trying to establish an alternative form of teaching and learning. To sum up, this book is a combined effort of thought and feeling; an active participation of the brain and the heart.

I have been teaching a course on the sociology of education. Teaching, I have felt, is a process of learning. I am indeed grateful to my students whose questions, interventions and comments have helped me develop my arguments. With deep gratitude, I remember my three students—Disha Navani, Anman Madan and Bikram Mishra. Their research interest in education has always been a source of inspiration. In fact, the culture of learning that continues to prevail in the Jawaharlal Nehru University has given me the strength to undertake a project of this kind. Urmila did the editing job with extreme care. And Drhva chose to publish the book. I am grateful to them.

Time and again, I have read out the manuscript to my wife. Her art of listening and suggestions have helped me move ahead with the project. In fact, I am grateful to everyone in my family, particularly my mother and elder brother who helped me cultivate my faculties of learning. I also recall my late mother-in-law, with whom I used to share my ideas. I am grateful to my friends and well-wishers. They have given me the strength. I have realised that without love, there is no faith; and without faith, there is no creativity. In a way, they are my teachers. If this book makes sense, the credit must go to all of them.

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Introduction

Life at School
Need for a Critical Enquiry

It would be difficult for anyone to overlook the crucial role played by schools in shaping our lives, especially in the context of modern/complex societies. Formal schooling, it is thought, gives one the necessary information, the required skills, and the much needed specialised knowledge. It is a measure of one's level of education; a deciding factor in the selection or rejection of people for professional roles. It trains the mind to adapt to a modern, technologically advanced civilisation. No wonder, there is an ever increasing emphasis on universal/compulsory schooling. As a result, one also gets to witness the parents' anxiety with respect to their children's school education. Without good schooling, it is argued, life cannot unfold its full potential!

It is, therefore, important to understand the phenomenon called schooling. To begin with, it is possible to look at schooling from a positive angle. School, as a formal educational institution, is viewed as a necessity in the modern society; a society that can no longer rest on the particularistic values of family and kinship. It can also be argued that schools, with their organised structure and disciplinary devices, legitimate knowledge and certified texts, examinations and hierarchies, systematise one's mind and evolve a 'scientific' way of looking at things. In other words, schooling (or its widespread networks) is seen as an index of societal progress. It is believed that the school is an agent of social change; it leads to modernity. Moreover, it makes social mobility possible.

But then, there are dissenters who are not happy with the way schools function. They are of the opinion that as schools tend to
monopolise the domain of education, alternative possibilities or orientations to knowledge get undermined. The schooled mind, as a result, tends to become closed and conservative. It begins to conform. It is also argued that schools perpetuate inequality and reproduce the values of an unequal social order. They make one believe in competition, social divisions, and in one’s success at the cost of someone else’s failure. Moreover, schools, it is believed, tend to become oppressive. The spontaneity/naturalness of the child is killed, and a regimented mind produced. This critique has also led many to innovate and experiment with new schools that are emancipatory, and are more sensitive to the child’s needs and natural growth.

A rigorous study of education, therefore, demands a critical enquiry into the meaning of schooling—its functions and dysfunctions, promises and contradictions, possibilities and ambiguities.

I

School as a Necessity of Modern Existence

Why is it that schools play such an important role in a modern/complex society? We know that in order to be certified as ‘educated’, all of us have to attend schools, study the appropriate texts, and pass innumerable tests at different stages of our ‘cognitive development’. In other words, what is called education seems to be impossible to acquire without schooling. It is, therefore, important to understand the reasons that make schooling a ‘necessity’.

What characterises a human society is its ability to renew itself, because ‘life’, wrote John Dewey, ‘is a self-renewing process’ (Dewey 1966: 2). And this self-renewal, it ought to realised, is not just the renewal of mere physical existence. It is, as Dewey argued, the renewal of the entire experience of the group—its ‘beliefs, ideals, hopes, happiness, miseries and practices’ (Ibid: 2). ‘And education’, he wrote, ‘in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life’ (Ibid: 2). In other words, education is a process of transmission/communication of the group heritage. It is this educative process that allows a society to continue and renew itself. Needles to add, education means that the adults who retain the knowledge and customs of the group transmit and communicate their ‘habits of doing, thinking, and feeling’ (Ibid: 3) to the younger generation.

Education as a means of the renewal of group heritage is common to all societies. But there is a qualitative difference between the ‘under-developed social groups’ and modern, complex societies. In the case of the former, as Dewey would say, there is no need of formal schooling. Children learn their customs and acquire their emotional set-and-stock of ideas by sharing in what the adults are doing. But then, as Dewey observed, things began to change as civilisations advanced and became more complex, because with the tremendous advancement in knowledge, resources and skills, children could no longer learn about the richness of their social heritage by merely observing the adults, one of the main reasons being that ‘in an advanced culture, much which has to be learned is stored in symbols and it is far from translation into familiar acts and objects’ (Dewey 1966: 8).

Take, for example, the advancement in literature, philosophy, or natural/mathematical sciences. It is impossible to learn all these ‘abstract symbols’ merely from the familiar setting of family and kinship. What is important, therefore, is a formal educational institution with its planned curricula and professionals who are capable of communicating these complex knowledge systems to the child. That perhaps explains the necessity of the school as a formal educational institution. To quote Dewey:

Much of what adults do is so remote in space and in meaning that playful imitation is less and less adequate to reproduce its spirit. Ability to share effectively in adult activities thus depends upon a prior training given with this end in view. Intentional agencies—schools—and explicit material—studies—are devised. The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons (1966: 8).

One thing is becoming clear. Given the complexity of our society, the importance of school as a formal educational institution cannot be overlooked. What further adds to this complexity is that a modern society, for its existence, rests on abstract/universalistic values. This is what distinguishes it from a simple society that depends on particularistic values of family and kinship. In other words,
human beings, in order to participate in a modern/complex society, must go beyond family/kinship ties, relate to a vast/impersonal social order and learn abstract/universalistic values. Schools, it is felt, are designed to serve this purpose, because here, surrounded by professional teachers and children from divergent families, one learns the abstract/universalistic values. It is, therefore, said that the school is a place that takes the child away from the protective context of family-kinship ties and places him/her in the ocean of the larger society. It is in this context that the cultural anthropologists distinguish informal socialisation from, say, formal education.

Yehudi A. Cohen, for example, has drawn a sharp distinction between socialisation and education. For Cohen, socialisation means 'the activities that are devoted to the inculcation and elicitation of basic motivational and cognitive patterns through an ongoing and spontaneous interaction with parents, siblings, kinsmen, and other members of the community' (Cohen 1971: 22). In contrast to socialisation, 'education is the inculcation of standardised and stereotyped knowledge, skills, values and attitudes by means of standardised and stereotyped procedures' (Ibid: 22). The reason why Cohen makes this distinction has to be understood. What he calls 'socialisation' is the characteristic of a society in which 'kinship is the primary principle in the organisation of economic, political and other social relations' (Ibid: 25). And socialisation means an over emphasis on the 'particularistic values of kinship'.

What he calls 'education' is 'the predominant mode of shaping the mind in social systems in which non-kinship and universalistic considerations are of primary significance in the organisation of economic, political and other social relations' (Cohen 1971: 36). The point that Cohen makes is that the need for 'education' arises more in a society that has become modern and complex in the sense that it has gone beyond the kinship networks and has adopted universalistic values.

It is at this juncture that Cohen speaks of the relevance of schools. 'The development of schools—the institutionalised predominance of education over socialisation in the shaping of men's minds—is a characteristic feature of state societies' (Cohen 1971: 39). Cohen reminds us of two major characteristics of a state society. First, it seeks to subvert local—especially kin—sources of solidarity, loyalty and authority. Second, in order to legitimise its authority, it seeks to establish an ideology of uniformity among its people. In other words, a state society requires the predominance of universalistic values—a set of standardised, uniform symbols and aspirations so that the state can exist as the ultimate authority. And schools, according to Cohen, serve this very purpose, because schools are designed to promote uniformity, standardised aspirations and universalistic values. There are many ways of doing this. For example, one can speak of 'uniform dress for school children (or even for their teachers), standardised sacred books and the paraphernalia of fetishes, flags, pictures of culture heroes or rulers that students face throughout the school day' (Ibid: 40). Or, one can speak of a universalistic curriculum like 'learning the multiplication tables,' remembering 'the dates of wars and treaties' or memorising 'the names of rivers, mountains, cities or ports' (Ibid: 43). What is interesting is that 'such learning is wholly independent of family background, ethnic or religious affiliation, regional membership or any other nexus that is a natural breeding ground for particularistic orientations' (Ibid: 43). Moreover, children are taught by a variety and succession of teachers. This reduces the possibility of any tendency to identify with any particular teacher. Finally, 'the allocation of standardised rewards and punishments for standardised performance' is yet another characteristic of school education. The fact, as Cohen intends to establish, is that there is a fair degree of resemblance between school education and state society, because the goals are uniformity, standardisation and promotion of universalistic values and discouragement of particularistic differences. In a way, while establishing the need of school education in a state society, Cohen makes a critical point: 'schools were not established originally to foster the life of the mind or the spirit of free enquiry' (Ibid: 41). As a matter of fact, Cohen's primary thesis is that schools were designed to promote loyalty—'the establishment of conformity to the aims and imperatives of a state system.'

In fact, there is no dearth of critical reflection with respect to the meaning of schooling in our life. Imagine, for instance, the positive dream centred around mass schooling: it leads to democratisation of society, it distributes knowledge, skills, information, and creates a
conscious/articulate public for a democratic society. But then, there is also a counter-argument that refutes this dream. It claims that in our society, schools exist for an altogether different reason. Schools exist not to create a democratic society or a civic ideal, but for ‘certifying, sorting and selecting personnel’ (Green 1971:133). True, there need not be a close relationship between the skills required for a particular job and a high school diploma. But what is significant is that the school diploma certifies ‘a certain measure of dependability, acquiescence, and plasticity of personality’ (Ibid: 134)—the qualities needed for participating in the economy. The point is that schools are necessary, particularly in a complex/technologically advanced society, for certifying and selecting people for their contributory roles in the economy.

It is at this juncture that we can make the following observations regarding the necessity of schooling in a contemporary society.

- In a complex society, schools—as formal institutions with planned curricula and professional teachers—exist to transmit and communicate our rich social heritage: its knowledge systems, beliefs, practices, skills and technologies.
- Schools enable the child to go beyond the particularistic values of family/kinship ties and adopt universalistic values without which a modern/complex society cannot function. In other words, schools are necessary for bringing about social transformation.
- Schools serve the requirements of a state society by promoting uniformity and loyalty to the state.
- Schools, by certifying and selecting people for future adult roles, justify their existence.

II

Schools, Morality and Social Order

It is, therefore, obvious that there are many ways of looking at the existence of schools. We will, however, begin with a positive orientation to schooling—how, for example, it disciplines the mind, reduces egotism, instils a sense of morality, and stabilises the social order. In other words, it is believed that schools ought to play an important role in the development of a healthy society where there is a general consensus regarding the moral authority of the collective. It is at this juncture that Emile Durkheim’s contributions to the sociology of education acquire relevance. Durkheim, a master sociologist, we know, put great emphasis on the power of the collective over the individual. For him, society cannot be reduced into its parts; it is independent of individuals. And, as he thought, one of the major functions of schools is to make the child realise and internalise this moral power of the society. Before we go any further, it is important to see how Durkheim understood education.

To begin with, it has to be realised that for Durkheim, education has a distinctive societal meaning. What we call education cannot be seen without locating it in the context of a given society; its specific needs and requirements. ‘It is idle to think’, wrote Durkheim (1956: 65), ‘that we can rear our children as we wish’. In fact, he wrote, ‘each society considered at a given stage of development has a system of education which exercises an irresistible influence on individuals’ (Ibid: 65). In other words, there is no abstract/universal content of education; it varies from society to society. This societal education—a specific way of acting, doing, thinking and believing—is difficult to escape.

Education, Durkheim thought, would mean interaction: adults exercising an influence on the youth and making them learn the needs/requirements of the society, its traditions, and heritage. Durkheim also reminded us of the diversity of occupations in advanced civilisations. Each occupation needs a specific aptitude and specialised knowledge. As a result, argued Durkheim, education in advanced civilisations cannot be the same for everyone; it would vary from person to person depending on one’s occupation. But then, there is something more than this ‘specialised education’. For Durkheim, the proponent of collective conscience, no society can survive without a ‘common base—a certain number of ideas, sentiments and practices which education must inculcate in all children indiscriminately, to whatever social category they belong’ (Durkheim 1956: 69). Education should, therefore, serve two functions: a) it should prepare the
child for a specific occupation, and b) it should enable the child to internalise the core values of the society.

To quote Durkheim:

‘Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those who are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined.’ (Durkheim 1956: 71).

The deeper meaning of education, as he thought, could be understood only if we look at its social function. Essentially, education creates a new being; an egotistic individual gets transformed into a social being. Without education, man’s social existence is impossible. After all, it should not be forgotten that ‘there was nothing in our congenital nature that predisposed us necessarily to become servants of divinities, symbolic emblems of society, to render them worship, to deprive ourselves in order to do them honour’ (Durkheim 1956: 72). It is education that enables one to become a civilised being and to internalise the language of the society.

To the egotistic and asocial being that has just been born, it must, as rapidly as possible, add another, capable of leading a moral social life. Such is the work of education and you can readily see its great importance. …It creates in man a new being. (Ibid: 72).

True, education is not spontaneous. It has to be forced. But this does not mean that it has to be oppressive, because the new being that education creates ‘represents what is best in us’. The beginning of education means that the child learns to exercise ‘strong self-control’ in order to contain his ‘natural egoism’ and subordinate himself to ‘higher ends’. One learns self-control because of two factors: a) physical necessity, and b) moral grounds. But the child, stressed Durkheim, cannot understand the importance of physical necessity, because he is not yet directly faced with the harsh realities of life. As a result, the child, self-control is possible only through learning. And herein lies the necessity of schools. For Durkheim, a major function of school education is that it evokes a sense of morality in the child. The child learns self-control and eventually becomes a disciplined/social being. While reflecting on the social function of schools, he spoke on morality, discipline and punishment, the role of the teacher, and the meaning of the school curriculum.

Schools instil a sense of morality into children. But what is morality? Durkheim made two relevant points. First, the function of morality is ‘to determine conduct, to fix it, to eliminate the individual arbitrariness’ (Durkheim 1961: 27). This means regularity.

‘Morality’, wrote Durkheim, ‘presupposes a certain capacity for behaving similarly under like circumstances, and consequently it implies a certain ability to develop habits, a certain need for regularity’ (Ibid: 27). Second, morality implies ‘the idea of authority’. The nature of this authority has to be understood. Let us take an example. When we fall sick, we accept the doctor’s authority, follow his orders. There is obviously a utilitarian meaning involved in it; we want to recover. But moral authority is qualitatively different. There is no such utilitarian reason. One must obey a moral command out of respect for it and for this reason only. In a way, according to Durkheim, ‘morality is a system of commandments’ (Ibid: 31). What is important is that it is the spirit of discipline that reconciles these twin aspects of morality. Discipline regularises conduct, and discipline does not come about without authority. ‘The fundamental element of morality,’ Durkheim concluded, ‘is the spirit of discipline’ (Ibid: 31). At schools, he argued, children learn how to discipline themselves and emerge as moral agents of society.

Yet, a question remains unanswered: Why should schools occupy such an important place? Can’t children learn lessons on morality in their homes, with their families? Well, in the family, one learns altruistic values—how to feel, and live for others. But then, according to Durkheim, the familial education alone is not sufficient for generating a sense of morality and discipline that the larger political society demands. Because the family is full of emotion and sentiment; there is no abstract notion of duty, no impersonality. Things, however, begin to change at school. Teachers and students who form a part of the school are not family members. There is something cold and impersonal about the obligations imposed by the school. In a way, the schoolroom society resembles the society of adults, and to enter it is to enter the bigger world. It serves as an ‘intermediary’ between the affective morality of the family and the more rigorous morality of civil
life. With schooling, Durkheim would argue, begins serious life. In other words, to live as a disciplined citizen in the larger political society, one has to adopt a moral/responsible attitude even towards those who are not one's immediate family relatives. And schools teach this abstract notion of moral responsibility and civil duty, that is, how to relate to and participate in the larger society. In a way, with schooling begins a child's journey towards the bigger world.

The bonds uniting the citizens of a given country have nothing to do with relationships or personal inclinations. There is, therefore, a great distance between the moral state in which the child finds himself as he leaves the family and the one towards which he must strive. This road cannot be travelled in a single stage. Intermediaries are necessary. The school environment is the most desirable. It is a more extensive association than the family or the little societies of friends. It results neither from blood relationships nor from free choice, but from a fortuitous and inevitable meeting among subjects brought together on the basis of similar age and social conditions. In that respect, it resembles a political society. (Durkheim 1961: 230–31).

Besides, the school conveys a message to the child: he must come to his class regularly and at a specified time; he must not disrupt things in the class; he must learn his lessons and do his homework, etc. Discipline is important, because 'a well-disciplined class has an air of health and good humour.' (Durkheim 1961: 152). Discipline also involves punishment. Durkheim wrote a great deal about the necessity and meaning of punishment at school. For him, the moral authority of the society is sacred. And if this authority is violated, it begins to lose its sacred character. 'A sacred thing profaned remains no longer sacred if nothing new develops to restore its original nature.' (Ibid: 165).

In fact, the moral harm caused by misbehaviour has to be understood. It shatters the child's faith in the authority of the school law. Hence, the law must assert itself and make the child believe that its refutation or violation cannot be tolerated. 'Punishment', wrote Durkheim, 'is nothing but this meaningful demonstration.' (Durkheim 1961: 166). In other words, the main purpose of punishment is that it restores the child's faith in the moral authority of the school law.

It is, therefore, obvious that, for Durkheim, the aim of punishment is not to cause terror and restore superficial order in the classroom. It is not to cause physical pain or suffering to the child. His voice against corporal punishment was clear and categorical: corporal punishment defies what moral education is all about—belief in the dignity of man. Because 'in beating, in brutality of all kinds, there is something we find repugnant, something that revolts our conscience—in a word, something immoral' (Ibid: 183). Punishment exists only to make the child see the sacredness of moral authority.

The importance that Durkheim attached to school education—its importance in the social and moral development of the child, and discipline and punishment—means that he was deeply concerned about the role of the teacher. The teacher, for him, is entrusted with a major responsibility. To the child, he represents the bigger world; the world that extends beyond the child's milieu of intimate family/kinship relations. It is for the teacher to make the child respect the moral authority of the larger collective. It is the teacher's task to discipline and punish the child. The teacher should, therefore, be a man of character. To begin with, he must have a strong will, because 'the child cannot have confidence in anyone whom he sees hesitating, shifting, going back on his decisions' (Durkheim 1956: 88). Second, it is also important to realize that 'just as the priest is the interpreter of his god, the teacher is the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and of his country' (Ibid: 89). The child has a tendency to equate the rule with the persona of the teacher. This is not desirable. Because a rule ceases to be a rule if it is not impersonal. The teacher should, therefore, make the child realize that the rule transcends him; that he is merely the instrument of a great moral reality which surpasses him.

Durkheim was equally concerned about whether or not the school curriculum was suitable for his celebrated ideal of moral education. An example would suffice: Durkheim did not attach much importance to art and aesthetics as a part of the curriculum, because he saw a certain contradiction between art/aesthetics and moral education. True, he admitted that there was an ideal in art—one's ability to get outside of oneself, to overcome the immediate/mundane interests of life. And this 'devotion to some transcendent objective,' he
felt, leads to morality. Yet, what should not be forgotten is that art, after all, is about dreams and images; 'natural laws do not exist for the artist.' (Durkheim 1961: 271). And that is why there is a fundamental contradiction between art and morality.

... the world of morality is precisely the world of the real. Morality demands that we love the group of which we are a part, the men who compose this group, the land they live on—all concrete and real things which we must see as they are, even though we are trying to perfect them as much as possible. Morals are in the domain of action... (Durkheim 1961: 271).

Art, however, takes us to an imaginary world and, therefore, should be considered merely a 'play', of not much relevance to moral education. Durkheim attached great importance to history, whereas aesthetic education, he felt, was merely 'secondary and incidental'. History, according to him, enables the child 'to live in close intimacy with the collective consciousness' (Durkheim 1961: 278); and to feel that he is a part of the society.

All that we have learned from Durkheim suggests that his is a functionalist view—an attempt to see the school as an institution contributing to the development of social cohesiveness; a moral order. This positive/comfortable relationship between the school and the society has further been elaborated by another well known sociologist—Talcott Parsons—who too saw school education serving a positive function: causing appropriate socialisation and selecting people for future adult roles.

While reflecting on the 'school class as a social system,' Talcott Parsons made some interesting observations regarding the role of school education in American society. For him, schools socialise children and also prepare them for adult roles in different walks of life. To begin with, the school class as the 'focal socialising agency' has to be understood. Like Durkheim, Parsons too believed that school is the starting point of the child's journey to the bigger world; it weans the child away from the 'primary emotional attachment to his family' and familiarises him with the 'societal norms and values that are a step higher than those that he can learn in his family alone' (Parsons 1968: 210). True, there are similarities between the family and the elementary school. For instance, like a parent, the teacher too is an adult, 'characterised by the generalised superiority.' Second, like the mother, the teacher is usually a woman.

But then, according to Parsons, there are fundamental differences between these two institutions. The teacher, unlike the mother, is not ascriptively related to the child; hers is essentially an 'occupational' role. Moreover, unlike the mother, the teacher's responsibility towards the child is much more 'universalistic'. She is not supposed to be emotional and biased towards the child; in fact, 'she is not entitled to suppress the distinction between high and low achievers' (Parsons 1968: 208).

Besides, according to Parsons, the socialising function of the school class can be realised most effectively as the 'development in individuals of the commandments and capacities which are essential prerequisites of their future role-performance' (Parsons 1968: 200). In other words, the school trains the child, makes him knowledgeable, and equips him with the necessary skills for a vocational role in the future. But what is really significant is that it is at school that the child learns the basic values of a competitive/achievement-oriented society: 'It is fair to give different rewards for different levels of achievement, so long as there has been fair access to opportunity, and it is only fair that these rewards lead on to higher order opportunities for the successful' (Ibid: 210). In a way, this is like learning 'the fundamental American value of equality of opportunity' (Ibid: 210). And this is important, because the child, in order to adjust to a competitive society, must learn the value of achievement: the desirability of differential rewards on the basis of one's level of achievement.

Parsons further states that when children join the elementary school in an American society, they experience what can be termed as 'initial equalisation', the reason being that the elementary school is normally a neighbourhood school and as a result, there is a fair degree of similarity among children in terms of their family/economic backgrounds. Moreover, children are given a 'common set of tasks', and the teacher is engaged in a 'relatively systematic process of evaluation of the pupils' performances'. In other words, children realise that the school situation is like a 'race' and that everyone has an equal opportunity. It is, therefore, desirable to differentiate and hierarchise
people on the basis of their achievements. Even the losers, despite the initial difficulty, begin to accept this logic.

This, according to Parsons, is a great socialising function. And this leads to another major function that the school serves: selecting people for manpower allocation. At schools, children are evaluated on the basis of their level of achievement. For example, those who do well at the secondary school, would join colleges for higher learning; and those who cannot do well would join the labour force. Moreover, those with relatively high 'cognitive' abilities would do better in technical occupations, for example, 'operatives, mechanics, or clerical workers'. And those with relatively high 'moral' achievement would be inclined towards more 'socially' or 'humanly' oriented roles like 'salesmen and agents of various sorts' (Parsons 1968: 214).

Essentially, according to Parsons, schools are doing a very important job. They enable the child to become an integral part of the system. They also create a mind-set that makes it easier for the child to take on a specific adult role later in life. Hence, from Emile Durkheim to Talcott Parsons, there is a positive story on schools—the story about their integrative functions. Schools, we are told, help the child adapt to a new society whose primary ethos is universalistic rather than particularistic. They generate a sense of morality and create the mind-set needed to accept the reality of a competitive society based on the principle of achievement. Schools, in other words, contribute the stability of a consensual/cohesive social order!

III

Towards a Critique of School Practices

It is obvious that not everyone agrees with this functionalist approach. There are many reasons why a critique of school practices has developed. Take, for instance, the most powerful functionalist argument: 'schools contribute to social cohesiveness'. Here, the question arises: whose society are the functionalists talking about? Modern society is not, after all, homogeneous. Nor is it egalitarian. What characterises it is its divisiveness, inequality and asymmetrical power relations. As a result, it is quite possible that school education may promote the interests of the dominant sections of society. As the argument goes: in the name of retaining social order and cohesiveness, school education reproduces the existing inequality.

There is another functionalist argument: schools socialise and discipline the child, thereby strengthening the moral foundation of the society. But there are dissenters who would argue that schools are essentially oppressive institutions. As 'disciplinary institutions', schools destroy the child's spontaneity, hamper his inner growth, and create a passive/submissive attitude to authority. Similarly, it can be argued that schools create a conservative/conformist mind. The schooled mind accepts the given order of things without questioning; without an urge to overcome it or to think of better alternatives. As we go deeper and elaborate on these points, we would try to present a critique of school practices, primarily from three angles.

Reproduction of the Existing Order and its Inequality

As we have already said, what characterises the contemporary society, particularly the class-divided capitalist society, is its inequality and asymmetrical power relations. It is, therefore, argued that education cannot remain neutral; it is inseparable from class interests. In other words, schools, instead of bringing about social transformation and creating an egalitarian society, tend to do just the opposite. It is in this context that a significant work by S. Bowles and H. Gintis (1976) deserves attention. There are three important points that Bowles and Gintis make in order to establish their thesis of reproduction. First, they argue that schools promote the 'technocratic-meritocratic' ideology: a belief that economic success essentially depends on the possession of the appropriate skills or education. This, they argue, is an 'ideological facade', because in reality, economic success or access to a job is linked to the individual's class, sex, age, race etc., rather than on talent, ability or qualifications. In other words, the 'technocratic-meritocratic' ideology creates a false belief, prevents one from seeing the real reason behind economic inequality, and legitimises it by arguing that success or failure
depends upon one's level of education. Second, Bowles and Gintis assert that schools prepare young people for their place in the world of class dominated and alienated work by creating capacities, qualifications, ideas and beliefs which are appropriate to a capitalist economy. Because 'the reproduction of the social relations of production depends on the reproduction of consciousness' (Bowles and Gintis 1976: 127). No wonder, 'schools reward docility, passivity and obedience... [and] penalise creativity and spontaneity' (Ibid: 42). As a matter of fact, schools tend to kill the creative ability of an individual. It is believed that there is a 'close correspondence between the social relationships which govern personal interaction in the work place and the social relationships of the educational system.' (Ibid: 12). For example, students, like workers, have little power. Workers do not have any control over the content of their jobs; likewise, students do not have any control over the curriculum. Again, education, like work, is seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself, because neither are intrinsically satisfying but are undertaken for the sake of external rewards (qualifications and wages) and to avoid unpleasant consequences (educational failure, and unemployment). Moreover, there is a correlation between the narrow range of work opportunities and specialisation compartmentalisation of knowledge.

In a way, Bowles and Gintis speak a different language—different from that of, say, Talcott Parsons, who too, as we know, wrote about American education. For Parsons, as we have discussed, school education, through socialisation and selection, contributes to social consensus and restoration of the social order. However, Bowles and Gintis question the social system that Parsons took for granted. By questioning the social system they critiqued the role of the schools.

This Marxist approach—an attempt to debunk the 'neutrality' of schools and see education as an articulation of the dominant class ideology—can be seen in the writings of Ralph Miliband and Louis Althusser. For Miliband, schools reproduce and legitimise the existing capitalist society; its inequality and class divisions. 'Educational institutions at all levels', wrote Miliband, 'generally fulfil an important conservative role and act, with greater or lesser effec-

tiveness, as legitimising agencies in and for their societies' (Miliband 1972: 239).

Public schools, according to Miliband, have done this job quite openly. But what is significant is that the schools for the masses seek 'to instil... a submissive acceptance of the social order' (Miliband 1972: 240). This 'class-confirming' role of schools can be seen in many ways. For example, schools teach working-class children that their failure is due to some deficiency in themselves. Moreover, they teach 'middle-class values' and impose on working-class children 'an alien culture, values, and even language' (Ibid: 242).

Likewise, Louis Althusser saw education as a part of the 'state apparatus'. For Althusser, this state apparatus has two components—the repressive state apparatus (police, army, legal system, government and administration) and the ideological state apparatus (religion, education, politics, communication, literature, etc.). No ruling class, according to Althusser, can rule by means of force or repressive apparatus alone. Herein lies the relevance of the ideological state apparatus for establishing the hegemony of the ruling class. And education, as an ideological apparatus, has a central place in contemporary capitalist societies. For example, it spells out the 'rules of good behaviour' for the child's later economic role. For future wage-earners/labourers, it fosters the feelings of 'modesty, resignation and submissiveness'; for future capitalists and managers, education instils a sense of 'cynicism, contempt, arrogance, self-importance, even smooth talk and cunning' (Quoted in Blackledge and Hunt 1985: 161). What is significant is that this whole 'class-maintaining' process is concealed from public view. Instead, the school is projected as a 'neutral' place, free from all ideological influences!

Essentially, what we are witnessing here is an argument that establishes the school as an institution serving the interests of the ruling/dominant class in the capitalist society. Another proponent of this argument is Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu—a leading French sociologist—there is a fair degree of likeness between the culture of the educational institution and that of the dominant classes. It is no wonder, as Bourdieu points out, that the children of the dominant classes tend to perform better at schools and universities, whereas
working class children fail. This explains why education seeks to reproduce the prevalent class inequality.

To begin with, Bourdieu points out that different cultures exist in a class-based society. But not all cultures are given equal importance at the educational institution. It is essentially the culture of the dominant classes that is given primary importance. Or, to use Bourdieu’s words, the educational system has its own ‘cultural arbitraries’ which are variants of the cultural arbitraries of the dominant classes. As a result, it becomes easier for the children of the dominant classes to adjust to the educational system or to excel. Besides, as the school, in teaching/learning, attempts to impose the cultural arbitraries of the dominant classes on the children who come from other cultures, a ‘symbolic violence’ is perpetuated. In other words, the school is instrumental in making the children of the working class feel that their culture is inferior and that it is the culture of the dominant classes that is worth learning!

According to Bourdieu, it is through spontaneous interaction with their family, kinsmen, and other members of their community that children get to learn about their culture: values, norms, ways of thinking and perceiving. It is in this context, he says, that the children of the dominant classes acquire their ‘cultural capital’. Being cultured, in terms of high culture, is a measure of cultural capital. For example, cultural capital can be equated with the ‘linguistic and social competencies and such qualities as style, manners, know-how as well as aspirations and perceptions of the objective chances of success’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 167). Its manifestation can be seen in acquired interests such as listening to classical music, visiting art galleries, reading non-professional books, etc. It is this cultural capital that enables the children of the dominant classes to excel at the educational institutions. Because the educational institutions, far from being neutral, are biased towards the cultural capital of the dominant classes. The examples that Bourdieu gives to establish his point are interesting. For instance, in France, as he reminds us, there are two forms of language: bourgeois parlance and common parlance. A major characteristic of bourgeois parlance is that it verbalises feelings and judgements. But common parlance is devoid of ‘fine words’. Now, Bourdieu says, university French is closer to bourgeois parlance. The literate tradition in education assumes that all experiences can be turned into a literary exercise where style and forms of expression are important. Not surprisingly, in the domain of higher education in France, the upper classes and Parisians dominate. The conclusion that Bourdieu draws is essentially critical in nature: what goes on in the name of education is not expected to create an egalitarian society. Instead, its primary objective is to reproduce the existing class hierarchies and inequalities.

The point emerging from this discussion is that what the schools teach need not be seen as something neutral. Instead, it is important to problematise it and relate school knowledge to the larger socio-economic reality. In Michael Apple—a leading American sociologist of education—we see a very sharp articulation of this perspective. The question that bothers Apple is, ‘why certain social and cultural meanings and not others are distributed through schools’ (Apple 1979: 27).

What is being regarded as ‘legitimate’ school knowledge, Apple argues, has to be seen as a ‘value-governed selection from a much larger universe of possible knowledge’ (Apple 1979: 45). And the meaning of this selection—selected by ‘specific social groups and classes in specific institutions, at specific historical moments’ (Ibid: 45)—cannot be comprehended unless we understand the dominant socio-economic ideologies. For example, in American schools, technical knowledge acquires ‘high status’. The reason is that technical knowledge does serve the interests of the corporate economy.

A corporate economy requires the production of high levels of technical knowledge to keep the economic apparatus running effectively and to become more sophisticated in the maximisation of opportunities for economic production. Within certain limits, what is actually required is not the widespread distribution of this high status knowledge to the populace in general. What is needed more is to maximise its production. As long as the knowledge form is continually and efficiently produced, the school itself, at least in this major aspect of its function, is efficient. (Apple 1979: 36–37).

This close relationship ‘between economic structure and high status knowledge’ explains why, for instance, ‘substantial funding was given to mathematics and science curriculum development while less
was given to the arts and humanities' (Apple 1979: 37). Indeed, it is argued that technical knowledge is 'macro-economically beneficial in terms of long run benefits to the most powerful classes in society' (Ibid: 38), because its 'economic utility' cannot be questioned. Moreover, it is 'discrete' in nature with an identifiable content and a stable structure. With such knowledge, Apple points out, it becomes easier to stratify and hierarchise individuals.

In other words, for Apple, the American school with its emphasis on 'high status technical knowledge' is engaged in retaining the status quo and reproducing the dominant class hegemony. This invariably implies that schools seek to create a technical/conformist mind-set; criticality is denied, and institutions or commonsense rules are projected as something 'pre-given, neutral and unchanging because they all continue to exist by consensus' (Apple 1979: 83). Essentially, a negative meaning is attached to conflict. It is thought that conflict is 'inherently and fundamentally bad'. The avoidance of conflict is clearly visible in the way science is taught in elementary/secondary schools. Apple argues that what schools teach is a 'consensus theory of science' or a 'positivistic ideal of science'. In other words, science is projected as 'bodies of knowledge organised around certain fundamental regularities'; science, it is thought, is always 'subject to empirical verification with no outside influences, either personal or political' (Ibid: 89). As a result, children are not told that the scientific community too consists of individuals and groups of scholars, and, science 'has had a significant history of both intellectual and interpersonal struggle' (Ibid: 88). For example, competition over priority and recognition in new discoveries is a characteristic feature of all established sciences.

Even in social studies, one sees the same orientation: the primacy of consensus and avoidance of conflict. For example, children are taught that all elements of a society are 'linked to each other in a functional relationship, each contributing to the ongoing maintenance of society' (Apple 1979: 93). But Apple asserts that this taboo on conflict is not desirable, because there is not just 'law or rule breaking dimension of conflict'. Conflict leads to new awareness; it is the beginning of a new journey towards social transformation. Furthermore, it is through conflict, as Apple argues, that the oppressed sections of society define their distinctive identity and strive for liberation.

Schools systematically distort the functions of social conflict in collectivities, and, as a result, contribute significantly to the 'ideological underpinnings that serve to fundamentally orient individuals toward an unequal society' (Apple 1979: 102). Apple concludes:

When a society 'requires' at both an economic and cultural level, the maximisation (not distribution) of the production of technical knowledge, then the science that is taught will be divorced from the concrete human practices that sustain it. When a society 'requires' at an economic level, the 'production' of agents who have internalised norms which stress engaging in often personally meaningless work, acceptance of our basic political and economic institutions as stable and always beneficial... then we would expect that the formal and informal curricula, the cultural capital, in schools will become aspects of hegemony. (Apple 1979: 102).

There is yet another important point that Apple makes. Schools tell the child that there is a fundamental distinction between work and play. Apple's study of a kindergarten leads him to believe that children are trained to see the incompatibility between work and play. For example, children learn that 'work activities are more important than play activities' (Apple 1979: 55). Not solely that, children are also trained to believe that 'work includes any and all teacher-directed activities'. Work is 'compulsory'; work means what one is told to do. But only 'free-time activities' are called play. What is equally important is that work-activities have to be done. It is this compulsion that enables children to appreciate the values of diligence, perseverance and obedience.

The point that Apple makes is that little children are made to see that there cannot be any reconciliation between work and play. Work cannot be an experience of freedom and choice. In other words, it is like preparing oneself for a world that is fragmented, alienated and devoid of creativity. As Apple says, 'unquestioning acceptance of authority and of the vicissitudes of life in institutional settings are among a kindergarten's first lessons' (Apple 1979: 57).

As we reflect on all that we have discussed so far regarding the theory of reproduction, we realise that its power lies in its criticality. It raises critical questions relating to the functioning of schools in
class-divided capitalist societies; it sees the ideological character of knowledge; it reveals the hidden curriculum and establishes its relationship with the politico-economic interests of the dominant classes. In other words, it tells us that society is not a cohesive whole, and the question of education cannot be comprehended without locating it in the context of power: how education is being controlled, defined and modulated by the privileged sections of society.

Yet, there are problems. The theory of reproduction, despite its potency, tends to be deterministic. It reduces education into a mere instrument of the economy. As a result, it tends to undermine everything about the traditional curriculum. But then, it is possible to argue that not everything about the traditional curriculum, or for that matter, the 'bourgeois knowledge', is necessarily bad. Science, for example, can be intellectually and cognitively desirable, and even beneficial for the working class and the socialist revolution. Again, this theory refuses to see the possibility of even the minimal autonomy of schools. It also denies the agency of the participants: students and teachers. It treats them as passive receivers of class ideologies, norms and values. But the point we wish to state is that human agency is never dead. For example, it is always possible to find innovative teachers who, despite all odds, may relate meaningfully to the children of the lower classes and generate alternative ideals for them. It is also possible to see resistance: how the working class children, far from blindly accepting the dominant class values, refuse to grant legitimacy to school knowledge. Henry Giroux articulates this point rather sharply:

One of the most important assumptions of resistance theory is that working-class students are not merely the by-product of capital, compliantly submitting to the dictates of authoritarian teachers and scholars that prepare them for a life of dehumanizing labour. Rather, schools represent contested terrains marked not only by structural and ideological contradictions, but also by collectively informed student resistance. (Quoted in Blackledge and Hunt 1985: 181).

In other words, it is possible to speak of a 'counter-culture' that emerges out of a protest against what schools tend to symbolise.4

School as a Disciplinary Institution

It is also possible to see the school as a disciplinary institution. Well, discipline, for Durkheim, is inherently positive. It brings out what is best in man, reduces egotism and nurtures the moral foundations of society. But then, there is yet another meaning of discipline: the school as a disciplinary institution based on 'surveillance' creating 'docile' bodies! In other words, the school is seen as a place where power is exercised over the child for 'normalcy'. Here, unlike what Durkheim thought, discipline acquires negative meaning; it is for creating 'mechanically subordinated cogs of a machine'; it is to produce 'automatic docility'; beneath it lies a 'military dream of society'.

To comprehend the meaning of the school as a disciplinary institution, Michel Foucault's insights are of great help. It was in Discipline and Punish that Foucault elaborated how the modern era witnessed a shift from a medieval penal theory to the institutionalisation of imprisonment. Physical pain was no longer a necessary element in punishment. What emerged was the 'new techniques of discipline' that act in depth on the heart, the mind, the will—in fact, 'a whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgements'. No wonder, as Foucault demonstrated, in the eighteenth century, a whole army of technicians gradually took over from the executioner: the wardens, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists.

What is significant is, as Foucault said, that these techniques of discipline were not limited to the prison. In fact, there was an astonishing coincidence between the new prison and other contemporary institutions: hospital, factory, school and the barracks. It was, therefore, not surprising, as Foucault pointed out, that Jeremy Bentham's famous 'panopticon'—a circular building enclosing a central inspection tower—was recommended in all these institutions. As a matter of fact, modern societies, as the argument goes, are maintained not so much by the army, police and a centralised state apparatus, but essentially by these 'carceral' institutions armed with techniques of discipline and surveillance.

It is in this context that Foucault viewed the school as yet another illustration of a disciplinary institution. And for discipline, what
is important is the distribution of individuals in space—something that the school learned from the monastary. This distribution of space was needed for constant supervision and observation of each pupil. As a result, the old system of teaching, whereby the pupils of all ages and ability were placed under the authority of one master was replaced by the class system which made the supervision of each individual possible. Simultaneously, it also facilitated the assigning of similar work for all. As Foucault put it, the educational space functioned like a learning machine that supervised, hierarchised, rewarded and punished.

Discipline also called for the control of activity, and the chief instrument for doing this was the time-table. The time-table, as its monastic origin suggests, was designed for a precise division of one’s days for measured/regulated activities. Foucault gave an illuminating example of the use of the time-table in the early nineteenth century in the French ‘mutual improvement schools’:

8.45 entrance of the monitor, 8.52 the monitor’s summons, 8.56 entrance of the children and prayer, 9.00 the children go to their benches, 9.04 first slate, 9.08 end of dictation, 9.12 second slate, etc. (Quoted in Sarup 1982: 16).

The time-table meant the measurement of time. It was needed for the ‘proper’ use of time. Time, to put it otherwise, became ‘disciplinary time’. As a result, the school, like other institutions, became subject to a whole micro-penalty of time (latenesslessness, absences, interruption of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (‘incorrect’ attitudes, ‘irregular’ gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency)’ (Quoted in Sheridan 1980: 154).

As a matter of fact, discipline meant hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and their combination in examination. It required a new kind of architecture that would make it possible for those on the inside to be kept under constant observation. As we have already said, for Foucault, Bentham’s ‘panopticon’ became the ideal model of such architecture; it could be seen in the prison, in the school, in the factory. Moreover, this constant observation and supervision was needed for ‘normality’. A centralised/coercive normality was introduced. The medical profession dictated the norm of normal health; the industrial system was designed to produce standardised products, and the school—with its disciplinary tools—must create the normal child! To quote Foucault:

The judges of normality are everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the ‘social-worker’ judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalising power. (Quoted in Sheridan 1980: 162).

This ‘normalising gaze’ made it possible to classify, compare, reward and punish. In other words, it meant the necessity of the examination as a disciplinary device. The examination, according to Foucault, is the ‘ceremony of power’; it ‘establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them’ (quoted in Sheridan 1980: 154). The examination, as a disciplinary tool, was an integral part of the school. It was needed to compare, hierarchise, grade and rank the pupils, and eventually to restore the required ‘normality’. Examination reduced each individual to a ‘case’: an object for knowledge as well as a site for the exercise of power. It was necessary not only to identify ‘normal’ individuals. It was also necessary to identify those who had to be trained or corrected, classified, normalised, or excluded.

The significance of Foucault’s work cannot be underestimated. It enables us to see what is often overlooked by those who believe that the school is inherently a positive experience, and that its primary task is to empower us with appropriate knowledge, values, and skills. Indeed, here we are getting an insight into the darker side of the school: how, like the hospital or the prison, it cannot do without perpetual surveillance—given its notion of ‘normality’; how, with time-tables and examinations, it restricts our movements and hierarchises us. The school is a disciplinary space—without any spontaneity or freedom. Or, as Foucault thought, the school ought to be seen as a site for the exercise of power: how the teacher exercises power over pupils; how power and knowledge are reconciled. Indeed, as Madan Sarup sees it,
at a time when there is a 'tremendous growth of disciplinary institutions', Foucault's work deserves special attention.

It is, however, possible to argue that Foucault's work was based on the French experience and it may not be generalised. But what is more important is that Foucault's conclusions were absolutely of a pessimistic nature. While seeing the school as a disciplinary institution, he completely overlooked the possibility of positive discipline: discipline as an inner call, discipline born of an authentic dialogue between the teacher and the pupil, discipline as a beautiful way of relating to the world in an egalitarian/harmonious manner. Perhaps because of his notion of power (power is multiple and ubiquitous, power relations permeate every aspect of social life) he could not visualise the possibility of an alternative practice: the school as a place where the teacher and the taught are engaged in a reciprocal relationship. He could not give us the option to believe that the school—if we try—can be qualitatively different from the prison or the hospital. But then, the questions that Foucault raised are bound to sensitise us as we begin to strive for alternatives.

**Dependence on Institutions and Expertise**

There is no dearth of critical evaluation with respect to the meaning of school education. For instance, it has been argued that the school is an instrument of power not simply because it prepares one to accept the hegemony of the dominant class, but because it also causes excessive dependence on institutions and expertise. As a result, it denies one's autonomy, one's faith in oneself, and one's ability to do things outside the institutional settings. It makes one terribly dependent on expertise. This, as Joel H. Spring puts it, is the meaning of schooling in our times. His observation is hardly surprising, because in our times the school tends to assume responsibility for teaching the child about everything: thinking, acting, dressing, playing, creating, and even leisure. And there are 'experts' for everything who define the 'proper' way of doing things. It seems that there is no escape from the culture of expertise. Spring narrates this frightening situation when he writes:

This form of institutional dependence can potentially freeze and deaden all human activity. It is not beyond the realm of possibility, for instance, that sometime in the future people will not engage in sexual acts until 'properly' taught the most valuable response and the most important scientific method. It seems possible that in the current discussions in geriatrics there will develop techniques to help people die 'properly'. Death education and sex education will probably become important elements in our educational system if current practices continue. (Spring 1972: 152-53).

This is essentially the ultimate experience in alienation: something rooted in the logic of the prevalent technological civilisation. It is in this context that Spring refers to the French sociologist Jacques Ellul and argues that technology dominates the goals and aspirations of man. The chief goal of technology, according to Ellul, is not human emancipation, but its own perpetuation and expansion. Man becomes a 'thing' to be controlled for the benefit of the technological system. To live in such a society is to adjust to its logic: accept what the technical experts are saying, repress your own likes and dislikes! This, for all practical purposes, has become the function of the school. For Ellul, children are educated so that they become precisely what the society wants them to become. They must have a social conscience that allows them to strive for the same ends as society sets for itself. For example, the much talked about 'vocational education' is seldom interested in the natural aptitude of the individual. Instead, its primary agenda is to nurture only those aptitudes which are essential to the needs of the technological system. 'The school', as a result, 'becomes a source of power for the technological machine' (Spring 1972: 161).

Hence, 'social adaptation', says Spring, is the chief purpose of the school. It is futile to expect that the school is creating a free/reflexive/imaginative mind. 'The only type of personality that the school can support and approve is one that fits smartly into the institutional organisation.' (Spring 1972: 164). With schooling begins alienation (losing faith in oneself and the resultant dependence on institutions and expertise), and it is this alienation that defines the technological system.

True, not everyone would accept this 'extreme' viewpoint, because not everything about the culture of technology/expertise is
bad, and thereby, the school cannot be unduly blamed if it prepares one for that culture. Moreover, it can be argued that there may be counter-cultures in the school itself that can pose a challenge to the dominant technological ethos. Yet, the point that Spring and Ellul raise cannot be denied, because the power of technology, as we are realising in our own times, is irresistible, and it does shape the environment of the school; the way it defines the agenda of knowledge and socialisation.

IV
Search for Alternatives

As we are beginning to realise, it is not easy to escape the questions being raised by the opponents of the prevalent school practices. It is, therefore, not surprising that an attempt has been made—by educationists and social philosophers—to strive for and experiment with alternative schools: the schools based on freedom (not control), creativity (not a packaged curriculum causing alienation), humanism (not arrogance or submissiveness), and a reciprocal teacher-taught relationship (not the monologue of the teacher as a dictator). It is important to understand the social meaning of these alternatives.

To begin with, let us reflect on Ivan Illich—a radical educationist whose disillusionment with the school as a 'manipulative institution' was total. No wonder, Illich was not willing to remain content with just moderate reforms in the school system. Instead, he pleaded for what appears to be impossible to many: 'deschooling society'. For Illich, the school evolves a logic of its own; it is not a 'dependent variable'; it is futile to believe that a change in the politico-economic system would alter the function of schooling, because 'schools are fundamentally alike in all countries, be they fascist, democratic or socialist, big or small, rich or poor' (Illich 1984: 77). Hence, what is desirable is to appreciate the 'revolutionary potential of deschooling.'

Before we understand the meaning of deschooling, let us see why Illich debunked the school. The schooled mind, according to Illich, loses freedom, becomes alienated, and internalises the myth that knowledge is impossible without certificates. One is 'schooled to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new' (Illich 1984: 9). This 'hidden curriculum' is dangerous, because it leads to what Illich called 'physical pollution, social polarisation, psychological impotence and modernised poverty.' For example, with schooling begins the internalisation of a series of myths. One learns 'the myth of institutionalised values'. In other words, the school tells one that nothing exists outside institutions; knowledge is what 'certified' experts teach at school; there is no such thing as a self-taught man or woman! One also learns 'the myth of measurement of values'. One is told that everything, including one's imagination, can be measured, graded and ranked. There is nothing unique about a man who refuses to be measured and compared. 'In a schooled world', as Illich said, 'the road to happiness is paved with a consumer's index' (Ibid: 46). One also learns 'the myth of packaging values'; how knowledge can be packaged in the form of a scientific curriculum. In fact, the school denies one's creativity, hampers one's inner growth and deprives one of learning from the flow of life itself. To quote Illich:

School makes alienation preparatory to life, thus depriving education of reality and work of creativity. School prepares for the alienating institutionalisation of life by teaching the need to be taught. Once this lesson is learned, people lose their incentive to grow in independence; they no longer find relatedness attractive and close themselves off to the surprises which life offers when it is not predetermined by institutional definition. (Illich 1984: 51).

Moreover, as schools tend to lay a total claim on the time and energies of its participants, we witness how the teacher begins to dictate the reality of life. According to Illich, the schooled society turns the teacher into a custodian, preacher and a therapist. And this is dangerous. Because this is a denial of the ethos of a liberal society—the spirit of freedom.

No wonder, this sharp critique led Illich to think of alternatives. The school system, he argued repeatedly, rests on illusions—say, the illusion that 'most learning is the result of teaching'. Illich fought this illusion, and asserted his conviction unambiguously.
Most learning happens casually, and even most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction. Normal children learn their first language casually, although faster if their parents pay attention to them. Most people who learn a second language will do so as a result of odd circumstances and not of sequential teaching... Most people who read widely and with pleasure, merely believe that they learned to do so in school; when challenged they easily discard this illusion. (Illich 1984: 20).

In a way, what characterised Illich was this firm hope and conviction that there were multiple ways of learning, and that there was no reason for anyone to accept the monopoly of the school. He, therefore, sought to liberate the human mind from the burden of schooling. With deschooling, he thought, would begin liberation. One would be able to choose one's education outside institutions; one would acquire the confidence to gain education even without passing through the ritual of examinations, graded rankings, and school certificates.

Illich proposed four approaches for implementing the agenda of deschooling. First, he spoke of the necessity of reference services to educational objects. The goal was to enable anyone interested in learning to use the educational material—the material that could be stored by libraries, laboratories, museums, theatres, factories, airports and farms. In other words, this easy accessibility of educational material would enable the society to fight against the school monopolising the domain of education. Second, he spoke of skill exchanges—a situation in which interested people would be able to list their skills, and the conditions under which they are willing to exchange them. This, he hoped, would lead to an abundance of skills, because the school would no longer be allowed to equate skills with institutional requirements, thereby making them scarce. Third, he felt the necessity of a communications network designed to allow persons—who want to learn a particular activity—describe their specific areas of interest so as to be able to find a partner who would be interested in their enquiry. This ‘peer-matching’ network would be easier to establish with the help of computers. Finally, he thought of reference services to educators-at-large. This would enable one to see beyond teachers and discover all those professionals, para-professionals and freelancers interested in engaging themselves with education as a communicative act. To conclude, Illich wanted a society in which education would no longer be confused with schooling, nor learning with teaching, or creativity with diploma. His was the vision of a society in which the trajectory of life would become free from bureaucratic/institutional control.

The points that Illich made are intensely enlightening. Yet, it should not be forgotten that the school has also a positive role to play. After all, the school, as we have already discussed, enables the child to come out of the protective context of family/kinship ties, allows him/her to experience the larger society, as well as to interact with the complex network of social relations. Moreover, the school, its limitations notwithstanding, may also prepare the child for organised learning, and which—even if it curtails the freedom of the creative genius—is not altogether meaningless for the majority of the learners. That is why, it would be wrong to remain blind to progressive changes/reforms/innovations in the school system. In other words, we need to focus not just on deschooling, but also on an alternative form of schooling: how new schools can operate and function with relatively enhanced innovation, creativity and egalitarian values.

Karl Mannheim, for example, saw the possibility of a more progressive form of schooling in tune with the process of democratisation of society. What he had in mind was the movement for progressive/child-centred schools that he saw emerging in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century. A major characteristic of progressive schools is that the teacher is 'gradually being turned from an authoritative and possibly authoritarian instructor into a guide who relies upon the initiative of the learner, and recognises that for good intellectual learning, a prior condition is emotional respect between teacher and pupil' (Mannheim and Stewart 1962: 28). In other words, the child ought to be seen as an autonomous person to be respected, not just coerced, disciplined, and moulded by the adult. This democratic process, Mannheim felt, could also be seen in the new form of learning. This meant that 'students are participating in the direction of their own learning, they are much more encouraged to discover for themselves through the use of libraries, laboratories, attendance at conferences and participation in committees and other forms of self-government' (Ibid: 31). As a result, subjects like art, music, crafts
acquired importance. Besides, education became an experience of inner joy; it was not based on ‘external rewards like marks, prizes, ranking’ (Ibid: 32). In Mannheim, we saw the affirmation of optimism. In the movement for progressive schools he saw the possibility of freedom, the autonomy of the child and above all a ‘broader and deeper’ notion of education affecting the personality of the pupil at all levels.

In fact, the progressive movement made it clear that it was possible to have an alternative notion of childhood and childrearing practices. Before we understand this alternative, let us examine the dominant/mainstream form of schooling and the associated childrearing practice. It is true that ‘organisationally, schools are still tailored to authoritarian, class-based impersonal forms of teaching, requiring both incentive and punishment as aids to control’ (Schostak 1986: 58).

Beneath this authoritarianism lies a particular image of the child—an image created by the doctrine of Original Sin, an image of the child as ‘material to be moulded and finally treated...by the will of the adult’ (Ibid: 45). This only goes to show that the child has no autonomy, that it is the responsibility of the adult to ‘discipline’ him/her!

But the progressive tradition, as Schostak argues, has altogether different notion of childhood and human nature. Its roots could be seen in Rousseau’s thinking. Rousseau, we know, advocated a form of child-centred curriculum which located the source of evil not in human nature but in society. Rousseau, therefore, pleaded for natural stages of development of the child. Education, it was thought, should not require much constraint, that is, the disciplinary gaze that coerces the child. Instead, it should rest on the child’s natural growth. No wonder, John Dewey—another advocate of progressive education—spoke of a new teacher who ‘reduces to a minimum the occasions when he or she has to exercise authority in a personal way.’ For Dewey, the model for teacher-pupil relations is that of the ‘well-ordered’ family. The teacher, far from being a dictator, thinks and does what is good for the child. But then, according to Schostak, this progressive tradition is not sufficiently libertarian, because it is not free from ‘subtle authoritarianism.’ It is ‘patriarchal;’ it assumes that the adult knows the best. But in ‘liberatarian traditions’ Schostak sees the possibility of true emancipation. The origin of the libertarian tradition could be seen in Godwin—the great English anarchist thinker. Here the primary assumption is that individuals do co-operate even without being coerced. In other words, the child is inherently good, social, and co-operative. It is, therefore, better to have faith in the child’s natural motivation for learning. The task of the libertarian teacher is to respect this motive, not to hinder or pervert the child’s natural inclinations.

Hence, although authoritarianism remains the dominant school practice, there have been attempts to strive for alternatives. And these alternatives—progressive and libertarian traditions—seek to make the school a better place, with a relaxed environment conducive to the child’s inner growth. Yet, one need not necessarily be happy even with this humanism. For example, the standardised Marxist critique is that this child-centred approach is romantic and conservative. It fails to realise that a class-divided/stratified/unequal society cannot be altered merely by changing the individual’s consciousness. In a way, it is an emotional turning away from the society. As Madan Sarup argues, ‘the entire approach is just an alternative to the dominant practice, but it is not oppositional’ (Sarup 1982: 11).

It is in this context that Paulo Freire’s approach to libertarian education would be appropriate. It is possible to have an affinity between Freire and the alternative tradition we have discussed, because Freire too disliked the monologue of the teacher, the reduction of the school into a disciplinary space that crushes the autonomy of the pupil. But then Freire—with his radical pedagogy—seeks to make the transformation possible: from an exploitative society to an egalitarian one.

Education, for Freire, acquires special importance, because it is through the prevalent system of education—or ‘banking education’—that the ‘culture of silence’ is reproduced. This education is not liberating for the oppressed. It is, therefore, important that the oppressed have new education—or ‘liberatarian education’—to emancipate themselves. Before we understand how Freire distinguishes his new pedagogy from the prevalent one, let us see how he views the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. He seems to be convinced that the power that the oppressors wield has already de-humanised them; that they cannot think of any emancipatory agenda.

In fact, it is the oppressed who have the ‘great humanistic and his-
torical task’ of liberating themselves as well as the oppressors. Because ‘only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both’ (Freire 1972: 21). Yet, Freire reminds us, it is not uncommon that the oppressed take on the values of the oppressors. This is a tragic situation, because ‘the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, themselves tend to become the oppressors, or sub-oppressors’ (Ibid: 22). This happens because of what Freire calls ‘prescription’—a hierarchical mode of existence in which the oppressors impose their values upon the oppressed. As a result, the behaviour of the oppressed becomes a ‘prescribed’ behaviour; it follows the guidelines of the oppressor. It is in this context that Freire talks about the ‘duality’ of existence that characterises the oppressed.

They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalised. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting him; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and recreate, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account. (Freire 1972: 24–25).

It is in this context that Freire talks about the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’—the pedagogy that would enable the oppressed to overcome their dilemma, show them the road to salvation, and eventually make liberation possible. This pedagogy, according to Freire, has two distinct stages. First, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression, and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. Second, when the reality of oppression has been transformed, the pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed only; it becomes a pedagogy of all men in their quest for permanent liberation.

According to Freire, it is not impossible to find certain members of the oppressor class joining the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. There is, however, a risk involved, because ‘they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin; their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know’ (Freire 1972: 36).

In other words, they talk about the people, but fail to establish any meaningful communication with them. That is why, Freire makes it categorically clear that liberation is not a gift from outside; that the leadership cannot implant in the oppressed a belief in freedom; that it must emerge from their own ‘conscientisation’.

The only effective instrument is a humanising pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a humanising pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers (here the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves. (Freire 1972: 44).

It is, therefore, obvious that the new pedagogy Freire is talking about restores the human agency. It strengthens the confidence of the oppressed, makes them believe that they matter and that it is possible for them to create a better world. With the libertarian pedagogy, they become subjects as they resist the process of objectification. Authentic education, they realise, requires the active presence of the learner. That is why, Freire distinguishes his new pedagogy from what he calls a banking concept of education. Banking education privileges the teacher. It assumes that the teacher knows everything; that the student is merely passive; that there is no possibility of a creative engagement between the teacher and the student. As Freire sees it, the banking concept of education suffers from ‘narration sickness’. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static and compartmentalised. He assumes that his only task is to ‘fill’ the student’s mind with the contents of his narration. The banking concept of education is, therefore, ‘an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor’ (Freire 1972: 55). In fact, in the banking concept of education, ‘knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing’ (Ibid: 56). This means that it is hierarchical; it perpetuates inequality and oppression. It is anti-dialogic.
But what characterises libertarian education is its dialogicity. Here the teacher, Freire says, is not merely the one who teaches. For him, teaching itself is a process of learning. As he engages himself in a dialogic relationship with his students, he begins to learn. Likewise, in the process of being taught, the students teach the teacher. As Freire says, ‘through dialogue, the teacher-of-students and the students-of-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teacher’ (Ibid: 53). In other words, unlike the banking education, Freire’s ‘problem posing education’ rests on creativity. It assumes that the learner is active and capable of attaching his/her own meaning to the world. As a result, it resists the status-quo, and celebrates revolutionary transformations.

It becomes clear that Freire’s educational philosophy has been heavily influenced by humanistic Marxism and existentialism. As a matter of fact, what distinguishes Freire is his faith in the power of dialogue. Because dialogue means faith in humanity. Dialogue means one’s refusal to accept one’s passive existence. Dialogue is a creative engagement with the world. It means love, reciprocity, mutuality. It is to overcome one’s silence. Dialogue, Freire says, is an ‘existential necessity’ (Ibid: 61). That is why, he attaches supreme importance to dialogue. ‘Without dialogue’, Freire says, ‘there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education’ (Ibid: 65). It is this dialogic education that Freire wants to be an important component of the revolutionary practice.

To sum up, as we reflect on the search for alternatives—from child-centred progressive education to libertarian pedagogy—we see a new notion of learning emerging: learning as a process of inner discovery; learning as a creative process filled with immense joy and enthusiasm. We also see the assertion of a dialogic/reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the taught. This means a new way of looking at the school, which, far from manufacturing cogs of a vast social machine, stimulates one to assert one’s subjectivity and agency, and prepares one for a world that is humane and egalitarian.

School Education in Contemporary India: Expectations and Anxieties

All that we have discussed so far helps us understand that the phenomenon called schooling has to be examined critically. In fact, it has become clear that one’s perception of schooling is deeply related to one’s socio-political imagination. For example, as we have seen, it was the vision of a stable social order that led Durkheim to see the school as a moral agent. For Parsons, the school must select the manpower for the workforce. But then, those who dislike the status-quo—the capitalist society—evoke a critique of the school, the way it reproduces class inequality. And those who strive for a humane/egalitarian society restoring human agency, see beyond the ‘disciplinary’ logic of the school and speak of child-centred/progressive/dialogic education. In other words, in the divergent perceptions of schooling, we see a spectrum of worldviews: from the celebration of a modern/industrial society to the critique of capitalism; from the postmodern critique of modernity to the romantic vision of a non-competitive, egalitarian society!

It is in this context that the debate on Indian schooling has to be located. Well, it may be argued that all that we have discussed so far has its origin not in India, but elsewhere. True, the theoretical debate that we have initiated cannot be isolated from the Western context: how the theory of schooling emerged in a modern/industrial/capitalist society. Yet, we insist, the theoretical insight—be it that of a French Bourdieu or an American Michael Apple—has given us the skill that we need to examine the sociology of schooling in India.

As we look at India, it is important for us to reflect on the following:

1. Here is a society that is experiencing massive social transformation. It is merging with the ‘new’ age: the age of modern science, technological development, and secular rationality. But, at the same time, it cannot forget the traumatic memory of colonialism: how the colonial West sought to demoralise it, and to undermine its traditional cultural knowledge and heritage.
2. Here is a society with its political agenda: the agenda of a modern nation striving for equality and democracy. In other words, the goal is to reduce societal divisions and disparities and to create a just society. A leading Marxist political economist speaks of what he considers desirable in the future:

The three most important elements in future education policy should be (a) to make primary education not only available but also reached to and availed of by all children, so that at least in the next generation, we have a more educated, alive and alert population; (b) to focus on the education of women, and particularly female children, by reaching out to them; and (c) to make education worth while, and relate it to the actual needs of the people in terms of suitability of the education imparted for employment, for better skills, for a better understanding of health, education, environmental and other relevant issues. (Ghosh 1992: 680).

As a matter of fact, in our times, the school has often been seen as a major instrument for achieving these objectives. The school, it is argued, is a ‘modern’ institution. It cannot remain contented with traditional/religious knowledge; it must train children for the new age and equip them with techno-scientific knowledge. It is also thought that with universal schooling, a society like ours would eventually move towards equality. Moreover, the school, it is hoped, would also decolonise the mind and retain the cultural spirit of India. Here, we see an optimistic perception of schooling. In fact, this optimism—or high expectations from school education—can be seen in different education commission reports in post-Independence India. By

But this positive view—the school as a progressive institution leading to social transformation, or the school creating a just society—is not necessarily shared by all. We are also witnessing a sharp critique of the prevalent functions of the school. This critique, to put it simply, seeks to make us aware of the fact that the school, far from creating an equal society, is reproducing the societal inequality; elite schools isolate the children of the privileged classes and take them to a world filled with arrogance, snobbery and contempt for the larger society. And schools for the masses somehow survive without creativity or inspiration. The critique also examines the politics of school knowledge and curriculum. It is also argued that the school, because of its close affinity with Western symbols, has failed to retain the spirit of decolonisation. It is, therefore, important to have new schools—schools that are in tune with India’s cultural/spiritual tradition. Furthermore, the school has also been criticised for its conservative functions: the way it breeds competition, promotes conformity, suppresses the spirit of innovation, and renders the learning process bereft of any joy or creativity. It is, therefore, felt that we need new schools—schools that would be different from the ‘mainstream’ tradition and establish alternative values: co-operativeness, togetherness, child-centeredness, holism, and affinity with nature. This alternative tradition draws its inspiration from the educational philosophies of Gandhi, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Jiddu Krishnamurti.

It is, therefore, possible to argue that there are conflicting views on the function of schooling in the Indian society: from optimism to despair, from an instrument of social transformation to a conservative machinery for reproducing social inequality, from a socialising agency preparing the child for the competitive techno-economic world to an emancipatory site for child-centred/progressive education in tune with India’s culture and spirituality. Hence, we need to focus our attention—more seriously and rigorously—on the meaning of schooling in India: the debate on educational policies and practices, how a post-colonial society looks at education, how knowledge is produced and received, the social meaning of ‘legitimate’ school texts and curriculum, the kind of values/orientations children internalise in the process of school education, and how the dissenters imagine and strive for alternative education—its possibilities and contradictions. In the following chapters, we have tried to reflect on these issues with the hope that we would be able to get a better understanding of the kind of relationship that exists between the school and the society, politics and knowledge, ideology and curriculum, social imagination and educational practices.