

SCHOOLING THE GIRL CHILD: EXPLORING THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM ON  
FEMININITY

Dissertation

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## **Declaration**

Date: 30/04/2022

I, Ayana Pathak, hereby declare that this M.Phil dissertation entitled ‘Schooling the Girl Child: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum on Femininity’ is based on my original research work, and to the best of my knowledge, has not been submitted in whole or in part in this University or in any other University for the award of any degree.

Ayana Pathak

## **Certificate**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ‘Schooling the Girl Child: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum on Femininity’ is the work undertaken by Ms. Ayana Pathak under the supervision of Dr. Sunita Chugh, as part of her M.Phil degree. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiner(s) for evaluation and award of the degree of M.Phil.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 The Problem**

A famous assertion by Simone De Beauvoir claims that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. This statement has its origin in the difference between sex and gender, being brought to light by feminist assertions which argue that there is nothing biologically present in the male species that make it superior to the female. Rather, it is a socially constructed category, nurtured through several generations of patriarchy, to dominate, subjugate and further exploit the female sex.

Historically, the power dynamics between men and women have always been unequal, with the latter facing subjugation and discrimination at every step. The access to education has been similar, with male children given the priority to be educated, while women were relegated to the private realm of the household. The role of the women's movement and other feminist movements from across the world have ensured the entry of women into the world of education, besides other spaces previously monopolised by men. The vast majority of research regarding gender issues now largely circulate around issues of enrolment, participation and learning outcomes, factors which are influenced by gendered differences.

The study of gender within education involves the careful breakdown of a large number of factors associated intricately with gender, as well as with the functioning of our educational institutions. In this wide range of subject matter, one aspect of gender which often tends to get overlooked is what forms the basis for this study, basically how gender as a concept is shaped and constructed by the social institutions, including schools. The topic of my study, therefore, revolved around this theme of social constructions of gender, with special emphasis on girl students, and how they are shaped into ways of femininity and womanhood, so as to fit into the societal binary of gender differentiation.



The historical marginalisation of the female sex stems from the practice of discrimination practised over the ages, which has created the need for a strict separation between the two genders. “..the hierarchical organisation of the world around gender is key to maintaining social order; that to live lives marked ‘male’ and ‘female’ is to live different realities” (Menon, 2012, Introduction, Pg. viii). According to specific cultural contexts, the male and female binary requires the practice of specific behaviour types and attitudes, which depict one as the docile, submissive and passive gender, while the other as the aggressive and dominant one. Sticking to these patterns of conduct ensures the continuation of the existing social order, functioning on power dynamics between groups specifically placed in a hierarchical system.

*“..the hierarchical organisation of the world around gender is key to maintaining social order; that to live lives marked ‘male’ and ‘female’ is to live different realities” (Menon, 2012, Introduction, Pg. viii).*

The problem then arises as to identify the ways in which educational institutions, primarily schools, make children aware from an early age onwards about the gender differences essentially through socialisation. While it is not entirely the role of educational institutions in shaping these dynamics, the purpose of this study is to examine this particular institution and its role in shaping conformity to traits of masculinity and femininity. While the former (masculinity) is seen as natural, femininity, on the other hand, is seen as something to be taught to girls, especially the ones who according to society’s conditioning are not ‘feminine’ enough. The pressure to be ‘enough masculine’ also exists, but the socialisation process is disproportionately directed towards female children, who basically need to be shown or taught their place in society, on the basis of their gender identity.

## 1.2 Gender and Schooling

As argued before, gender is basically a social construct which facilitates the smooth continuation of the social order. The hierarchical positioning of these groups as *dominant* or *subordinate* (produced at different times and in different spaces) are intrinsically linked to the process of gendering (Menon, 2012). Echoing Nivedita Menon's argument, 'gendering' refers to "the ways in which people are produced as 'proper' men and women through rules and regulations of different sorts" (Pg. ix, *Seeing Like a Feminist*). The construction of these gender binaries, resulting in the categorisation of male and female, is aided by the primary socialisation units of family, society and culture. On the basis of these groupings, masculinity and femininity are introduced as the primary determining agents which separates the two genders. In order to ensure adherence to characteristics of masculinity and femininity, the socialisation and key information about gender related identities, as is conveyed to the young children is very important. It is this idea of gender which shapes their perceptions and ideas, and continues to guide their thoughts and actions in later life.

*They (schools) function to bring about behavioural changes in women, grooming them from an early age onwards, on to ways of femininity and womanhood, as is deemed fit by societal standards.*

The role of the school as part of the society which facilitates this process, is important as another basic socialisation agent, which is universally a part of every children's life. Although some degree of socialisation already happens by the time the children are in school, the process of training into 'appropriate' gender-specific forms of behaviour, dress, play and so on is continuous. The role of the school as an institution of 'organising standardised patterns of social behaviour' aids this process. They function to bring about behavioural changes in women, grooming them from an early age onwards, on to ways of femininity and womanhood, as is deemed fit by societal standards. Girls in schools are often taught in ways of reinforcing further stereotypes of what it means to be a woman in

society, how to conform to their roles, and dictating the manner in which they ought to behave in particular situations. Disciplining behaviour and conduct among its students therefore becomes the primary role of the school as an institution. Through the enforcement and enactment of these value systems, an all-round socialisation of children is facilitated. By means of attending schools, children are sensitised into learning more about their identity, the position which that identity occupies in larger society, and finally, how to behave in appropriate ways vis-à-vis their association with it. The subtle nature in which this 'schooling' is carried out, besides the formal curriculum, is what may be categorised as the hidden curriculum in schools.

### 1.3 The Hidden Curriculum

Education is tasked with the responsibility of shaping the younger generation, which is the future of the society. By virtue of this role, educational institutions, especially schools, function to provide not just formal education to its children, but also specific ways of behaviour, attitudes and values. Termed as the hidden curriculum, the teaching of such attributes does not constitute the prescribed syllabus of classroom teaching. Rather, they come with an all-round agenda of training children to become members of the society through grasping the innate and complex interplay of various roles and functions within it.

*...(the hidden curriculum brings with it) an all-round agenda of training children to become members of the society through grasping the innate and complex interplay of various roles and functions within it.*

The adjectives used to describe the hidden curriculum may be ‘unarticulated’, ‘unacknowledged’, ‘implied’, etc. It is often obscure or taken for granted, in a manner that certain values and ethics are treated as part of the moral fabric of the school, or the society of which it is a part. These include values like punctuality, ethics such as not talking back to teachers, and so on. It functions in subtle ways, for instance, by means of rewarding certain behaviour as the ideal, or punishing certain kinds of deviant behaviour. On an institutional level, intolerance to certain aspects of makeup, or the adornment of the uniform in a particular way, conveys ideas about the preconceived notions of appearance, what is acceptable and what is not. In doing so, it reinforces the hidden assumption of the expected ways of behaviour from all the students in the school.

The hidden curriculum is an intrinsic part of school culture, often justified by the argument that education extends far beyond what we learn from textbooks. It is under the garb of this fact that external lessons about morality and decency, taken for granted aspects of behaviour and virtues, are taught and implied. The students are largely expected to conform to these unwritten rules, failing which sanctions are invoked to punish the

deviants. A significant social characteristic of the hidden curriculum, therefore, is to develop uniformity, and to do away with individuality. As there are two sides to each coin, while the hidden curriculum may impart ethics relating to honesty and fairness, it may also serve to perpetuate age-old stereotypes and roles, which very often function to reinforce the dominant culture. It functions to imbibe in children values, while at the same time training them to conform to the social order.

*“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Pg. 93, Hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black).*

In the context of gender, the hidden curriculum serves to dictate lessons on the proper way of gendered behaviour, especially in the case of girls. With respect to the social expectation of gender, there is no written rule for the way of behaving according to gender identification. It is rather the informal way of addressing and policing these aspects that makes the hidden curriculum significant. It essentially makes use of ‘gender codes’ to enable differentiation and initiate socialisation, in order to maintain the social order which rests on gender hierarchy. As Bell Hooks rightly pointed out, “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Pg. 93, Hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black).

Thus, this study sets out to present an overview of the process of schooling of the girl child, through the means of the hidden curriculum, to establish the argument that schools play a major role in shaping the gendered differences between men and women. The available and selected literature for the purpose of this paper establishes various conceptual categories within which the argument is based. Starting from John Dewey's categorisation of schools as 'miniature societies', it goes on to Bourdieu's reproduction theory, which argues that inequalities are nurtured and perpetuated within the education system itself. In this capacity, it relies on analogies drawn from Foucault's analysis of discipline systems in prisons, to understand the control that is exercised on the bodies of students, especially in producing gendered bodies. In the context of girl students and their experiences, Goffman's theorisation of front stage and back stage performance is evoked and applied to understand the impact that their appearance has in shaping situations. Within these broad conceptual frameworks, evidence from research papers in the related theme are supplemented to develop the argument further.

#### 1.4 Overview of chapters

This study is divided into six chapters, each of which grapples with the interwoven themes of gender and schooling, and consequently seeks to answer the research questions as outlined in the study. Starting with a background of the topic, the role of the school as an institution, in the sociological sense of the term, is established. This provided the backdrop against which the study is based, along with a preliminary idea of the idea of gender as has been used in this regard.

Following the basic introduction provided to each of the concepts dealt with over the course of this study, the researcher seeks to provide an overall literature review of the particular field of study that this study covers. This review of literature brings together theoretical frameworks and research papers, which covers various aspects of gender in education, relevant to the topic of research. The overarching theory of this study is John Dewey's categorisation of schools as 'miniature societies', which depicts the school as being modeled on the larger society of which it is a part. In accordance with this theory, the study sets out with the proposition that the continuation of the social order, i.e., the hierarchical ordering and power dynamics within it, are echoed at schools, which are taught to children from an early age onwards as the norm. Schools function to build children as conformist individuals who do not challenge the existing order, whose basis actually exists on very shaky foundations which could collapse if threatened or questioned. This theory is aided by the reproduction theory of education which claims educational institutions to be systems which function to reproduce and perpetuate inequality across generations. Moreover, in order to establish adherence to these specific values, strict discipline systems are in place designed with sanctions to avoid deviations. This draws from Foucault's theory of discipline systems in prisons which is used as an analogy to understand the schooling patterns. Amidst these theoretical foundations, the question of gender is contextualised and analysed within this framework. The question of differentiation and socialisation takes precedence as it proceeds to understand the ways in which the school plays a role in the social constructions of gender. Following the contextualisation, the key persons involved, that is the girl students and the impact it has on shaping their behaviour, conduct and personality is examined vis-à-vis their schooling

process. Besides, an overview of teachers' perspective and viewpoint is also shared, so as to attempt to understand the societal conditioning which prompts them to enforce these gender patterns onto their students.

The third chapter deals with the research design of the study. Setting out with the research objectives, an insight into the methodology adopted is provided, which lays out in detail the area of study, the rationale behind it, details of the fieldwork conducted, tools used, and the data collected in the process. This chapter reveals the entire process of the study, starting from the idea to the manner in which it was conducted, how the data was collected and an analysis of the material that is at hand.

Following the methodology and the development of the case studies, the findings and analysis of the data collected are presented. This includes a detailed understanding of the concepts outlined in the topic, with the help of the data collected from field work. Starting from the schooling of the girl child, this chapter shall enable a basic understanding of the research, and the overall interlinking of the various themes running through it. It focuses on the possible factors which determine the functioning, as part of a certain wider structure which influences it. This includes a focus on the power dynamics, the constraints of external society, contextual variations of morals and values and so on. Following that, it focuses on the second part of the title, which is, the hidden curriculum. This part is an analysis of the collected data, related to the concepts and theories mentioned in the review of literature, and finally linked to the practices and behaviour patterns which govern day-to-day life in gendered terms. This seeks to cover under it various themes pertaining to cultural expectation, gender coding, gender socialisation and differentiation and finally the whole idea of doing gender.

The fifth chapter is a case study analysis, developed from the analysis of the interviews collected during fieldwork, in order to arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the topic and the associated concepts. This chapter includes the narration and accounts of the girl students, as well as their experiences of gender based disciplining, which are key to answering the research questions as outlined in the study.



The final chapter is the conclusion, which seeks to wrap up the study by attempting to answer the research questions with the data collected, linking it to the theoretical underpinnings which construct the base of the study. It includes the bringing together of the entire paper by connecting all the themes and thereby arriving at a conclusion for the research objectives outlined at the beginning of the study, followed by a discussion on the larger theme of gender in education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Background**

The sociological dictionary defines an institution as a system for organising standardised patterns of social behaviour (<https://sociologydictionary.org/institution/>). Schools function in the capacity of an institution by being more than a mere collective of individuals, but also being representative of a domain of repetitive social actions and standardised group behaviour in the form of regular classes and assemblies. A school, in this regard, constitutes an institution whereby socially accepted forms of behaviour are imposed upon children by means of disciplining systems, venturing out of which results in punishments and sanctions. As such, it can be aptly seen as a socialising unit, by means of which young children are groomed in a particular way as part of a repeated pattern of churning out batches of students, who are eligible to function in society as is acceptable. In a rapidly changing world, the differences between girls and boys are fast diminishing, with girls competing equally with boys in almost all fields. The main problem however lies with the mentality and outlook, which as this paper argues, continues to be perpetuated by institutions such as the school.

#### **2.1 Miniature societies**

The role of school as an institution necessitates its functioning on the model of the larger society of which it is a part, and this idea has been developed by John Dewey (1907) in his concept of school as ‘a miniature society’. In his words, “all that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members”. To put it simply, Dewey refers to the school as an institution which mirrors the goals and ideals established by society at large, and functions in a way to initiate the new members into the ways of the world. Through its introduction of various forms of active occupation

into the learning curriculum, schools go beyond mere textbook education to construe itself as a child's habitat, learning directive living as is to be done in the future. As such, it functions as a 'miniature community' or an 'embryonic society'. Locating gender within this theory, Robinson (1992) writes, "...being a microcosm of society at large, these schools perpetuate the male hegemony concomitant with a patriarchal society. Under these circumstances stereotyped attitudes and values surrounding models of masculinity and femininity flourish, frequently unchallenged, determining aspects of teacher and student behaviour" (Pg. 274). He claims that the environment of the school is in whole reflective of the discrimination and inequality that persists against women in larger society. In other words, schools can be seen as models of society, designed and patterned according to the ways of the society, but in effect, functions to create individuals to conform to the rules of the world that they are being schooled for.

## **2.2 Reproducing Inequalities**

In its capacity as a miniature form of society, schools also incorporate within it the systems which perpetuate discrimination and stereotypes, leading to marginalisation. The reproduction theory in education develops this idea of school further into identifying it as a site for reproducing inequalities across all categories, including gender. Presenting Bourdieu's argument in an analysis of his work, the author (Azaola, 2012) claims that "the school pedagogic action transmits the dominant culture and contributes to the reproduction of the structure of power relations within society" (Pg. 83). The reproduction of inter-generational transmissions of inequality are further aided by these institutions by reinforcing much of the commonly held stereotypes and discriminatory practices towards marginalised groups, establishing it as the norm. By establishing gender differentiated disciplinary practices as the norm, these differences are tasked with the job to establish power relations. The gestures and body language governing the behaviour and attitude of young children serves to place them into gender binaries, in accordance with the roles associated with their identification and subsequent categorisation. As such, the unequal power relations, with the man or masculinity being treated as the superior human form, is

perpetuated, unquestioned. With more awareness and sensitivity being generated about gender issues, the unequal treatment of boys and girls may be challenged on the grounds of gender discrimination. This is aided by the fact that women are almost as visible as men in the public domain, earning a name for themselves, while refusing to accept their subordination. In the wake of such rapid progress being made by the female sex, gender disparity continues to be propagated in subtle forms, such as schooling children from an early age onwards into gendered behaviour practices. The manner in which schools carry out this task forms the main argument of the study.

### **2.3 Social control through disciplining systems**

Irby (2014) writes, “A school discipline net is a socially constructed, contested, and symbolic ‘space of trouble’ that a student falls into when she or he behaves outside of the normative expectations of a school setting” (Pg. 514). The normative expectations are yet again reflective of the norms and values dictated by society upon the behaviour and conduct of its members. These overwhelmingly tend to centre around the adults’ notion of fairness and justice (Irby, 2014), which they impose on the children. “Values provide the major premises from which specific rules are deduced” (Becker, 1963, Pg. 131). It is with reference to values that rules are framed, within which actions are approved and forbidden, attached with sanctions. The accepted behaviour for students is shaped and filtered through lenses of race and gender. The various factors in play in such a setting are primarily an intersection of students’ identities, teacher beliefs, school practices, etc, which are in turn influenced by national, state and local policies, as well as school locations (Irby, 2014). Foucault’s analysis of the discipline systems in prisons which rely on modes of surveillance and physical regulation to ‘discipline’ the body is applied by Morris (2005), as a similar technique used by schools for the same purpose. In the context of discipline enforced over the body, Foucault (1995) claims, “In every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations” (Pg. 136). The scale of control over the bodies tended to break it down into individual units, exercising subtle coercion individually upon movements, gestures, attitudes (Foucault,

1995). In the words of Irby (2014), getting into trouble at school, that is, deviating from the set standard of behaviour norms and expectations, is ‘the first point of entry into the school to prison pipeline’ (Pg. 513). Although mostly the management of student behaviour is confined to the classroom level interaction, a broader analysis requires the school wide level to be taken into account (Gregory, et al., 2010). The idea is to incorporate bodily behaviour and display which is acceptable and normal according to societal standards. Voicing Foucault’s claim, Martin (1998) emphasises, “a disciplined body creates a context for social relations” (Pg. 495). She argues that in congruence with Foucault’s idea that disciplinary control produces docile bodies, it also produces gendered bodies. Embodied within schools as the ‘hidden curriculum’, research has revealed the prevalence of body regulation in the social reproduction process. As part of this process, students are expected to be passive followers of the rules, without questioning or arguing (Pokharel, 2013). Classroom discipline is one area where, Robinson (2006) argues, “such (stereotypes based on masculinity and femininity) attitudes flourish, and double standards and traditional values about males and females are reinforced in students” (Pg. 274). The regulation of the bodies of boys and girls within the classroom ensures the establishment and continuation of gender hierarchy (Martin, 1998).

## **2.4 Contextualising gender**

Gender is a performance, an idea which stems from the concept of ‘doing gender’, which suggests that it is through bodies that are managed, adorned and fashioned in particular ways, that gender and gender relations are established. This performance manifests itself in bodily differences between men and women, which dictate their behaviour. Most commonly seen in subtle and taken for granted ways (such as women taking smaller steps, occupying less space, sitting in closed positions, etc), these ideas and notions of femininity shape popular perception of the gendered differences between the two sexes (Martin, 1998). Justified on the grounds of ‘decency’, female sexuality is attempted to be repressed and hidden in the pretext of establishing ‘safety’ for girls (Duits and Zoonen, 2006). Acting as a major socialisation agent for young children going to schools, the teaching of

such attributes and values constitutes the 'hidden curriculum'. Besides the overt curriculum of schools, lessons on 'how to speak, what to wear, how to move their bodies and ultimately, how to inhabit different race, class and gender positions' are also imparted to the students (Morris, 2005, Pg. 44). The hidden curriculum, as an effective part of gender socialisation, distinguishes girls and boys, and sets them apart from each other in terms of dress, behaviour, voice control, physical attributes, as well as in interactions. Through the creation of these differences, the physical differences between the two genders are made to feel natural (Martin, 1998). School discipline is designed in a way so as to keep the behaviour of students in check, in accordance with their gendered identification. A research conducted by Morris (2005) revealed that in comparative terms, girls' movements are restricted more than boys, and are also expected to exercise greater control over their bodies. This results from the idea of stereotypical femininity and its associated behaviour patterns, which is set as the standard for dictating the ways in which girls are expected to conduct themselves.

The gendered-differentiated treatment as part of the ways of the school, in imparting education, as well as other aspects of grooming, is mostly the cultural norm, not an exception (Schechter, 2006). Pokharel (2013) argues that gender discrimination stems from gender socialisation, which emerges from the differential treatment of boys and girls. Gender codes structured along these lines of traditional stereotypes form the basis for teacher-student interactions. This process of gendered disciplining, Riddell (1989) argues, is essentially dialectical, in that, teachers base their coping strategies (of classroom control) on their typification of male and female pupils, while pupils respond either by conforming, or by resisting teachers' authority through the parody and contradiction of these gender codes. The established gender codes dictate the boundaries for student behaviour. The general notion which serves this mindset places boys as the naturally aggressive, loud and unruly gender, while girls are expected to be polite, submissive and obedient. Any kind of deviation from this standard behavioural tendency involves sanctions. More so for girls, failing to stick to traditional feminine etiquette invites criticism and judgement with regard to their moral character as well. Using this criterion as the standard for judging the femininity levels of girls, Robinson (1992) outlines the broad categories into which girl students are placed on the basis of their behaviour, namely, 'good girls', 'bad/difficult

girls' and 'tarty girls'. The first category of girl students fit into the ideal of the traditional passive, submissive and obedient girl. They are considered 'good' because they behave in the manner which is deemed appropriate of young girls of their age. The 'bad/difficult' girls tended to reflect the behaviour pattern of boys. Owing to their deviation from the standard of feminine behaviour in terms of being assertive, loud or aggressive, they are categorised as 'difficult', as they are not as easy to discipline as compared to the former category of girls. While such behaviour was expected from the boys, this behaviour in girls was seen as a violation of disciplinary norms. The third category of 'tarty girls' is also reflective of class background, frequently associated with girls coming from underprivileged areas or from a lower class. This categorisation is based in terms of their appearance, as well as sexual activities, which is generally acknowledged to be the tainting the positive image of the school (Robinson, 1992).

Summarising the argument above, the gender differentiated socialisation process of girls and boys stems from the innately established ideas of masculinity and femininity in society. This gendered socialisation leads on to gender-based differentiation, which sets in place different behavioural rules for boys and girls, with more control being enforced on the bodily autonomy and movement of girls. The tendency to deem 'natural' behaviour of a kind which was attuned with more freedom and relaxation for boys, resulted in stricter and harsher sanctions for girls to prevent deviations.

## **2.5 How are the girls affected?**

Girl students precariously live within a world which is quick to judge their moral character on the basis of any slip or deviation from the traditionally established norm of femininity. Goffman's theorisation of the front-stage and back-stage appearance of humans suggests that the manner of dressing has a profound impact on the message and vibe that a person is trying to convey. Based on these notions, girls dressing brings into question their 'character' and 'decency', which is constructed on the basis of assumptions, and has corresponding consequences. In such a hegemonic discourse, where the way the girls dress and the manner in which they conduct their behaviour influences that of societal moral

perceptions, girls are denied their agency and autonomy in matters relating to their own sexuality and character (Duits and Zoonen, 2006). As such, dealing with such disciplinary patterns, the approaches by girl students may be two pronged: *conforming*, or *resisting*.

### *Conformist attitudes*

The stereotyped attitudes of femininity and masculinity are also imbibed by the students themselves, and very often these stereotyped perceptions influence the way that girls behave, and in terms of their attitude to other girls, teachers and boys. They see the ideal notion of 'female' as a goal to be attained, and hence feel the pressure to stick to certain ways of behaving which convey a message about their gender and gender role. Failure to conform to those norms results in them labelling them as 'bad' girls, who were not adequately 'feminine' in nature. Such labels and categorisation had effects on their reputation in the school, which further impacted their employment prospects, quality of schooling, and marital aspects as well in some cases (Robinson, 1992).

### *Resistance*

Disciplinary control can actually have the consequence of further marginalising particular student groups, which very often tends to translate into resistance (Morris, 2005). Girls who were categorised as 'difficult/bad' girls for instance, tended to be dealt with by teachers as dealing with boys, and it resulted in the girls reacting negatively to this approach. Judgements on the moral character or sexuality of girls prompted teachers to deal with them flirtatiously, so as to get their way, which reinforced among girl students the belief that their appearance influences gaining positive attention from male teachers (Robinson, 1992). Many girls tried to challenge gender codes by disrupting activities in the classroom, which were commonly associated with boys. Some other girls actively tried to be both sexually attraction and intellectual, as part of attempts to bring about radical changes in the perceived notion of masculinity and femininity (Riddell, 1989).



## **2.6 From the teachers' viewpoint**

The perspectives and viewpoints of teachers and educators, in their capacity as adults, are mostly shaped by the traditional societal notions of masculinity and femininity. With this mindset, they impose upon their students, disciplinary systems, which function to ensure the continuation of fixed and discriminatory gender roles within society. Research shows that teachers identify distinct differences between boys and girls which enables them to typify the students into categories based on their gender, and define the boundaries of their behaviour in that regard (Riddell, 1989). As part of this differentiation and categorisation, teachers identified and expected girls to be neat, polite, and calm, whereas boys were expected to be loud and disruptive, boisterous and aggressive (Pokharel, 2013). This finds reflection in the statement frequently used, 'Act like a young lady!' (Morris, 2005). For the teachers, ensuring discipline in the classroom was a matter of professionalism, as well as that of power and control. This fact too was differentiated among male and female teachers, who dealt differently with students on the basis of their gender. Consequently, the teachers' notion of femininity shaped their perceptions on the disciplining of girls. This followed and led to the categorisation of girls on the basis of the behaviour they displayed into 'good girls', 'bad/difficult girls' and 'tarty girls' (Robinson, 1992). An interaction with the teachers about the aspirations of the girl students of the school by Bettie (2000) revealed what the teachers expect from girl students in terms of education, "they'll all be barefoot and pregnant" (Pg. 12).

### **Summary**

In most societies, attending school is the norm. The basic knowledge and knowhow of the world and its functioning is introduced to children through the medium of the school. As its first interaction with a world outside of its immediate family, the school acts as the window to the outside world for which the children are being socialised, being made aware of their identities, and through that, their position in the world. Apart from the normal curriculum of the school, it acts as a socialising agent in terms of grooming the children into proper ways of behaving, speaking and dressing, and with particular reference to the

theme of this paper, in accordance with the manner deemed appropriate with their associated gender. The education system, especially schools in particular, teaches children two profound lessons: first, the social positioning on the basis of attributed identities in wider society; and second, how to conform to the expected behaviour pattern of their identified category. The curriculum of schools tends to rely on subjects like history to depict the evolution of society, but very often fail to point out the problems associated with age old discriminatory practices which continue to persist. In the light of such a stance taken by the institution, inequalities and marginalities are established as the norm. Within this discourse, the school facilitates the identification with particular identity groups, by making the children aware about their belonging and association with their socially assigned category. Following this, ways of behaviour are enforced based on these categorisations, which are enforced through discipline systems.

Although discrimination based on gender categorisations may be declining, owing to the awareness being generated around the issue, as well as girls making rapid strides in almost all areas to eliminate these differences, the behavioural expectations centred around character and conduct continue to dominate gender perceptions. As regards the attitude and demeanour with which children are expected to conduct themselves, the categorisation and classification into the binaries of gender function to exercise more control over women and restrain their independence and curb their freedom. Through this study, the role of this school in this regard has been analysed and examined for the purpose.

In John Dewey's terms, in its capacity as a miniature version of society, schools tend to function to emulate the ways of the society by initiating children into the accepted roles according to their social positioning, dictated by identities into which they are categorised. In accordance with this model in place, the reproduction theory in education subsequently draws light to the inequalities and marginalities reproduced within schools. Such discrimination is perpetuated by means of injustice being taught and imparted as the norm, from an early age onwards. As Robinson argues, such practices are seldom questioned or challenged, thereby resulting in flourishing stereotypes and attitudes of masculinity and femininity. Once these values are ingrained, the smooth functioning of society, ensured by the domination or exploitation of one group over another, is facilitated. In a way, a school

functions to maintain the status quo, as opposed to the expected function of education; to break discriminatory barriers and create an egalitarian society.

The discipline systems in place are congruent with Foucault's conceptualisation of discipline within prisons, which serve in a similar way to establish control over bodies. By governing and regulating their bodies, girls are subtly trained to submit to the superiority of the other sex. This is ensured by encouraging meek and docile behaviour, as well as body language which is not too assertive, thereby in sync with the position they occupy in the larger world. Demonstrated in the research by Morris, these find frequent reinforcements in quotes and phrases which ask children to behave in ways specific to their gender (to act like a lady, or throw like a man). The gendering of bodies in this manner is also consumed by the students, enacted by boys who look down on behaviour indicating feminine tendencies, and girls having a heightened consciousness about the impression they give with their appearance and behaviour.

Research on the field has significantly shaped the discourse surrounding gender in education, aside from the mere statistical figures of gender visibility in the domain. Though most of the research highlights the gendered aspects in terms of shaping cultural notions of femininity, there continues to remain a significant gap in terms of understanding the impact on girls. Their personal experiences, as well as their views and outlook on how the system affects them, continues to remain largely unresearched and unexplored. However, with the help of the available literature, the argument surrounding the role of the schools in the socialisation process of gender differences is explored and presented, and attempts have been made to identify an angle to view gender dynamics within the education system.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Education is often seen as a liberating space from all kinds of exclusion and discrimination, as a space where old stereotypes and prejudices are challenged. However, in light of the problem of gender issues being perpetuated, the education system needs a closer introspection in terms of awareness and sensitivity to gender. While a lot of research has focused on gender inequality in education in terms of access, interaction and outcomes, there is also the need to focus on the school's role in constructing and shaping of gender, imparting ideas of masculinity and femininity among its children. This is in congruence with the disciplinary systems of schools, which are designed to avoid deviations from socially constructed gender norms. Enforced with sanctions in place to keep rule breakers in check, it is part of a larger societal understanding of 'proper ways of behaviour' for men and women.

Having identified the problem at hand, this study sets out to understand the gendered ways of society, as is facilitated by the medium of schools, through their gender socialisation process. The first step is to arrive at a conceptual understanding of the role of the school in society, its functioning as an institution, and how it mirrors the ways of society in its outlook as well as structure. Following that, the study attempts to understand disciplinary systems in schools as nets of social control, their regulations of gender dimensions within the school, as well as the repercussions and sanctions associated with it. By laying out the conceptual framework of the key systems in place, we proceed to obtain the views of the key actors in the process, the teachers who enforce the system, as well as the children who are bound within it. The rationale of this study, therefore, is to identify the ways in which gender as a category has connotations to it within education, beyond that of purely quantitative statistics.

Within these objectives, it is the hidden curriculum which is recognised as the medium through which the process of schooling is carried out. This research is therefore entrusted

with the task of understanding and contextualising these concepts of schooling and hidden curriculum, along with a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in relation to sexuality. The secondary literature collected as part of the study, helps in building the theoretical framework against which the data collected from the field is represented and analysed.

### **3.1 Research Objective**

The objectives of this study can be broadly classified within the following points:

1. To examine the process of gender socialisation in schools
2. How the school as an institution is reflective of the ways in which gendered patterns of behaviour exist in larger society
3. To explore the hidden curriculum, and analyse its role in facilitating gendered differences
4. To bring to light the perspective, outlook, and experience of the key players involved

### **3.2 Research Questions**

Drawing from the research objectives outlined above, the following research questions are framed, which shall be attempted to be answered through the research conducted:

1. What is the role of the school in producing gendered children?
2. How does the hidden curriculum facilitate gender differentiation in schools?
3. What is the experience of girl students in this regard?

### 3.3 Area of Study

The study is proposed to be conducted in Guwahati, in the state of Assam, from the north-eastern region of the country. “Women in the region when compared with their counterparts in other parts of the country, are often portrayed as enjoying greater freedom with respect to their mobility and the absence of certain practices such as dowry, obligatory wearing of burqas” (Buongpui, 2013, Pg 73). Against this background, in a region which is supposed to be comparatively better off for women, and more progressive in terms of gender equality, I propose to base my study in an urban middle class setting, in the prime city of Guwahati. The rationale behind choosing Guwahati (besides the assumed gender progressiveness of the place), is also my own cultural background. By virtue of belonging to this part of the country, my understanding of the nuances and subtleties of certain actions and words, information which may be unavailable to another person from a different cultural setting, will facilitate the better conduction of the research. My ability to understand the local language will also further aid the interaction process with the various stakeholders involved.

### 3.4 Research Design

The proposed research is in part explanatory, and in part, exploratory. By explanatory, the nuances and issues of gender as a conceptual category shall be introduced, the role played by society in shaping or developing it as a concept. In its exploratory sense, the idea is to explore the system and structure which facilitates and nourishes the gender binary in society. For this purpose, we shall be using a mixed method approach, by means of which the idea is to include both primary as well as secondary sources of information to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the issue. Overall, the research is largely qualitative, as it focuses on experiences and narratives, instead of statistics and numbers.

The secondary sources of data collection seek to provide insight into conceptual understandings of the various terms used in this study, which include gender and schooling. The nuances of these particular terminologies are examined in light of their relation to one another, with theoretical understandings which help to contextualise one in the other, and secondly with the help of research articles which seek to understand these interlinked ideas in various settings and spaces. In a context where the pandemic has imposed barriers on effective fieldwork data collection, the secondary sources of data contribute to a major chunk of the research by helping us understand the problem and the nuances associated with it in an overlapping context.

For the primary data collection, the study is conducted in Guwahati, Assam, primarily in schools catering to the urban middle class. This study is therefore localised and contextual, and cannot be generalised to be the case for the rest of the country, or even that of the northeast region.

The sample chosen for this research are a group of 20 high school students, in the age group of 15-19 years, representing 7 schools, selected through the random sampling method. This shall comprise two all-girls schools, two all-boys schools, and three co-educational schools. Having shortlisted the schools and the respondents for the purpose, five such cases are selected and extensive case study is conducted on them. The purpose for this is to arrive at an in-depth understanding of these individual cases and delve deeper

into the nuances of schooling, the execution of the hidden curriculum, as well as larger questions associated with masculinity and femininity.

With respect to the first two research questions, the observation method is applied, by means of conducting fieldwork in the respective schools. This enables the understanding of the subtleties and manner in which gender differentiation happens, in a way which is justified as the norm. It also helps to understand the ways in which schools seek to enforce discipline patterns, and the resulting degree of strictness for every action which is considered as deviating from the norm. By means of undertaking this field research, the idea is to gain greater clarity on exploring the term 'hidden curriculum' and how it can be linked to the gender problem at hand. Owing to the difficulty imposed by pandemic related restrictions, the question relating to the role of the school, by means of the hidden curriculum has been sought to be answered through the data collected from the girl students, about their specific experiences.

The next question focuses on key players being affected in the general outlook of the problem, that is, the girl students, and hence the methods employed for this purpose are interviews and narratives. The interviews are structured in a manner so as to ask relevant questions about the way in which the actors perceive or understand gender differences. Moreover, by means of narratives, girl students can talk about their experiences, and their understanding of gender and femininity can be derived from this process. However, owing to the probable non-feasibility of fieldwork in view of covid restrictions presently in force at educational institutions, these interviews have mostly been conducted in an online mode, through telephonic interviews. These are also aided by the particular case studies which helps to shed more light on the ways in which these processes are aided and perpetuated by schools.

Owing to the cultural variability and regional differences, the secondary research only facilitates building our general view of the problem, and does not serve to address the issues of the proposed cultural location. It will serve as the broader theoretical or conceptual framework within which the study shall be based.



### 3.5 The field study

The study was aimed at analysing the conditioning and socialising that takes place in schools, for children at an age when gender differences between them become apparent, and they are taught to be aware and sensitive to those differences. In an attempt to restrict the study to one particular area, the city of Guwahati (my home town) was chosen, and the objective was to understand the research questions in the context of the schools located in this city. As a part of the north-eastern part of India, often considered to be the ‘gateway to the north-east’, the city of Guwahati seemed to be the perfect place to base the study in order to get an idea of the way gender processes function in this part of the country, which is otherwise known to be better than the rest of the country in terms of gender parity issues. Also, by advantage of being the residential place of the researcher, the ability to understand and relate to the cultural nuances seemed to be particularly relevant. This stems from the fact that the main idea behind the concept of ‘hidden curriculum’ is to ingrain culturally relevant ideas of sexuality, roles and differences, often expressed through symbols and by means of the local language. The ability of the researcher to understand the finer subtleties underlying the commands and sanctions, by virtue of belonging to that society, served to fulfill this purpose. The middle class and upper middle-class sections of Assamese society, in a bid to establish their superiority, often vouch for their gender-less and casteless ways, which seeks to set them apart from the rest of the classes, as well as their Indian counterparts, in their seeming ‘progressive’ ways. Hence this study is an attempt to verify the validity of this claim, and test it in the face of the existing gender sensitivity and awareness this study seeks to highlight or draw attention to.

After having zeroed in on the field of study, the next task is the selection of schools. The schools selected for the study had to be representative of both all girls’ schools, as well as co-educational ones. The idea behind this is to help ascertain the way girls in all girls’ schools are sensitised to behavioural ethics, and the manner in which their ‘grooming’ is dealt with in a co-educational institution, if the contrast arises sharply to that of the disciplining applied to boys. However, with the current circumstances imposed by the pandemic, most schools were functioning at half-capacity and in a hybrid mode (half online, half offline), which acted as a deterrent to observe the normal way of functioning

and disciplining. In this scenario, the study was shifted to a purely online mode, wherein the narratives and experiences of girl students studying in co-educational and all-girls schools were taken. It is from the answers collected from these respondents that the research questions laid out in the beginning were sought to be answered. The fieldwork conducted in schools provided an outlook into the ways in which disciplining is imposed, although gendered differences took a backseat due to inability of conducting classroom observation.

The initial days of fieldwork at school constituted visiting those schools, and being observed in the conduct of daily activities such as assembly and then the classroom interaction. The strict systems of discipline for each of the schools was very evident from the beginning, with laid down signs and symbols, which the students understood and were expected to abide by. This included the keen attention paid to the school bell, whose every gong had separate instructions. The ringing of the bell immediately required all the students to form a line for the assembly, with uniformity and disciplinary rules in place, about the gender separation, height filtering and the acceptable distance among one another. There is also a strict urgency at such times to ‘maintain silence’ and to ‘stand straight’. Moreover, the instructions given in the form of *saavdhan* and *bishram* also dictated the ways in which they were supposed to stand at what time or part of the assembly. The failure to stick to these strict rules involved being scolded by the teachers who acted as the disciplinarians in this regard. Following the end of the assembly, the line which proceeded to the classroom was met with a team of teachers and students who were responsible for checking the uniform, and overall appearance of the students. Many of them would get pulled out of the line on the pretext on long and uncut nails, wearing *mehendi* on hands or other forms of make up, and more so in the case of girls, the length of the skirt, the length of the socks, etc. This constituted an elaborate and intense ritual of every day in school, which also most of the students agreed to dreading it the most.

For the part of conducting interviews, the sample of girls were selected through the snowball sampling method, who agreed to give narratives of their gendered experiences. A list of questions were prepared, but the questions were largely unstructured, and more emphasis was laid on the direction in which the respondents preferred to take the interview,

dwelling from their narratives and experiences. This was the major source of data collection for the study, as the field work observation was limited in nature due to the pandemic induced barriers.

Following the interviews of the respondents, a case study of five of such interviewees were taken, so as to reach an in-depth understanding of the issue. These case studies enabled the researcher to push forward in learning about the particular experiences of gendered schooling, which also enabled an insight into the psyche of the enforcer, by means of analysing the statements which accompanied the sanctions involved. It also acted as an inlet into the various other interviews conducted, by means of highlighting the cases in which the results were stark.

### 3.6 Tools used

The study required use of qualitative methods of inquiry, which were used to arrive at an attempt to answer the research questions outlined at the beginning of the study. The first method which was used was that of the observation method. With respect to the first research question, relating to the school's role in facilitating gender socialisation and sensitisation, the restrictions and difficulties imposed by the pandemic created barriers to efficient data collection. In this case, however, the initial field exposure shed light on how schools function as discipline nets, setting boundaries for normal and relaxed behaviour, developing conformist children, who were taught to obey signs and commands under the strict vigil of disciplinarians specially placed for the purpose. Besides, separation between the two genders could be seen in the general nature of conduct in the playground, before classes began.

Secondly, the interview method acted as the second tool in aiding the data collection process in schools. Unstructured telephonic interviews with the respondents contributed to a major chunk of the data that was collected as part of the research undertaken in this study. A list of questions were prepared which followed the general guideline, but no strict adherence to those particular questions only enabled the researcher to pick up other information with relation to gender grooming ways, a part of which was aided by the girls providing lengthy narratives of their particular experiences.

The third tool is that of the case study method. The case study method focused on five respondents, to represent their story in the research, so as to get an idea of the manner in which the girl children are 'schooled'. This helps to shed light on the hidden curriculum, because most of the instructions given to students in this regard are not part of the formally laid down rules, rather they are subtle and covert ways of ensuring and maintaining the continuation of the social order.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysis**

The methodology outlined in the previous chapters of the study sheds light on the manner in which the data was collected for the purpose of the research, by means of the various tools. First, the observation method and secondly, the interviews have attempted to address the major theme of the study, as has been reflected in the title- ‘Schooling the Girl Child: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum on Femininity’. From this analysis, five case studies have been selected and drawn, in order to engage in an in-depth understanding of the issue.

The observation method as applied in schools, to observe the functioning of schools, as well as the gendered differences in terms of sexism, was hampered to a large extent due to the pandemic and related restrictions on the functioning of educational institutions. As most of the classes were conducted in a hybrid mode (half online and half offline), the data collected from these sources at the given point of time is very fluid and hence cannot be used to establish the findings as an in-depth analysis of the education system in schools. The main emphasis is therefore on the information collected through unstructured interviews, which facilitated the narrations of girl students of their experiences in schools, as well as developing case studies from these descriptions, which we shall set as the basis upon which the results of the study have been arrived at.

In an attempt to conduct observation of the manner of gender differentiation in schools and the resulting sexism which arises from there, visits were made to the selected schools and very basic information about discipline systems, as were functioning in the pandemic induced circumstances, were collected. This shed light on the importance of the significance of each bell and command, right upon entering the school, which is reflective of the ritualised system of functioning which is unique to each institution. The students are well aware and prompt in responding to these instructions, which brings the focus on to the ways in which children are taught to conform to societal norms, by means of signs and commands, as part of their initiation into wider society. This is where Foucault’s concept of

discipline systems in prisons can be applied as the broader and overarching theme, in that the posture and bodily movements of students are restricted to a great deal, while they are within the boundaries of the institutionalised school system. The existence of strict disciplinary rules when it comes to maintaining silence, a certain erect posture, as well as one arm distance between one another in the assembly line points to the rigid nature of these systems. An inspection of the uniform and other aspects of appearance before entering the classrooms, attempts to control and produce a generation of students who are bound by a strict social order, and maintain its continuity by means of conformity and adherence to its norms and existing social structure.

Following the preliminary insight into discipline systems and the functioning of schools, the main focus of the study, that is, the schooling of the girl child by means of the hidden curriculum, is analysed by means of interpreting the information collected from the interviews. The interviews conducted are largely unstructured, but seeks to touch upon various aspects of the school experience for girl students, as well as the manner in which they were made to feel aware of the gender categorisation and their simultaneous identification. The experiences of the girls are indicative of how they are schooled, and following from that, the manner in which they are schooled is reflective of the hidden curriculum and the way it functions to ensure conformity to gender norms. It is these two aspects of the study, that is the schooling of the girl child, and the hidden curriculum on femininity, which have been examined and explored in this chapter, and thereby seeks to answer the research questions as outlined in the beginning of the study.

#### **4.1 ‘Schooling’ the Girl Child**

The institutionalised nature of schooling functions primarily on the premise that young children have to be socialised and educated as future members of the society, who will comprise the core of the system and aid its functioning. The whole concept of the term ‘schooling’ which largely refers to indoctrination of some kind, takes within its ambit this idea which thereby goes on to reinforce and distill into young minds, the social order. The construct of this social order rests on a large number of factors, basically structured around the contextual set up of the society of which it is a part. It is by means of the hidden curriculum that this function of the school is carried out. This involves lessons in punctuality, morality, ethics, awareness of identities and their position in society, and simultaneous association or identification with groups.

As the research conducted has revealed, girl students during their tenure in schools are taught and socialised in ways which seek to reinforce notions of femininity and womanhood, as it exists in their society. Among the many identities of which they are a part, gender is the most prominent one which sets them apart from boys and something they are made aware of since the early stages. Respondents have claimed that strict differentiation has always existed between the two genders, right from separation in assembly lines up to the pattern of seating arrangement in classrooms. This division into the two fixed binaries has often called for the visible differentiating markers which set apart the two genders, and often act as a barrier to assimilation or dictate the terms of interaction. This idea arises from the binary categorisation which facilitates the perpetuation of the social order, without threatening the hierarchical separation, as it exists in society.

The whole study has revealed the fragility of the system, which restricts questioning and encourages conformity, whose foundations can be shaken by the mere breaking of boundaries by a handful of children who resist the impositions being set on their free will. As such, strict disciplinarian sanctions are in place, which most respondents have

confirmed to have been invoked for them, thereby attempting to curb their freedom and basic spontaneity or individuality.

The interactions with the girl students as respondents have also managed to shed light on the thoughts and narratives which prompt such action to be undertaken or to restrict. This helps to reveal the larger backdrop and background of the cultural context within which the said pattern of behaviour exists. Focused within the gender dynamic, it acts as an insight into the moral ideas as well as cultural ordering of the society, which rests on a basic premise of patriarchy and reinforces stereotypes, ideas and notions about the fixed position of each individual on the gender hierarchy. Besides facilitating the enforcement of the gendered patterns of behaviour, these thought processes find their justification and endorsement in the school textbooks, or the prescribed curriculum, which reinforce gender stereotypes relating to occupation and conduct, and thereby perpetuate the hegemonic domination of one gender over the other.

The practices and behaviour patterns of casual sexism as it appears in the day-to-day functioning of the institution of school can be analysed under the following identified themes, which cover the various societal perceptions of gender differentiation and inequality as it exists in the context of Guwahati city, amongst the urban middle class.



#### 4.1.1 Power Dynamics

The polarisation of the masculine and feminine as two extreme ends of a spectrum indicates the existence of an inherent power structure being built into the very separation of the two. The social construction of this basic idea signifies a certain status, and the associated power that comes with it. Like the rest of the country, in this context as well, the way that women treat and conduct their bodies in public, can be seen as a sign of subordination, by virtue of belonging to the female sex. Similarly, young girls going to school are taught to adopt a similar posture and conduct, as the cultural ordering dictates. The young girls who participated in the research recalled instances of being called out for sitting in an ‘improper’ way if their legs were spread out wide, or their hands outstretched, basically cases where they seem to be occupying more space than what is considered appropriate for their gender. As such, body positions which reflect a demure posture, legs crossed up at the knees, hands firmly close up to the body are manifestations of the idea that the public sphere is dominantly the realm of men, while women have to tread carefully and not assert their presence. A woman’s narrative in a similar article claims how girls generally tend to have a ‘don’t notice me’ posture, with rounded shoulders and indrawn chests (Gopalakrishnan, 2022). All the respondents of the study have echoed this sentiment. The girls studying in all-girls schools are taught such things as part of the norm, while girls in co-educational schools could notice the stark difference in the way in which they were schooled into taking up less space than their male counterparts. The development of five case study accounts from this analysis, later elaborated in this study, also shed an insight into the ways in which the girls who threaten this body language separation, are ‘schooled’ into behaving in accordance with their gender.

Aside from the physical posture, the tone of the voice, the framing of sentences, riddled with inflections of doubt are all contributors to the power dynamic which is dictated by the larger social world order (Gopalakrishnan, 2022). The author argues that all these behaviour patterns are part of women being taught to be meek and agreeable, so that their opinion does not question or challenge the existing order. It often finds expression in women averting their gaze while walking, offering drawstring smiles to others, etc. The article also claims that study patterns have revealed how men tend to talk as if they belong

to a higher genetic order, while women tend to talk as if they are of lower genetic order. The obvious manifestations of these are reflected in ways in which women question rather than declare, soften their sentences with qualifiers, listen in an encouraging manner and so on (Ibid). Such behavioural differences are not part of any biological differences between men and women, but rather societal conditioning into ways of masculinity and femininity, which focuses on young girls to school them into feminine behaviour patterns from an early age onwards. Few girls who exhibited a conduct which wavered from this ideal, were schooled into what was deemed appropriate for them. For instance, the girls who were comfortable sporting short hair, were repeatedly asked to put on a hairband at all times, as a marker of their 'femininity'. The case of the loud and boisterous girl can also be seen as an instance in which such conduct from the part of girls is not acceptable, and who need to be taught how to speak more like a lady.

Practices such as restricting bodily gestures and voice patterns as part of the association with a particular gender, seek to put in place clear power dynamics which signify a relationship of domination and subordination. In this process, personal features or natural characteristics of young children are often tweaked or 'corrected' to fit the dominant narrative or idea about the position of each gender on the hierarchical ladder. This entails schooling children into gender-specific ways to ensure the normal continuation.

#### **4.1.2 Accessibility and acceptance in public spaces**

Public spaces have, for ages, come to be dominated by men, while women were relegated to the private domain of the household. However, with women carving a space for themselves in the public domain, their presence in this domain has been noticed and acknowledged. Despite that, the presentability and acceptance of the demeanour with which women conduct themselves in this regard continue to guide societal prejudices.

The access to public spaces for women is guided and monitored by a variety of factors. With a firm resolve to keep women in their 'position', society functions in ways of threatening or punishing girls who seek to assert their dominance in the outside world. This

can be seen in the societal gaze on character, habits, as well as dressing. Most of the girls in schools are schooled for their uniform, skirts which are not long enough, or shirts which are not covering enough. Their manner of dressing is profoundly impacted not by comfort, but basically guided by society's notion of what is deemed 'appropriate' and 'acceptable'. Many girls recall being called out for wearing colourful innerwear, or having their dignity compromised by checking the length of their inner concealer. Teachers and disciplinarians have gone to the extent of accusing girls of trying to molest their male friends, or attempting to 'excite' them. One respondent reported being traumatised by a teacher saying, "How do you manage to get the boys around you so excited?".

The public place of the school, even in cases of all girls' schools, have strict undertones when it comes to dressing and appearance. These are strictly layered on top of notions which consider it a favour to girls of being able to be a part of this space, but having to know their place within it by acting or behaving in accordance with the moral guidelines of society.

#### **4.1.3 The societal gaze on 'character'**

The access and acceptance in public spaces is shaped by a fierce gaze on the 'character' of young girls and women, curtailing and restricting their freedom and choice to a large extent. This stems from the idea of having to fit in, by occupying less space, and not being distinctly visible in the public space. Girl students therefore have to carefully navigate the line drawn between proper and improper dress and behaviour, in a society which is quick to judge them on the basis of their dress and actions. This creates a categorisation of girl students into 'good' ones and 'bad' ones, which has also been demonstrated by Robinson in his research. The respondents of this particular study have shared a similar concern, wherein their personal styles and choices were curbed on the accusation of 'seeking attention', by giving out a vibe of having 'loose character'. Several students have been a victim of this claim, whereby one reported having had to dye her hair to the natural colour after having dyed it in a different shade, and many more having to let go of accessories they chose to wear to school on some days. This went against the 'disciplinary uniform' of

the school, which wanted girl students to strictly adhere to the ‘ethical dress code’, one which would be accepted by the larger society, and not bring a ‘bad name’ to the school.

A school’s reputation seems to ride highly on the moral conduct of its girl students, as is the case with any patriarchal community or society. Strict sanctions therefore govern the freedom and movement of these women, who are forced to toe the line in accordance with the rules set in place, failing which, serious consequences were threatened. A lot of girls responded by saying that their parents have been called on numerous occasions at the behest of ‘unruly’ conduct of their daughter, thus shaming their parenting, and as such making things worse for girls at their homes. Any patriarchal society thrives by controlling the women in a way that their free will is curbed and their ability to assert themselves in the public space. It is only by such measures that the power dynamic of the social order is maintained.

#### **4.1.4 Ensuring “safety” of the female sex from the pervasive fear of rape, assault or harassment**

In a society where crimes against women are constantly on the rise, with sexual predators feasting on girls of every age, the responsibility to prevent such crimes is often and still being put on the shoulders of young girls. Phrases like ‘men will be men’ take away the burden of crime from the hands of the perpetrators to that of the victim, to ensure their own safety. Notions and opinions of this nature prompt the efforts being made to contain such crimes in the wrong direction. As many girl students reflected, hearing things like, “sit properly”, or “dress decently” were basically forms of teaching girl students to conduct themselves in a manner so as not to get ‘raped’ or ‘assaulted’ because of their posture. The sexual underpinnings of such statements are merely translated to women ‘deserving’ or ‘asking for it’ in case of any eventuality of such a kind. These were frequently found in the distinct categorisations of girls into ‘decent’ or ‘loose’ girls, to justify acts of sexual assault on women. The standard perception of girls who were ‘loud’ in their appearance, in the form of wearing makeup, colouring their hair, or wearing bold colours, were categorised as the ones who were seeking to attract attention from men.

The disciplining in terms of uniform especially, is validated from this premise, in the name of ensuring the safety of the girls. Girls of one particular school especially expressed their unease when their skirts would be lifted to check the length of their vest, one which was mandatory to be worn over the innerwear, so that it does not shine through or is seen by outsiders. Lessons on moral sciences also constantly slut shame girls for their dress choices, with assertions being made about the 'type' of girls who get raped. This formed a major chunk of the time in schools being spent on checking the way the uniform was worn, into what was deemed 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate'. The obvious justification is to prevent their girls from getting 'raped', or from piquing the interest or curiosity of their male peers, instead of teaching the boys to learn to respect women, their bodies and space, along with the idea of consent.

The larger idea dominating the issue surrounding gender in any society circles around the notion that women comprise the weaker and subordinate sex, who need to be 'protected' and whose safety needs to be ensured by the self-proclaimed guardians of 'moral' society. As such, as this chapter discussed, the power dynamics of society functions in a very hierarchical manner and the continuation of this order rests on the prevalence of existing relations among groups as they are. The assertion by any community or identity group for its own self results in threatening the social order which leads to conflicts. The idea is to abstain from any kind of conflict, primarily ensured by those who are in power, so that their position is not challenged.

## 4.2 Analysing the Hidden Curriculum

The seeming differences between men and women are most evidently expressed through clothing, patterns of behaviour, and the manner in which they conduct their bodies. The seeming naturalness of this difference however, can be argued, is a social construction of the gendered structuring of the social order. The functional necessity of society to function in particular ways are guided and shaped by the manner in which people conduct themselves in accordance with this functionality, and thereby serve to facilitate the maintenance of status quo. By organising and presenting our bodies in gender specific ways, the maintenance of the social order, through gender hierarchy is maintained. This is where the role of the hidden curriculum of schools comes into focus. The traits of masculinity and femininity are not biological manifestations of sex, but are culturally constructed, appropriated and instilled into new members of society. While this happens over an elaborate process of gender socialisation and differentiation all throughout life, schools play an important role by assuming it as part of the education which they impart to young children, although not part of the formal curriculum. It is a standard characteristic social feature of the hidden curriculum to reinforce age-old stereotypes and roles, in the name of ethics, morals, values and proper ways of behaviour for women.

As such there are several aspects to this theme which needs to be explored in detail. Gender differentiation is the basis of the maintenance of the social order, which in turn rests on gender socialisation to facilitate this. All of these concepts are centred around the whole idea of 'doing gender', which refers to performative acts of masculinity and femininity. These acts are shaped by the contextual cultural expectations or the society and community which dictate or dominate the value ethics of the region. This leads to the emergence of specific gender codes which govern the way in which behaviour patterns and conduct of young children are judged, who are required to act according to those ideas.

Entrusted with the task of grooming young children into the ways of the world, schools function to provide not just formal education, but also specific ways of behaviour, attitudes and values. Termed as the hidden curriculum, the teaching of such attributes does not

constitute the prescribed syllabus of classroom teaching. Rather they come with an all-round agenda of training children to become members of the society through the grasping of the innate and complex interplay of various roles and functions within it. In this way it seeks to maintain the status quo by reflecting the functioning of the society exactly as it is, behaviour patterns enforced with sanctions to avoid deviations.

#### **4.2.1 Gender differentiation**

Gender differentiated treatment in classrooms is the norm, not the exception (Schechter, 2006). The hidden curriculum, as an effective part of gender socialisation, distinguishes girls and boys, and sets them apart from each other in terms of dress, behaviour, voice control, physical attributes, as well as in interactions. Through the creation of these differences, the physical differences between the two genders are made to feel natural (Martin, 1998). This separation is seen and made to be felt when girls and boys form a separate line for attending the assembly, and in some schools, they are made to sit separately too. In an extremely heteronormative society, such steps are taken to avoid intermingling and interaction between the two genders to the maximum extent possible, especially in formal setting when such control can be enforced. The whole narrative basically runs around maintaining the 'image' of the school, which is reflected in the conduct of its students.

School discipline is designed in a way so as to keep the behaviour of students in check, in accordance with their gendered identification. The research conducted by Morris (2005), revealed that in comparative terms, girls' movements are restricted more than boys, and are also expected to exercise greater control over their bodies. This results from the idea of stereotypical femininity and its associated behaviour patterns, which is set as the standard for dictating the ways in which girls are expected to conduct themselves. This differentiation is especially felt in co-educational schools where girls saw the stark contrast in which their bodies were more strictly governed or controlled, as opposed to their male counterparts. The effort is consciously made in the direction of making girl students aware

of their vulnerability as the female sex, and many girls felt being side-lined when it came to hard core career choices.

The respondents of the study claimed that they were made aware of the gender differences between them and boys from as long as they could remember. The whole idea of separation, be it in assembly lines or in classroom seating, or eyebrows being raised over a girl and a boy sitting together or being friends, instilled in them this idea that the two genders are very separate and it is important to maintain separation from the other, in order to maintain the difference. As also highlighted in the secondary literature on the same, the differences in terms of voice, behaviour and conduct are made to feel natural and deviation from any one belonging to either gender was met with strict repression. This idea of separation and differentiation is what is felt natural by society, and hence facilitated to be enforced by means of the hidden curriculum.

#### **4.2.2 Gender socialisation:**

Gender socialisation as a process starts right from birth, and hence children are already exposed to some amount of socialisation before they enter schools. Schools play the role of extending this process, in accordance with the ways of the society, working to ensure the maintenance of the social order. Children are taught to behave in accordance to the groups or categories that they are taught to identify themselves with. Besides the overt curriculum of schools, lessons on ‘how to speak, what to wear, how to move their bodies and ultimately, how to inhabit different race, class and gender positions’ are also imparted to the students (Morris, 2005, Pg. 44). Gender socialisation eventually leads to gender discrimination (Pokharel, 2013).

Starting with the differentiation process, girl students are made to be aware of their bodies and in this way they should take care of ‘covering up’ or ‘protecting themselves’ from the male gaze. The emphasis is towards girls, as one reported girl being accused of “exciting” the boys around her. This had underlying subtleties about the conduct of the girl and how she was considered as one of having a “loose” category, and being categorised as having



low moral values, which needed 'fixing'. This kind of socialisation is also a way of showing female students their place in the society, instilling the fact that they shall always be subordinate and vulnerable in front of the opposite sex, as a result of which they needed to guide their behaviour accordingly. The girl being asked the question about "exciting" boys around her was called out not because of her uniform, but primarily because of the tone of her voice, and her free spirited will, which was seemingly "un-ladylike" for the standards of the school.

Moreover, frequent recourse to statements which emphasise on the mannerisms and conduct of what it is to be an ideal woman in society, is part of a larger process of gender socialisation which attempts to ingrain socially constructed notions of femininity onto the young girls. Disciplining in terms of wearing the hair in braids or putting on a hairband to avoid looking like a boy are all indicative of the hidden curriculum on femininity.

#### **4.2.3 Gender codes:**

The general notion which serves the creation of gender codes places boys as the naturally aggressive, loud and unruly gender, while girls are expected to be polite, submissive and obedient. Structured along lines of traditional stereotypes, these gender codes dictate the boundaries for student behaviour. Any kind of deviation from this standard behavioural tendency involves sanctions. More so for girls, failing to stick to traditional feminine etiquette invites criticism and judgement with regard to their moral character as well.

This process of gendered disciplining, Riddell (1989) argues, is essentially dialectical, in that, teachers base their coping strategies (of classroom control) on their typification of male and female pupils, while pupils respond either by conforming, or by resisting teachers' authority through the parody and contradiction of these gender codes. The established gender codes dictate the boundaries within which students are expected to behave. This leads to their eventual categorisation into pre-fixed categories, as namely, 'good girls', 'bad/difficult girls', 'tarty girls' (Robinson, 1992). This is the manner in which the teachers deal with the students, after this essential typification, is soft tones,

harsh tones or disciplining tones, on the basis of the category of good, bad or tarty that they belong to.

Drawing from the literature available from the secondary sources of data collection, the primary information also revealed the existence of gender codes when it came to disciplining girls who were seen as deviating from the ideal of the feminine, and were acting in ways which were more characteristic of boys. These girls complained of being schooled in terms of ways of speaking and behaviour, as well as being forced to engage in more feminine activities. The loud and aggressive nature of a certain girl was seen to be a deviation, and she was frequently told to behave in ways which were more characteristic of her gender.

These codes were also largely apparent when separate classes or seminars are held for girls to teach them about reproduction and menstruation, while boys are left guessing about what happens behind these closed doors.

#### **4.2.4 Gendered behaviour**

The idea of ‘doing gender’, that is developing gendered behaviour, stems from the idea of gender as a performance. Bodily differences are manifested in the way people are supposed to conduct their bodies in accordance with their gender. Gender is a performance, which suggests that it is through bodies that are managed, adorned and fashioned in particular ways, that gender and gender relations are established.

After having established the existence of gender codes, or proper ways of behaving for men and women, the manner in which they are required to perform in accordance with these codes is the larger idea of what it means to be ‘doing gender’. This highlights the social constructions of the word gender even more, as it is seen as something to be performed, and not a natural manifestation of the bodily differences between the two sexes.

The schooling of girls who choose to wear their hair short, or talk in a boisterous or aggressive tone is what is the primary argument of this theme. By means of displaying

certain bodily conducts or fashion adornments, these girls threaten to break the stereotypical images of gender construct as it exists in society. The hidden curriculum, through disciplining these girls, is carrying out the larger work of facilitating the gender differences, so as to maintain the hierarchical ordering of the social structure.

After having analysed the two major parts of the study and the title, the schooling of the girl child and exploring the hidden curriculum on femininity, the research questions pertaining to the manner in which schools facilitate and maintain gender differences is sought to be answered. From the above analysis of the data collected through observation method and conduct of interviews, five case studies have been developed which offer more insight into the specific problems faced by girls. The chapter following that and the final chapter, that is the conclusion, tries to bring together all of these separate themes to weave the study as a larger question of the role of schools in constructing social ideas and identities with respect to masculinity and femininity.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Case study analysis**

The case studies for this particular study have been conducted among the sample chosen for the larger study, to be able to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the issue, and the finer nuances when it comes to knowing about the experiences of girls in schools. Drawing from the analysis laid out in the previous chapter, this chapter seeks to shed light on specific instances and experiences which highlight the real issue.

While the study has focused on middle class families in general, the schools that have been covered in this regard are also therefore those catering to the urban middle class, in the city of Guwahati. Representatives from both all girls as well as co-educational schools have been considered in this regard. The sample selected for the study, which forms the superset of the ones collected for the case study, fall in the age range of 16-19 years, students belonging to the high-school section.

The rationale behind undertaking five case studies from the sample selected for the purpose of the study is to delve deeper into the schooling of the girl child, by focusing on particular instances and experiences, which have larger connotations for the way gender has been shaped for the young girls. The narratives which have been shared by the girls are all reflective of the broader hidden curriculum, which is otherwise vague and generalised, and vary contextually, as well as from school to school. An understanding of what essentially constitutes the hidden curriculum in schools, is therefore also attempted to be analysed through the help of the following case studies as have been elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The case studies undertaken reflect several themes running through them, which basically pans over sexuality, its understanding and manifestation, gender, the dynamics and differentiation of it, and finally, the categorisation of girl students on the basis of their conduct, behaviour and mannerisms. The analysis done at the end of it will deal with these issues in greater detail.

The names of the respondents have been changed in each of the case studies, to give anonymity and respect their boundaries. The schools have also been listed generally and not been named, except for mentioning the category, that is all girls, or co-educational schools.

### **Profile of case 1:**

Ashmita, 17 years of age, attended an all girls' school, right from kindergarten up to class tenth. She, along with her sister, were both sent to the same school, as her parents wanted strict disciplinarian values in each of their children, which is the hallmark of the school they attend. The school in question is one of the oldest English medium schools in the city. It is a semi-private institution, which caters to a large population of the urban middle class. The strict disciplinarian systems which the school boasts of, also acts as a good option for parents who prefer all girls' school for their daughters, for fear of intermingling with the other gender during their school time. The opposition to interaction and engagement with boys arises from an aversion to romantic relations being developed at schools, which parents feel would have an impact on the academic performance of their children.

### **The case:**

Ashmita spent her entire school life in the same school, and claims that all her ideas of conduct and norms are shaped by the overarching values that the institution holds dear. Given the strict disciplinarian nature of the school, a strict vigil was kept on the way the girls wore their uniform, did their hair, and their overall appearance in terms of neatness and tidiness. These two factors largely shaped the idea of 'character', which is based on the manner in which the girls conduct their appearance.

Regarding the uniform, Ashmita claimed having felt violated many times during uniform checking at assemblies, when she was called out for her skirt being 'too short' or her shirt not being tucked in properly. The strict vigil on these aspects of the uniform was defended by the assertion that such 'loose' depiction of the self could lead to unwanted attention from boys/men, including those of male teachers and other staff at school.

Makeup and other aspects of beautifying tendencies are met with strict suppression, and kept well out of bounds, as part of the school uniform. Ashmita recalls once being pulled out of the assembly line for wearing *kajal* in her eyes. She was at once asked to wash it before she was allowed to enter the classroom. One instance of harsh repression that stands out for her, as she narrated, was once when she had dyed a strand of her hair in 8<sup>th</sup> standard. This seemingly outrageous act of hers created a great ripple in the school, and after morning assembly she was required to see the headmistress, as the teachers responsible for checking uniforms were unsure of the manner in which to handle this particular case of appearance violation. The ultimate punishment in this regard was a written note to the parents, complaining about the spiralling conduct of the girl, and how she needed to be “kept in check” by her parents, to avoid such actions in the future. Moreover, she was also asked to dye her hair back to the original colour, a financial expense, as well as a violation of the basic autonomy that a person has over aspects of their appearance. This also caused her a huge deal of embarrassment among her classmates, as well as invited the wrath of her parents for the ‘shame’ that was brought to the family because of this act of hers.

### **Profile of case 2:**

Payal, 16 years of age, has been attending the same co-educational school all her life. This was a private educational institute, at the heart of Guwahati city, and much sought after for its excellence in academic as well as other co-curricular activities. She is an only child in her family, and comes from a relatively well-off family background, the reason for which they could afford one of the more expensive schools in the city for their daughter.

### **The case:**

Responding to the questions asked in the interview, Payal narrated instances of various times when she has been subject to slut shaming tendencies by her teachers, as well as being pointed out for problems in her behaviour, which were in violation of the normative

and expected behavioural conduct of girls in society. Her understanding of gender is therefore largely shaped by ideas of conformity and rigidity about what it is to belong to one particular gender group, of the existing binary differentiation. She claims that boys of her school, on the other hand, although equally having to face strict disciplinarian norms, were not penalised on the basis of gender appropriate behaviour. As a result, Payal has been schooled to think of gender dynamics as one being unfairly tilted in favour of men, while the responsibility for their safety lies essentially in the hands of young girls themselves, including protection from the ‘male gaze’.

She recalls an incident in which a female teacher had called her over from the classroom and insulted her for wearing colourful underwear beneath her white t-shirt. She was pointed out for the ‘indecent’ act, and as such consequently came to be known among the teachers as one who needed to be ‘kept an eye on’. In yet another instance, which she claims as being horrific and traumatising for her, was when a teacher asked her as to why the boys around her always seemed ‘excited’. This thought being implanted in her head led her to believe that she was somehow responsible for the way the boys in the school behaved with her. It resulted in her questioning the friendships that she had developed throughout her school life. Also owing to the fact that she had many friends who belonged to the opposite gender, she was automatically categorised as what in common parlance roughly translates to a ‘loose girl’.

### **Profile of case 3:**

Konkona, 19 years of age, attended an all girls’ school in Guwahati. She comes from a middle-income family background, and has a sibling brother. Coming from a family having a strong inclination towards sports, she was one of the better sportspersons in her school. She has also represented her school in various sporting events such as basketball and kho-kho, at inter-school tournaments.

**The case:**

As per the information revealed through the interview, Konkona had a very conflicted relationship with the teachers in her school. She claimed to have had strong oppositions to the ways in which her demeanour, posture and conduct were constrained, as not being 'feminine' enough, as is expected of young girls of her age. Teachers in her school repeatedly asked her to *sit like a girl* (that sitting with legs spread wide is a sign of masculinity), and to walk with her hands closer to her chest (*as ladies do*). Her body language and outward appearance relegated her to be viewed as a tom-boy, who was thereby effectively categorised by her teachers as a 'difficult girl', who needed to be 'tamed' into ways of femininity. Konkona also preferred to keep her hair short, which again caused the teachers to point out the necessary wearing of a hairband, so as to make her 'look' feminine. Her keen interest in sports was well appreciated during sporting events, but she also recalled being forcefully asked to participate in more 'feminine' activities, such as flower arrangement and salad dressing competitions.

Konkona's appearance which aligned with the typical image of a boy also piqued the interest of other girls in the school, making her one of the popular figures who were looked up to and admired. This, as feared and lamented by the teachers, gave rise to feelings of intersexual intimacy and attraction, which was a major threat to the dominant heterosexual nature of the society.

**Profile of case 4:**

Rashmi, 17 years of age, attended an all girls' school in Guwahati, a school which was highly renowned and sought after by the middle school sections of the society. Both Rashmi and her younger sister attended the same school.



**The case:**

The interview with Rashmi revealed that she was one of the girls in the school who was considered 'ideal', and set as the benchmark for other girls to emulate and look up to. She was also a favourite among all the teachers, mainly owing to the fact that her appearance was 'neat', with respect to the way she did her hair and wore her uniform, and hence more often than not selected as the captain of the class. Her duty in this role, besides academic purposes, was to check the uniform of her classmates, ensuring that they were kept in check. In this regard, she remembers the instructions that were given to her, while conducting the check, some of them which even required her to lift the skirts of girls, in order to check the length of their slip. While Rashmi herself was uncomfortable doing this, she also spoke about the irk she drew from the other girls during these sessions.

Rashmi's academic prowess, as well as her obedience and conduct inside the classroom, were set as the standard of the ideal girl child. She even cited instances whereby the seating pattern was arranged in such a way that she herself, and a few other similarly categorised 'good' girls were given permanent places in the front row, and other girls who 'required help' were made to sit with them, with the implicit assumption that the so-called 'good' girls would have a positive impact on those who needed it.

The responsibilities laid on Rashmi were also in a way overwhelming for her, as she claimed, since she had set standards and expectations to live up to, with little margin for error from her side. This involved simultaneous pressure both from her teachers as well as her parents. She could not afford to underperform in any exam, while at the same time, being aware of the hostile attitude she garnered from most students, being seen as a teacher's pet. Overall, for Rashmi, her school experience so far has been strictly bound by a conformist agenda, which she happened to confirm by virtue of her natural attitude, while at the same time being prompted to convince others to follow the same.

**Profile of case 5:**

Manisha, 17 years of age, is the single child of her parents. She attended an all girls' school initially, up to the fourth standard, after which her parents moved her to a co-educational school. The basic motive behind undertaking this step was to ensure that their daughter got a better exposure in co-curricular activities, as per her interests, which were more encouraged in the latter school.

**The case:**

“Manisha is a ‘loud, boisterous and talkative’ girl”, she recalls being described by her class teacher in her previous all girls' school, during a parent teacher meeting. Being an extrovert person with a loud voice, Manisha was used to this personality of hers being in constant conflict with the teachers of her school, by means of challenging the stereotypical feminine character of the ideal student. She recalls being ‘put in place’ many times for her ‘loud and aggressive’ demeanour. Her keen interest in sports, the tone and pitch of her voice, her personality and conduct were all seen to be characteristic of typical ‘tom-boyish’ attitudes. She was many a times asked to walk properly or stand straight during the assembly, being told that restless fidgeting and ‘shaking the legs’ is symptomatic of how boys behave, and not how girls are supposed to conduct themselves.

In due course of her shift to the second school, which was a co-educational one, Manisha appeared to face similar problems with regard to her demeanour and conduct. After having been schooled appropriately by the previous school, her attitude in the second school also tilted her towards the ways in which the boys of her class behaved, and she was called out and pointed out the same. She remembers being told of the essential differentiation between the two genders and how her behaviour resembled that of the ways of behaviour of the boys. This she was told was not acceptable as per the conduct which was expected of her, by virtue of being a woman.

## **Discussion:**

As argued before, the presentation of the five case studies presents before us three interrelated themes for understanding the manner in which the girl child is schooled by means of the hidden curriculum. These include gender dynamics, sexuality, and the essential categorisation of girl students on the basis of their conduct and behaviour.

The first case of Ashmita points to the unfair assumptions being made on a girl's character on the basis of their appearance. This results in the creation of the 'tarty' girl category, into which non-conformist attitudes or behaviour patterns are shoved into. Drawing from Robinson's (1992) argument of this categorisation, we can argue that girls students are minutely observed for behaviour conduct along the scale of morals and values as identified by the society of which they are a part. Ashmita's seemingly rebellious attitude of creating a certain perception about her appearance prompted immediate intervention from the school authorities to make her 'toe the line' for sticking to standards of 'decency', as was expected as per the image of the school. The issues of decency and acceptance in public spaces are intricately wound up with the larger cultural idea of what is expected of women from their presence in public places, being strictly governed by a moral compass which draws a thin line of differentiation between appropriate/ acceptable and inappropriate/unacceptable appearances and behaviour.

The experience of Payal, as discussed in the second case study, is evident of the ways in which society treats its women, and how schools ensure the grooming to be done in particular ways so as to meet the needs of the cultural expectation of society. The association of character and image with the way of dress and behaviour is a common way to make girls adhere to the vaguely constructed notion of 'decency'. The whole idea of pointing out colourful underwear as a problem to be addressed, is part of a larger problem which grapples with the acceptance of women in public spaces. With women making their entry into these spaces as well as making their presence felt, society attempts to stifle them by coercing them to occupy less space and remain invisible, and all aspects of their sexuality being strictly confined to the private sphere, in a move to refrain drawing any kind of attention to themselves.

With regard to the question of “exciting” boys around her and the regular idea of having a ‘loose’ character on the basis of the number of friends from the opposite gender that one has, fits into the narrative of a general idea that boys will be boys, and the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the girls lie purely upon the shoulders of the women themselves. In a society with constantly increasing crimes against women, it is such a thought process and ideology that shifts the whole discourse in the wrong direction, and which precisely is the root cause of the problem. In a film which wonderfully illustrates this issue (Pink, 2016), the argument is that the attempt to keep these crimes in check have been unsuccessful because all the efforts are being made in the wrong direction. It is precisely the need of the hour to educate boys on how to respect ideas of boundaries and consent, and not girls, on how to cover and protect themselves.

The issue of having ‘boyfriends’ in school or any romantic partner for that instance, also rests heavily on the assumption that young children during their time in school should primarily focus on academics and not any other source of distraction. It is also a largely heterosexual understanding of the way romantic relationships are imagined and understood, with very little tolerance for intermingling at an early age. To sum up, this case highlights the sexist nature of the cultural setting of Guwahati city, which penalises and shames girls for the attention and interest that they acquire from the other gender. The basic idea is to remain invisible, while focusing on your studies, and preventing oneself from being taken advantage of, by virtue of their characteristic labelling.

The particular case of Konkona very effectively highlights the social construction of the word gender. As per our basic socialisation, ways of masculine and feminine behaviour are at two ends of the spectrum, with sharp distinction being made between the two. The stigma associated with not being ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ enough is associated with the larger idea of power dynamics within society. This stems from the hierarchical separation between the two genders, with the former being considered superior to the latter. In this regard, it is imperative for society, in order to ensure the maintenance of the social order, to keep the two genders separate from one another. This distinction serves to facilitate the status quo of society by keeping the conduct of its members in check, as is in accordance with their identity affiliation.

Femininity, or ways of womanhood, are dictated by set standards for feminine in each culture. As highlighted by this case, girls ought to have long hair, or accessorise their hair to fit into the set standard of what it is to '*look like a woman*'. The girl in question, as such, had to grapple with identity issues simply by choosing to look a certain way, and by means of her interests. 'Feminine' activities such as flower arrangement, as is the case here are encouraged and propagated for young girl children to adopt and take an interest in, in accordance with the societal understanding of what it is to be a woman.

This case of Rashmi is a classic example of the trope of the 'good' girl as it exists in society, who is set as the ideal benchmark for the rest of the girls to look up to. The notion of the ideal is drawn from cultural notions of femininity, which in the context of Guwahati city, expect girls to be docile, well-mannered and to a large extent, performs well academically. The obedience and passive nature of such a woman is what sets the basis for the notion of the 'ideal women', which facilitates the status quo in the social structuring in society.

The basis for categorisation of girls prompts the need for 'schooling' them into ways of the world. This categorisation is largely based on the concept of feminine and femininity, what it is to be a woman in the particular societal context, and accordingly trained as per the position of the girls on the spectrum, by virtue of the personalities and behaviour patterns.

As Rashmi has already revealed, the pressure of this role is immense, having to live up to several expectations, while at the same time also jeopardising her relationship with that of her peers. As is evident from this case, it is obvious that women are invariably put in positions where they have to compete with one another to prove their worth, or pitted against one another in a way that the victory of one ensures the loss of the other. As such, most girls are taught, from an early age onwards, to be in a constant state of competition to have one upmanship over someone else of their gender. This is the manner in which the training of girls is so rigorous, wherein anything diverging from that of the ideal feminine trope is seen as dangerous to the rest of society.

The fifth case study highlights the idea of femininity and highlights the importance of ensuring its continuity as part of the maintenance of the social order. A social order which

thrives on differentiation and distinction between identities, placed on a hierarchical ordering, seeks to reproduce this very structure. As exemplified in the case of Manisha, her deviation from the expected ideals of 'femininity' came as a challenge to the very basic separation which sustains the social order. The idea of the "loud, boisterous and talkative" female, which tends to spill out of its standard trope and fall into the realm of the masculine, is seen as a threat to the separation between the two genders.

Thus, from the summary and conclusion of all the five case studies, an insight into the way in which the hidden curriculum functions in schools is found. Aside from the formal academic rigour, sometimes subtle and sometimes overt manifestations of expected behaviour types and conduct go on to constitute the hidden curriculum. It is termed so because it is not part of the written legislation of schools. Proper ways of behaving like a lady or speaking like one do not constitute the formal curriculum of schools. But as has been argued from the literature review, schools by acting as miniature versions of larger society, seek to reproduce the hierarchical power relation as it exists. This is what rationalises the concept of 'schooling the girl child', as the primary hypothesis of the study, to reflect the ways in which girl students are 'schooled' into ways of the world by socialising agents, which include the school.

The various instances as depicted by the five case studies shed light on the larger themes of gender dynamics, sexuality, and categorisation of girl students as it happens in schools. The dynamics of gender as they appear to be, are what the students accept as the given, and very rarely tend to question or resist it. By means of putting constraints on the manner in which girls are supposed to behave, and no similar restrictions on boys automatically give the idea that men are placed higher on the hierarchical ladder, and are mostly free to do as they please, in accordance with their gender. The girls have responded to being made aware that they are the weaker sex, who need to take care of being protected by the more dominant other sex.

In terms of sexuality, masculinity and femininity are construed as two ends of a spectrum. The behaviour patterns of children in the middle ranges appear to threaten the very existence of this differentiation, and hence acts as a threat to the social order as it exists.

More often in the case of girls, they are attempted to be schooled in ways by which they need to be more 'feminine' in nature, so as not to create imbalance on the hierarchical spectrum of masculinity and femininity.

The categorisation of girl students has been drawn from the work of Robinson (1992), and it appears to fit into the narratives of the girl students, who were aware of these categories as well as the placement of the girls into them accordingly. This idea has been naturally ingrained in them, as part of a basic socialisation process, and hence produces a batch of children who have very rigid ideas of what constitutes a 'good' or 'bad' girl in society, based on their character attributes.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

The study, '*Schooling the Girl Child: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum on Femininity*', set out with the task of identifying the ways in which gender dynamics are shaped and perpetuated in schools, by laying particular emphasis on the grooming of the girl child. The rationale behind the study has been developed through a lens of feminist thought and literature which questions the social constructions of the term 'gender', and the aim of the study is to therefore analyse the way in which this term has been constructed by one particular institution, that is, schools. Acknowledging the fact that schooling children into ways of masculinity and femininity is not part of the formal curriculum of schools, the concept of the hidden curriculum has been adopted for this purpose. As explained before, it comprises the teaching of attributes and values with regard to attitude and behaviour patterns. The value radar and moral compass of each society varies contextually, and owing to the fact that this is a small-scale study, the city of Guwahati in Assam has been chosen as the field to conduct the research. The population and sample size collected for the study are a small number, and hence cannot be generalised for the entire north-eastern region of India or even for the state of Assam.

The various concepts and ideas which have been mentioned in the title have been explored in themselves throughout the course of the study, and then subsequently interlinked with the larger theme running through it. The development of secondary literature on the topic has helped to gain an in-depth understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of each of the terms, and facilitate the contextualisation of each of these ideas into the field of school education. Against the backdrop of the theoretical connotations, the data collected from the field are examined and analysed to further reach the conclusions for the study.

Starting from John Dewey's idea of schools as miniature societies, the theoretical framework against which the study has been set, is developed. This lays the ground for the assertion that the institution of the school functions to emulate the ways of the larger



society of which it is a part, in the manner in which they function and conduct their day to day activities. This larger conceptual framework is then aided by more educational theories, such as that of Bourdieu's reproduction theory, which emphasises on the reproduction of inequalities through the education system. In sync with this line of thought, Foucault's theory of discipline systems in prisons are invoked to understand the sanctions and rules which are kept in place to ensure conformity and check deviance. Thus, the primary argument of the study, that schools facilitate to reproduce existing gender dynamics, and have rules in place to ensure adherence, is addressed. This leads us to dealing with the larger question of how this process is enabled, wherein comes the first part of the title of the study, the schooling of the girl child.

The whole idea of the schooling of the girl child arises from the essential binary categorisation of the world into two fixed genders, man and woman. As feminist scholars have argued, no person is born into their genders, rather they are socialised and groomed into the ways of the categorisation done on the basis of biological separation. The role of the school in this regard has been examined in terms of 'schooling' the girl child, into behaviour patterns which are considered appropriate for their gender. The interviews conducted as part of the study and the narratives and experiences of the girl students have shed light on the various ways in which their behaviour, attitude and posture has been restrained and constricted so as to fit into the ideal of the feminine. The hypothesis that the study set out with has been confirmed by means of testimonials from school going girls, whose ideas of gender and sexuality are largely shaped by their school experiences. Although a large degree of gendered socialisation also happens by virtue of other agents such as family and society, the role of the school is especially important since it stands out as the most formalised and ritualised practice of gender differentiation as it exists in society.

The contextualisation of the theoretical connotations of the role of the school as reflecting the practices of wider society, reproducing and perpetuating the inequalities within it by means of strict discipline systems, has been aided by ethnographic studies conducted by various researchers on these aspects of gendered school education. The various studies which have been considered for the purpose of this particular study has helped to ascertain

the hypothesis that gender differentiated ways of education are very much a part of the school structure, and the same has been applied by all institutions in ways according to their specific cultural contexts. In the case of India, no particular study has focused on sexuality and gender being developed by schools, with most of the focus and emphasis being laid on gender inequality in terms of access, participation and outcome.

This is the place where the hidden curriculum comes into the picture, by means of subtly and covertly teaching certain attributes and values to the young generation in order to aid the continuation of the social order. The manner in which students are casually pointed out or coerced into wearing the uniform in a particular way, talking or behaving in a particular sense, are all parts of this larger agenda of schools to perpetuate the social hegemony of groups. Along with being celebrated and acknowledged for imbibing in children basic values and morals, the hidden curriculum also functions to reproduce the existing relations within society, by enforcing the same roles and stereotypes which aid this process. Nevertheless, the concept of the hidden curriculum encompasses within it various nuances and connotations and needs an in-depth study by itself, which was not possible in the scale of study as was conducted for an M.Phil dissertation. Moreover, the pandemic induced barriers to classroom observation also caused hindrance in collecting more effective data with regard to the way in which the hidden curriculum is imparted. In this study, the narratives of the girls and the manner in which the restraining orders were imposed on them has been loosely referred to as constituting the hidden curriculum, as such education does not comprise the formal curricula of schools.

The methodology of the study set out with identifying the theoretical background against which the study was to be set, and then going on to analyse the ways in which the contextualised gender experiences fit within these themes. The sample selected for the purpose was taken to be representative of the urban middle class section in Guwahati, and covering most schools in the region, all girls' as well as co-educational. This is however still a very tiny sample in comparison to the population, and hence the findings of the study cannot be generalised for that of the whole population.

The category of respondents who were selected for the purpose of the study were a group of school going girls, in the age group of 15-19 years. By means of telephonic interviews, which were largely unstructured, the narratives and experiences of the girls were observed and recorded, which served as the primary data for this study. The accounts of these interviews drew attention to the manner in which everyday sexism continues unabated in our society, be it in the form of discrimination, or controlling of our girls. Minute accounts of their personality, as well as behaviour patterns, are governed by the strict societal gaze, which further dictates their acceptability as well as accessibility in public spaces. The school plays a major role in this regard, by enforcing the majoritarian and dominant perspective of the gendered differences. This starts by simple separation practices which in some schools include separate seating patterns for boys and girls, as well as separate lines to stand in during assembly time. This basic differentiation and separation at an early age is a marker of identity categorisation and awareness, which later spills out into the hierarchical positioning on the social ladder.

Starting from separation, schools further facilitate the grooming, or as this study puts it, 'schooling' these young children into ways of behaviour of their respective gender. While the focus of this study relies heavily on that of the girl child, the information collected from the respondents revealed that every part of their actions and mannerisms were strictly governed and accordingly guided towards behaving in a way which is the stereotypical assumption for their gender. Frequent terms like 'sit like a girl', 'talk like a woman' or 'behave like a lady' are everyday guidelines as part of their disciplinarian grooming in schools. This is an example of the hidden curriculum, in which certain aspects of personality, behaviour and ethics are so taken for granted, that they are enforced as the norm. The trope of the feminine is what largely dictates the manner in which these girls are supposed to conduct themselves, so as to fit into the society's categorisation of identity groupings. These identities are then further placed on the hierarchical ladder, which facilitates and ensures the continuation of the social order, an order which rests on the exploitation and domination of a few, in order to maintain the hegemony of those in power. Invariably therefore, the hidden curriculum is seen as natural, and reinforced as the only proper way to conduct oneself.

The various themes of gender dynamics which have come to light by means of undertaking this study are namely, the unequal power dynamics between the two genders, the question of acceptability and acceptance in public spaces for women, the societal gaze that constantly keeps a check on the character of girls, and the all-pervasive issue of safety, or the fear of rape. All of these themes and their execution has been facilitated in schools by means of the hidden curriculum. These are ways of instilling behaviour patterns as part of an education, which is not formal, yet considered necessary for the grooming of the young children for the outside world. While it covers a large range of values which include, cleanliness, punctuality, etc, the schooling into ways of femininity is what was the focus of this study.

The interviews and the responses collected from there shed light on the variety of ways in which school children are disciplined and controlled, but to draw attention to the part of the study which focuses on the hidden curriculum based around femininity, the case studies provided the required in-depth knowledge into the matter. The five case studies done in this study are collected from the interviewed respondents who raised their voices on matters pertaining to exercising control over their bodily autonomy and other aspects of their personality. Each of the cases provided one significant insight into the manner in which the schooling of the girl child is done, by means of enforcing the hidden curriculum, to achieve the set standard of femininity. It seeks to address the research questions the study set out with and delves deeper into the understanding of the rationale behind the conduct of such activities.

The research objectives outlined at the beginning of the study asked the general questions about processes of gender socialisation in schools and its role in mirroring the gendered patterns of behaviour of larger society. Moreover, the idea was to examine the hidden curriculum, and also bring to light the insights and opinions of the girl students, who were the target population of this study. The simultaneous research questions which followed from there addressed issues pertaining to the role of the school in producing gendered children, the role of the hidden curriculum in enforcing gender identities, and finally the narratives and experiences of the girl students. With the help of the primary and secondary

sources of data collection employed for this study, an attempt was made to answer these questions as part of the research work.

The data collected revealed an intrinsic linkage between the functioning of the school and the contextual moral values of the society. Aside from the normal academic curriculum, the values which are the norm of the society of which the school is a part, also becomes the unwritten norm as part of school education. As argued before, and exemplified by testaments of the respondents, strict disciplinarian systems ensure the conformity and adherence to the value system of the school. This is in line with the accepted forms of behaviour in public and private spheres, which are largely governed along identity lines. In the case of this study, since the focus is on gender identity, the ideas surrounding masculinity and femininity form the major lens through which the hidden curriculum of the school is examined. The idea of the ideal female person is set as the benchmark to which all the young girls had to aspire to reach. There have been various justifications or explanations behind each of the disciplining techniques involved, but the takeaway is that gender was, and continues to remain, a dominant identity in categorising people and communities. This is the case in the city of Guwahati, a part of the state of Assam and considered to be the gateway to the north east, which is considered to be more tolerant to gender dynamics as compared to the rest of the country.

The hidden curriculum which facilitates the continuation of the said gender discriminatory practices, have been analysed under four broad themes as identified by this study. The first theme is that of gender differentiation which is a subtle way of ensuring the strict separation between the two genders. From this theme of differentiation arises the broader concept of gender socialisation. Although in a wider context this term has far more nuanced concepts and understanding, in the case of this study, lessons on what to wear, how to speak, and how to conduct their bodies forms the overarching frame of gender socialisation as it happens in schools. For the gender socialisation process to be facilitated, there exist gender codes, which dictate the boundaries for student behaviour. These gender codes are social constructions of sexuality, of what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviour, and the importance of ensuring this binary separation so as to facilitate the continuation of hierarchical power dynamics in society. This essential categorisation

dictates the need for what can be termed as ‘doing gender’, that is bodies and behaviour and conduct being manifested according to the placement in a particular identity group. In order to establish the gender relations that exist in society, it becomes pertinent to ensure that members belonging to either group of gender perform in ways which are characteristic of their gender. As such, the need to manage, adorn and fashion bodies and behaviour in particular ways extends within the theme of doing gender, which is again facilitated and taken care of by means of the hidden curriculum.

The analysis and findings of the study work towards strengthening the hypothesis that schools act as a major socialising agent for young children. Moreover, given the indispensable role of the school in the childhood experiences of all children in our particular cultural context, this role is more profound in its importance. It is the norm for all children after reaching a certain age to attend school. Their basic development and understanding of the world, as well as the first exposure into a formalised setting of an institution, is what makes school a key part of every child’s life. As such, the sensitivity and acknowledgement of the functioning of the world, the positioning of identities and their role, and the subsequent attachment of these young people being the future members of the social order and social structure, makes it imminent to give them education which is revolutionary and thought provoking. Disciplining and constraining the free will and minds of these young children simply raise them to be conformist agents of the social order, and such facilitate the unequal distribution of resources as well as power among groups. It is only when stereotypes and prejudices are not imparted to children as education, do they get the chance to openly explore and question the implicit assumptions behind these practices.

## **The way forward**

The nuance and sensitivity required in dealing with children at a tender age, that is during their time in schools, is preferably the need of the hour. This awareness can be generated by having proper sessions of counselling and training to the teachers about gender awareness and sensitivity, to impart education in a way that personal biases and partiality is left out of the picture and a very professional mode of learning is established. In this context, the sensitisation and awareness of gender differences is a very pertinent matter which needs to be dealt with and taught with the utmost sensitivity to gender issues. It is only when such a change is facilitated at the level of educational institutions, can we expect to see and bring about a change in terms of the unequal gender dynamics as it prevails in our society.

By virtue of being an institute of educational planning and administration, NIEPA can play an active role in bringing about changes in this regard. Besides focusing on the access, participation and outcomes aspects of gender in education, detailed intricacies in terms of basic understanding of gender, how to make the concept accessible to children, and developing their ideas and information on the same, can be done as part of various outreach programmes on gender sensitivity and awareness, organised in schools.

Apart from that, proper depiction and representation in curriculum, which deviates from the stereotypical gender roles and ideas, is crucial and essential as part of the curriculum building, which instils basic ideas of gender understanding in children. Textbooks are the primary sources of education, in terms of how they see and understand the world, and hence the shaping and structuring of gender issues in these books is very sensitive and therefore needs to be dealt with utmost care.

**Limitations:**

Like every other research project, this study too has several limitations which were imposed by both foreseen as well as unforeseen barriers. First of all, the major limitation arises in view of the covid 19 pandemic and the restrictions in place because of the same. This acted as a barrier in conducting on-site field work, that is, by means of proper observation of the ground realities of the school environment. Most of the schools which were attempted to be visited were either closed, by virtue of being a containment zone, or functioning in a hybrid mode, that is half online and half offline. In such a scenario, the setting of schools was nowhere near normal and hence the limited fieldwork done in this regard may not be the most reliable or accurate data. As such, the research was conducted primarily through telephonic interviews, from which the case studies were drawn, and accordingly the conclusions were arrived at. Thus, it wouldn't be totally wrong to say that the study might have had more depth and nuance had it been possible to visit schools and observe first hand, the kind of behaviour disciplining and attitude controlling that the respondents have testified for.

Secondly, given the small-scale nature of the study, only one city has been selected for the purpose. This city too, being a large city and quite cosmopolitan in nature, is vast enough to cover the adequate sample size needed to generalise for the case of the whole city. Owing to paucity of time, only a small sample was selected, and a few schools represented through them, and as such the findings of the study cannot be generalised to portray the scene of gender dynamic of the city, the state of Assam, the north-eastern region.

Third, given the limited amount of time and resources available to conduct research at the level of an MPhil degree, very in-depth study on the concepts could not be arrived at. This can be said largely for the concept of the hidden curriculum, which is a large and complex concept, with many layers interwoven within it, to which due justice cannot be done by mere testimonies and dictionary definitions.

Finally, a major and important limitation of this study is the binary approach to gender, which has been adopted, and can be seen as narrow insight into the varied and broad dimensions and connotations to the concept. Drawing from the small-scale nature of the



study, in depth analysis into gender dynamics has been refrained from, and the major focus of this study is on one aspect of sexuality, which is that of femininity. While this issue in itself addresses and touches upon various aspects of sexual identity and orientation, the role of the school in generating and perpetuating gender binaries and associated behaviour patterns with it is the primary theme. The idea is to understand the problem at the roots, that is, the practical shaping of the concept, before delving into the deeper intricacies of gender.

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