

Old and New Dilemmas in Indian Civic Education

Civic education represents a space for learning about life in the public sphere, which though not stringently separated from the domestic and the personal, still involves several new relations and strategies. There also exist different cultural positions on how to behave in the public sphere. The challenge in rethinking Indian civic education is twofold: (a) how does one deal with the existence of different paradigms of public behaviour? (b) what are the basic principles of any particular paradigm and how can they be explicated and given a living meaning?

AMMAN MADAN

Civic education is at the core of the school-state relationship. It reflects basic understandings of the character of society under the Indian state and the changes which have come with capitalism and modernity. This is intimately linked with a key issue in the sangh-inspired attempts to rewrite school curriculum – the question of moral decline. To address this the NCERT has expanded the civics curriculum at the cost of other social science areas. It is to civics that a section of the Indian education establishment looks as a salvation for their discontent with public morality. Such is the backdrop against which we seek to examine, from an anthropological perspective, the social and political roots of civic education.

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that social contradictions and conflicts make up the core of the educational process. Education in India, or anywhere else in the world, consists of the production and reproduction of society. The character of a society defines its systems of education and the latter are an important arena where the forces of change engage in bitter struggle. The constant re-creation of social life that occurs through education is shaped by the changing social structure, the institutions of education, by the ideologies that dominate these, and by

the relations which tie the different actors together, particularly the relations of power. There is a tendency to underplay the role of power in education. However, the nature and contours of power are fundamental to what education is all about. This is not to say that education is just a means to power, but that relations of power are deeply intertwined with all that happens in education. It is always, but always, an assertion that certain ways of behaving are better than others.

Education is thus, primarily an assertion of cultural power. For instance, that a certain way of speaking is better than what your parents might have taught you, the rules of the state are better than what you are told on the street corners, etc. And these must always be negotiated against counter agendas. For any serious attempt to rethink Indian education and its impact on society it is necessary to closely examine both what educationists wish to say as well as what they are speaking against.

Different Cultures in School

The politics of culture is not usually acknowledged in the school. Problems in the teaching of concepts and skills are conventionally reduced to pedagogic questions. Here, we look at education, and its institutionalisation in the form of schools, as an arena for cultural politics where different cultures interact and

negotiate their contradictions. An understanding of this cultural politics must look at the different histories, ideologies and material conditions which constitute the interacting cultures, as well as the terms of the negotiations taking place.

At one level the cultural contradictions played out in the school may be seen as the two poles which have been most eloquently described by A K Ramanujan (1990). Cultures like those in India, he writes, tend to think in terms of context-sensitive rules. Particular ragas are to be sung in particular times; certain foods are to be eaten in certain ways; steadfastness is a virtue in the kshatriya and bending with the wind a virtue in the vaishya. This may be seen most clearly in the varnashrama and the division of society into different castes, each with their own ways and 'tolerant' of the others. The tendency of thinking in context-free, universalistic rules, too, is present, but is a less emphasised one. Globalisation, capitalism, modernity and the contemporary liberal state rely heavily on context-free universalism for their domination. There are powerful hegemonic tendencies in the west which propagate universalism and context-free rules. These are relatively widespread in the North Atlantic fringe countries, linked closely with the powerful hegemonic tendencies promoting them. In India, too, universalism has had a long history and is growing fresh roots. But it struggles with other strong patterns of social behaviour. The school is an outpost of a certain universalising tradition, which must interact with several local traditions.

When I look around in the small town I live in or in the villages around it, it seems that people rely more on particularistic patterns of behaviour. Most people that I know do not go directly to the officials of the state to get a ration card or a driving licence or to get their building plans approved. They go through their social networks of intermediaries, which are constructed heavily on the lines of caste, kinship and the opportunities offered by their work and education to make contacts with people outside these descent-based groups. When I meet someone new they usually mistake me as a newly transferred government official here

and go out of their way to be polite to me. There is hardly any industry to speak of and the state is the single largest institution in the region. And as a friend of mine once said, you should speak nicely to everyone, you never know when you might need their help.

Yet, at the same time there is occurring a dissolution of existing particularities, of existing watertight compartments of behaviour. It is clear to everyone that never mind what the laws of the government try to prevent, actually everything is possible. What you can manage to achieve depends upon the degree of support you can mobilise. And there are marked differences in the kind of leverage which is available to say a big landowner, a large trader, a petty shopkeeper and a dalit landless labourer. All this is in sharp contrast to the liberal foundations of the Indian state which emphasise the rule of law, with clearly spelt out limits and rights and the equality of all, with special protection to some. The universalism of modernity has not been embraced wholeheartedly, and at the same time the old segments of social behaviour are being slowly, but surely, breached.

Believers in Civics

The notion of the status group offers a powerful tool for understanding societies like ours. The literati created by colonial schooling is the key entry point for beginning to understand the forces of change in Indian educational institutions. Like all status groups it may be defined by the means of entry to it – in this case a thorough socialisation into the ways of schools and universities. These celebrated the institutions and sub-cultures brought to India by the British and propagated by the state. The Indian literati may be further distinguished into regional and national categories, the latter, with their use of English, being for long the dominant group.

Over the last fifty years basic changes have been taking place in the character of power and its institutional apparatus in India. The political and moral crises of the literati are directly linked to the challenges being posed to them and to their cherished beliefs. The ideologies that describe and justify the ideal structure of the Indian state are increasingly being confronted with contradictory incidents and anecdotes.

It was the protection of initially the colonial order and then the newly independent Indian state which contributed to the

rise of this literati and gave birth to the modern middle-classes in the first place. Industrialisation took place in India through the active intervention of the state. Close links with the bureaucracy and the existence of networks of patronage and kick-backs were for a long time essential for the rise of entrepreneurs. The licence raj is still far from being dismantled and the products of the colonial model of the school-state relationship continue to exert disproportionate degrees of influence. The confidence of the middle-class in its destiny and its place as, at the very least, the moral leadership of the country relies heavily upon being able to retain and increase its share of the bounties of the state.

The confusions of the literati are due to the gradual displacement of the older cultural domination of the state and its ancillaries. This is leading to a basic shaking up of Indian society because for a long time it was the state which was the single overriding source of power.

The economy has taken on a growth trajectory of its own. Commercial and industrial centres have developed which see entrepreneurship as a higher ideal than the bureaucratic manipulation of files. The state is losing its hegemonic status and the corporate model is gradually beginning to influence even the corridors of the bureaucracy. While a stamp of being 'educated', continues to be essential for success, new sets of ideologies and symbols are now challenging the old. At the other end of the spectrum, meanwhile, there has been the green revolution and a leap in the negotiating leverage of the agrarian classes. The big farmer lobby, especially, is active and vocal in all political fora.¹ The growth of many new sources of cultural power has loosened the old literati's grip on moral high ground. Old symbols are being re-interpreted and new symbols are being created. Local and regional languages are being used to challenge the domination of English and the snobbery of big city folks. Literary circles are becoming more vocal in debunking the intellectual posturings of the old national elites.

It is the rise of multiple competing blocs that have led to the shattering of the literati's complacency. Their official ideology of merit, hard work and technical competence stands exposed before other growing status groups who are also gaining the ability to manipulate power. Contrasting notions have emerged of the state and of the kind of social organisations which

should constitute public life. This literati rose to power with the growth of the state and with the gradual withdrawal of the latter it, too, finds itself in deep waters. And one of the responses to the change in their times is a call for strengthening the presentation of the ideologies of the state through schoolbook civics.

Demystifying Social and Historical Roots of Schoolbook Civics

To understand the changing structures of public behaviour in India, the processes of structuration, as it were, it is necessary to dig deeper into the basic forces at work here. Civics in India primarily served to propagate the worldview of public behaviour that our kind of state expected of its citizenry. The most important things to emerge from the colonial legacy of public life were first, representative democracy as the primary mode of the sharing and control of power; second, bureaucracy as the primary mode of social organisation through which public institutions functioned; and third, state-supported capitalism as the primary mode of economic growth. Each of these contributed to the construction of schoolbook civics and therefore needs to be analysed and held up to a critical eye.

The genesis of the independent Indian state drew very heavily from the development of traditions of public behaviour among our erstwhile colonial rulers. The British parliamentary model which was sought to be imitated with some modifications here was the result of the ascendance of liberal democracy in their home country. Liberalism had emerged in England as a political strategy to protect the growing interests of capital and commerce from the threat posed by the French revolution and the turmoil of an industrialising country. It sought to reconcile the upsurge of democratic feelings with the protection of capital and large private estates. It spoke the language of freedom, but was revealingly reluctant to commit all its forces against poverty and exploitation. The expansion of liberal democracy may be best understood not as a simple process of the expansion of human freedom, but also as a means of steady incorporation of powerful oppositions into and within the establishment.

Liberal democracy works through a system of representation. A few people are chosen to represent the masses and it is

this elite which runs the country. Liberal democracy is more of a legitimacy-building device than a true system of the participation of all in decision-making. It works through control by the most powerful groups in a society, with a systemic mechanism of the inclusion of powerful outsiders into the establishment. Such a political system well-suited the growth of commerce and industry. The continued rise of capitalism required the willing cooperation of large sections of society. Liberal democracy thus, in spite of all the benefits it has given to the underprivileged, comprises the fundamental hegemonic tool of the most powerful sections of society.

Civics, too, exemplifies this approach of claiming a nominal sanction from the people while avoiding any closer examination of their own cultures and aspirations. Civics textbooks are marked by a distrust of local initiatives and seek to push only the validity of the state's actions. There is little discussion of the rationale behind democracy. All that children are expected to learn is the mechanism of elections and the formation of governments. The conflicts of interests, the character of the major power blocs and their struggle for power, in short, all that is actually necessary for any informed decision-making, is quietly brushed under the carpet. This is the pattern of both the older NCERT textbooks as well as its newly released curricular framework. In this respect the BJP simply carries on with the practices of the older regimes.

Modernity and rationality were important ideological forces that supported the rise of capitalism. They lent useful support for the overthrow of feudalism. The growth of reason and science as the most legitimate ways of thought challenged the bases of older social forms. Reason and empiricism became the touchstone for all legitimate knowledge. What did not conform to logic or was not observable according to strict standards of cross-checking was rejected. Universalism was central to modernity. A law of science had to be the same no matter who checked it or where it was tested. The formulation of a universal discourse of rights was, similarly, an important aspect of liberal democracy. Rights were said to be true and applicable to all irrespective of their particular contexts.

Behind this formalisation of social principles lay the need to protect the interests of the rich and powerful. A basic aspect of liberalism has been its emphasis on

defensive rights. The discourse is centred around the protection of the individual's rights, not on effective sharing of power. Thus, the right to property is a bastion of liberal thought. A primary task of the liberal democratic state was to protect these rights of its citizens. In India the paradox of contemporary civics has been that it teaches democracy, freedom and rights in a fundamentally undemocratic way. These principles are not opened up for discussion or debate. Children are taught that they are free, but not free to criticise or dispute what they are taught. And if occasionally the textbook does suggest open-ended questions, the authoritarian school structure ensures that only 'correct' answers are rewarded.

The greatest expression of modernity and reason in social organisations took place in the emergence of the bureaucracy as a social form. And it is the bureaucratic organisation of the state that dominates the teaching of civics [Jain nd, Madan 1995]. Children are taught long sets of rules, how the government is elected, how it is divided into the executive, legislature and judiciary, what are its schemes for public welfare and so on. The bureaucratic mode of social behaviour is that of an impersonal implementation of given norms and rules. The basic characteristic of the bureaucratic mode is that of impersonality, of doing whole-heartedly what one is told to and doing it without any contamination of one's duties with one's own relationship to what is being done. It is this which permits the greatest efficiencies to be attained in doing relatively repetitive tasks. Every manager and worker in a mass-production factory knows that it is through a complete focus on the immediate task and the elimination of all personal attributes of an individual personality, that the greatest productivity can be achieved. The bureaucratic mode allows resources from diverse corners of a highly complex society to be drawn, processed and reallocated. This is also the same mode of social behaviour that allowed otherwise normal, decent human beings to march millions to their death in concentration camps. And today busies itself in counting surplus bags of wheat in India while people die of hunger.

The bureaucratic mode, modernity, capitalism and reason, all these are driven by a universalising tendency. Where specifics are subsumed within larger abstractions and those within ever more abstract formulations. Universalism is a double-edged sword. From one edge it liberates

humanity from its particularities, from the oppressions of the here and now, and fuses it with ever wider collectivities. Capitalism frees us from the tyrannies of feudal lords, from the horrors of food scarcities and from the helplessness of humanity against nature. Reason frees us from the domination of the clergy and the superstitions of the fearful. Bureaucracy frees us from the anarchy of the mob and the partisanship of the factional leader.

At the same time, the other edge of universalism cuts deep. The bureaucracy ignores local needs and tries to make everyone eat cake. The domination of science makes a mockery of any other form of knowledge. Capitalism drives the small farmer and artisan into either starvation or into joining the nameless, soulless hordes of daily wage labourers.

The problem with universalism is that even when going to greater levels of abstraction it continues to represent particular interests. Globalisation actually means the domination of the industrialised nations. Capitalism privileges some and discriminates against others. Power emerges as the deciding factor in forcing a transition towards greater abstraction. What gains acceptance as a scientific fact is decided not just by the criteria of science, but also by which scientist is more influential. The older relations of inequality are dissolved to give rise to new relations of inequality.

The middle-classes like to see themselves as the bearers of the truth of modern times. The truth they speak of is that of the universalising tendencies that they had joined up with in the past and continue to aspire towards today. They want to teach the ignorant 'masses' how to live, how to behave and how to be ruled. However, each of their premises is a historically created one and is now being questioned by many competing particularities. The civics curriculum in India is primarily the agenda which the state-patronised middle classes want to teach. To understand its nature better and to comprehend the challenges posed to it, we now turn to the nature of the opposition to it.

Universalism in India and Challenges before It

The human urge to be part of something larger than just the immediate and the particular has been an important strand in Indian society from the earliest times. This has been given its greatest expression in

religious thought. The Upanishadic and Buddhist traditions urged humanity to move above the daily exigencies of life into something higher and nobler. The bhakti and sufi saints developed this further by emphasising the equality of all and the many different ways that could be possible of attaining God. However, universalism was more the realm of religion than that of political organisation. There have been several universalistic trends in Indian polity, too, but none seems to have attained the same degree of elaboration as may be seen in many bhakti and sufi writings.

In the social organisation of power the consolidation of forces has been a major factor. Power coalesces to create greater power and consequently greater inequalities. The work of historians and anthropologists has been crucial in seeking to understand this dialectic. S Eisenstadt's writings [Eisenstadt and Shachar 1987] have repeatedly drawn attention to towns as a place for the concentration of power. The cycles of urbanisation and deurbanisation have also broadly been the cycles of the consolidation and fragmentation of social power. It is in the euphoria produced by the coming together of human collectivities that one sees the greatest outpouring of creative energy. The concentration of power has led to the most creative spells of the human spirit and also its greatest efforts to channelise and harness itself.

The notion of discipline has recently come back into academic discourse with the works of Michel Foucault (1995). It is through discipline that armies are raised, schools are run and power is focused. While Foucault's concern was with the oppressions this created in western civilisations, it must also be pointed out that discipline was the key to all civilisation. It is through a selective pruning of energies that societies create their own unique patterns. And the greatest institution for this has been the state.

The processes of state formation in India have been a point of considerable debate among historiographers.² The emergence of many new forms inevitably leads to great stress and insecurity in a society. These in turn further add fuel to the fires of change. The myth gains currency that there used to be a golden period which has now been devastated. The 'golden period' encapsulates the deep ranging nature of the change and its other's, the non-golden period's, lack of legitimacy. The idea of a wide ranging collapse

permits one to dabble in the new emerging ways. If all has been corrupted, how can one survive without getting one's hands soiled, too? It is interesting to note the popularity of the concept of kaliyuga to describe the evil and immoral nature of contemporary times. This concept was initially used in the early half of the first millennium AD when serious threats to the varna order had come up with the rise of 'lower castes' and non-brahminical orders [R S Sharma 1982].

Paradoxically, it was this very period which nationalist historiographers struggling to create a sense of self-respect picked upon as their 'golden age'. The image they constructed of ancient India was very close, suspiciously close, to the traits which the British colonial state claimed to be the symbols of its own superiority. The 'traditional' Indian state was said to be a monolithic, centrally administered unit, with a strong ruler.

In social life it often does not matter whether something exists or not. This mirroring of the colonialist's self-image in ancient India is no longer accepted by serious historians. Be the facts what they may, there is still taking place a reconstruction of identities in contemporary India, where many are groping for a myth of stability and order. This takes many shapes. The imperial model has already been mentioned. The other extreme form that the myth of stability can take is that of the noble villager. For a long time the unchanging village republic was celebrated as what the real India was all about. This was what generations of 19th century Englishmen sought in India as their own agrarian society unravelled with the spread of industrialisation. Later, this was what Gandhi and his supporters picked up as their chief counterpoint to British imperialism. Through an eclectic choosing of symbols that undercut both the British as well as the dominant native elite Gandhi was successful in building a vast movement that threatened, at least in principle, to topple both. Contemporary forms of this search for primeval order may be seen in movements and writings that celebrate the local as the other of the oppressive state. Sadly, the sophistication of their critiques of the colonial and post-colonial state and its relation with society is not matched by a similar analysis of indigenous institutions of power and the local understandings of the state. The local is rarely sought to be theorised in terms of its own contradictions.

The disputes between Marxist historians and the English historian Burton Stein and his followers have been a particularly fertile source of insights into the nature of pre-modern power structures in India. The differences between the Marxists' formulation of feudalism and Burton Stein's model of the segmentary state, inspired by the last works of British structural-functionalist political anthropology, may perhaps be less than the fierceness of the debate suggests. For us what are important are the points on which the opposing groups do reluctantly agree: that there was a loose pattern at least from the later part of the first millennium AD of local concentrations of power, under the tenuous and often symbolic control of a nominal higher authority. The direct rule of kings and emperors decreased with distance from the capital and to control their empire they relied more upon the coming together of regional satraps in their support. The latter in turn repeated this pattern, with their authority coming from the support of the leaders of relatively localised groups and so on. The spread of a consensus and the hegemony of imperial symbols was to a great degree limited to symbolic measures. The lack of legitimacy of universally framed propositions of social behaviour is therefore not a new thing at all. What was relatively recent was the creation of social institutions operating primarily on impersonal norms as could be seen in the incipient bureaucracies of the Mughal empire and certain other pockets elsewhere in the country.

When the British arrived in India the Mughal state was gradually evolving towards a widespread bureaucracy, especially in the organisation of its army and revenue collection system. Among other places in Kathiawar and Travancore, too, we may see the emergence of bureaucratic norms. Capitalism was on the upswing in India around the time the East India Company began to rapidly acquire new territories.

These indigenous universalist institutions were soon swamped by the major new agent of rationality in the social world which was, of course, British colonialism and the institutions and myths it strove to establish. The distinctions between the rational bureaucracy, both indigenous and imported, as a form of social behaviour and the older forms have been captured by Max Weber in the concept of patrimonialism [Gerth and Mills 1970].

The essence of the distinction comes from where the source of legitimacy lies.

Patrimonialism implies the identification of authority with a person, and the various symbols associated with him or her. The bureaucratic mode, in contrast, draws its authority from an abstract idea. Consider, for instance, a slow transformation that took place through a series of reconfigurations of social groups in England. It led to the agents of the state slowly to cease being bound by allegiance to, say, King Charles I, and instead become the servants of the Crown or even the Commonwealth. The essence of the bureaucracy is to function under abstract impersonal norms, that are conceived as universal and binding.

The debates on conflicting political and organisational cultures have by and large left Indian schooling untouched. In the admittedly rare instances when the place of schooling vis-à-vis the Indian state has been critically examined, the debate has continued to be circumscribed by the boundaries of rationality and the conventional institutions of the state. What are the other forms of collective social action that engage in a dialectic with the post-colonial state and its liberal, rational, formally legal constitution? What is that other of the dialectic that creates the familiar pattern of negotiations, modifications and subversions of the liberal, rational agenda? If civics has so far seen its job primarily as teaching an explicit and implicit curriculum of a liberal state, then we must necessarily have a clear formulation of the other that we must educate against. If in the process the liberal curriculum itself loses its claims to being a universal truth and comes to be located within wider paradigms, so be it.

Rethinking Civic Education for India

The existence of plurality necessarily implies the existence of different kinds of educational goals. The problem of formulating a relevant education for India, be it through the teaching of civics or anything else, is also the problem of discovering an education that can address often contradictory social principles.

Every educational system aims at certain key principles getting internalised by young people. Many cultures would thus see dignity, sincerity and hard work as the chief objectives of their education. Some would see shrewd business acumen as a major goal, and for some as in ruling sub-cultures, the assertion of their own cultural

superiority over others is a basic requirement. The liberals would want children growing up with at least a commitment to freedom and individuality. And in a very few sub-cultures, there would be a strong emphasis on learning independent reasoning. The goals of education, as articulated by different cultures or different strata within a culture, may have some overlap, but there are also usually sharp contradictions and conflicts among them. This is only to be expected. Cultural and educational goals are strongly influenced by social relations and the politics of culture. It suits those dominating education to portray it as a sweet, innocent realm of consensus. Actually, it can be highly heterogeneous and conflicts within it are resolved in a way similar to how that society handles conflict in other realms.

Civic education is a particularly troubled area. It represents a space for learning about life in the public sphere, which though not separated in a water-tight way from the domestic and the personal, still involves several new relations and strategies. As the earlier part of this essay has argued, there are different cultural positions on how to behave in the public sphere. The challenge in rethinking Indian civic education is thus twofold: (a) How does one deal with the existence of different paradigms of public behaviour? (b) What are the basic principles of any particular paradigm and how can they be explicated and given a living meaning?

It is necessary to look beyond the conventional mould of civics as the building of dutiful subjects of the state, with their memories brimming with the rules and regulations of the government. The Indian state's own philosophical underpinnings call for much greater depth than this. Ours is a state based on liberal and socialist principles and these call for the learning of freedom and of reason. It can be validly argued that the kind of civics being taught in our schools more often than not leads to the subversion of these ideals instead of supporting them. Meanwhile, other cultural systems active in India are also condemning this reification of the richness of life into the rote of formal laws. Meaningful lives, they argue, are created by traditions, duties, noble ideals – not the narrow vision of 'kanon'. They pose other kinds of principles and systems of thought which may be made the basis of life in the public domain. The conventional kind of civics is thus under attack from different directions.

What, then, can be the focal point of a new education for public life? This question may be better posed as how one should go about discovering such a focal point. In the presence of multiplicity, two kinds of responses may be commonly seen. One is to spell out a partisan view and struggle with all the means possible to establish its domination over the rest. This is the most popular strategy, but is easy to see how this can easily lead to totalitarianism and fascism. Leaving aside questions of whether this is actually achievable, there is another basic difficulty here. Totalitarianism presumes that only set of people may possess a complete understanding of the truth. Such an epistemological position cannot be accepted. Philosophical isolationism in itself is sufficient ground for the dominative strategy to be suspect.

Another kind of response is to see multiple groups as the bearers of different parts of a larger picture. This would seem to be a more accurate view of the human struggle. Such a pluralistic ontology then calls for strategies by which different perspectives can engage with and learn from each other. Ground rules must be worked out for accepting or rejecting arguments. The protection of dissent is critical here. All dissent which does not seek a forcible overthrow of the system should be allowed to flourish. It is from dissent that innovations and improvement follow. Its suppression is the need of totalitarian systems, not democratic ones.

The process of developing a meaningful civic curriculum then should be seen as the process of developing democratic institutions. It calls for an attempt to understand different points of view. For setting up institutional structures based not on bureaucratic fiat or the stamp of small exclusive committees, but on large networks of consultation and discussion. We are faced with a situation where school textbooks are placed by the state's authority before a huge population as a compact capsule of all that is good and worth knowing. Against this we must pose a process of asking the people what they themselves would call good, worthwhile knowledge.

This is by no means an easy task. An unequal and stratified society would find this especially difficult. Our democratic institutions are still half-baked and nascent. We are still struggling to work out what equality means and how there can be free and equal participation in public decision-making. People who claim to

represent the opinion of a section more often than not air only the view of the powerful among that section. The consequences of a democratic society are paradoxically the same as the requirements for it – a highly equitable sharing of power. The state can go only so far in promoting such a society. Beyond that it is the role of non-state actors, who are not compromised by the trappings of power, to take the lead.

A civics curriculum that expresses the shared meanings of a society, then, can be constructed only through the culmination of the democratic process. The state's own curricula meanwhile will continue to be implemented by virtue of the power of its institutions. Unless the nature of the state itself changes, such curricula will continue to be defined by the bureaucratic systems that have so far been dominant. This should not discourage us from the struggle to formulate a democratic curriculum. We must continue to discover and use the spaces in which this would be transacted. The very meaningfulness of a democratic curriculum would be what would sustain it. It must draw its support and strength not from the power of the state and bureaucratic imposition, but by the support it would draw from various kinds of communities.

To be sure this cannot be an isolated process, taking place in school curricula alone. Freedom cannot be taught through closed, authoritarian school systems. The character of the school, too, would have to undergo rethinking and change. It would need to empower the individual teacher and also the individual student. It is only a democratic school that can teach a democratic culture. Freedom cannot be learnt by memorising the history of the French revolution. It can be learnt only by struggling with the oppression of ideas and institutions; by learning what it means to be rid of domination; by learning how important it is to guarantee the freedom of others if one wishes to retain one's own. These are not acts of memory, they are social action, praxis, and can only be learnt by the practice of democracy. The rethinking of civics is fused with the rethinking of what education should be and how our educational institutions should function. Without this it would be impossible to teach and learn about what should be the best way of organising our public life.

The rethinking of civics deals intimately with the effect of capitalism on our older

institutions and the struggle for alternatives to emerge. This is, therefore, not just the limited task of a small group of concerned educationists and scholars. It must be seen as an integral part of a vast, civilisational process of re-inventing our society and the way it functions. The rethinking of civics is inextricably tied up with the character of the public debate on big dams, with the domination of big landowners and large capital, with the way trade unions function, with the way municipal councils and panchayats work. It is necessary for all who are concerned with the various processes of social change in India to begin to pay attention to what happens in the school and especially to what it means to teach civics. They would agree that this is a space which links up with all the many diverse struggles that are daily transforming the face of this land. **[PW]**

Address for correspondence:
ammanmadan@sify.com

Notes

[The author would like to thank Eklavya, with which he was previously associated, for extending every possible help in terms of facilities

and for giving him the opportunity to write this article.]

- 1 See, for instance, Dipankar Gupta, 1997, *Rivalry and Brotherhood: Politics in the Life of Farmers in Northern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- 2 The major dimensions of the debates have been presented in the anthology Hermann Kulke (ed), 1997, *The State in India: 1000-1700*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

References

- Eisenstadt, S N and S N Shachar (1987): *Society, Culture and Urbanisation*, Sage, Newbury.
- Foucault, Michel (1995 orig 1975): *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books, New York.
- Gerth H H and C Wright Mills (1970): *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, pp 296-99.
- Jain, Manish (nd): *Evolution of Civics and Citizen in India*, unpublished manuscript.
- Madan, Amman (1995): 'Nagarik Shastra ki Pustakon mein Nagrikon ki Chhavi', *Shaikshik Sandarbha*, no 5, May-June, pp 88-92.
- Ramanujan, A K (1990): 'Is There an Indian Way of Thinking: An Informal Essay' in McKim Marriott (ed), *India through Hindu Categories*, Sage, New Delhi, pp 41-58.
- Sharma, R S (1982): 'The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis' in S N Mukherjee (ed), *India: History and Thought*, Suvarnarekha, Calcutta, pp 186-203.