

Growing Up Hindu and Muslim: How Early Does It Happen?

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This study, based on interactions with children in a school in Daryaganj, Delhi, reveals that children very early on show explicit identification and communicated prejudices towards the “other” religion practised in their neighbourhood. This has important implications for educational policy, curricular choices, pedagogy and teacher training. While the present curricular material does not acknowledge cultural identity in childhood, the new National Curriculum Framework suggests that schools engage with children’s socialisation at home and in the neighbourhood.

Identity is a complex terrain to explore. On the one hand, it indicates sameness and on the other, individuality. This paradox can be understood by answering a fundamental question – what is an identity? The term “identity” probably explains what makes an individual unique as well as similar to others.

According to Kakar (1978) “identity is meant to convey the process of synthesis between inner life and outer social reality as well as the feeling of personal continuity and consistency within oneself. It refers to the sense of having a stake in oneself, and at the same time, in some kind of confirming community.” This implies that identity has cultural and historical connotations as well. Erikson (1979) has explained how a growing individual’s mind fuses all the developments and experiences together in a sense of sameness and continuity. Explaining the stagewise development of an individual in American society and the emergence of ego-identity, Erikson spells out how at every stage the ego is strong enough to achieve harmony between inner processes and surrounding social institutions.

Children’s Identity

The child cultivates self-images through all the experiences of childhood and gradually prepares a sense of identity. To be a person, identical with oneself, presupposes a basic trust in one’s origins and the courage to emerge from them. Basic trust in one’s origins implies a wide range of experiences, affiliations and activities that are available to a child, including religion, language, community, school, teacher, family, texts and socio-cultural and political context. The child internalises all these by participating in the societal dialectic.

The social institution in which a child is born, the family, on which she remains dependent for survival is also a critical

agency in the process of achieving harmony between inner life and the social world. In the initial years of life the child internalises the family’s values, opinions and behavioural patterns. Berger and Luckmann (1991) explain that when a child is born, her family members become the “significant others” who become the child’s source of learning. By identifying with the significant others the child becomes capable of acquiring a subjectively coherent and plausible identity. This identification in the immediate familial setting makes the child a member of a larger collective and gives her a collective identity – an enlarged part of oneself. It becomes accessible in the form of feelings and attitudes developed through membership of collectives like religious groups. The attitudes and values related to a religious identity are lived and transmitted to the next generation through myths, symbols and ceremonies.

A child’s life constitutes many experiences including religious ceremonies and daily rituals. Sharing of mythological tales and use of symbols and the material used during rituals and ceremonies give a continuum to the child and therefore become meaningful to her as a maturing individual. The religious collective derives its own cohesion by recounting of its various experiences and encounters with the “other” collective. The cohesive element gets strengthened when the events in present are discussed in the light of similarity with events in the past. In this manner even negative experiences like religious riots, stereotypes and community-specific generalisations about others also get linked up. As a member of a religious collective the maturing child not only identifies with the group’s attitudes and the values inherent in them, but also develops beliefs in accordance with the beliefs which her own group holds towards other religious groups.

It is generally believed that the consciousness of identity does not take shape in a child’s mind before early adolescence. On account of this belief the study of identity has remained confined to the adolescent years. In the context of child’s education, the concern for identity as an

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aspect for training has therefore remained confined to preparation for teachers at the secondary stage. However, my experience of working with small children and my awareness of the social-political trends in the last couple of decades (i.e., since the 1980s) permitted me to hypothesise that the children as young as four years of age already begin to identify with their religious group and develop a sense of separateness from other religious groups.

1 Setting and the Children

The data for my research are in the form of interaction with small Hindu and Muslim children living in Daryaganj. This is a neighbourhood of Delhi. It derives its name from two words 'darya' which means river and 'ganj' means market. Daryaganj includes the walled city of Shahjahanabad which is now known as Old Delhi. The Darya refers to the river Yamuna which is just outside the walled city and the market around it came to be known as Daryaganj. It is a major commercial hub of modern Old Delhi. The area bustles with shoppers throughout the day. Prior to the British, the area served as a small open market-place for the habitants of Shahjahanabad.

Daryaganj is still a market but has now become overpopulated, busy and congested. It has the offices of some of the most well known distributors, publication houses and organisations of the country apart from restaurants and shops selling a variety of items. Finest musical instruments, oldest and the latest books, bicycles, garments and wholesale vegetables from a makeshift early morning market can be purchased in Daryaganj. The presence of distinctly varied places of worship and monuments, i.e., mosque, temple, church, cemetery, fort and a library signifies the cosmopolitan nature of Daryaganj. Apart from being a market, it also serves as a residential area for a large number of people.

Daryaganj is an interesting place for any research in social sciences because of its mixed population and as a residence-cum-trading area. The presence of Muslim families is prominent in Daryaganj, yet it does not come across as a ghettoised locality like some other Muslim dominated

areas of Delhi such as Zakhir Nagar or Seelam Pur.

In order to find means of access to young Hindu and Muslim children and their families living in Daryaganj, I went for walks in the area several times. Sometimes in the morning, at times late in the evening and on some occasions went twice a day. The purpose was to find a place other than school, where young children could be found. I realised that mostly children played on the streets or walked to and fro to their tuition centres. There are many tuition centres in Daryaganj, which help school-going children in doing their homework and other school-related assignments. These centres function like another school in a child's life; where everyday she spends two hours studying school subjects, doing homework and prepares for school tests.

To familiarise myself with the children and interact with them for the study, I taught in a tuition centre for four months where children of both religious groups came. The familiarity with the children grew in less than a month. After that I collected information about their families by interacting with their parents or the siblings who came to drop or pick them up everyday. I finally decided

upon 16 children coming from different parts of the area. The sample consisted of eight Hindu children and eight Muslims, ranging in age from four to eight. The lower age limit of four was determined by the awareness that most of the children begin going to a formal school at this age.

Both Hindu and Muslim children came from middle income business families who are in wholesale trade of cloth, beetle nuts, beetle leaves or run small hotels. They lived in joint families where the men were the bread-earners and the women took care of household, except one in which both the parents were doctors. All the parents had completed their college level education and three of the fathers had done postgraduation. I selected four to eight-year old children enrolled in municipal corporation schools. These schools are secular institutions of education and do not teach any religion as an organised area of knowledge.

I developed my familiarity with children by playing with them after their tuition class or walking with them to their homes. These interactions led to a comfort zone between them and me. It took about six weeks for me to be sure of children's readiness to talk to me on the topic of



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my study. I wanted children's articulation on sensitive aspect of human life, namely, the sense of belonging to a religious group. Therefore, I decided not to ask straight questions. My search for related studies led me to an understanding that I needed non-experimental, non-psychometric tools which could lend themselves to culture-sensitive assessment. I organised the interaction with the children around certain tasks which were devised within a broad framework of the clinical interview method by drawing from children's life experiences around their religion.

The interaction with the children was structured around four tasks which are described below.

2 Tasks

In the first task I presented a mixed set of material associated with both the religions. I asked the child to recognise the material and then classify them on the basis of familiarity and then asked questions about the significance of every material. I noted down the exact verbatim spoken by the children when they described the material or showed ignorance. The set carried a collection of pictures, material and symbols found in the places of worship of both the religions. From Hinduism, I chose the pictures of four popular deities: Shiva, Hanuman, Laxmi and Ganesh, and stickers of Om and Swastik. The set included a packet of red bindis and red bangles – symbols of married status for Hindu women. From Islam, I decided to include the following – traditional perfume used for religious rituals, an amulet, a sticker of number 786 and the sticker of a crescent moon and star, pictures of the mosque of Mecca and Madinah, a card with Yaseen – verses of Koran printed on it. In addition to all these things there were four items which are used by both Hindus and Muslims for their religious rituals. They are 'kalava' (red thread, which is used for various religious purposes) incense, 'diya' (light in a small earthen pot) and sweet offerings.¹ I included these items in the set to see if children knew that Hindus as well as Muslims use them.

The second task was to judge children's familiarity with the famous tales of both

the religions. From Hinduism I chose the episode in which a test was designed by Sita's father to assess the young men who wanted to marry his daughter. Ram successfully passed his test and married Sita in an elaborate ceremony. From Islam, I chose the tale in which a spider and a dove saved prophet's life when he was once escaping from his enemies. I had collected pictures related to both the tales which I placed in front of the child and asked if she knew the related story. If the child recognised the story and narrated it, I recorded it verbatim. If the child did not do that then I narrated the story and asked her if it was familiar and from where had she heard it.

The third task was about creating a real life like situation. It is often observed that schoolchildren respond to the stress of exam by a belief that if they pray, they will succeed. I, therefore, used this to design my second task. I sat with the child and placed an illustration of a mosque and a temple between us. I asked the child to imagine that it was an examination day and on her way to the school she crosses a temple and a mosque. The hand drawn illustrations kept there aided the child in imagining herself in that situation. I then asked if the child would go inside the temple and the mosque to pray for her exam. The conversation was further built with the help of cues to know how much children knew about the places of worship of their religion as well as the other religion. This task gave an opportunity to probe in children's thought and gather their views about place of worship and people of the other religion.

The fourth task was simple in which I just talked to children about certain festivals of both the religions. From Hinduism I talked about Diwali, Holi and Karvachauth. From Islam, I talked about Id and Muharram. The aim was to understand how much the children knew about the festivals of their own religion and of the "other" religion.

Every task involved a substantial conversation with the child, therefore, in one meeting I administered only one task. I interacted with the children around the tasks in the tuition centre or in the child's home. The children's responses to different tasks were varied. I developed a

profile of every child by collating her responses to every task. The profiles were then analysed to develop a comprehensive understanding of their identification with their religious collective and the sense of separation from the other collective.

3 Locating Identity in Religion

All the eight Hindu children recognised the symbols used by Hindus and Muslims separately, without any prompting. They neatly classified the material into two sets. In one set, they placed the symbols and material belonging to their own religion and placed the symbols and material of the other religion in the second set. The Hindu children placed all the four material which are common to both the religions in the set of their own religion. They did not mention the overlap while talking about the significance of that material. It reflects that their enculturation has already happened and they are immersed into the rituals and practices of Hinduism. They drew associations with festivals, practices and temples while describing the material. The pronounced expression about things as "their own" conveyed that Hindu children had internalised their family's religion as their own. They called themselves as Hindus and saw the material used during rituals as their own material. Their association and unmistakable recognition can be seen in the following conversations:

Ye to hamaaree hain (these are ours).

Ye ham Hinduon ki cheezein hain (these are our... Hindus' material).

Ye ham log karte hain (we people do this).

Ye apni si lag rahee hai (this looks familiar).

The Hindu children consolidated their religious identity in a comparative framework by referring to Muslims as being different and the material used by Muslims as "their". The encounter with the symbols or material of the other religion made them even more conscious of their Hindu identity. They expressed the feeling of distance from others by using the following phrases: "*Ye to Musalmanon ka hai, mujhe pata nahin kya hai*" (this is Muslims, I do not know what it is). "*Ye to Musalmanon ki cheezein hain main to Hindu hoon*" (these things are of Muslims, whereas I am a Hindu). "*Vo kuchh bolte rehte hain*" (they

keep uttering something). The children distinguished themselves by using third person pronouns while referring to the Muslims. The ignorance or limited knowledge about things used by Muslims was evident in the conversations; I had with all the Hindu children.

A strong consciousness of one's religion figured in the interaction with Muslim children right in the beginning of the conversations. All the Muslim children wished me by using collective-specific cultural emphatic phrases as following: "Assalamvalem" (courtesy call used by Muslims). "Sab Khairiyat se hai?" (is everything fine with you?). These children also neatly classified the material into two sets. One set represented the material of their religion and the other represented the material related with Hinduism. They also recognised the material and the symbols instantly and described it as their own. The description was very associative, which can be seen in the following phrases:

Madinah ki masjid. Masjid hai hamaari (it is the mosque of Madinah. It is our mosque).

Hamaaree musalmanon ki (Ours... Muslims'...).

Ham log Kalma padhte hain (we people read Kalma).

Masjid mein ham log namaz padhne jaate hain (we people go to a mosque to pray).

Muslim children were conscious of their own religious identity while talking about the symbols used by Muslims during religious rituals but they asserted it more by recognising Hindus' materials and symbols as of Hindus. They were aware of practices and symbols of Hinduism. While categorising the material and symbols used by Hindus in a different set the Muslim children mentioned every time that it was used by Hindus whereas they were Muslims.

Bindi Hindu lagaate hain, kyonki vo Hindu hain (Bindi – Hindu wear it, because they are Hindu). *Ghanti hai. Ise mandir mein lagaate hain – isse Hindu pooja karte hain* (It is a bell. It is there in the temple. Hindus use it to offer prayers.) *Ye Hanuman hai. Hinduon ki moortee hai. Ham to Musalmaan hain* (this is Hanuman. It is an idol of Hindus whereas I am a Muslim.) *Ye Hinduon ki hai. Ye pooja ke vakt bajaate hain. Main to Musalmaan hoon* (this is played at the time of Hindus' prayer whereas I am a Muslim.)

These children articulated their awareness in a neutral manner without using

any pejorative. The Muslim children were aware that the ornaments given in the set were worn by both Hindu and Muslim women although there is a distinction of colour. Most of them mentioned that red bangles and bindis were worn by Hindu women and not by Muslim women in daily practice. While talking about the common material between both the religions six Muslim children mentioned without any clue or prompting that Hindus also use kalava, incense, light and the sweet offerings.

4 Faith in Family's Religion

The use of respectful adjectives and the passion with which Hindu children talked about Hindu idols convey that they not only relate to family's faith, but also take pride in it. They consider their faith as an important aspect of their life. The conviction in the family's faith and submission to Hindu idols as caretakers and wish fulfillers became more evident on account of the tone, expressions and gestures used by them. They folded their hands and bowed while talking about their idols. Snippets from conversations with these children show that the association with their religious collective had already developed. All the Hindu children used first person plural pronoun – "we" while talking about idols. None of the children used "I" during this dialogue. When Hindu children talked about their idols they referred to themselves as members of a collective and that is why they used the plural pronoun. Their articulation on the idols centred on the submission and faith in those deities for protection, blessings, wealth and general well-being.

Ye hamaare bhagwaan ji hain. Bhagwaan hamaare raksha karte hain. Hamaare man mein rehte hain. Ham sab ke kaam karte hain. (These are our respectful god. They protect us. They live in our heart. They do everything for us.)

In Hindu mythology different idols are assigned discrete roles. People offer prayers to each one of them for specific wishes. There is also a distinction between male gods and female goddesses, and at the same time, there is a hierarchy. Certain deities are considered superior and more powerful than others. The Hindu children in my study mentioned these specific roles, hierarchy and they

also referred to the deity as a male or a female by using the pronoun. This proves that they are deeply immersed in their family's faith and have already imbibed the attitudes and values inherent in it. One example of this kind is.

Lakshmi ji ki pooja karte hain kyonki vo dekhte hain ki ghar ke Lakshmi door na chale jae. Ye Shiviji hamaare sabse bade bhagwaan hote hain. (We offer prayer to the goddess Lakshmi because she ensures that our wealth should not go away. This is Shivji. He is our biggest god.)

Box 1: Hindu Child 1 (HC1)

*Ye masjid hai (This is a mosque).
Aapne kaise pehchaanee? (How did you recognise it?)
Mere school ke paas masjid hai (There is a mosque close to my school).
To aap andar jaenge? (So, will you go inside the mosque?)
Ham andar nahin jaa sakte kyonki ham Hindu hain. Vo baahar nikaal denge (We cannot go inside, we are Hindus. They will shoo us out).
Aap kabhee gae ho? (Have you ever been inside?)
Nahin kabhee nahin gae (No, never).
Man karta hai? (Do you feel like?)
Man nahin karta hai (No, I do not feel like).
Kyon? (Why?)
Saare Musalmaan hote hain. Badboo-badboo hotee hai. Vo namaz padhte hain to hamara kaam sahee se nahin hota (All Muslims are there. There is lot of foul smell. When they offer their prayer our things cannot be done properly).
Matlab? (What does it mean?)
Jaise vo paper ke samay namaz padhein to paper bigad jata hai (For example, if they offer prayer during my exam, my performance becomes bad).
Aapko kaise pata? (How do you know that?)
Hamein pata tha (I knew it).*

On the other hand, Muslim children also expressed their faith in the family's religion in a pronounced manner. Most of them recited the related verses of the Koran when they picked up the rosary. These children spoke about incidents they were cured of illness by wearing amulets, which are believed to have the power to fight bad omen. While responding to the cards showing Mecca, Madinah and verses of the Koran, Muslim children's hands rose in a spontaneous manner as if they were offering prayers.

5 Ignorance, Prejudice and Stereotype

The conversations held with Hindu children revealed that they were by and large ignorant of practices and rituals of Islam even though Daryaganj has a prominent presence of Muslim families. Some of them had noticed a few things used by Muslims, but were completely ignorant about amulets, verses of the Koran and

pictures of the mosques at Mecca and Madinah. It is natural for children to make an effort to accommodate new information or cues from their environment. In this manner we can understand why

Box 2: Hindu Child 2 (HC2)

*Ye masjid hai, main janta hoon (It is a mosque. I know it).
Masjid mein kya hota hai? Log kya karte hain vahan? (What happens inside a mosque? What do people do there?)
Haath dhote hain, chappal utaarte hain, fir baithte hain, fir namaaz padhte hain (They wash their hands, take off their slippers, then they sit down and then offer prayers).
Aap ja kar kya karoge? (What will you do if you go inside?)
Musalmaan ke bheed mein agar ham reh gaye to fans jaenge (If I am left behind in a crowd of Muslims, I will get trapped).
While saying this there were expressions of fear on the child's face.
Fir kya hoga? (Then what will happen?)
Fir ghin aatee hai (Then I feel disgusted).
Aap vahan jaate ho? (Do you go there?)
Vahan se gujarte hain tab baahar se dekhte hain. Bahut ghin aatee hai ham baahar se bhaag jaate hain. (When I cross the mosque I see from outside. I really feel disgusted and I run away from outside it self).
Kyon? (Why?)
Musalman bahut gande hain. Bakra-vakra kaat ke pakaa ke khaate hain. Ghin chadhte hai. (Muslims are very bad. They cut goat and all and cook it to eat it. It is sickening).
Hindu bakra nahin khate? (Don't Hindus eat goat meat?)
Hindu murgee khate hain. Usse ghin nahin chadhte. Vo use saaf karke khaate hain. (Hindus eat chicken. That does not make me feel nauseated. Hindus clean it before eating it).
Musalman gande hote hain (Muslims are dirty).
To Hindu Musalman alag hote hain? (So Hindus and Muslims are different?)
Ek hii hote hain (No, they are same).
Aap Musalmanon ke ghar jaate ho? (Do you go to Muslims' house?)
Ham nahin milte unse (I do not meet them).
Aapke Musalman dost hain? (Do you have Muslim friends?)
Nahin (No).
Kyon? (Why?)
Kyonki Musalman ne maar diya to sar phod diya to, ghoonsa maar diya to. Vo gandagee khilaa dete hain. Ham behosh ho gaye to pakad ke le jaenge. (Because... What if Muslims kill me, they break me head or punch me? They give me dirty things to eat. What if I become unconscious? They will kidnap me and take me away).
Aap ko kaise pata? (How do you know all this?)
Ham jaate hain to kheer khilaate hain ham bhaag jaate hain (When I go close to them they offer sweets but I run away).
Kyon? (Why?)
Kuchh daal denge haath se banaenge to ham behosh ho jaenge (If they mix something in it while cooking, I will get unconscious).*

Hindu children came up with the idea that Muslim men wear rosary in their neck. The children saw the apparent similarity between the rosary and a necklace, and on this basis they attempted to provide an answer to the question about the use of rosary. These children observe things available in their environment but do not have any knowledge to derive meaning of those observations. It is clear neither the family nor the Muslim peers are

providing the necessary explanation. The Hindu children did not appear accustomed to the material used by Muslims. A statement of this kind which proves this is as follows:

Jyada nahin pata. Isko haath mein le ke vo kuchh bolte rehte hain. (I do not know much. They take it in their hands and keep uttering something.)

In the second task when the children were shown the story of prophet not even a single Hindu child found it familiar.

Their counterpart Muslim children were found to be aware of Hindu practices and rituals. They recognised all the Hindu idols and knew their names. They were

Box 3: Hindu Child 3 (HC3)

*Masjid mein nahin jaenge. Kyonki ham Hindu hain. Usmein Muslim jaate hain (I will not go inside a mosque because I am a Hindu. Muslims go inside it).
Vo kya karte hain vahan? (What do they do there?)
Namaz padhte hain (They offer prayers).
Aur? (What else?)
Aur nahin pata? (I do not know anything else).
Aap jaate ho masjid (Do you go inside a mosque?)
Nahin (No).
Kyon? (Why?)
Lagon ka dar lagataa hai. Pataa chale ki ham Hindu hain to vo khush nahin hongee (I feel scared of people. They will not be happy to know that I am a Hindu).
Kaise pataa (How do you know that?)
Mummy ne bataya (My mother told me).
Musalman kaise lagte hain aapko? (How do you find Muslims?)
Apne se thoda alag lagte hain (They look slightly different from myself).
Kyon? (Why?)
Vo topi pehente hain. Topi achchhee nahin lagtee (They wear a cap. I do not like that cap).
Kyon? (Why?)
Usmein chhed hote hain (It has holes in it).
Aur kya achchha nahin lagtaa? (What else do you dislike about them?)
Ghabraahatt si hoti hai. Hamaare aas-paas Musalman hain. Ham akele nahin jaate (I feel scared. I have Muslims around me. I never go out alone).
Aapne kabhee sunaa hai Hindu-Musalman ladaaee karte hain? (Have you ever heard that Hindus and Muslims fight?)
Mummy ne bataya jab main paidaa nahin huuaa tha to Punjab mein ladaee hue thee (My mother told me that before my birth, a fight had taken place in Punjab).
Fir kya huaa tha? (What had happened then?)
Musalman ne Hinduon ko bahut mara tha Musalman gande hote hain (Muslims had beaten Hindus very badly. Muslims are very bad).
Kya ganda hota hai unmein? (What is bad in them?)
Vo bakra kaattee hain. Musalman bahut roti khaate hain, Id par bakre mein lagaa ke (They slaughter goat. Muslims eat lot of bread with meat during Id). The child said this with expressions of disgust and hatred on his face. He squeezed his nose and covered his face with his hands.
Aapko kaise pataa ye? (How do you know this?)
Hamne dekha kattite hai Sheeshmahal mein. Bakre bhee kattite hain, oonit bhee. Sab khoon khoon hota hai. Bahut ganda lagta hai. (I have seen the slaughter in Sheeshmahal. Goats and camels both are slaughtered. There is too much blood everywhere. It looks so dirty).*

conscious that the Hindus practise idol worship. All the Muslim children recognised the mythological tale of Hinduism instantly just by looking at the pictures. All of them attributed their awareness to their families and the cartoon programmes and serials they had seen on television, films and newspapers.

Box 4: Muslim Child 1 (MC1)

Exam vale din raaste mein ye mandir padega to tum andar jaooge? (So, if you cross this temple on your exam day will you go inside?)
 She thought for a while and then said,
Mandir mein Hindu pooja karte hain (Hindus offer prayer in a temple).
Aur Kya karte hain mandir mein (What else is done in a temple?)
Hindu ghantee bajaate hain (Hindus ring a bell).
Aur? (What else?)
Pata nahin (I do not know).
Hindu kaun hote hain? (Who are Hindus?)
Jo log pooja karte hain moortee ki (People who do idol worship).
Aapko kaise pata ki Hindu moortee ki pooja karte hain? (How do you know that Hindus do idol worship?)
Maine dekha hai kae baar. Chhote bazaar mein ek mandir hai. Vahan darvaaje par khadee ho kar dekhte hoon (I have seen it many times. There is a temple in chhote bazaar. I stand at the gate and observe things).
Andar nahin jateen? (Don't you go inside?)
Jaatee hoon kae baar apni friend ke saath (I go many times with a friend).
Kaisa lagta hai (How do you feel there?)
Achcha lagta hai. Vo white white bhee khaya hai maine jo aapne dikhaya tha. (It feels good. I had eaten that white thing which you also showed).
 The child referred to the sweet offerings distributed in Hindu temples. The same sweet offerings are distributed in 'dargahs' also.

The Hindu children remained charged during all the tasks. They talked about things related to their own religion passionately. The consistency in the passion remained during all the tasks when the Hindu children expressed their prejudices toward Muslims. They reinforced those prejudices in every task and expressed a lot of disgust by their facial expressions and gestures. For example, while talking about the veil worn by Muslim women, they pressed or squeezed their nose as if they had regenerated that imaginary foul smell in their mind. They said that they feel suffocated when they see Muslims and hate the sight of too many Muslims together or while crossing the popular mosque. Let us look at the conversations held four Hindu children in the third task (Boxes 1, 2 and 3, p 39).

These conversations reveal that the difference in religious practices and rituals gets translated into emotional

distance. If we carefully look at the four conversations quoted above, we can notice how strong prejudices develop in certain aspects.

In relation to hygiene it can be drawn from children's observations that they view Muslims as people who always remain together and appear as a threatening crowd. While talking about Muslims, these children conveyed the images of a Muslim crowd which stinks and is unhygienic. Muslims' eating habits are used by Hindu children to reinforce their prejudices as the HC2 stated that the places where Muslims get together smell a lot or HC3 stated that Muslims eat goat meat, so they are dirty. When I tried to prod a child by pointing out a similarity between eating

Box 5: Muslim Child 2 (MC2)

Achcha to mandir mein jaoe aap (So, will you go inside the temple?)
Haan chale jaenge. Inse bhee keh denge paper mein pass kar do (Ya, I will go and ask them also for success in exams).
Inse kinse? (Who are they?)
Baithe hote hai (They keep sitting there).
Unhein kya kehte hain? (What are they called?)
Moortee kehte hain (They are called idols/statues).
Aur mandir mein kya hota hai (What else is there inside a temple?)
Kuchh le kar aate hain. Phir? Unko dete hain jo le lete hain. (People bring something. They give it to the people who take it).
Aapko kaise pata? (How do you know that?)
Maine dekha hai bahut baar aate jaate. Main gaya hoon mandir mein. Mere dost se maine Hanuman ki photo bhee lee thee. (I have walked by these things many times. I have also gone inside the temple. I even took Hanuman's picture from a friend).
Aapko mandir jakar kaise lagta hai. (How do you feel inside a temple?)
Theek lagta hai. Main Musalman hoon jyada nahin jata (It feels ok. I am a Muslim. I do not go there often).

habits of Hindus and Muslims, the child went to the next level of dislike which consists of hatred. It is evident that the prejudices against the Muslim community have become generalised and are used by Hindu children to show their disgust in every aspect. Hindu children communicated a pronounced fear and scepticism while describing how they perceive the places of worship in Islam and the Muslims. The threat perception of the "other" as a powerful reckless mass is evident in these children's ideas. These children see Muslims as an undifferentiated mass of people who cannot be trusted or who can turn violent any time. Muslims do not exist as individuals in these Hindu children's minds. They do not have distinct names or bodies; they

only exist as contributors to creating a threatening crowd.²

These conversations need to be seen in the context of Daryaganj where Hindu and Muslim children live in close proximity. The conversations reveal that Hindu children highlight the urge and ability to justify why they do not like Muslims. It reflects a collective behaviour which gets expressed when the community does not have a choice in the matter of living physically close to the other community. When people of one religious collective pray together it creates a bad omen for the people of other collective. One of the four children quoted above stated that his performance in an exam suffers poorly if he gets to hear the prayer offered by Muslims. Here we can see the seeds of superstition which is a belief that the mode of worship, practised by the people of certain religious collective can have an ill-effect on the people of other religious collective.

During the fourth task, Hindu children talked about their festivals with lot of excitement. They shared how they celebrate and how their family offers prayers during those festivals. But while talking about festivals in Islam, all these children used emotive language to express their hatred

Box 6: Muslim Child 3 (MC3)

To tum mandir ke andar jaooge? (So, will you go inside the temple?)
Ham Musalman hain (I am a Muslim).
Haan to? (So what?)
Hamein mandir mein andar jana mana hota hai (We are not allowed to go inside a temple).
Kaun mana kartaa hai? (Who stops you?)
Hindu log (Hindus).
Aapne kabhee ja kar dekha. Kissi ne roka tha? (Have you ever tried it? Did anybody stop you?)
Nahin, madam picnic par le kar gae thee. Maine pooja bhee dekhee thee. School mein bhee pooja hoti hai. (No my teacher had taken us for a picnic. I even saw the process of offering prayers. Even in my school prayers are offered in a Hindu style).
Mandir mein andar sab kya karte hain? (What do people do inside a temple?)
Mandir mein sab prasad dete hain. Ghantee bajate hain. Haath jod ke jo mangna ho vo mangte hain. (People distribute sweet offerings. They ring bells. They fold their hands and ask for their wishes).
Kisse maangte hain? (Whom do they ask?)
Bhagwan se (God. The child used Hindu word for god).
Bhagwan kaun hota hai? (Who is bhagwan?)
Jaise hamaare allah hote hain unke bhagwan hote hain (The way we have our allah they have their bhagwan).
Aapko kaise pata (How do you know?)
Mujhe pata hai. Maine dekha hai mandir mein. Picture ki kahane main dekha tha. Daadee batate hai. (I know it. I have seen it in the temple. I also saw in a movie story. My grandmother tells me).

towards Muslims. Their awareness of festivals was limited to the practise of slaughter. They were unaware of “Muharram” and denied the practice of any festival other than Id. Muslim children are inevitably part of these Hindu children’s peer group, yet this group carries strong prejudices about Muslims.

Let us look at the conversations held with Muslim children during the third task (Boxes 4, 5 and 6, p 40).

The conversations with Muslim children show that they were relaxed while talking about Hindus’ place of worship and their symbols. They noticed the differences as differences. They also communicated a child-like innocence while sharing their knowledge about rituals and practices followed inside a temple. When probed about the source of their knowledge, one noticed an inevitable expression of their mischief being caught by an adult. There were children who refused to go inside the temple in the beginning of the conversation, but they did not express any disliking or hatred towards Hindus. They saw other’s faith just like their own faith. They came across as being aware about Hinduism and more tolerant towards their Hindu neighbours. These children are aware of the differences between Hindus and Muslims and also recognise that it can be a source of tension if one visits religious institutions of the other religion. Somehow these children did not use the differences and their awareness of the tension to develop prejudices against Hindus. Not even one Muslim child said that Hindus are bad. These conversations show not only considerable familiarity with the practices and symbols of the “other” community, but also a degree of positive interest and tolerance. This is in contrast to the ignorance and negative feelings that we have earlier identified in conversations with Hindu children. One wonders if it is their primary socialisation or the minority consciousness that has made Muslim children of Daryaganj so moderate and tolerant.

Cultural Identity and Education

We have seen in the course of the analysis that socialisation in the family reinforces the attitudes and prejudices which are in conflict with the stated goals of

educational policy. The latter has remained distant from the life inside the classroom and its subtle interplay with the child’s life at home. Although the Constitution articulated a clear expectation from the educational policy that it needed to enable children to imbibe secular values and attitudes, the effort to fulfil this expectation was never made on any large scale or in depth. Numerous studies³ point out that the larger socio-political ethos became increasingly divided along communal lines over the past two decades. This period has seen a resurgence of Hindu religious identity in the larger national scenario. Political mobilisation of youth in the name of Hindutva made a significant impact on the social ethos of metropolitan cities like Delhi, including the neighbourhoods such as Daryaganj, where Hindu and Muslim households are living together. It is not surprising that the children in this study showed an explicit identification and communicated prejudices towards the other religion practised in their neighbourhood.

The present study shows how early this cultural and political socialisation sets in. Though small, the study has serious implications for educational policy, curricular choices, pedagogy and teacher training. The study reminds us that the education of small children cannot rely on rhetorical exercises, such as taking a pledge in the morning assembly that all Indians are brothers and sisters. Most of the present curricular material is reluctant to acknowledge cultural identity in childhood. A beginning has been made in the National Curriculum Framework of National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi [NCERT 2006] to overcome this situation. The present study provides an evidence for the relevance of NCF’s concern that schools must engage with children’s socialisation at home and in the neighbourhood. Some of the new textual material developed on the basis of NCF indicates the challenge involved in this new policy. In a system, where children’s own life and personality receive little attention from the teacher, the scale of the challenges involved in NCF’s perspective is formidable indeed. The greatest challenge lies in teacher training which, at present, ignores the task of sensitising teachers

towards issues like the child’s reality and socialisation at home. The teacher has to be equipped with the understanding of family’s role in imprinting cultural identity and with the abilities to create an ethos in the school in which the effect of socialisation can be loosened up to enable the children to reflect on their own socialisation so that they can eventually develop a rational outlook. Teacher training programmes have to take a proactive stance so as to be able to create in teachers the confidence to recognise children’s socialisation and to enable children to develop a balanced, secular identity. Only when teachers have such a confidence that they can be expected to impart a tolerant identity which the Constitution of India visualises.

NOTES

- 1 Hindus call it ‘prasad’ and Muslims call it ‘tabarrukh’.
- 2 See Canetti 1984 for a detailed analysis.
- 3 See for example, Corbridge and John (2001); Varadarajan (2002) and Vanaik (1997).

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