*', '*wo chamar-bhangi log macchi khate hain*' and '*musulmann log aise hi puja karte hain*' were often heard in their narratives. To what extent prejudice had set in was difficult to gauge –patterns of play in the school and those mentioned in the neighbourhood did not suggest an entrenchment of prejudice. The point is that the children's awareness of social difference appeared to be characterised by fuzzy, rather than direct, distinctions.

Gender, although subsumed within these 'fuzzy categories', was one line of difference which was more clearly defined. Social knowledge of gender relations was primarily based in social knowledge of what was permissible in one community, and what lay beyond the bounds of social acceptability. The fact that the children represented different regions of India provided an interesting lens to their narratives on gender. Two areas emerged as constitutive contexts of gender construction in these narratives: one was the domain of 'work'; related to this was the area of education. In these contexts there was a clearer demarcation of boundaries of gender.

5.1.2.1 Spaces of being: 'work' and 'play'

Most children had little difficulty telling me what their fathers' work was, although many of them were not able to give their exact occupations, and there were discrepancies in description. However, children found my question: what work does your mother do? extremely problematic. Answers like 'nothing', 'nothing, she only cooks and cleans', 'she just sits' (*baithi rahti hain*) were commonly encountered. Coming from someone who was clearly educated and associated with the world of work 'outside' the home, they were perhaps unable to gauge what response I would anticipate. However, there was another angle to their responses. Work inside the house was not considered 'work'—in contradistinction to the work their fathers, teachers, or myself, were engaged in. Unpaid work, in other words, did not classify as work at all—it was not seen as 'productive' in economic terms. Moreover, work is something which one does 'outside' the home. This is borne out by the responses of those children whose mothers worked as domestic workers: They responded 'she goes to *banglas*' without any hesitation. With appropriate prompts, all children were able to specify in detail what their mother's housework comprised.

Contrary to expectations, both girls and boys said they did housework, which they called 'helping their mother': sweeping, cleaning and washing. Distinctions were more in terms of the nature and degree of work done: boys were entrusted with most of the 'outside' work, like running errands, filling water when it had to be brought from a distance. Girls did a greater share of domestic work, and this was mandated by parental controls. Household work included looking after younger siblings while mothers cooked and attended to other duties, and cooking, which none of the boys claimed to know (they all, however, said they could make tea.) The 'burden' of housework did not, however, escape the girls' notions of fairness.

> My brothers don't do any housework if we sisters are around. If we aren't then they have to...
> [Int/Mandeep/20.2/4a]

> My brothers don't do any housework. Mummy says boys shouldn't do girls' work. I sometimes get angry and tell her to tell them. She says no.
> [Int/Rekha/1.3/4b]

> My elder sister does the housework. If he [Vasu, her brother, in the same class] does, Mummy says boys don't do, girls should do, because she says this, he doesn't do...if I tell him, Mummy hits me...
> [Int/Neela/4.3/4b]

> My brothers do [sweeping, cleaning] but less than me and my sister...if I was a boy I wouldn't have to do...
> [Int/Priti/15.2/4a]

These were clearly aspects of socialisation of girls into domestic roles, but as the narratives indicate, these patterns did not go uncontested. Girls reported that they got scolded by mothers and fathers for '*ulta seedha kaam*', which connoted not doing housework properly (breaking things, not cleaning up, etc.).

'Apprenticeship' into gendered domains of work was also seen in the case of the boys. Most of them were expected to do outside chores for the house, or contribute to the family income through assisting their fathers or doing piece-rate, seasonal work. Boys whose fathers were vegetable vendors (all from the states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) went to the evening *sabzi mandi* to sell small items on their fathers', or their own hand-

carts(*larris*). There were boys who did ironing and laundry work in the afternoons after going back home and went for deliveries in the evening.

For boys, the category of work was distinguished by differences of class and community. Deepu, a boy whose father was a vegetable vendor, and belonged to an Agrawal community, was one of the 'good' boys in 4a. He told me that he did not go with his father because his mother said it did not become their *jat*. Boys who had fathers who were drivers, all from Sikh families, learned auto mechanics more directly through unpaid apprenticeship; being relatively better off, they were not expected to work for money. As one of them told me:

> Many boys in our class work in the evenings...I don't, my father says learn [mechanical skills] now, later when you become big, I'll start taking you with me. [Int/Amarjit/4.4/4b]

The discussion on work clearly indicates gender differences in primary socialisation practices. What emerges is the manner in which other characteristics such as *age* and caste/community interweave in the discussion on work. The fact that these children were in what is classified as 'late childhood' meant that they were already being 'groomed' for adult roles (Saraswathi and Dutta: 1988) within cultural boundaries defined by caste and community. These separate areas of work (and visibility) are part of a circumscription of physically and culturally distinct 'spaces of being' for girls and boys. While physical horizons were larger for boys, for girls they were restricted to immediate neighbourhoods; culturally, too, there were restrictions on girls.

> My brother goes to see pictures on the dish[cable TV] in my aunt's house. [You don't go?] Papa doesn't let me go. He said do the housework, what will you do seeing pictures, see only *bhagwan* pictures.
> [Int/Neela /4.3/4b]

Restrictions on play were also evident. There were clearly 'boy s' games' and 'girl s' games,' but boundaries appear related to both gender and age. Girls and boys knew each others' games, primarily from having played them together when they were younger, or with their younger siblings, but there was a code determining social visibility—they could be played together, but with younger brothers and sisters, and within distinct boundaries.

> I play indoors. Either in Kaushal's house or ours. Mummy says such a big girl doesn't go out of the house... She says not to talk to any of the boys except your brother. I don't know why...Mummy says if you don't listen [about school] I'll take you out and keep you in the village... anyway she says I should not study for more time...
> [Int/Reena/1.4/4b]

Kabaddi, catching cook and *chor*-police –games characterised by spatial spread and physical body-contact, were boy's games; skipping, hopscotch, *satdholiya* (seven stones)—involving less space and more group-centred, were girls' games. All the children said that they had played these games together –boys and girls—at some time, which suggests that age is a factor in gender divisions in games. Some games were more clearly demarcated, like hopping (*langdi*), associated as a girl's game, and playing with marbles, which was *strictly* a boy's game. Within the school, the children enforced strict boundary maintenance when it came to playing these games. Dilip, a boy in 4b, claimed at the beginning of the year, that his favourite game was *langdi*; over the year, he was taunted and teased by both girls and boys, in the classroom and the playground. In several contexts—whether he was crying over a torn bag, or had been hit by another boy, or moved closer to the girls' side to get a better view of the blackboard, I would hear children tell him deprecatingly: '*tu ladki hai kya*?!' Other boys would shove him onto the girls' side on the playground, where girls would shout this at him.

> I used to play *langdi* with my sisters and their friends. I also play skipping rope[*rassi*] with them. *To kya*? Teacher says boys will become tall if they play *rassi*. I want to be tall...
> [Int/Dilip/23.3/4b]

A more serious transgression across gender boundaries was associated with girls playing marbles. I was witness to this when Pramila in 4b, known as one of those girls who did *dhamaal* because she played with the boys, was found with marbles in her pocket. Interviews with girls revealed that they were forbidden to play marbles: although they all claimed to know how to play.

> I have marbles, my brother has, I take from him and play, he plays alone...Mummy says marbles is a boys' game, you shouldn't play. One girl in our class Pramila, she plays. And Priti from 4a. I've seen them in the neighbourhood.
> [Int/Kiran/13.3/4b]

> The boys play marbles in the neighbourhood.[You don't?] No Mummy says not to play. I watch sometimes. When Mummy goes out, I play...Papa says girls don't play like boys, they should play separately... There, boys play *rassi*, but not here... [Int/Munasha/23.3/4b]

What emerged from the interviews was that although there were restrictions on play imposed by parents, there was also self-monitoring by boys and girls themselves. In the school setting, public admission of playing/enjoying games associated with the opposite gender had more serious consequences for membership in the gender category than knowledge of these games and participation in them in the neighbourhood. The same logic applied to playing with children of the opposite sex. While there were parental controls, there was a degree of fluidity permissible (playing with siblings, or their friends); in school, as I shall show in Section 5.2.3 the boundaries were maintained more distinctly. Girls who played 'boy s' games' in the neighbourhood could not do so within the strictly-maintained divisions of the school.

5.1.2.2 'Women don't study, men have to work'

Notions of formal education are to be seen within these permissible 'spaces of being' for girls and boys. As discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.7.2, there seemed to be a disjunction between the idea of children contributing to home-based or other work, and their participation in formal education. This had to do with the reality that work left children little time for studies at home.

> Teacher says don't go home and work, go home and study.
> [Int/Chandana/1.3/4b]

> The teacher tells us that we shouldn't do work, that we should study...My father said he'll find some work for me soon, because we are poor. [Don't you go to the *banglas* with mummy?] Yes, no...I used to go when I was small, now she doesn't take me...
> [Int/Gururam/24.3/4b]

The experience of living in communities with strong linkages to the 'native' land engendered an understanding of gender relations which were based in discursive practices in the 'migrant' situation. Children displayed an acute understanding of dominant community-based ideologies governing the education of women: that they could go only up

to a certain age, that they could not aspire to do anything with their education other than using it in child-rearing, etc. Variations in responses reflected regional, social class and caste/community differences, all of which have a bearing on symbolic constructions of gender, particularly in Hindu families (Dube: 1988).

> Earlier in our village they didn't let girls go to school...[Are there no schools?]No, the boys used to go, but not the girls. *Abhi to yeh zamaana aaya ki*...they let girls go, but only small girls not like [mentions girl monitor].
> [Int/Suman/15.2/4a]

> In our village the girls can only study till they become big. My eldest sister doesn't go to school. In our *desh* when girls grow up they don't go to school. She studied till 3rd. When we went in the holidays, *dadi* said she's become big, all the other big girls left school, so papa took her out of school.
> [Int/Savita/23.2/4b]

> In our *desh*, women don't study. Mummy studied till 3rd and got married. Mummy says I can write letters and sign, that's enough. Women can hardly aspire to be collectors! [*Thodi collector ban sakti hain*!]
> [Int/ 'Chote' Sunil/10.3/4a]

> Mummy studied till 5th. She knows a little. Nowadays she does housework and *bangle ka kaam* so it's gone out of her mind.[You don't teach her?] She says no. Even the *bahen* who come [volunteers for the literacy campaign], they asked her. She said who will do the housework if I go? My sister, in private, 9th, she has lots of school work, and mummy said you do that properly, so there's no-one to help her.
> [Int/Tukaram/19.2/4a]

> Mummy studied till 10th. She's forgotten everything. *Ma ko padke kya karna hai*? Now she's married and stays at home, it isn't like she's going to work. In our *desh*, those who get married don't work they only teach children at home. In our *desh* they don't. They study when they're young and till 12-13. [Mummy told you?] No, it's like that. When a child is in the house, the mother teaches till they are 5 or 6 and then puts them in school. When I go there I see, only men work after marriage, 18-19 years, they get them married.
> [Int/Raju/7.3/4b]

Knowledge of adult roles must have an influence on children's perceptions of themselves in the 'future'. Femininity and masculinity – the *social condition* of being female and male, exists not only in the realm of discourse for children, but is also inscribed into patterns of everyday life. The expression of contradiction between the rhetoric of gender equality through education on one hand and material practices which constantly reinforce gender

divisions was manifest in children's narratives on expectations from them as educated persons.

The children in the school are mainly from regions in India which have low participation of girls in education, high female illiteracy rates and where early marriage is widely prevalent. This larger landscape defines decisions regarding when they should be withdrawn from school, what constitutes 'enough' *padhai*. Functional literacy and basic numeracy skills were seen to be adequate attributes of girls' learning, since they would not be expected to use more than these skills when they were married. This has been seen in other studies of socialisation in the Indian context (Kanhere:1988)

> [You like school?]
> Yes, my mummy says study till 5th, that's all. My cousin sister tells my mummy to make me study till 7th... She says you learn to write letters, that's all.[And then?]My mummy will get me married. [Did she tell you?]No. I know. *When girls learn to write letters, they get married.*.[Why when they learn to write letters...?]When we are sad then we can .... then my brother will come and take me (home)...[How do you know all this?]*It all happened to my mother. She couldn't write letters to my grandmother and so she was more sad.*(emphasis added).
> [Int/ Ruman/24.2/4a]

> After 4th, what will I do? Nothing. I'll go to the village.[What will you do in the village?] Nothing... I've been here since 1st, after 4th , I'll leave. Papa will take me out.[What do you want to be?] Nothing. *In our place girls aren't allowed to be anything. They get married and do farming.* My papa said. [You don't want to be anything?] No. My marriage is after Diwali, we'll get married together, my sister and I. [What do your future husbands do?] Farming... and carpentry. In our *desh* we don't get to know the boys, our fathers do everything. We don't get to know. (emphasis added).
> [Int/Bhavri/23.2/4b]

There were girls who had to fight for recognition of their performances in school. Despite engagements with housework and little encouragement in the family, these girls had found the self-confidence to resist cultural ideologies governing the education of daughters. It was interesting to observe that these expressions of resistance were found among the quieter girls who sat in the middle and back sections of the classrooms, and were not particularly visible or vocal in classroom interactions.

I study twice a day. I came 3rd. Mummy says you couldn't, you're lying. I told her you meet teacher...she came yesterday. Teacher told her your daughter's good at studies. No-one teaches at home. No-one has studied in our family. Only one uncle, he has a shop. So who'll teach? I sit myself with my books. I taught Mummy to write her name...she had never been to school so she didn't know.
... I'll study till 7th. *Hamare mein* they don't let girls study much. They make the boys study more, send them to sewing class... they let the girls study less, *Muslim hain, na, is liye*.(Because we are Muslims.) Papa tells Mummy we should make the girls study less. I asked him till when can I study. He said 7th and then you go the village and study Urdu. In my mind I think that if I was a boy I could study more, go to sewing class...
[Int/Shamina/16.3/4b]

Mummy doesn't send to tuition, because of work at home, and I have to mind my baby sister. I want to be a doctor. Papa says study till 5th and then learn machine. I don't want to. [Then how will you be a doctor?] I'll study at home. Papa says 5th but I'll study till more. If he says leave I won't. I'll study till 8th or 9th.
[Int/Neelam/ 14.2/ 4a]

I'm good at Mathematics, I know all the answers. I go to tuitions near my house. From next year, I won't go, Mummy said it's too far. She doesn't believe that I'm good at studies. Even when I show the results...I'll study a lot, *poori class*...Papa says I'll go to the *desh* after 6th. *Aise hi hota hain hamare mein*.(This is how it is with us.) But I won't go, I'll study here, *poori class* (all classes)...
[Int/Kaushal/23.3/4b]

I want to be a police. I see them in their uniforms every night behind my house where the *daru*-log (bootleggers) are. My mummy says not to look, but I peep from the window. They take them away, wear nice uniforms...I'll study *poori class*...My mummy says study and get married soon. My father says no, if you want to study *poori class* then study. Mummy says you won't be anything, you'll be a *gutter saaf karne waali* (gutter-cleaner)...
[Int/Priti/21.2/4a]

Girls who belonged to relatively prosperous families— whose fathers worked as employees in the government sector as 'Class 4' employees , and those whose fathers were drivers, had aspirations which went beyond functional literacy and numeracy. For them also, their fathers appeared as principal decision-makers, but aspirations for paid work were in the realm of the possible.

I'll study till 12th. Papa said he'll teach me computer course, after that I'll do *naukri*. Actually I want to be a doctor, but Papa says you should do computer course. [And your brothers?] He'll open shops for them, different for each. Papa says *doctori ke liye sabse jyada mehnat karni padti hai* (you have to work hardest to study medicine), you do computer course.
[Int/Jaspreet/24.3/4b]

The effects of the lesson '*Kaun kya banega*' had not yet worn off when the interviews were held, so children alluded to it while mentioning what careers they aspired to.

> Actually I wanted to be a doctor, but when madam asked I said *chalo*, teacher. It came out , so I said I want to teach illiterates. I want to be a *tick-tock wallah* [she describes typing]. Papa says he will put me. Mummy says you can learn to stitch, we'll put you in sewing classes.
> [Int/Seema/20.2/4a]

One girl, Harsharan, among the youngest of both classes at age eight and a half, wrote in the short biographical notes I had asked the children to write during the initial period of the study: 'I want to grow up and be like my mummy.' During the class, she said she wanted to be a 'sister'. Her narrative rather dramatically reveals the ritualistic nature of curriculum transaction, and the nature of interactions and normative interpretations about gender, 'work' and education in the family:

> [Hadn't you told me you wanted to be like mummy? She smiles.] Yes. [Then why did you say you want to be a sister?] I don't know if I'll be able to be like mummy.[Is it difficult?] It's easy, but mummy says *tu kucch bun le*. [What does it mean, to be like mummy?] To do housework...Nothing else. If she was a doctor, I would have said doctor...[What if she had to become one?] She will tell me, should I go back to school, or what?!
> [Int/Harsharan/12.2/4a]

For the boys, expectations from schooling were obviously higher. Going to tuition classes was more prevalent among the boys (although some girls did also go.) This represents an aspiration of their families to upward mobility through the education of their sons. The narratives of boys who went for tuition indicate that they were expected to do well in school. *Tuition pe jaana* was a marker of social status for boys in the class, because it implied the capacity of a family to do without the economic contribution of a son, and also connoted an eagerness to do good '*padhai*'. There were boys who worked as well as went to tuition classes, but these boys often did not perform well in examinations. Although there were girls who were also sent to tuition, the pressure on them to perform well in school did not appear to be as severe as that on the boys, all of whom told me that their fathers chastised them more for studies. There also seemed a feeling in families that their sons should do better than fathers, achieve success through being educated, do something with their schooling, which they –the fathers—could not achieve. The feeling of loss at

having to move from agricultural farming to wage-labour or minor self-employment in the city seemed to have some impact on the way sons in particular were socialised into believing that they could, and should, make use of their urban education to 'make good'.

> Papa says study more than me, be better than me...
> [Int/Ashok/24.3/4b]

> Papa scoldsfor studies. He says don't be like me, study and get a good *naukri*...
> [Int/Imrankhan/14.3/4b]

The boys were also more conscious of the contribution of schooling to social status, particularly the prospects of getting a 'good *naukri*'. The following interaction took place between Raju, Vasu and Pawan in the classroom.

> Vasu: I'm going to study till 14th Class...
> Pawan: I'm going to study even more than that.
> Raju: There's nothing after 14th class.
> Vasu: After college, we can get a good *naukri* immediately, start a shop...
> Raju: My father has gone to college...
> Vasu: Who? Yours? Hah!
> Pawan: Mine has studied up to 10th.[To Vasu] Yours?
> Vasu: 7th... at 18 he got married and then...
> Pawan; And your mother?
> Vasu: 2nd.[Pawan and Raju exchange glances.]
> Raju: Mine is till 10th.
> Pawan: Mine is till 8th.
> Vasu: But she can teach us all nicely! Her mother was an *angoota chhaap*...
> [ep4/7.12/4b]

Raju told me during his interview:

> My Papa hits for studies, he says if you don't, you won't be able to work, no-one will give you a '*acchi naukri*' (good job). My mummy says[if you don't study] no-one will say you've studied. [You like school?]Yes...I'll become big, have a job; if I don't like school how will I study? I'll become big and just loaf around then.
> [Int/Raju/7.3/4b]

Vasu, on the other hand, was clear that economic conditions would not permit him to study. He described to me the back-breaking work of vegetable vending that gave his father severe calluses on the hands which would sometimes have to be surgically removed. He said it would be difficult for him to escape meeting the same fate:

> Papa tells my sister, study till 7th, learn to sign letters. Even me, Papa says study only till 8th. He says anyway you won't get a good job...afterwards you can run the *larri* the whole day. I don't know if Papa will let me study. *I want to study and get a good naukri. I don't want to break my hands running a larri.* [And your sister?] My parents are worried about *desh ki karza.* Mummy says finish 7th, learn *hisaab*, letters, and get married...I will probably study only till 10th.(emphasis added). [Int/Vasu/10.3/4b]

Getting a good *naukri* meant doing well in studies, and for those who could not, the options were more clearly defined by normative discourses of education:

> I'll be a farmer. What else can an *angoota chhaap* (illiterate) do? [Int/Gururam/14.3/4b]

5.1.2.3 'Going to English'

The ideal of a 'good' education was strongly associated with 'private', and particularly 'English-medium' schools. Going to an English-medium school was seen to confer social prestige and an investment in future material well-being. All the children expressed an eagerness to go to 'private', by which they meant non-government, often English-medium, schools. These schools seemed to fit the normative ideal of schooling in a far more coherent manner than their own. Several girls had brothers in English-medium schools; some expressed sadness at not being able to go as well, but displayed an acute awareness of the compulsions of their parents' decisions. That English is the language of the public sphere of paid 'prestigious' employment and the vernacular is the language of the private sphere of domestic work or low- paying jobs was clearly understood by them.

> [Why don't you go to English like your brother?]
> Girls can do housework, that's why. Boys will have to work.
> [Int/Bhavna/12.2/4a]

> My brother will be a doctor. [To be a doctor, do you have to go to English?]Yes.[And what about you...?]No. I'll be a teacher.
> [Int/Ritu/22.2/4a]

> My brothers are in English. Here there are no studies. Papa says they have to study and work ...
> [Int/Anjana/4.3/4a]

> Papa says he [her brother] is a boy, he'll have to go to English medium. We say so what? Papa says he's a boy, he'll have to be sent to work; girls, even if they don't do 'service' can do housework...
> [Int/Mandeepkaur/22.2/4a]

The English-medium schools referred to here were not those which came with some social guarantee of 'educational success', like convent schools, but smaller, private schools. Whatever the quality of education offered, the issue of potential cultural capital which could be accumulated by the family was seen as more important. The dichotomy between private/*sarkari* was critical to this discourse. Several children told me how in 'private', *padhai* is good, and there's no *dhamaal.* Kishan, a boy in 4b who played cards, smoked and ate tobacco, and got into fights in school told me:

> I don't like this school, there's no *padhai* and too much *dhamaal.* Next year I'll go to private English, like my [younger] brother. It is very good...there are benches and chairs...I see them when I go to leave him every day.
> [Int/Kishan/28.3/4b]

Ashok, who had declared his desire to do '*sarkari naukri*' in the class, told me that actually he wanted to be a 'police', because you have to work less but get more money. This boy came to the class where the interviews were held everyday with a pile of English primers. He sat down next to me and started displaying his ability to read from them. He had assumed that I was going to test his English, perhaps because I took notes in English. I asked him where he got the books from.

> Papa buys. He says we don't have money to send you to English, but you read these books well and go to tuition from 5th.
> [Int/Ashok/2.3 /4b]

There were contradictory reactions of girls towards going to English schools – accommodation to the idea of higher investment in brothers' education, a sense of injustice, and trepidation at being isolated in an alien environment:

> Papa and mummy said that I'll put you sisters in Hindi, let *bhaiya* study in English. [Why?] *Bhaiya* said I'll study here... we said why not us, just because he's a boy...[You also want to go?] No, I don't like it there. I won't like it there. [Have you been...?] No. I don't go. I won't be able to study anything there...I don't know English and my friends won't be there...
> [Int/Harsharan/12.2/4a]

My three brothers all study in English. [You don't ?] No. I don't like it there... I'll be alone there.
[Int/Chaya/2.3/4a]

Home and school

In this section, I have attempted to provide a landscape of practices within the communities the children came from—seen through their eyes-- and the manner in which they framed children's understanding of gender ideologies in relation to schooling. The way in which gender marks the division of physical and ontological spaces for boys and girls through expressions of *difference* emerged as a focal theme in analysis and interpretation of children's narratives. These spaces defined parental and familial expectations from education as well as aspirations of the children themselves. The picture that emerged was that there was considerable pressure on children –both girls and boys—to adhere to expectations from schooling, in the case of boys in a far more 'serious' manner. For girls, schools were a welcome relief from the stringent conditions of life at home, and many girls told me that they liked school, because they can do *masti*, and not get punished for doing *ulta-seedha kaam*.

While these practices represent children's primary socialisation into gender roles, they also appeared to be characterised by certain complexity. Firstly, gender ideologies were not monolithic; gender appeared as a critical, but not the only, axis of difference on which ideologies defining ontological space were framed. Gender ideologies were overlayed with others relating to age, social class and caste/community/region. Secondly, there was a shared commonsensical meaning attached to divided spaces among the children, particularly when it came to games and playing with members of the opposite gender category, but divisions were not inviolable, as long as families were large and there was play among siblings. Thirdly, children did not, except in the most extreme cases, appear to be passive recipients of received 'traditions'. Children had their own logic by which they understood gender divisions, and however much their responses represented parental 'voice', in the process of engagement with practices and traditions, they created their own systems of meanings about the experience of social reality where gender played a constitutive role. In the case of girls, there appeared a greater propensity to interrogate these traditions, possibly because the burden of gender injustice was more severe in their

case. Finally, although there were contradictions in the two discursive terrains – formal education, with its promise of opportunity and accessibility to codes of power, and community 'traditions' which were confining and restrictive—children appeared aware of these contradictions and able to negotiate the divide, either through accommodation to them or questioning them through expression of personal aspiration.

5.2 Learning one's gender through the hidden curriculum

As discussed in the preceding section, children came to school with a well-established system of understanding about their gender identity. They were also of an age where culturally-sanctioned boundaries imposed on interactions between boys and girls were beginning to be manifest, and the contours of 'legitimate' aspirations for their futures were being experienced as 'impending realities' and negotiated by them.

The institutional setting of the school provided another 'window' to knowledge of gender relations for children. Here there was a simultaneous de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation of their social experience of being male or female. While normative discourse of curricular knowledge does not make this distinction, at least within the contexts of co-education, in practice there is a continuous ratification of dominant ideologies of gender-appropriate behaviour through the hidden curriculum. As discussed in Chapter 4, at one level, these symbolic constructions shift between gender *and* social class, highlighting the contradictions between ideals and material reality.

In this section, I will attempt to interpret the hidden curriculum of gender in the school, through the prism of children's social experiences in the neighbourhood and community, and their knowledge of ideologies of gender and education from these sites of primary socialisation. Four issues are examined in this section: 1) children's perceptions of task differentiation; 2) indiscipline or *dhamaal*, which, as discussed in Chapter 4, is a constitutive feature of everyday constructions around gender in the classroom; 3) the ways in which *dhamaal* patterns notions of good education and 4) perceptions of divided physical spaces, and territorial proprieties. As discussed in Chapter 4, these are overlapping contexts and cannot be understood in isolation. They are dealt with separately in this section only for purposes of analysis.

5.2.1 Division of labour in the classroom: legitimation of gender roles

The sex-differentiated system of task assignation (Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3) legitimated gender distinctions in everyday school life. Hidden in the patterns of task division was the legitimation of the inside/outside dichotomy in roles and responsibilities. Girls were given tasks which restricted their sphere of responsibility to the closed spaces of the classroom and the school, and cast them as dependable, responsible and pliant to adult authority. Tasks such as teaching, considered an ideal quality for a girl to be a monitor, kept them under the direct tutelage of the teacher. Boys were allowed the freedom to leave the enclosed spaces of the school to run errands. These patterns of differential task assignation closely mirrored children's primary socialisation, and has been seen in other contexts as well (see, for example, Anandalakshmy: 1994; Dube: 1988; Kanhere: 1989; Saraswathi and Dutta: 1988).

Areas of responsibility were extensions of 'work' done at home by children. For the girl monitors, in particular, duties were cast in the mould of ideal feminine domesticity. Even the term in the vernacular for 'minding' was 'looking after the children'(*bacchon ko sambhalna*). The girl monitor of 4b, Geeta, was considered ineffective by the children because she was not able to control the indiscipline in the classroom; children complained that she contributed to it by playing with her friends, talking, and not being strict with her friends. The hidden agenda of domestication is brought out in the commentary of Prakash, a boy in 4b,

> Our teacher tells our monitor : You are a girl and you can't keep the children quiet? See Mandeepkaur[how effective she is].
> [Int/23.3/4b]

Echoes of primary socialisation can also be heard in the narratives of boys entrusted with responsibility:

> [What work do you do as a monitor?]
> We get things from the teacher's house...Girls can't do [this], they can have accidents, fall down. We are more careful, we have *aadat* [habit].
> [Int/Deepu/23.2/4a]

Whether teacher-directed or not, the 'cues' of the differentiated system were effectively internalised by the children, who used these spaces of power to increase their visibility in

the classroom. Although teachers would often draw the boys' attention to the fact that they could 'also' do tasks associated with girls, like making garlands, *rangolis*, *torans*, stitching, etc., informal interactions between teachers and children often nullified the intensity of these statements. When a teacher needed something to get done, like a torn textbook to be gummed together, or a duster to be made, the interactions would be between her and the front row of girls. These interactions were not necessarily consciously initiated by teachers; rather girls would respond to the *cues* they were accustomed to experiencing in everyday life.

> Mrs Vankar [looks down at the duster, says aloud to herself] : This duster is torn.
> A girl sitting in the first row : I'll make one and bring [it] tomorrow.
> [ep6/12.9/4b]

Also, it was interesting to observe that not all children participated in responding to cues, however subtly these were signified. Often there were power struggles over who should be in 'visible control', even among the girls. Kamaljeet, a girl who sat at the back in 4b, had got hold of the keys of the teacher's trunk one day when the girl monitor was absent. Till the end of the year, she refused to hand them over, despite the fights over them everyday. This gave her a certain power over the front row of girls, who were viewed by those at the back as being close to the teacher.

Accommodation could also be seen in which there was hesitation to violate the gender code. Interviews with the children were held in an unused classroom for which a bench had to be found every day. Initially the teachers would tell the boys to find one and bring it in. A few weeks into the interviews and fading from the everyday school reality of teachers, I would often ask the individual child to get one. Only one or two girls apart from the monitors managed to muster the courage to flagrantly violate the gender code and actually be seen carrying a bench. Over the period in which the interviews were being done, my appearance in the corridor itself would act as a cue—with boys racing around to organise a bench which would then be delivered in a flourish of self-importance. One girl whom I requested to bring in a bench put up passive resistance by going over to the window and looking out. I finally asked her to request one of the children from her class to get one. She did not budge. Two boys eventually brought one in; I asked her why she did not get it

herself. Her response highlights the entrenchment of gender separation in everyday school life.

> I don't talk to *them*...I've never talked to *them*, that's why.
> [Int/Chanda/13.3/ 4a]

Another girl said, after a boy (her brother) brought a bench in :

> [Why didn't you get it ?] I can't ... Nobody gives...My brother said he'll bring it.
> [Int/Neelam/18.3/ 4b]

The system of separation in tasks reinforced the sexual division of labour in the classroom., signifying distinct spaces of roles, responsibilities and duties for girls and boys. These spaces were not necessarily 'imposed' by teachers, but formed part of the landscape of social gender relations within the school which children gave meaning to and acted upon. Differential task assignation by teachers underlined and essentialised gender dualism, making a distinction between 'feminine' domestic work, and 'masculine' work. While there are obvious parellels in the patterns of socialisation within the family/community and differential task assignation in school, one point needs to be remembered. Through school routines and practices, children encountered gender divisions in a far more *ritualised* and *formalised* manner than they did at home. Girls and boys accommodated to these definitions to give themselves a sense of shared identity in classroom social structure. Spaces of work were also spaces of power, and each gender category carefully guarded the latter. Through the entire period of observations, I never saw boys bringing or taking back the teachers' tea-cups, for example, or sweeping the classroom. Resistance to gendered expectations were rare. The only exception was that of monitors, who often resisted taking responsibility for controlling discipline in the classroom.

5.2.2 Deconstructing *dhamaal*: Children's perceptions

In the preceding section, children's perceptions of the contrast between private/*sarkari* schools was discussed. This should be seen in the backdrop of teachers' reminders to the children in everyday life that they were not 'worthy' beneficiaries of government-run 'free' education, which included books and the mid-day meal. As described in Chapter 4, these comments were more directed to the boys than girls. The context within which labelling patterns were made was the context of indiscipline, or *dhamaal*, in the classroom.

In the eyes of the children, *dhamaal*, in addition to violation of a disciplinary code, takes on other meanings. Tables 5.1 a and 5.1 b presents a summary of children's narratives on *dhamaal* in the classroom.

Table 5.1 a *Dhamaal*: Girls' perceptions

Who does *dhamaal*, and how	
Boys	**Girls**
Monitors -hit -stand up even when the teacher doesn't ask them to *Others* -hit each other -fall on us -roam around -throw things at us -disobey/hit monitors	*Monitors* -they hit -play among themselves -bring toys -talk to the boys -play with the boys *Others* -talk

Table 5.1 b *Dhamaal*: Boys' perceptions

Who does *dhamaal*, and how	
Boys	**Girls**
Monitors -hit -stand up even when the teacher doesn't ask them to *Others* -don't listen to the monitors -hit back at the monitors	*Monitors* -hit us -play among themselves -don't hit the girls -talk *Others* -talk -shout at girl monitors -throw things at us -push us -get teased

The gender sub-text of children's narratives suggest themes which construct gender in everyday classroom life in which *dhamaal* plays a prominent role. Children's interpretations of *dhamaal* shows its strong association with cross-sex interaction.

Both boys' and girls' understandings of *dhamaal* stressed the sacrosanct rule of spatial equilibrium, which is violated by crossing the gender boundary. For both boys and girls, hitting, pushing, teasing and throwing things across the aisle constituted *dhamaal* in the classroom. As Dilip, a boy from 4b, put it, '*Ladki tang karte hain, ladke dhamaal karte hain*' (the girls irritate/tease, the boys do *dhamaal*). Some boys said that by getting 'teased', the girls did *dhamaal* (this was probably because it called for the intervention of the teacher and/or the monitor).

Monitors came in for particularly harsh indictment from the children: from the boys, who expressed anger that the girl monitors favoured the girls and often played among themselves; and from the girls that the boy monitors 'stood up' even when they were not asked to., and hit them. There was agreement that girls contributed to *dhamaal* by their talking in the classroom; as. discussed in Chapter 4, this was an established gender stereotype in the classroom context, and children's perceptions of girls' *dhamaal* may have possibly been conditioned by teachers' constant admonition to girls for talking.

> All the boys do *dhamaal*. [What about you?] No. I keep sitting.
> [Int/Rekha/1.3/4b]

The monitors were expected to maintain classroom discipline. This they did by carrying out teacher's instructions. In 4b, where there was a mandate from the teacher that children must not be hit, the monitors were constantly pulled up for letting the class do *dhamaal*. Children perceived Mrs Vankar to be weak and ineffective in controlling the *dhamaal* in the classroom. Monitors resisted 'standing up' because their role was not legitimated by her.

> Our teacher doesn't scold, so nobody sits quiet. Even if she does shout, nobody listens. The boys are all *haraami*... the girls listen, but the boys don't .... They trouble me. They hit me back. The 4a madam is *kadak*, she hits, kicks, everyone is scared of her...
> [Int/Geeta, girl monitor/20.3/ 4b]

> This teacher doesn't hit. I'm supposed to be the monitor but I don't stand up, even if the teacher says. No-one listens... I'll do my own work and let the ones who do *dhamaal* do. In 4a she's *kadak*. In our classes the girls don't listen to the girl monitor, where will the boys listen? In 4a, the monitor enters and the boys sit quiet. They're scared of her. I gave my stick back after four days. The boys say if you hit them they'll tell their fathers and there's *lafda* at home. Our teacher says her head

> spins at the noise, and she leaves;[she says] die fighting... only when she takes the *danda* everyone sits quiet.
> [Int/Mahesh, boy monitor/28.3/ 4b]

The girl monitors were older and physically bigger than the other children, who called them 'didi' (elder sister). They were both the eldest in their families. The 'didi's' role in preserving the 'good name' of the class through management of children and her responsibilities in the household as mother's helpmate and sibling-minder constituted a sort of 'double exposure' of scenes from these two areas of her life :

> I sometimes feel like getting another monitor to mind... I teach the whole day here, and then I have to go home and do housework and look after my brother.
> [Int/Mandeepkaur/22.2/ 4a]

The omnipresence of *dhamaal* in classroom culture, and the positioning of boys as its principal agents by teachers (and children) appears to have had consequences for the ways in which children evaluated their everyday school experience. One result was the way in which it constituted a terrain within which oppositional gender categories of 'submissive femininity' and 'aggressive masculinity' were constructed. Teachers would expect ideal norms of classroom discipline to be maintained by the girls, often with remarks like: 'If you behave like this, what will happen to the class?'[ep5/22.11/4a;ep 13/2.1/4b] The pattern of labelling and stereotyping cast the girls as 'ideal learners' in the eyes of most children. Several of the boys said that the girls were better at studies because they did not do *dhamaal* (some said 'readily' !), that they sat 'peacefully'.

> The girls are better at studies. Their minds are more powerful. They don't do *dhamaal* and they're smarter.
> [Int/Krishna/2.3/4b]

> All the girls are good at studies. I don't know why. Teacher says all the girls are good and the boys are zero.
> [Int/Suman/ 2.3/4b)

Only one boy, Rajesh, differed from this view. He had been singled out for praise on a few occasions by the teacher for having improved in studies over the year. This can be seen within the context of teachers' addressing boys for achievement/examination –related issues.

> Boys are better at studies, because girls cook. *Boys have to study, work, sweat.* Only Mandeepkaur is good. And me. (emphasis added.)
> [Int/Rajesh/10.3/4a]

In another sense, *dhamaal* also signified the relative inferiority of a 'sarkari' education. In Section 5.1, children's narratives indicated that there was an understanding of the merits of education in 'private' schools, in particular private English schools. The fact that *dhamaal* occupied so much space within classroom discourse made it a feature of 'sarkari' schooling. Children perceived *dhamaal* as an impediment to learning; an 'effective' teacher was one who could control the *dhamaal* of the boys.

> In 3rd I was better but now with this *dhamaal* everything has gone out of my mind, I've forgotten everything. I only think about what *dhamaal* is happening.
> [Int/Punam/23.2/4b]

> In 3rd there was no *dhamaal*. The teacher used to get a thick stick from one of the boys and break our bones if we did *dhamaal*.
> [Int/Kiran/13.3/4b]

In 4b, girls appropriated the ideology of 'soft' maternalism to extend their power and authority in the classroom. There was a geography of power on the girls' side. Since the teacher's table was on the girls' 'side' of the room, the front rows of girls had more opportunities for informal interaction with her. It was common to see these girls vying with each other for her attention as they brought her flowers or small objects they had made. Appropriation of the maternalistic ideology meant that the girls of 4b could do just as they liked, as long as they were careful not to violate the sanctity of spatial equilibrium so essential to being viewed as a 'good' class. Extensive industry flourished in all the girl's rows - origami, knitting, crotcheting, drawing, etc. The demands on the first rows of girls were higher—the ones at the back were always complaining that they contributed to *dhamaal* by doing these activities, and therefore resisted their disciplining. In the eyes of the front- row girls, the ones at the back of the classroom had more interactions with the boys, which characterised discipline violation. These dynamics of power were evident in classroom observations. The point is that in the process of participation in interactional contexts, girls were both accommodating to, and creating ideologies governing their 'femininity'.

In my informal interviews with teachers, it was evident that they subscribed to the 'natural theory' of boys' behaviour. (The one 'nurture' argument they all put forward was that the boys' fathers were often away and did not discipline them.) In 4b the boys were able to accommodate to the ideology of 'innate' aggressive masculinity. They engaged in a lot of imaginative body-play - jumping on each other, sparring and kicking. There was undoubtedly a subtext of violence present in boys' interactions. It was common to see boys brandishing weapons at other boys - usually pencils, but also nails, compasses, and even blades, brought from home to seek retributive justice for some earlier attack. On two occasions I had to abandon my position as observer and intervene in these fights. The one or two quiet boys would often be teased, especially by the more boisterous ones: 'We know you play *juwa* (cards)' - an activity signifying social deviance.

Despite the sanction of the 4a teacher to hit the boys, the monitor of the class had a similar story :

> Both boys and girls do *dhamaal.* [Names them: the boy monitors, and three girls.] But the girls...the teacher had hit once so they don't do, but the boys don't care... the boys make more noise and don't listen.
> [Int/Mandeepkaur/22.2/4a]

There is a degree of overlap between the ways in which children and teachers construct *dhamaal.* Notions of docility and aggression were attributed to girls and boys in a distinctly oppositional manner by both these sets of social actors. Children participated in the contexts of construction of these ideas. They, however, relate *dhamaal* more directly to boundary-crossing, or cross-sex interaction. This is an area most heavily criss-crossed with experiences of gender outside the school setting. The following section examines the relationships between symbolic constructions around gender and the constructions of distinct physical spaces, or 'sides'.

5.2.3 'Us' and 'Them' : Interaction in gendered spaces

Most of the attitudes and gender 'positionings' of schoolchildren are carried over from the home. However, the total absence of mixed-sex activities and confinement to non-overlapping gendered physical spaces heightened the 'us' and 'them' orientation of the children, inhibiting opportunities for, and creating new, institution-based taboos and restrictions on cross-sex interaction.

Tables 5.2 a and 5.2 b present children's responses to categories of 'talk' and 'play' across the gender boundary. All the children told me that they only talked and played with same-sex friends. A few children mentioned siblings and neighbourhood children as opposite-sex playmates, although most of them did not talk or play with them in school. The patterns which emerge from children's responses show that 1) there are continuities between patterns of interaction in the community and those in the school; 2) certain contexts and practices within the school–like organising games separately--inhibit cross-sex interaction in the classroom and the playground; 3) children's cross-sex interactions were chiefly with monitors and neighbourhood children; 4) there was a distinct blurring of perceptions between 'talk' and 'play'. These patterns established a division of discursive spaces, both physically and symbolically, in the school context.

Play, in particular, formed an important area of separation and differentiation. Although children played (albeit selectively) with children of the opposite gender in the neighbourhood, peer pressure and disapproval played an important role in maintaining the gender divide in school. Krishnakant, in 4a, told me how he played with a classmate, Ruman, every day in the *maidan* near their houses, but preferred not to be seen playing with her in school. He justified this by telling me – as many children did—that girls and boys played different games in school.

> I don't play with the girls in school... the girls skip and we play catch....My friends say come we'll go there and play.
> [Int/10.3/4a]

> I play a lot with Deepak [a classmate who lives nearby]...not at school, because he plays *kabaddi*... I don't know how to play and my friend (the girl monitor) says come let's play something else.
> [Int/Harsharan/10.2/ 4a]

Table 5.2 a Cross-sex 'talk': Children's responses

	Don't talk : why	Talk : Whom/when
Boys	-Just like that -Don't feel like -Feel shy -Monitors hit -The girls get angry, swear	*Monitors* -about studies -hit back -when they hit *Neighbourhood children* -unspecified
Girls	-Boys do *dhamaal* -Not supposed to/taboo -Feel shy -Parents say -Female monitors say -Have 'habit'	Only with *boy monitors* : when they hit; about studies Only with *neighbourhood boys*: -unspecified *Others:* -when they hit -only good ones who don't hit *-rakhi* brothers

Table 5.2 b Cross-sex 'play': Children's responses

	Don't play : why	Play : with whom/when
Boys	-They play different games -Teacher/girl monitor make us play separately. -They don't know our games -We don't let them play in our games Peers say -There are fights/*dhamaal* if they get hurt (we get into trouble)	With *monitors* in class: when teacher's not there *Neighbourhood children* : unspecified
Girls	-They play different games -Teacher makes us play separately -Girl monitor makes us play separately - Neighbourhood friends say (about playing in school) -Have 'habit'	*Monitors & Others* : When they hit, we hit back *Neighbourhood boys* -In classroom when teacher's not there

The indignation of the boys - whom I observed taking up much more physical space on the playground - at girls' transgression on their gender space in school underlines aspects of male socialisation similar to those expressed by Kumar (1986b). Peer pressure and separation of spheres of interest within school introduce taboos related to purity/pollution and shame. The boys, in particular, found my interest in their interactions with girls utterly incomprehensible.

> [Do you play with the girls?]What? The boys will say you don't have shame you're playing with the girls ?
> [Int/Om/14.3/4b]

> I play with the girls in my neighbourhood, not in school, because the girls come in the way and then we have to leave the place and go somewhere else... what work do girls have in boys' play !!
> [Int/Rakesh/19.2/4a]

The underlying text of potential 'trouble' that boys can get into if girls complain about them to teachers in school, or to elders in the community, was also evident in boy's narratives. It is here that we see regulatory aspect of gender divisions coming into play, and the subterranean violence implicit in boys' *dhamaal* acting as an influence on maintenance of rigid gender boundaries, enforced both, by the order of the school as well as the children themselves.

> My friends at home say you shouldn't play with girls in school... *we'll become bad, if we play langdi like them, because then they'll say you wear girls' clothes and then we'll become bad.* In the neighbourhood we play. There's no place here, the girls can get hurt...there can be *dhamaal* and knives...(emphasis added.)
> [Int/Pawan/23.3/4b]

Strict gender restrictions in group games were maintained, particularly when teacher - organised, but also by the children themselves. Boys and girls admitted to knowing each other's games, having learned them from siblings, neighbourhood children, or, as in the case of boys, watching girls play in the teacher's absence from the classroom. However, school culture did not allow for playing cross-sex games.

> In the village school we used to play *kabaddi*. No one plays here so how can I play alone [with the boys]?
> [Int/Neetu/15.2/4a]

Normative expectations from children also influence their maintenance of gender divisions in interaction. Parental controls on daughters' social interactions are limited when they are at school. Given the orientation to conform to community norms regarding early marriage and 'proper' conduct, it is not surprising that parental disapproval will be made clear to girls with regard to interactions with boys they are not familiar with. Neighbourhood boys fall within a 'permissible' category, but even here, within the school context there appears to be a screen between 'real' and 'peripheral' interaction. These blurred contexts can be heard in the narrative of Chaya, a girl in 4a :

> My mother says have nothing to do with the boys in school.[When she says this, what does she mean?] Don't do this, don't do that, and no roaming with them.... in school I only talk to boys from my society [neighbourhood].[Who?] Deepu.[You talk to him?]No. If he hits me only then.[What do you say?]My friend who sits next to me says why're you hitting us?[You don't tell him?] No. *I only talk if he hits*...Not the other boys. I feel shy.
>
> [Int/15.2/4a]

The screen referred to was seen to lift in the teacher's absence from the classroom, when 'imposed' contexts were not operative.

> No one from the girls does *dhamaal*.... No, some do. I don't know their names but I've seen them when the teacher's not there.
> [Int/Lalit/15.2/ 4a]

> I don't like to play with girls. My mother says don't play with girls.....I used to play, now I don't..... There's too much *dhamaal*. When Madam wasn't there we used to play.
> [Int/Satish/23.3/4b]

Gender and physical space

Taking 'sides'

Engendered by sex-segregated practices was the construction of 'sides': a (further)fracture in the social interactions of children which heightened the 'otherness' of the opposite gender category. Several children brought up the issue of 'sides' in the context of classroom interaction.

> I don't know their [the girls'] names. I don't pay attention to that side, I pay attention to my studies.
> [Int/Rajusingh/10.3/4a]

Many more children [apart from those she's mentioned] do *dhamaal*. I don't know their names.... we girls sit on one side, those children, the boys, sit on that side... We don't sit together, Madam says you'll do too much fighting, and the boys hit us.
[Int/Poonam/24.2/4a]

We don't look that side. If I go to see the boys jump on me.
[Int/Dilip/23.3/4b]

In the classroom, 'sides' were constructed so as to minimise *dhamaal*. Boys' sides were away from the door, which did not really prevent them from running out when restraints were lifted. In a bid to stem the *dhamaal* in 4b, Geeta, the class monitor, devised along with the teacher, a different pattern of 'sides', based on 'shaming into silence' by breaking the gender divide:

The boys used to sit on one side, they'd throw things at the girls, trouble the girls. I thought if I put them in the middle, with girls on both sides, they won't be able to trouble us. And the girls used to sit with their friends and talk, so teacher said change their place... The boys, they've gone back to their own places, next to their friends .... the good boys are still sitting in their new places.[Which?]2-3 boys, I don't know their names.... the girls' names I know, many of the boys' names I don't.... I talk to all of them because I'm the monitor...Nowadays there isn't much *dhamaal* because 'we' [the girls] can see from both sides.
[Int/Geeta/16.3/4b]

The reactions to the new arrangement of 'sides' highlight the association between gender and physical space :

I like it a little, don't like a little...because the boys hit. [Earlier?] We didn't know them earlier, now *jaan pehchaan ho gaye* (we know them better).
[Int/Leela/23.3/4b]

We don't like them next to us, they fall on us...tomorrow, we'll sit like before, Madam said.
[Int/Harmandeep/1.4/4b]

The girls are hitting the boys and the boys are hitting the girls... they can do more *badmaashi* now. The teacher can't see three sides... if the girls are on one side and the boys on the other, teachers can see the boys' side.
[Int/Kiran/13.3/4b]

Girls do *dhamaal* when the teacher's not there....sitting like this there's more *dhamaal*.
[Int/20.3/Kishan/4b]

As children's narratives indicate, there is a strong taboo, possibly age-related, relating to physical proximity between girls and boys. Breaking this taboo through '*shaming*'—by de-segregating children -- was a disciplinary technique employed by teachers in the school to control *dhamaal*. Both teachers and children told me this was done (although I did not directly observe it myself.)

> Teacher makes us sit together when the boys do *dhamaal*. [Where do they sit?] With the girls at the back who do *dhamaal*. She makes the girls sit next to the boys, one girl, one boy.
> [ep3/2.1/Sunita/4b]

> In the 3rd, we used to do *dhamaal* and the teacher used to make us sit one boy one girl, like that. The girls and boys fight together, but more among themselves.... when there was more *dhamaal* teacher used to make us sit like that, together.... the boys run back to their places, sometimes they do *dhamaal* even if they sit like that.
> [ep7/20.3/Rekha R/4a]

Shaming is a method to ensure silencing through the breaking of taboos related to gender proximity. What is important to note is the fact that shaming forms a part of the ritualistic formalism of gender separation which is unique to the school setting, and never encountered in the home and community. Knowledge of gender is, in a sense, re-learned through such school practices, constructing the other as oppositional. What is interesting is the way in which such practices are particularly directed to stem the assumed aggressive masculinity of boys. It is similar to the social knowledge that for boys, proximity signals a loss of masculinity (as can be heard in the fear expressed by Pawan of 'becoming bad'.). Seen in the context of a positioning of working-class boys as threatening to middle-class teachers' perceptions of 'ideal students' because of innate aggressive tendencies, these separation and shaming practices reinforce stereotypes and self-images of both boys and girls.

On the playground, an objective of making/taking 'sides' was to ensure that boys did not leave the school premises. Children said and gesturally indicated that the boys' 'side' was the one opposite to that of the school gate. The monitor of 4a told me that she made the girls play on one side, and the teacher made the boys play on the other side.

> [What if you make them all play together, the same game?]The girls listen but the boys run off.
> [Int/Mandeepkaur/22.2/4a]

> The boys hit the girls. That's why teacher makes them play on that side. If we [the boys] play the teacher has to be there.
> [Int/Deepak/10.3/4a]

> The teacher makes us play separately on that side. She says she doesn't like.[What?]That boys and girls play together.
> [Int/Suresh/20.2/4b]

There was a shared knowledge of games from playing in the neighbourhood together but playing together was not permissible in the school context. One wonders why. Was this yet another reflection of the logic of gender separation in school? Teachers were clear that there was a practical need for girls and boys to play separately because they need separate 'attention'. Children appropriated this logic to mean that they could not play together because they played different games, as indeed they did, and were made to, by teachers. Both boys and girls welcomed playing separately because this meant that they could maximise fun without being troubled by the 'other' gender category; for boys, the potential to get into trouble with teachers was reduced. There was therefore a shared set of meanings given to this situation.

'Legitimate' interaction: Rakshabandhan

The gender divide in the classroom served to keep levels of attrition low and enabled the teacher to get on with her school day. However, within the particular class context of this school, it was also seen as a necessary 'stricture' to avoid 'trouble' between the sexes in the future. This formed the rationale of gender divisions, in the minds of both teachers and children. This rationale was particularly evident after the incident of stabbing outside the school. Alluding to the incident, the principal told me

> In..... [the private secondary school] don't ask what sorts of things happen. Here we're very strict, we make sure girls don't get into any trouble.
> [ep 2/2.1/P.O]

In conversations with me as well as with their students the teachers would often say that boys and girls 'stay' as brothers and sisters. 'Equality' is not the cultural message here : sisters have a subordinate position in the power structure of the patrilineal and patrilocal Indian family. *Rakshabandhan,* one of several rituals which emphasise the commitment of brothers to protect their sisters, and sisters to serve them, was celebrated in the school.

Between unrelated females and males, *Rakshabandhan* grants legitimacy to cross-sex interaction, especially for girls.

> There's one boy, Pawan, I talk with him. [What do you talk about?]Nothing. Nothing else. My friend and I think of him as a brother. We tied a *rakhi* on him. [Int/13.3/Satnamkaur/4b]

This legitimacy was fragile and not without its contradictions, and girls accommodated to it with a canny pragmatism :

> Naresh [a boy monitor] hits a lot, but the teacher still says treat them as brothers. She told the boys to treat the girls as sisters. I treat the boys as brothers. [Int/15.2/Amandeep/4a]

> We think of the boys as brothers. But they hit too much. Then we think : what sort of brothers are they ? Then we hit them back. [Int/Seema/20.2/4a]

Summary

This chapter presents a discussion of children's narratives of social experiences and their everyday school experiences which construct gender. The discussion indicates that gender appears to be 'learned' in school through participation in school processes. Gender divisions are maintained and strengthened through these processes, and legitimated on grounds of discipline and 'order'. These are processes intrinsic to the school experience. The experience of ritualistic separation does not necessarily mirror social experiences at home and in the community: the latter appears to be re-contextualised within the institutional setting of the school. In this re-contextualisation, the agency of both teachers and children is implicit.

Normative discourses – around what constitutes ideal gender behaviour, and the value of education for girls and boys – are heard in the children's narratives of school experience. These discourses demarcated acceptable spaces of being for children in the school. The logic underlying the separation of spheres was based on assumptions of difference between girls and boys. In these constructions, gender formed one axis of difference –social class, caste/community, and relative power of children in the social structure of the classroom were others.

Boys clearly understood the value of formal education to upward social and occupational mobility. Normative discourses of education centred on the inadequacy of government schools in bringing about such mobility. Girls were acutely conscious of the fact that only boys deserved 'better' schooling, such as private, English-medium schools. 'Proving' themselves to their families and teachers was far more difficult.

This chapter attempted to analyse and interpret the 'messages' of the hidden curriculum, focussing primarily around children's narratives. The following chapter is an attempt to interpret the hidden curriculum of gender based on the totality of ethnographic fieldwork in the school.