

## **Disciplining the Saffron Way:**

### **Moral Education and the Hindu *Rashtra***

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#### **Abstract**

This paper explores the relationship between Hindu nationalist ideology and the disciplinary practices of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Primary School. It is an attempt to understand how the rhetoric that revolves around the creation of a ‘Hindu *rashtra*’ (Hindu nation) is translated and implemented in pedagogical terms and interpreted and articulated by children. Specific focus is on the way that primary school children experience and talk about the School’s disciplinary enterprise, which is underpinned by ideas about Hindu superiority and the need to protect the Hindu nation against threatening cultural and religious minorities. With respect to the political end to which this enterprise is geared, it is argued that children interpret and value this enterprise not as a vehicle for the spread of Hindu nationalist ideals, but as a means by which educational success can be ensured.

India has witnessed an unprecedented rise in militant Hindu nationalism since the late 1980s<sup>1</sup>. The long-term ideological and political agenda of this movement is the spread of *Hindutva*, or ‘Hindu-ness’, and the transformation of Hindu culture into an undifferentiated whole, for the purpose of forging ‘one nation, one people, one culture’ (Khilnani 1997: 151). This kind of singular Hinduism assumes that India has always been ‘fundamentally Hindu’, a community united by geographical origin, racial connection and religious belief (see Thapar 1991). And indeed, the very notion of ‘*Hindutva*’ itself equates religious and national identity, where an Indian is defined as a Hindu, and the Hindu faith in turn is defined as the core of Indian nationhood (van der Veer 1994: 1). According to most analysts, the larger political strategy built around the Hindu nationalist quest for power can only succeed in a context where there exists a perceived threat – real or imagined – to the majority community of Hindus (see Hansen 1999: 208). Indeed, the perception of the ‘threatening Other’ – namely Muslims and Christians, whose origins and allegiances ostensibly lay outside of this community – has been called the ‘cornerstone of the Hindu nationalist movement’ (Jaffrelot 1993: 522; cf. Froerer 2006)<sup>2</sup>.

One of the most visible proponents of *Hindutva*, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), has been making serious ideological forays into government educational policies since 1997, when the Hindu supremacist political party, the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), first came to power as head of India’s national coalition government. Such forays have resulted in government curricula, syllabuses and school textbooks being redesigned with an explicitly *Hindutva* flavour<sup>3</sup>. While this party suffered a defeat in the 2004 national elections, the Hindu nationalist movement continues to influence the course of Indian politics and penetrate everyday life. Part of the RSS’s interest in education, which officially began in 1952 with the launch of the first RSS-run primary school, stems from the view that the ‘denationalising heritage left behind by the British’ had corrupted the educational mainstream (Sarkar 1996: 240). The RSS aimed to counter

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<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork for this paper took place over a ten-month period between September 2002 and September 2003. I am grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number 1 SAN S281) for funding this research. Special thanks are due to my friends in Chhattisgarh. I am also grateful to Jonathan Parry and Chris Fuller for their valuable guidance and comments. Earlier versions of this paper were presented in seminars at the LSE, Edinburgh University and Oxford University, where I received constructive comments. I would especially like to thank Patricia Jeffery, Evan Killick and the anonymous referee for their useful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> For further commentary on the antecedents and rise of Hindu Nationalism, see Basu *et.al.* (1993); Gold (1991); Gopal (1993); McKean (1996); and van der Veer (1994).

<sup>3</sup> See Panikkar (2001 [1999]: xx-xxi) on how the BJP’s rise to power has led to qualitative change in educational policy at both the centre and state levels.

this problem by inculcating ‘true national education that teaches the student to be proud of his/her Hindu heritage’ (ibid.). Today, the single school that marked the RSS’s initial incursion into education has grown into a network of over 17,000 schools across India, ranging from single-teacher, one-room structures in remote villages to large, multi-class complexes catering to thousands of pupils in urban areas. These schools, which are managed by the RSS educational branch, *Vidya Bharati*, cater predominantly to lower-middle class students (cf. Basu *et. al.* 1993: 45-50; [www.vidyabharati.org](http://www.vidyabharati.org)).

Present-day concerns of these schools, called Saraswati Shisu Mandir (which translates as the ‘Temple of the Pupils of Saraswati’ [the goddess of learning]), revolve around the increasing degradation of Indian values and the continuous deterioration of nationalistic feelings amongst children. These concerns are compounded by the fear that an increasing number of Hindu students are being lured to English medium schools run by Christian missionaries that impart harmful social values and a sense of anti-nationalism. In the name of ‘stopping this cultural pollution’, the ideological aims of the School curriculum have evolved in congruence with wider *Hindutva* objectives and include the preservation of Hindu culture, the restoration of a sense of nationalism for the motherland, and the inculcation of discipline and moral values into society. Such aims are meant to produce true Hindu citizens who are prepared to defend the Hindu nation.

The principal vehicle through which the School is currently implementing this agenda is called Sadachar, translated as ‘moral education’ or ‘moral improvement’. Taught as the first class subject of the day, and construed as a broader enterprise in nation-building, moral education encompasses and presupposes the existence and cooperation of disciplined, docile bodies. Discipline (*anusasan*) in such a context is manifested through physical control, bodily comportment and social etiquette. Viewed as both a corporal force and a moral and ideological good, discipline is understood by RSS ideologues and teachers alike to be the primary means through which moral education is in the first instance inculcated, and through which pupils are eventually drawn into the project of nationalism (see also Levinson *et.al.* 1996; cf. Alter 1994: 566)<sup>4</sup>.

This paper is about the relationship between Hindu nationalist ideology and the disciplinary practices of the Saraswati Shisu Mandir (or ‘Shishu Mandir’) Primary School. It is an attempt to understand how the nationalist rhetoric that revolves around the creation of a ‘Hindu *rashtra*’, or Hindu nation, is translated and implemented in pedagogical terms and interpreted and articulated by children. Couched in terms of ‘moral education’, the pedagogical focus in the first few years of primary school is predominantly on physical discipline and bodily comportment. As we shall see, this emphasis begins to shift around Class 3, and the strongly physical orientation of the project takes on a moral and ideological focus. Where others (Sundar 2004 and 2002; cf.

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, there is a similar preoccupation with discipline and moral education within *madrasah* (Islamic educational institutions) philosophy in U.P., northern India (cf. Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery forthcoming).

Sarkar 1996) have concentrated on the ideology of hate that is propagated within these schools, I am interested in how primary school children experience and talk about this moral and disciplinary enterprise, and how this compares to the nationalist ideals conveyed through the school curriculum and broader ideological agenda of the RSS. To date, little scholarly attention has been given by anthropologists and other social scientists to children's perspectives and specific experiences within India and elsewhere, and this paper is an attempt to redress this imbalance<sup>5</sup>.

As to the extent to which children understand the larger *Hindutva* ideals that buttress this enterprise, it is also important to note that this is not a study in cognition. As such, I try to stay away from making any connection between how children articulate their views, and the actual belief behind them. However, I do think that children's views offer important insights into the different ways that Hindu nationalist ideals are received and interpreted by the intended recipients. Such insights, moreover, call into question existing perspectives held by scholars and activists alike on the long-term implications of RSS pedagogical techniques<sup>6</sup>.

Indeed, what my ethnography reveals is that the way that children interpret the objectives of the disciplinary enterprise is not, as one might expect, in terms of acquiring cultural or religious superiority, or the need to physically defend the Hindu nation against threatening others, but is to do with more banal concerns like doing well in exams for the purpose of acquiring a respectable job in the future. In other words, the disciplinary enterprise instituted at the Shishu Mandir, whilst cloaked within Hindu nationalist rhetoric, is not very different from government and other non-RSS schools around India, 'where the idea and significance of discipline is linked to being a good citizen and achieving success in one's individual life' (Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey forthcoming; for a similar discussion, see Simpson 2000 and Srivastava 1998).

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<sup>5</sup> This is due in part to traditional assumptions that revolve around processes of 'socialisation', whereby culturally appropriate roles, norms and values come to be bestowed upon passive, malleable children, automatically replicated in successive generations. As Toren (1993: 461) has noted, anthropologists have regularly assumed that 'the endpoint of socialisation is known', and that the study of children therefore has no bearing on our analysis of the practices and beliefs that inform largely adult cultures and social relations (cf. Morton 1996).

<sup>6</sup> In this regard, parallels can be made with Mankekar's (1999, 1993) research on television viewing in urban India. Examining the specific role of television in the ideological construction of nationhood and womanhood, Mankekar uncovers the variable and contested nature by which the discourses disseminated through this particular medium are translated and interpreted by its audience.

It is true that the difference between the Shishu Mandir disciplinary project and that instituted in other schools continues to be the political end to which the students are disciplined (cf. Alter 1993: 51). This end is fundamentally nationalist in nature: to be disciplined the saffron way is to be groomed to defend (physically and ideologically) the Hindu *rashtra* against what is perceived to be threatening cultural and religious minorities. Indeed, this ideology continues to underpin the school's pedagogical project. In the face of this, my conclusions may be construed as an apology – particularly by those who have placed the RSS's 'ideology of hate' at the centre of their analysis – for what is regularly and rightly identified as a fascist organisation and agenda.

While I do not wish to mitigate the fundamentally militant nature of the RSS and its involvement in educational organisations, detailed consideration of the primary school children's experience and perspectives has always been left out of earlier analyses. And it is these views, which hail the disciplinary enterprise more as an effective vehicle for inculcating success in educational terms than for inculcating a sense of superiority over and hatred of minority communities, to which the present paper gives voice.

### **I. Schooling, Discipline and the RSS: Historical Antecedents**

There is a growing discourse within anthropology on the relationship between education and nationalism, specifically on the role played by schools in nationalist projects and nation-building (see Bénéï forthcoming, 2002b, 2000; Levinson and Holland 1996). This discourse dates back at least to Durkheim (1961) who, in context of a larger project on moral education, observed how '[modern] schools have served to inculcate the skills, subjectivities and disciplines that underpin the modern nation-state' (from Levinson et. al. 1996: 1). Recognising the importance of educational institutions in linking the child to the national society, Durkheim held that the school is the primary moral agent through which the child is able systematically to learn to know and love his nation, and indeed to shape national morality as a whole (1961: 79).

For Durkheim, moral life was linked to the concept of discipline: to learn to act morally is also to learn conduct that is orderly (ibid: 31, 46). His early observations served to shape the direction of later studies on schooling and education, which have endeavoured to show how schools, more than 'innocent' sites of cultural transmission, are sites geared toward the reproduction of discipline and conformity demanded by the nation-state (Levinson and Holland 1996: 5)<sup>7</sup>. More recent literature follows in this vein. With specific respect to India, for example, Bénéï's (2005: 1, 4; 2000: 206) studies on ordinary and military school education have revealed that schools are 'privileged sites' for studying 'the intricate relationship between the teaching of nationalist values and the disciplining of bodies' (cf. Kumar 2001; Ghosh 1995). Similarly, observations have been

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<sup>7</sup> See also Schwartzman (2001: 10). Cf. Althusser (1971), whose famous pronouncement of schools being among the most powerful 'ideological state apparatuses', where the student-as-subject becomes ideologically positioned, also had significant influence on this literature.

made by Allen Chun in a forthcoming article on the moral cultivation of citizenship and national identity in a Taiwan middle school, the term 'etiquette' is used to describe orderly conduct and the 'ritualised restraint of behaviour, which is the product of school disciplinary routines' (cf. Elias 2000; for comparative examples outside of India, cf. Luykx 1999; Starrett 1998; Mitchell 1988).

The importance of discipline to this project and, more specifically, to the RSS's pedagogical project and the wider *Hindutva* agenda as a whole, has its antecedents in numerous historical legacies. These include the Hindu revivalist movements initiated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which, among other things, promoted a 'vision of Hindu cultural renewal through personal discipline' (see Jaffrelot 1993: 11-17; Gold 1991: 533)<sup>8</sup>. These movements were also influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century European conceptions that the source of national identity is located in the disciplined body, and that strong individual bodies would yield a strong 'social body' (Vrettos 1995: 133; cf. Bénéï 2002a: 1648-49).

Current manifestations of the *Hindutva* movement have also borrowed features from older traditions such as scouting and the British police (Jaffrelot 1993: 48; Gold 1991: 577). Additionally, the RSS has been heavily influenced by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century German ideas of the nation and ethnic nationalism, whereby 'the individual's will to loyalty and sacrifice ultimately determines the nation's will to cohesion and organisation' (Hansen 1999: 41). These ideas, which were manifested most extremely in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nazi Germany, emphasised physical strength and self control and revolved around the drive to inculcate patriotism and national identity (cf. Bénéï 2000: 209-210; Jaffrelot 1993: 11-12, 28-32)<sup>9</sup>.

There are obvious parallels with the disciplinary and pedagogical focus imparted in nineteenth and twentieth century Christian missionary schools and related educational activities as well. Their increasing investment in education is another example, according

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<sup>8</sup> With respect to the emphasis on personal discipline, interesting parallels can be made between Hindu revivalist movements and Islamic reform movements (cf. Metcalf 1990; Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey 2004).

<sup>9</sup> As Gold (1991: 568) and other (see Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 1993) point out, the reformed Hindu social ideals that were advocated by early Hindu reformist movements and adopted later by the RSS, while influenced by German fascist notions, nonetheless run counter to Western fascisms. The latter imply a monolithic nation under a powerful leader, while the former envisage a nation composed of individual communities in organic cooperation. Jaffrelot (1993: 77) and others (Alter 1994: 567-68; Gold 1991: 577; Nandy 1995) have noted that there is a certain irony in the fact that the identity of *Hindutva* was largely crystallised through the application of political and value concepts from the West.

to Thapar (1991: 18), of how Hindu nationalists have ‘attempted to defend, redefine and create “Hinduism” on the model of the Christian religion’. Patterning their school disciplinary regime on the success of Christian educational institutions, the RSS’s interest in education (as well as in hospitals and health care) represents the broader ‘mimetic dimension’ that underpins historical and modern-day manifestations of Hindu nationalist endeavours (Jaffrelot 1993: 34; Hansen 1999: 103-107; Andersen and Damle 1987: 18).

Another clear legacy on the form and expression of the RSS and early Hindu nationalism comes from Gandhi, not least from the obvious example of his body discipline (van der Veer 1994: 96; Alter 2000) and his advocacy of physical fitness (Alter 1994: 559), both of which remain at the core of RSS ideology today. Additionally, Gandhi’s respect for the higher cause of Hindu unity (Bayly 1999: 250) is seen today in the RSS’s espousal of notions of subservience of individuals and groups to the Hindu nation as a corporate whole (Hansen 1999: 85)<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, the contemporary importance of discipline to the RSS’s pedagogical project has been influenced by nineteenth and twentieth-century values associated with Europeans, such as the capacity of being ‘well-disciplined’ and possessing a ‘dutiful nature’ (Hansen 1999: 72-73). The latter resonates with Jawaharlal Nehru’s alarm at the absence of order and discipline across post-colonial India, and the problem of indiscipline and lack of civic sense on the part of members of the population who ‘consistently fail to behave as required by citizens of a nation-state’ (Hansen 1999: 47).

As we shall see throughout this paper, these seemingly disperse historical antecedents continue to underpin the RSS’s disciplinary enterprise and aims at the pedagogical level. Such aims revolve around engaging the body in disciplined activities

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<sup>10</sup> Whilst the influences of Gandhian ideals are clear, it is also important to mention the instrumental aspect of the RSS’s appropriation of Gandhian idioms, which have in more recent times come to conveniently fit into the RSS’s larger ideological endeavour to represent itself as ‘the sole and true inheritor of Indian nationalism and the only legitimate guardian of Hindu society’ (Hansen 1999: 86; see also Alter 2000: 55-112). Gandhi’s influence is also present as the *force against which* Hindu nationalists of the time, and those into the present day, (re)acted and continue to formulate their ideology. The most obvious example here is the notion of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, which is considered to be a ‘feminine’ response to the ‘threatening other’, particularly when compared to the masculinised, militancy and aggression manifested by past and modern-day proponents of *Hindutva* (cf. van der Veer 1994: 96). Gandhi’s assimilationist conception of the Indian nation and espousal for religious tolerance (especially for Muslims) and cultural plurality (see Andersen and Damle 1987: 19-20) are also positions against which the RSS and other early nationalists have consistently fought.

congenial to building up ‘collective strength’ for the purpose of defending and protecting a threatened Hindu majority and nation (cf. Basu et. al 1993: 34-36; Gold 1991: 571). This enterprise is clearly regarded by ideologues and teachers alike as a means by which students’ bodies and characters are introduced to and subsumed within the Hindu nation (Alter 1994: 566). What the ethnography demonstrates, however, is that the importance that children attribute to this disciplinary regime relates more to achieving success in one’s education and future career aspirations than to creating a Hindu *rashtra*.

## II. Student, teachers and curricular profile

The research on which this paper is based took place over a period of 9 months between October 2002 and August 2003, during which time I spent an average of two days a week at the Saraswati Shishu Mandir primary school. For reasons related to other research obligations, I did not live in the locality where the School was based and the students lived. While this precluded more detailed research into other aspects of students’ lives, I discussed children’s non-school lives with them at length, and I availed of regular opportunities to visit the homes and talk with the parents of a handful of pupils. The bulk of the research, however, took place in the school setting itself, where I was able to converse frequently with children and talk at length with teachers and the headmaster<sup>11</sup>.

The School is one of seven in Korba, a burgeoning industrial city of around 200,000 located in central India. It serves both primary and secondary students, with the latter occupying classrooms throughout the morning session (7:00 am - 12:15 pm), and the former throughout the afternoon (12:15 pm - 5:00 pm). There are just over 1000 primary school students, divided almost equally between girls and boys, and ranging from KG 1 (age 3 ½) to Class 5 (age 10-11)<sup>12</sup>. Each class of 160-170 students is divided into four sections, with 40-45 students per section.

The school caters to predominantly lower middle class students. Around 75% of the school student body is comprised of ‘*service-wallahs*’ children (that is, children whose parents are government employees, industrial plant-workers and small-business owners), while 25% are children of lower working class parents (auto rickshaw drivers,

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<sup>11</sup> All discussions and interviews took place in Hindi; all quotations outlined in the text below have been translated from Hindi to English.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to acknowledge here that while gender is a fundamental issue with respect to broader RSS and *Hindutva* ideology and praxis, it is not constructed, in terms of pedagogy or discipline, as a significant issue at the school. It is likely that more of an explicit issue is made of gender during secondary school, but at the primary school level, boys and girls are regarded equally as ‘future defenders of the Hindu Rashtra’ and disciplined, and articulate their understanding of this discipline, in very similar ways. For this reason, I do not address or problematise the issue of gender in this paper.

office peons, etc.). The religious affiliation of the children is nearly 100% Hindu (approximately 98% Other Backward Castes and 2% *adivasi*, or tribal)<sup>13</sup>; there are two Sikh students in the primary school. While most parents cited the school's reputation for instilling discipline and the emphasis on hard work and academic success as the primary reasons for sending their children to this school, another important criteria is the school's relative affordability. In this way, the student body is fairly representative of Shishu Mandir schools across India, which cater to lower-middle class (often OBC) families who can afford the Rs 1000-1200 annual fees. In Korba, those who cannot afford to pay these fees send their children to the non-fee government schools; children of middle class families are typically sent to the higher fee-paying, Catholic-run English-medium schools (cf. Sundar 2002).

There are 32 teachers at the school, divided equally between male and female. Most are OBC and have been employed within the Shishu Mandir system from between one and 25 years. The headmaster, Shri Jha, has been working in the Shishu Mandir system for 30 years, 12 as a teacher, 18 as a headmaster. Most of the female teachers are assigned to the younger classes (KG to Class 3), whereas the majority of the male teachers are assigned to the older classes (Class 3 to Class 5). Reasons for the preponderance of women amongst the younger classes, which are discussed in further detail below, are related to the importance given to the mother-figure relationship in children's early pedagogical training.

In a custom adopted by the School to set itself apart from other schools, female teachers are addressed not as 'Madam', which is the custom in government and English-medium schools, but as '*Didi-ji*' ('big sister'), a term of address that is said to impart a feeling of warmth and friendship. Equally, instead of the more common 'Sir', male teachers are called '*Aachariya-ji*', which is Sanskrit for 'guru' or 'spiritual guide'. Teachers are also made to wear 'traditional' uniforms of white sari with red trim for women, and white *dhotis* (a kind of sarong) and *kurtas* (long shirt) for men. These forms of address and sartorial custom represent the school's aims of transmitting traditional Hindu culture, and I was told by one teacher how such practices 'express the feeling of *Hindutva*'.

In order to keep itself accredited, the school is obliged to follow the government-prescribed curriculum, which includes maths, Hindi, Sanskrit and English. Beyond this, there is little or no government intervention, a fact that is given much importance by teachers and other school administrators. The school day is tightly regulated, with five 40-minute classes punctuated by a 20-minute lunch break and recess. Sport and yogic exercises are conducted for around 15 minutes on alternate days, and Saturday sees a special 1.5-hour extended assembly called *Shishu Bharati* (India's children), where teachers give talks valorising specific RSS ideologues and students are encouraged to perform skits from the Ramayana or sing special Hindu Nationalist songs. Importantly,

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<sup>13</sup> Other Backward Caste, or OBC, is the official classification that designates traditionally lower (but not untouchable) castes.

the Shishu Mandir is the only primary school in Korba that has invested in computers and teaches computer classes to Class 4 and 5 students.

What sets the School apart from government and Christian schools is the focus on moral values, physical discipline and Hindu nationalist ideology, which is the objective of the daily, 20-minute ‘moral education’ class, Sadachar. As pointed out at the beginning of the paper, Sadachar is at once a class extolling the virtues of moral conduct, and a disciplinary enterprise which underpins the School’s project of nation-building and the dissemination of its *Hindutva* agenda<sup>14</sup>. It is meant to inculcate into students an ‘appropriate’ set of values as prescribed by Hindu culture in order to ensure a sense of Hindu superiority and protect the Hindu nation. To this end, and in a final endeavour to ideologically package the government-prescribed curriculum, the academic routine of the School is encased within two 20 minute assemblies, the beginning and end-of-day *prathna* (prayer).

### III. Disciplined Bodies and Social Space: *Prathna* and the Classroom

The strongly Hindu orientation of the school becomes immediately apparent as one enters the five acre Shishu Mandir compound where, just to the right of the gates and dominating the entrance, there is a large, two-room Saraswati temple. It is Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the school’s namesake, to whom daily prayers are made and devotion is given by students and staff alike.

Saraswati’s presence extends into the classroom, where large posters depicting her image are flanked by two or three pictures of other Hindu gods. In what Chun (forthcoming) calls a ‘politicisation of public space’, and in a clear reference to the school’s ideological slant, these are joined by pictures of important historical leaders of the early RSS and *Hindutva* movement. There is also a small shrine in the corner of every classroom dedicated to the propitiation of Saraswati.

The most striking image with which one is confronted upon entering the school grounds is the throng of identically-clad students, dressed in the mandatory uniform of navy blue frock (for the girls) or navy shorts or trousers (for boys), with white blouses/shirts. Accessories such as belts, hair bands, ribbons, and socks must be red. The only time that students diverge from this uniform is on their birthdays, when they are allowed to wear ‘civilian’ clothes. And the only school-prescribed items that the students are allowed to personalise are their school bags and water flasks. This, and the teachers’ daily monitoring of children’s apparel, is not dissimilar from government schools. As we

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<sup>14</sup> Like government-prescribed courses, children are examined in Sadachar at the end of each school year.

Exams are simple question-answer style and consist of naming Hindu heroes (especially those who fought Muslims), Hindu mythological figures, sacred texts, geographical centres and events, and sayings from the Ramayana and the Mahabharat (cf. Basu *et. al.* 1993: 46).

shall see below, what is different is the way that the uniform is used and conceived, by students and teachers, as a disciplinary tool.

At the sound of the bell, which rings precisely at 12:15 pm, total chaos erupts within the school grounds. Primary school students, who have been congregating in the middle of the school playing field, make a mad dash to get inside the classrooms that the secondary students have been occupying since early morning. Little effort to control the pandemonium is made by teachers and other staff, who themselves are caught up in the chaos marking the change-over from secondary to primary school. The undisciplined nature of this part of the day is notable only in its stark contrast to the extreme disciplinary regime that pervades the rest of the school day. Indeed, up until the moment the students are marched, single file, by their class teachers at the end of the day to the school gates, and with the exception of the 20-minute lunch and school recess, the rest of the day is tightly regulated within a strict programme of disciplinary time, space, and activities.

Minutes after the primary school children have been settled in their classrooms, they are herded out again by their class teacher and made to join the rest of their classmates in preparation for the *prathna* (morning assembly). The *prathna* is where the school's disciplinary regime is most prominently displayed; where strict attention to bodily comportment and students' demonstration of physical discipline is buttressed by the inculcation of religious Hinduism and Hindu nationalist ideology. The ideological content and scriptural order of the assembly, which is conducted by four Class 5 girls, is rarely altered. It begins with a rousing nationalist song, prevailing upon children to march forth in the name of mother India. Following this is the more sober recitation of the *Saraswati Vandana*, a prayer to the goddess of learning. This is preceded by a lengthy recitation of between 12-15 verses from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, along with the recitation of the *Ekatmata Stotr*, a scriptural-style verse that marks the places associated with sacred Hindu geography, Hindu mythological figures, Hindu saints, poets and kings, and early RSS leaders (cf. Sundar 2004: 1609). Throughout the *prathna*, the identically-clad students' bodies alternate between various meditative positions, mirroring each other as they perform this daily liturgy. Indeed, the occasion exudes a powerful sense of collective identity – a social body being trained to provide unequivocal devotion to the Hindu nation (cf. Bénéï 2000: 205).

In contrast to the disciplined reverence displayed by the students are the actions of the teachers. Stationed at the sides, front and back of each group of students, teachers police their charges' every physical movement in an attempt to spot the slightest sign of misconduct. Docile bodies remain invisible, whereas bodies that do not conform are made visible through the display of corporal punishment (cf. Simpson 2000: 69). As the *prathna* progresses, teachers call out names of disruptive or misbehaving students, rebuking them for a variety of bodily transgressions such as opening their eyes, holding the wrong meditative position, or talking out of line. Teachers walk through the rows of students, delivering forceful whacks across the back, neck or head of disruptive pupils. The extremely disruptive ones are called out of the social group and beaten across the back or the buttocks, in front of the rest of the student body.

Toward the end of the *prathna*, the children stand at attention, bodies straight, arms to the side while the *Rashtragit* (National Anthem) is sung. Teachers, after ensuring that all pupils are holding themselves appropriately, also put a halt to their policing activities and join in respectful homage as their nation is ‘sung into being’ (Bénéï 2000: 195). At the end of this, the children and teachers join in a cry of ‘*Bharat Mata ki jai*’ (long live mother India). Teachers then resume their policing as the students are made to sit once again in respectful positions, listening to the patriotic speech made by the headmaster<sup>15</sup>.

The discipline that is displayed and the rituals that are performed by the students in context of *prathna* routine is, according to teachers and RSS ideologues, reproduced in identical fashion in every other Shishu Mandir across the country. In this sense, it constitutes a sort of ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983), whereby the Shishu Mandir students are part of larger collective which engages in the same activity, at the same time, for the same purpose: invoking and paying heed to the Hindu Nation through ‘highly ritualised’ processes that combine the ceremony of power with the establishment of the Hindu nation (cf. Starrett 1998: 181).

The discipline exhibited on this occasion, which is reproduced in identical fashion in every other Shishu Mandir across the country, is a culmination and tribute to the hundreds of hours of training in correct bodily comportment and moral education, the bulk of which takes place in the classroom, to where students return after *prathna* ends. Leaving their shoes outside the classroom as a mark of respect to the ‘temple’ presided over by the goddess of learning, children settle behind their desks. As soon as the teacher enters the classroom, the students stand at attention and recite the ‘*gurumantra*’, a worshipful hymn of praise and respect that extols the divine virtues of the teacher. Outside of the classroom setting, children must also greet all teachers and authority figures by touching their feet. After the greeting, the teacher immediately calls out the names in the class register, in response to which every student present has been trained to stand and identify him or herself with the words ‘*namaste didiji/aachariyaji*’ (good morning teacher).

As we will see below, for younger children, the importance of and respect which they give to discipline has nothing to do with moral education, or indeed the larger

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<sup>15</sup> In terms of the extent to which children understand the ideological message propagated in context of the *prathna* or the speeches, Gold (1991: 551) has observed that ‘being a good Hindu does not depend very much on what individuals think or what scriptures they revere, but it does depend on what they do’. In this sense, one could argue that it is the acting out and ‘doing’, or performance of discipline, that plays into the creation of a disciplined child, more than the actual ideological message, the understanding of which will come later on.

ideological aims of *Hindutva*, but revolves around the avoidance of corporal punishment. Children only begin to view discipline as a worthy moral project from around Class 3 onward, when the importance they give to the avoidance of punishment is combined with that which they give to proper ways of behaving. Not until Class 5 do children begin to associate the production of good behaviour with the creation of good Hindus.

The following section documents this transformation by examining children's experiences and highlighting the ways they articulate their views about the School's disciplinary enterprise. One issue that will emerge from the ethnography is how the strongly physical orientation of this enterprise takes on a moral and ideological focus as children progress from KG to Class 5. More critically, what I want to highlight is the way that children from Class 3 onward articulate their views of this disciplinary project. While children are being schooled to view discipline as the primary means by which the Hindu nation can be physically and morally defended, what I want to draw attention to is the kinds of issues that children themselves deem to be important. What will become evident is that children are more concerned with how discipline will help them achieve success in educational terms, than with how discipline will help them to become bearers of *Hindutva*. In other words, what the ethnography demonstrates is that, from the perspective of the students, the school is less about inculcating Hindu nationalist ideology and more about inculcating success in educational terms.

#### **IV. From the Body to the Mind: Corporal, Moral and Ideological Discipline**

##### **1. Sadachar and Discipline: Kindergarten**

Much of the Sadachar training at the kindergarten (KG) level, and the underlying reason for the existence of the kindergarten class in the first instance, is an enterprise in physical discipline and bodily comportment. This is a difficult project at the initial stages, when tearful 3 ½ year olds are first brought to the school by their parents and deposited in the care of their teachers. For, as one teacher told me, 'these children know nothing. Their minds are empty and blank, just like simple paper. It is up to us to teach them. Whatever we teach them will be scripted on their minds throughout their lifetime'. In this respect, the job of the KG teachers is to undertake a sort of 'civilising process' (Elias 2000), whereby children are taught bodily and behavioural control and transformed from primitive to 'civilised' beings.

The KG teachers adopt a very comforting and nurturing role toward the KG children. During the first two months of school, kindergarten children are often to be found cuddled safely in the arms of their teacher or clutching the edge of her sari, as if she were their own mother. 'We are like their mothers', confirmed one female teacher to me. 'We have to wipe their tears, open their bottles, help them get their books out. We have to do everything for them, just like their mothers'. This mother-figure relationship, the way in which education fits into the reproduction of motherhood, and its association with 'Mother India' has been well documented by Nita Kumar (2000) and others (see Benei 2002b). This relationship is also acknowledged by teachers to be an important

pedagogical necessity for children's early disciplinary training, which is manifested in the fact that the majority of teachers from KG to Class 3 levels are female.

One of the most obvious arenas in which physical discipline and training is undertaken in kindergarten is the *prathna*. Patterned after the main school *prathna* and held twice daily in the corridors outside the kindergarten classrooms, one of the teachers will begin with a rousing RSS song invoking deities and noble figures associated with strength and power, such as Ram, Shivaji, and Bhavani. Songs (sung in Hindi) are the primary medium through which kindergarten children begin to be taught proper physical comportment and behaviour. Like elsewhere in India, and in common with certain 19<sup>th</sup> century German nationalist programmes, songs are central to the development and spread of nationalist culture and ideals amongst children (cf. Bénéï 2000: 209). Sung during both *prathna* and class time, they consist of ordinary nursery songs about animals and the alphabet, along with the more numerous 'teaching songs' which are specifically oriented toward inculcating good bodily habits, hygiene and respect for the elders<sup>16</sup>. Children are also made to repeat the national song and the Saraswati prayer, which are recited more soberly by the teachers.

The importance of songs as the pedagogical medium is related to the somatic element that songs are said to possess. As one teacher remarked, 'songs are used so that small children can develop their senses, along with their bodies and minds. If we teach them through songs, then children observe more carefully and accept the messages in the songs more quickly. When they start singing, it helps them to concentrate on their bodies'. Indeed, the body is the primary object of discipline, and I was regularly told by teachers of the importance of disciplining the body before the mind. In the words of one teacher, 'we can do nothing with the child if his body is not disciplined; disciplining the body allows for the disciplining of the mind'. Here, the body, at least in context of the disciplinary enterprise, is viewed as an entity quite separate from the mind<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> One of the favourites includes the following lines: 'everyday you must get up early...'; 'everyday you must bathe...'; 'everyday you must clean your nails...'; and so forth. At the end of each line is a sing-songy question 'who must get up early...?'; 'who must bathe daily...?', to which the children respond in a loud chorus of 'I must, I must!'. A similar song carries the message of the importance of coming to school on time, of touching the feet of one's parents, of greeting the teacher in proper fashion, and so on.

<sup>17</sup> This view, reflected more assiduously by the RSS in context of its propagation of physical training and advocacy of disciplined bodies, is very different from more 'traditional' views of the 'Hindu body', which sees the person as a more synthetic force combining somatic, sensory, and cognitive forces' (see Parry 1989: 492-96; Alter 1993).

Only once did a kindergarten teacher hint at the connection between disciplining children's bodies and broader aims of nation-building, with the remark that 'if the child's body is disciplined from the beginning itself, then the child will maintain it throughout his life, for his family and for the nation. It is our responsibility to prepare children's bodies in order to make this nation great'. But the justification for nearly every disciplinary endeavour in the kindergarten classes, referred to as a general project of 'moral education', is geared toward this end. For example, the body becomes a pedagogical tool as teachers adjust arms and legs while children are taken through drills and taught which specific bodily postures are associated with which particular songs, scriptures and chants. Attention also shifts between the individual to the social body, as teachers regularly scold or remind the small children where or how they should be sitting in relation to the group.

This hands-on physical training is transformed into a sanitary exercise when teachers shift their attention to daily clothing and body inspection, regularly demanding to see the state of cleanliness of each child's teeth, nails, hands and hair (cf. Mitchell 1988: 99). Focus is also on the child's apparel, as teachers inspect uniforms and accessories, adjust collars, button shirts, wipe faces and tie shoes.

As part of Sadachar, children are also being taught proper classroom etiquette and the correct manner of engagement with adult authority. This includes training in appropriate greetings for teachers, in how to answer properly when the register is taken, in standing when adults enter the room and greeting them, and in touching the feet of their teachers and elders. This sort of 'training' is directly linked to the RSS notion of *samskar*, which connotes 'good character' and a disciplined, ethical way of acting (see Jaffrelot 1993: 48)<sup>18</sup>. Such 'training' takes place throughout the day, within and between lessons, and is interspersed with physical drills.

In short, the primary aim of the kindergarten course is to physically prepare children, conceived of as 'blank canvasses', for the academic and ideological training that will come later. In some respects, the fact that children are considered to be 'blank', devoid of any previous ideological influence or indeed social marking – such as that associated, for example, with caste or class background – could itself be construed as a type of Hindu Nationalist rhetoric, which regards children as unfinished entities ready to be somatically moulded into proper Hindu persons (cf. Alter 1994). It is thus up to the School to invest this 'unfinished entity' with discipline, order and meaning (see Shilling 1993: 102). Though rigorous at times, discipline in the KG class is dispensed 'with love'

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<sup>18</sup> This ethic was originally observed by Brahmins, whose status implied respect for such values. It was appropriated and propagated by the RSS and has since filtered into the Shishu Mandir moral enterprise. In the words of one chief RSS ideologue, 'We try progressively to give children this outlook because in the RSS family there is no bad language. [In the RSS *samskars*], one learns to be polite and to address one's elders with respect' (quoted in Jaffrelot 1993: 48).

and kindness by teachers who construe themselves, and are viewed by children, to be mother-figures. Discipline is not at this stage accompanied by corporal punishment, a fact that features strongly in the way that older children talk about their kindergarten years. One Class 5 student, for example, became very emotional when she described her early days in the school: ‘When I came to kindergarten for the first time, my mother dropped me off and I cried because I didn’t know what was going to happen. I used to refuse to enter the classroom. But after that, the teacher used to love me so much. She treated me just like her daughter. I never used to think about my parents, so much affection was given to me’. The mutual affection shown here stands in contrast to Class 1, where corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool is first experienced.

## 2. Sadachar and Discipline: Class 1

Like kindergarten, the principal focus of the moral education enterprise for Class 1 students is on physical and behavioural discipline and improvement of the body. While the moral education class (Sadachar) has, by this stage, become officially relegated to a single class period, it is still a day-long endeavour, imparted less through songs and more through verbal lessons on the merits of cleanliness and good behaviour. Instead of regular individual inspections of the sort conducted in kindergarten, a daily ritual is undertaken whereby teachers request and command students who have followed these physical guidelines to identify themselves by standing up or raising their hand. The primary change that we see in Class 1 is that, unlike in kindergarten, the transgression of Class 1 children are met with physical punishment.

Sometimes, the teacher turns the Sadachar inspection into an exercise in obedience. On one occasion, the teacher requested those who had *not* cleaned their teeth to raise their hand. Accustomed to identifying themselves if they had brushed, students were unsure as to who was to raise their hand and who was not. The lesson shifted from a focus on cleanliness to one on obedience, listening and paying attention. ‘I said those who had *not* cleaned their teeth to put up their hands, not those who *had*’, said the teacher, as she strolled around the room, randomly striking students with her stick. ‘You must listen, not talk, listen’, she continued. ‘I only want you to show your hands, not to talk. I don’t want anyone to fail in following my orders. Those who can’t follow orders and listen quietly to what I am saying, I’ll send back to kindergarten’.

This was a direct reference to the obvious untrained behaviour of the younger KG students, and was quite insulting to the Class 1 children, who pride themselves on being part of the ‘bigger’, older cohort of students. Comparisons are constantly made, with teachers reminding Class 1 children that if they want to advance into higher classes then they should stop acting like small kindergarten children<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. James (1993), who discusses how the import of such statements is clear: the bigger one is, the better one is and the more social one becomes. This in turn tends to stress the importance of growth and development of the physical body in the present for future identities. See also Simpson (2000).

In spite of these comparisons, Class 1 children are more adept at responding correctly to the orders given by their teacher, and to the general demands that the disciplinary regime imposes on their bodies. Nonetheless, teachers spend a good part of the day policing their bodies and actions. Students must be told again and again about appropriate behaviour during *prathna*, and reminded about cleanliness and general physical comportment in the classroom. These reminders are invariably accompanied by a beating. Commenting on the relentless practice of giving orders, checking for physical transgressions, and dispensing corporal punishment, one teacher said to me, 'Children are just like soft mud. We can do what we want with them, they are so soft. Just like the potter, who makes beautiful pots. But what the child become depends on what we make out of him. Mud can be thrown away uselessly'.

It is for this reason that teachers, both male and female alike, take the disciplinary tasks that they have been charged with very seriously; and it is for this reason that the sometimes excessive use of the stick is viewed as an unfortunate but necessary tool. One Class 1 teacher, remarking on the unruliness of her charges and holding up the wooden stick that she used for beating children, informed me: 'This is why we use the stick. We don't enjoy this, but sometimes we are forced to beat these students. Otherwise, they will not respect us; they will not learn'. Another Class 1 teacher linked the necessary discipline with the child's future, by saying that 'without instilling discipline at this young age, our students will not get good jobs in future. No one can become great and have successful futures without the kind of discipline that we at the Shishu Mandir impart'. As an afterthought, she added, 'Discipline makes a nation great'.

Punishment, in other words, is an aspect of discipline (Mitchell 1988: 74; cf. Foucault 1979), and discipline from Class 1 onward has become essentially physical. All teachers are in possession of a similar stick, which is used liberally for disciplining anything from incorrect postures, to talking or creating other types of disturbance during class or assembly. Even during academic classes, which are invariably marked by excessive recitation of the lesson, teachers can be found walking through the rows of students, distributing whacks across the backs of students who are not rocking in time to their repetitive chanting. Students who falter at their lessons are accused of being lazy and struck several times across their arms or head. The headmaster often joins the teachers in dispensing physical punishment. During one class recitation session, I witnessed the headmaster enter one classroom and give a beating to a Class 2 student who had faltered at his 8-times-tables. Two classrooms down, he put a Class 1 child into tears by severely twisting his ear and beating him with his wooden stick for coming to school wearing a soiled shirt.

Along with the liberal use of the 'stick', teachers also begin to employ other, more manipulative tactics to instil discipline into their young pupils. One Class 1 teacher was thoroughly exasperated by a particularly disruptive group. In an effort to link the disciplinary consequences that would befall her pupils to those that would befall herself, she said to them, 'listen, if you don't be quiet, *Jhaji* [the headmaster] will dismiss me from this school. And if I get dismissed, I'll come and take you away as well. Just see,

when you see him standing outside this room, then you'll come to know, he's come to get me'. Comments at this stage can also be insulting. For example, one Class 1 teacher refused to accept a student's declaration that she had indeed bathed that day. 'I don't believe you', said the teacher. 'But I did bathe before coming', insisted the student. 'Then why do you look the way you do? You smell so badly'. Most of these remonstrations are, of course, accompanied by a whack across the head, back or neck.

It is clear that the disciplinary regime has by this stage evolved from being the positive and nurturing experience it was in kindergarten, to being negative and punishing, even hurtful. As one Class 1 student put it, 'Our Class 1 teachers love us much less than our KG teachers. It is in Class 1 when the teachers start to beat us'. The effect that the experience of corporal punishment has on Class 1 children is evidenced by their comments about its absence in kindergarten. One Class 1 child reported to me that 'we used to play for 2-3 hours, and make lots of mischief. Didiji never used to scold us then; she never used to beat us either'. While teachers are aware of and speak about the broader enterprise in moral and ideological education, the pedagogical focus that revolves around physical discipline and is primarily concerned with the creation of docile bodies is almost entirely devoid of any obvious ideological content.

As Class 1 students are getting accustomed to this new regime of corporal punishment, it is in Class 2 that corporal punishment, and its avoidance, becomes the principal reason articulated for the importance of the Shishu Mandir's larger disciplinary project.

### 3. Sadachar and Discipline: Class 2

The disciplinary focus in Class 2 remains oriented toward the maintenance of good physical behaviour, appearance and hygiene, and proper social conduct. In addition to the kind of disciplinary measures employed in Class 1, Class 2 teachers also appoint a class monitor, usually the top student, to assist in classroom surveillance and the reporting of any infractions. Regular refrains of 'Didiji, he's talking', 'Didiji, he is lying', 'Didiji, he is hitting me' are invariably met with the use of the stick against the transgressing child.

For Class 2 children, discipline (*anusasan*) is associated with following the rules, whether these concern hygiene and appearance, or classroom behaviour. And while children attribute an importance to the rules of good conduct themselves, their comments associate this importance specifically with the experience of corporal punishment. Being disciplined is thus construed with not being punished; and being un-disciplined means behaving in such a way that results in corporal punishment. What gives these rules their authority is not, as Durkheim (1961: 175) claimed, the child's view of them as inviolable, but the child's view that their infraction will result in corporal punishment. For example, when I asked why it was important to take a bath everyday, one Class 2 student told me that 'if we do not, then Didiji [teacher] will send us to the headmaster, who will then beat us'. Another Class 2 child informed me that children must look nice and wear all of their accessorised apparel in correct fashion, because 'it is the rule. If we don't dress nicely in

clean clothes then the headmaster will beat us'. It also was important to behave nicely in class and respond correctly to the teacher because 'Didiji will beat us severely if we do not'. The importance of disciplinary rules was, in other words, directly related to the corporal consequences.

By extension, Class 2 children also associate the importance of the moral education class, Sadachar, with obedience to the type of disciplinary rules that defines it. Recall that in kindergarten and Class 1, Sadachar revolves predominantly around hygiene, bodily comportment and social etiquette. In the formal Class 2 Sadachar course, this focus is for the first time complemented with the addition of morality lessons and the introduction of textbooks. Value lessons, meant to impart good character, bravery and moral ways of acting, are narrated in context of stories from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana. In this way, sacred texts are transformed into 'systematic, socially and politically useful products' for socialization (Starrett's 1998: 129). As indicated in the introduction to the Class 2 book, Sadachar also hints at the broader *Hindutva* agenda with the words: '*Lord Ram is the greatest among model persons. He has the qualities of sacrifice, generosity, patience, bravery and humility. It is the duty of every Indian child to follow his example. Only by doing this can they go on and serve the Hindu nation*'. The introduction ends with the statement 'Bharat Mata (Mother India) is waiting for you'. Such a textbook, in short, provides what Starrett (1998: 142), with reference to the rising Islamic influence in Egyptian mass education, calls a 'liturgy of the moral authority of the state'.

When I asked Class 2 children why the stories that they read in Sadachar are important, the responses I received ignored the specific value lessons taught in the books and focused instead on the general future benefits to be gained from the knowledge imparted in the books. For example, I was informed that reading these stories is a good thing because 'it will increase our intelligence and help us to pass our exams... But only if we pray to God before taking out our books'. It is also through reading these stories, I was told by another Class 2 student, that 'god gives us knowledge. And only if god gives us knowledge will we be able to pass our exams and become a doctor, or teacher, or anything'. More generally, I was told by other students, Sadachar was necessary because it 'makes us disciplined and increases our intelligence'. Responses also focused on the importance of social etiquette learned within Sadachar, as seen in one child's view that 'Sadachar is important because it teaches us that we must touch the feet of our parents before coming to school'. With the exception of these responses, however, most of the children's replies once again associated the importance of lessons learnt in moral education with the potential disciplinary consequences. Take the comments of one child: '[In Sadachar, we learn that] we must not make noises when Didji comes into the classroom, for if we do, she will beat us'. In another child's words, 'when the headmaster visits our class, we must greet him properly; otherwise we shall be beaten'. None of the comments made by Class 2 children, in other words, referred to the specific values of bravery, patience and humility imparted in the Sadachar textbooks, or hinted at the ideological nature of the lesson.

As indicated in these responses, ‘discipline’ for Class 2 students is identified entirely with the physical body and the avoidance of corporal punishment. Whether construed in context of good behaviour in class or appropriate postures during *prathna*, the association between discipline and general moral education revolves around the importance of continual threat of physical punishment. It is at this stage that the focus on physical behaviour is also complemented by the addition of morality lessons and the introduction of textbooks. Here, however, the ideological slant and moral stories are not mentioned as issues of disciplinary importance, although they do revolve around RSS notions of *samskar*, or good character and proper ways of acting. Responses do, however, highlight children’s budding concern for educational success.

This strong correlation between discipline and corporal punishment begins to change in Class 3, when students’ reasoning begins to include a moral element.

#### 4. Sadachar and Discipline: Class 3

While corporal discipline still tends to be directed toward physical behaviour in Class 3, minor transgressions are no longer automatically met with the stick. These are instead indulged with a lengthy lecture as to where this type of behaviour and disobedience will lead. At this stage, the threat of corporal punishment has become more common than its actual distribution: teachers stand at the front of the classroom, ready to use the stick lying in their hand. But they rarely do. Students’ transgressions instead are more frequently addressed with verbal threats: ‘be still’, ‘stop making noise’, ‘stop doing that’, ‘sit down’ – which are nearly always followed by the comment ‘or I will beat you’. Children have, by this stage, learnt that the teacher will, if they carry on with their behaviour, actualise her threat, and their relatively improved behaviour is a reflection of this. Greater attention is also placed on academic performance, but even here, teachers have become more relaxed about distributing their threats. One day, for example, a Class 3 teacher scolded her entire class after several students in a row responded incorrectly to a geography question. Shaking her head in disgust and waving her stick at the class, she said ‘You children don’t remember a thing, no matter how many times I tell you. I suppose I’ll have to beat all of you’. This threat was not actualised.

When a transgression is considered to be particularly serious, then a harsh beating will be accompanied by an admonishment to the entire class. For example, when two students from Class 3 rushed out of the room at the sound of the bell announcing the mid-day recess, ignoring the pleas of the teacher to remain seated, he called them back and beat them both forcefully across the back with his stick. He then used them as an example to the rest of the class as to why it was important for all students to wait for permission from the teacher to exit the classroom, even if the bell has rung. Carrying on, he turned this example into a lecture on children’s respect for their elders, and good Hindu’s respect for their mother country. In this way, and following in the tradition of the RSS and *Hindutva*, a direct link was made between good somatic behaviour, being a good Hindu, and the Hindu nation.

While the frequency of beatings has decreased, Class 3 children are still preoccupied with corporal punishment as a primary tool of discipline. But it is at this

stage that students begin to reflect on their own and others' experiences. In reference to the incident above, where his two classmates were harshly beaten, one child informed me that 'we are often beaten with a stick like this by Aachariyaji. We don't like being beaten. Even when others are being beaten we feel as if it is we who are being beaten'. Another child agreed. 'Sometimes they beat us very badly and we get bruises'.

In spite of their continued preoccupation with corporal punishment, the way in which children articulate the importance of physical discipline has also shifted to a focus on the correlation between physical discipline and future success, or the more positive aspects that discipline can bring about. As one child admitted, 'When we get a beating, we remember why and we become intelligent because of it'. This child continued, 'if we do not become intelligent, then how can we pass our exams and succeed in life?' The benefits of acting in disciplined fashion in other aspects of school life are also highlighted. 'If we stand very still and hold ourselves properly during *prathna*', I was told by another child, 'then our Didiji will think that our class is nice, and other students will also remark on how good we are, how nicely we behave. In this way, we will be promoted to higher classes'. Here again a direct correlation is made between discipline and future achievement. Similarly, the importance that children give to maintaining proper social conduct has also shifted from avoidance of negative behaviour to an awareness of the effect that this conduct can have on others. As a third child informed me, 'It is not nice for anyone when students shout. Shouting is disruptive. It can prevent others from learning, and it can also harm other people's eardrums'.

Like the Class 2 moral education course, Sadachar has also become textbook-focused. This time, values such as bravery and generosity are highlighted in context of stories from another Hindu epic, the Mahabharat. These stories are also imbued with a *Hindutva* tone and, as declared in the introduction to the Class 3 textbook, '*the inspiration drawn from these stories should enable children to preserve their Hindu culture*'. Like their younger counterparts, however, the values that Class 3 children are meant to imbibe through the reading and study of these stories are not specifically articulated by the students or associated with the broader moral enterprise of Sadachar. Instead, the values that are being articulated revolve around ensuring educational success. Take the comments made by one Class 3 boy: 'The Sadachar class is necessary because if you are worried about your studies, then you must read your Sadachar book you'll be able to acquire some qualities of god that will help you to succeed'. This sentiment is also expressed in the views of another pupil, who asserted that 'the stories we read and the prayers we learn in Sadachar help us to become more intelligent, and if we are more intelligent, then we will pass our exams. If we don't do Sadachar and read these stories properly, then how will we pass our exams and become successful persons in future?' A more practical answer was given by another student, who told me that daily study of the Sadachar books and prayers was necessary 'because if you don't have time for prayers at home, then doing the Sadachar lessons properly at school will help you to gain some qualities of god and pass your exams'.

In short, what we begin to see in Class 3 is a gradual shift from an almost exclusive association of '*anusasan*' with corporal punishment, to a more reflective

articulation of the practical necessity of discipline as an enterprise in imparting good behaviour and ensuring future success. Class 3 children also appear to be more concerned with how their behaviour and actions affect others. While this is also the first time that we see the formal Sadachar lessons being associated with spiritual values, there is a stated lack of emphasis given to the specific ideological goals of moral education. What has begun to emerge more prominently is the association that children are making between the values being promoted in Sadachar and the achievement of academic success.

## 5. Sadachar and Discipline: Class 4

By Class 4, and certainly into Class 5, children have become more docile and very rarely engage in the kind of behaviour that would merit the sort of beating they received in earlier years. They even more rarely mention it as a significant element in their ongoing moral education. Bodily comportment is still a central focus of classroom behaviour, however, as indicated by the fact that children are made to stand, arms straight, when called upon by the teacher to respond to a question. However, in terms of the distribution of discipline, corporal punishment has been replaced with public shaming and physical discomfort. Instead of being beaten if they give the incorrect answer, Class 4 students are made to stand throughout the entire class period.

One obvious difference between Class 3 and Class 4 students is the latter's apparent acceptance of discipline as a moral or practical 'good'. This is evidenced by their comments about '*anusasan*', which are once again geared toward achieving success in one's studies. For example, I was told that 'discipline is necessary because it is good for us and we will gain knowledge from it; it is only through this knowledge that will we succeed in our exams'. Discipline at this stage has also come to be articulated in terms of the practicalities and benefits of studying, as seen in the question posed to me by one student: 'If we are not disciplined, then how can we study? How will we get a job when we grow up?' Interestingly, teachers seem to concur with this view. 'Here at the Shishu Mandir', I was told by the Class 4 English teacher, 'we give them a good education along with strict discipline, and sometimes beatings are required. Only with this will our student's knowledge and intelligence grow. After receiving a good education here, they can go on to become doctors and engineers, and visit foreign countries'.

In addition to the general good that discipline provides, it also enables the cultivation of healthy habits. 'Without discipline', one student told me, 'then we will grow up and make bad choices. We will start smoking and eating tobacco. We will waste our money on bad habits that will be harmful for us. In this way, our future will also be harmed'. What is also notable here is how children, like those in Class 3, become complicit in justifying corporal punishment as a necessary learning experience. 'Beatings are necessary', I was told by one student, 'because when we get a beating, we remember it. In this way, we learn from it and become intelligent'. A similar view is offered by another child, who remarked that beatings are important 'because otherwise students won't learn, and we will become like rogues; if this happens, then we will have no future'.

In terms of the formal moral education (Sadachar) class, similar values of bravery, honesty, and sacrifice are emphasised. Instead of being taught through stories from Hindu epics, however, values are now imparted through a Hinduised version of Indian history. Historical events are diluted with stories about how Hindu gods assisted rulers in defeating the foreign invaders who attacked 'Hindu lands'<sup>20</sup>. The noticeable change at this stage is the way in which the comments made by Class 4 children begin to contain a mixture of morals and *Hindutva* ideology. For example, I was told by one Class 4 student that 'Sadachar gives us values...it teaches us that we must be brave in order to defend our mother country'. Regarding the specific historical aspects of Sadachar, another student commented that 'In the Sadachar book, we are told about the ancient times and who the people are and what they did. We get lessons from that period [about] what we must do to become good Hindus, and to defend our country'. This is a very important shift that has occurred, when compared to younger students, not only with respect to the sudden reference to the moral values that are imparted through the textbooks, but in terms of the ideological values associated with being a good Hindu. But even these views, and the association that children are ostensibly gleaned from the Sadachar teachings, are laced with concerns and a preoccupation with future success. As this same student continued, 'These values are also important because it is through them that we learn to be honest and courteous in our dealings with others. If we can acquire these values, then this will surely help us in our future studies, and it will enable us to succeed in becoming a respectable person with a good job'.

The religious importance given to the prayers recited in *prathna* is also underpinned by the practical benefits that can be attained and by a larger concern for future success. Referring to the necessity of daily prayers to Saraswati, this student continued 'In this way, she will be pleased and will help children to acquire knowledge and succeed in their futures. It is Saraswati who has given us our intelligence, and our ability to succeed, and for this we must remember her'.

In short, corporal punishment and its association with discipline no longer figure in Class 4 students' comments, apart from the justification that they give for its necessity in the moral education project. Discipline has instead come to be construed as a moral and practical good. While the views articulated by Class 4 students are also beginning to incorporate the moral values imparted in the Sadachar books, there is a parallel association between this enterprise and future success in one's academic and professional life.

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<sup>20</sup> See Panikkar (2001 [1999]: xxxiii n.19 and xxxiv n. 35) for details on the exact nature of the contents of the prescribed RSS textbooks. These include how the map of India has been altered, how geographical names have been Hinduized, and how historical events are altered to underline Muslim aggression and Hindu valour. For comparative examples, see Starrett (1998, chapter 5), who examines how a 'synoptic vision of Islamic belief and practice' is propagated through state-sanctioned textbooks.

## 6. Sadachar and Discipline: Class 5

By Class 5, the moral education enterprise sees its most visible results, with students having evolved into seemingly disciplined, moral and ‘mindful bodies’. Most students were in agreement about the necessity of corporal punishment in the creation of disciplined children, and many give a practical explanation: ‘When children make mistakes, they should be beaten. This is so their behaviour will improve. And children must understand that it is for their overall improvement’. As another child explained, ‘You can go on to become very intelligent but if you don’t have discipline in your life then you are a fool; you will succeed at nothing’. Reasons for this necessity were related to the view that discipline and, by extension, Sadachar, were fundamental ingredients in everyday life. ‘Discipline is life’, declared a third student. ‘Without discipline nothing can be done; there will be no future in India. Everything is maintained by discipline’. Comments such as these, which mimic not only the class teachers’ but RSS ideologues alike, are indicative of student’s increasing complicity in the School’s disciplinary regime. This is not so surprising, perhaps, since Class 5 students are fully aware that they will be graduating into ‘secondary school’ the following year, where studies and the pressure to succeed become more serious.

Discipline is also articulated in terms of dress and bodily comportment, and Class 5 students give great importance to how such discipline reflects on the reputation of the school. ‘If we do not maintain discipline, then the teachers and students from other schools will say that we are no good. It is because we maintain good discipline that everybody has a good opinion about our school’. Even the apparent triviality of students being punished for the smallest piece of apparel out of place is justified in terms of the social good of the school. ‘See’, one student explained, ‘even if only one student has not put a ribbon in her hair, then this affects everybody. If this happens, then the teacher will shout at everybody, saying why have you not worn your ribbon?’ Maintenance of this sort of social discipline results in a sense of collective unity, according to another student: ‘if we are all disciplined as one, then whenever any problem comes about, we can organise ourselves and face it together’. This is exactly the kind of objective that features in the moral education textbooks, and that ties in directly to the historical antecedents and wider *Hindutva* aims.

The significance of discipline as a positive value is also expressed by Class 5 students in terms of comparison with government schools. While teachers go on regularly about how dreadful the education and discipline imparted at government schools are in contrast to the Shishu Mandir, this is the first time that we hear students mimicking these views. Such comparisons not only reveal the importance that students give to the disciplinary enterprise in their own school, but once again highlight the association that children make between discipline and future academic success. This is seen in one girl’s statement about how ‘in government schools, uniforms are not necessary and they don’t maintain such strict discipline. This affects the students’ future studies as well’. Another student noted how the lack of discipline in government schools was a reflection of the latter’s status as a successful educational institution: ‘Discipline is not compulsory at

government schools. This is why students from such schools do not pass their exams and do so well later on, compared with students from the Shishu Mandir, who are very successful'. Students also note the commitment that Shishu Mandir teachers have to furthering educational goals compared to government schoolteachers who, they have heard, 'are absent from the classroom at least 50% of the time, who do not know the subject they are teaching, and who do not care if their students learn anything'. Most interestingly, comparisons that students make between their own and government schools included an ideological focus: 'If you go to government schools', I was told, 'you will see that they don't take their prayers seriously. This is why students of other schools don't maintain discipline, and don't do so well in their future studies. And this is why they won't become good Hindus'. By making these comparisons, this student was linking the disciplinary enterprise at the School both with the objectives that drive the wider *Hindutva* project and the means by which future success could be achieved.

Like Class 4 students, moral education is also imparted in the guise of Hinduised history lessons. Added to these is the narration of the lives and actions of important RSS historical figures. In the Class 5 Sadachar book, it explicitly states that '*it is necessary to develop in children a feeling that national interest is above all else. And for this, discipline is necessary*'. When asked about the importance of these lessons, the most striking aspect of the responses given by Class 5 students is the way they collapse the notion of discipline into Sadachar and articulate the meaning and necessity of moral education as an important life-value and social good, as a means by which to achieve success. 'Sadachar is discipline (*anusasan*)', said one Class 5 student. 'And discipline means that we must follow the rules. This will enable us to succeed in life, and become great in India and in other countries. Only by doing so', this student added, 'will we be able to develop a good character and become good Hindus'.

With respect to their comments about Sadachar, there is equally an unmistakable shift in the way that Class 5 students associate moral values with Hindu nationalist ideology. For example one student said that the most important aspect of Sadachar was learning about the necessity of always worshipping Lord Ram, not only 'because we are impressed by his character and because a feeling of patriotism comes to our mind', but 'because this kind of worship will ensure success in one's future studies and job'. More revealing is a statement made by another student, for whom patriotism was just as important as studies: 'If you don't develop other qualities then excelling in studies will be of no use. Children have to become patriotic along with becoming a good student. Otherwise, what will happen to our nation?' Class 5 students' explanations for the liturgical content of the *prathna* tend also to invoke Hindu Nationalist reasoning. I was told, for example, that the scriptural verses that children are made to recite daily are very important because they revolve around 'issues that are related to our country. We must recite them so that we can show people that we are Hindus, and so that no other country can have bad views about us. Our country is not a slave nation'. But even here, daily recitation of the scriptures was also vital to more practical achievements, like 'passing exams, getting into a good university and becoming a doctor or an engineer'.

Interestingly, it is at this stage that discipline begins to extend outwards from the school, as children begin to take the discipline and values that they have imbibed in Sadachar to their homes (cf. Simpson 2000). One Class 5 student told me how she had succeeded in getting her mother to engage in the ‘correct habit’ of regular morning prayers, while another said that she insisted that her father accompany her to the local temple at least twice a week – a suggested degree of frequency prescribed in her Sadachar class. Two other students, both boys, boasted how their families were ‘nearly vegetarian’, after they had succeeded in convincing their parents of the physical and spiritual benefits (that they had learnt about in Sadachar) of a vegetarian lifestyle.

In spite of the increasing ideological importance granted by Class 5 students to discipline and the School’s moral enterprise, all students interviewed in Class 5 unanimously agreed that the most important class in the Shishu Mandir was not Sadachar, but computers – which they had been learning since Class 4. The computer class included training in basic word processing and internet use. The importance of this training was again linked to success in one’s future. ‘Computer class is my favourite’, I was told repeatedly. ‘It is not only fun to learn, but it is necessary for us to know how to use computers for our future career’<sup>21</sup>. Students are regularly told by their computer teacher and the headmaster alike how fortunate they are to be studying at a school that gives such importance to computers, and how such training will benefit them in the future. This is reflected in students’ own observations. ‘Nowadays’, I was told by one enthusiastic student, ‘it is most necessary to have computer skills, for this is the way India’s future’. But what about discipline and becoming a good Hindu? ‘Discipline is of course necessary, for without it we will not be able to learn and acquire the skills necessary to ensure a successful future. We have to be disciplined in order to learn the computer’. More tellingly, the computer class, which is taught to Class 4 and 5 students, is the only course for which students are allowed to miss the compulsory Saturday assembly. As the headmaster told me, ‘learning computers at this early age will ensure that they have an advantage over other students in the future’. He is extremely proud of the fact that his school boasts the only computer lab of all local primary schools.

By Class 5, then, discipline and Sadachar have been identified as fundamental moral goods, necessary for the maintenance of everyday life. What is most revealing about the statements made by Class 5 children is not that they have begun to incorporate the broader Hindu nationalist ideological enterprise and identify themselves as ‘good Hindus’, but that they view enterprise as intrinsically tied to achieving academic and professional success. This was illustrated in terms of both the comparisons that students made between the Shishu Mandir and government schools, and the practical utility that they attributed to both the Sadachar class and *prathna*. In short, while it is in Class 5 that the words articulated by students come to closely resemble and begin to reproduce official, Hindu nationalist rhetoric, it is also in Class 5 that the strongest connections are

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery (forthcoming) for comparative research on the importance that computer literacy has for Muslim youth in North India.

being made by students between this disciplinary enterprise and the more practical achievement of success in their future.

## V. Disciplining the saffron way: the production of educational success

This paper has been an examination of how Hindu nationalist ideology is translated into a pedagogical project and interpreted and articulated by primary school children. Historical antecedents of this ideology, in which the individual is charged with the protection and unity of the Hindu nation, include nineteenth-century German ideas of the nation, nineteenth-century values associated with Europeans, and Gandhian notions of discipline and social unity. Under a strict disciplinary regime, this ideology is propagated in the context of an exclusively Hinduised version of Indian history and cultural life that portrays non-Hindu communities as threatening and anti-nationalist. The pedagogical aim is to inculcate the superiority of Hindus and the consequent need to foster Hindu unity against threatening minority communities. In this respect, the end to which Saraswati Shishu Mandir students are disciplined is nationalist in nature: to be disciplined the saffron way is to be groomed as a future defender of the Hindu nation (cf. Alter 1993: 51).

This particular agenda is implemented through the vehicle of Sadachar, or ‘moral education’. As the first class subject of the day and as a wider enterprise in nation-building, discipline is the principal method through which ‘moral education’ is first introduced and through which pupils are therefore drawn into the project of nationalism. As we saw early in the paper, the daily assembly (*prathna*) is the context where discipline is most visible and where the moral enterprise is buttressed by the inculcation of religious Hinduism and Hindu nationalist ideology. However, it is in the classroom where the inculcation of the wider enterprise in moral education takes place.

With respect to this enterprise, the pedagogical focus in the first years of primary school is on physical discipline and bodily comportment. The primary aim here is to physically create ‘docile bodies’ and prepare children for the moral, academic and ideological training that they will receive in later classes. Such training in the KG class, which combines songs, drills and social etiquette, is linked to the RSS notion of *samskar*, which connotes ‘good character’ and a disciplined way of being. A similar agenda carries over into Class 1, where corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool is first introduced. Focus in the early years is almost entirely devoid of any explicit (verbal) ideological content, which is instead conveyed implicitly whilst being inscribed onto the body through the kind of training described above.

It is in Class 2 that a focus on physical discipline is complemented by more explicit ideological instruction with the introduction of textbooks. Yet the values imparted in these books, which continue to revolve around RSS notions of *samskar*, are not mentioned by the children as issues of disciplinary importance, and the ideological content is totally ignored. The strong correlation between discipline and corporal punishment begins to change in Class 3, when children begin to speak more reflectively about the necessity of discipline as an enterprise in imparting good behaviour. While this

is the first time that we see the textbook lessons being associated with spiritual qualities of the sort propagated by RSS ideologues, there is still an obvious lack of importance given by the children to the specific ideological goals of moral education.

By Class 4 students have begun to demonstrate a greater awareness of the way in which moral education and the associated disciplinary enterprise are connected to Hindu nationalist ideology. More importantly, they also begin to associate moral education and discipline with practical success in future life. The connection between discipline and academic achievement becomes further pronounced by Class 5 students, for whom discipline has become a fundamental moral good, necessary for the maintenance of everyday life.

The transformation that occurs in the disciplinary focus from kindergarten to Class 5, and the way that children talk about this enterprise, offers valuable insights into how Hindu nationalist ideals are translated from a disciplinary to an ideological project. The rhetoric that begins to emerge in Class 3 and that is regularly articulated by Class 4 and 5 students further illustrates how this enterprise has transmitted basic ideas about the Hindu nation.

Notwithstanding this rhetoric, an additional insight that the ethnography has highlighted, and that other writers have largely ignored, is the way in which children interpret and articulate their understanding of this project. What is most striking here is the lack of importance that children give to the association between discipline, moral education and the wider aims of *Hindutva*. Instead, greater significance is attributed to the association between discipline and academic success. It is in Class 3, for example, that we begin to see links being made between discipline, intelligence and passing exams, and by Class 4, children have begun to make more obvious connections between discipline and academic achievement. While discipline is increasingly viewed by Class 5 children as a necessary moral good, the most important objective that children attribute to discipline is not as a means of 'becoming a good Hindu' or 'defending mother India', but as a vehicle for educational attainment.

In this respect, the disciplinary enterprise around which the School's pedagogical regime revolves is not very different from that found within non-Shishu Mandir schools, where the idea of discipline is more specifically linked to the 'production of good citizens' and to finding a respectable job in the adult world of work (Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey forthcoming; Sarangapani 2003). The kind of discipline imparted at the Shishu Mandir happens to be viewed by students as superior to other schools, but not for the Hindu nationalist rhetoric that underpins the disciplinary enterprise. Couched within a Hindu nationalist ideology, the School is viewed as superior because its disciplinary project utilises substantive pedagogical resources and techniques to provide students with the necessary and practical tools that will enable them to succeed in their future lives.

It is clear that the most important issue underpinning the discussion above is the relationship between the educational attainment and opportunities provided by the School and valued by students, and a pedagogical agenda that has the propagation of Hindu

superiority at its core. Previous analyses (Sundar 2004, 2002; Bénéï 2000; Sarkar 1996) have been largely preoccupied with the latter: specifically, with how the transmission of Hindu nationalist ideology is rendered possible through schooling and education. While RSS interest and investment in education is indeed part of a broader ideological aim that is underpinned by *Hindutva* and communal politics, what has been ignored is the perspective of the primary recipients of this education: the children themselves.

As illustrated in the ethnography above, children are more concerned with the importance that studying and discipline have for their educational attainment than with ideas about how minority communities continue to threaten Hindu superiority. In other words, while the transformation of these students into disciplined soldiers for a Hindu nation may underpin the School's wider ideological agenda, it is the future potential that this School offers that is of primary concern for its students. That educational attainment is the main concern for Shishu Mandir students is not surprising, given the 'certificate-and-degree-oriented economy' (Sundar 2004: 1611) to which children's future success is increasingly tied. Indeed, the way in which the Shishu Mandir school system fits into the 'wider political economy of educational provision' (Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey forthcoming: 12) – in affording a substantive alternative to both expensive private schools and to the notoriously poor education imparted within government schools – has been given cursory attention by previous scholars (Sundar 2004; Sarkar 1996). However, the fact that this school system also serves an important educational role by providing its students with the kind of confidence and skills that will enable them to compete successfully in the future has been largely overlooked.

To this end, the issues raised in this paper offer a perspective beyond the familiar view that sees the Shishu Mandir education primarily as a vehicle for the propagation of Hindu nationalism and the politics of hate. Such concentrated focus on the latter not only renders the views and educational experience of children silent and therefore insignificant, but also results in further complacency about the way in which more routinised aspects of Hindu nationalism are being inculcated in government and other non-RSS educational institutions<sup>22</sup>. As Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey (2004: 36) point out, there exists an insidious 'banal Hinduism' (Billig 1995) in government and other non-RSS schools, where marginalized students (e.g., Muslims and *adivasis*) are regularly exposed to educational regimes and curricula – both explicit and implicit – that denigrate and demean them (cf. Balagopalan and Subramaniam 2003; cf. Kumar 1989: 59-77; Bénéï 2000: 210-212). The pervasiveness of these practices is also present within the 'Hindu bias of the Hindi syllabus', along with the school assemblies and other events such as Republic Day and Independence Day, which are infused with Hindu iconography and Sanskritised Hindi (Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey forthcoming: 10). In other words,

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<sup>22</sup> I thank Patricia Jeffery (personal communication) for these insights. For comparison, see Jeffery, Jeffery, Jeffrey (forthcoming: 10-11), who note the 'institutional stranglehold' (Orsini 2002: 382) of the Hindi establishment over education throughout UP school curricula, which still contains narratives of mythology, Indian history and Hindi literature where Muslims are depicted negatively.

focusing strictly on the ideology of hate in RSS schools in the way that previous scholars have done tends to conceal the more covert (or even overt) forms of saffronisation found within government schools. Whilst fostering strongly Hindu and anti-minority cultural ideals is certainly an explicit part of the agenda that underpins Shishu Mandir education, the denigration of minority communities and the propagation of a communal understanding of Indian history and culture is not unique to the RSS pedagogical programme.

All of this notwithstanding, it is true that Shishu Mandir education has problematic implications, particularly with respect to the kind of communal project that underpins the project. With its emphasis on Hindu superiority and the physical defence of the Hindu nation, such an educational regime offers little in the way of communal understanding or constructive inter-community dialogue. What continues to distinguish the Shishu Mandir from other schools is thus the way it harnesses pedagogy to a clear political end (Sundar 2004: 1611), the purpose of which is to inculcate *Hindutva* ideals. Moreover, it is through such a regime, ideologues and scholars alike believe, that the production of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of young Hindus who are prepared to use potentially violent means to establish and defend the Hindu *rashtra* will take place.

While this discourse clearly underpins the Shishu Mandir regime, it nonetheless remains to be seen how successful this endeavour has been. Meanwhile, it is important to stop ignoring the views of the intended recipients of this endeavour, for whom this disciplinary regime is viewed chiefly as a superior vehicle for inculcating practical study habits, through which the production of educational and future success will be ensured.

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