

FREEDOM AND DISCIPLINE: A STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE AT RISHI VALLEY SCHOOL

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This paper is an outcome of research conducted in Rishi Valley School, a residential school in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, which is guided by the vision and ideas of its founder, J. Krishnamurti.

According to him, education should take place in an environment marked by the absence of fear and conditioning. Each sphere of life, he believes, has its own discipline, and through education and culture the accepted discipline is inculcated in all its members. However, for him, the word “discipline” comprises *learning*, and not conforming, suppressing, or imitating. Thus, freedom and discipline exist alongside each other-- one makes the existence of the other possible. Discipline and freedom for him should not, and cannot, be imposed by external agencies, but should sprout from within the students. This can only happen if they are considerate towards each other and to everyone else in the school. If they respect and are sensitive towards others, they will self-regulate their thoughts and behaviours, therefore giving rise to a sense of discipline which is intimately tied up with freedom. Therefore, the limits on freedom are self-imposed as guided by their awareness of others’ freedoms. (Krishnamurti 1974).

In accordance with these views, the educational philosophy of the school commits to the creation of an “atmosphere of affection, order and freedom without either fear or license”¹. These ideas led me to investigate how the relationship between discipline and freedom actually plays out in the school.

“Disciplining”, as understood by Foucault, stands apart from the concept of discipline and the system of learning envisioned by the school and its founder. The target of disciplining, according to Foucault came to be the individual body, and the aim was to shape this malleable and “docile body” (Foucault 1975: 135) in order to make it obedient i.e. adhere to the rules and instructions of the institution in which these bodies are located. The very location of these individualized targets of power is in fact partitioned and fixed to a specified space at a particular point in time—this can be found in the timetables of institutions which seek to “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition” (ibid: 149). This

¹ As elucidated on the school website- rishivalley.org.

partitioning of the day according to time and space is then said to facilitate surveillance. According to Foucault, Bentham's model of the Panopticon prison can be applied to various institutions, even schools. This structure induces a constant sense of being watched. This perpetual possibility of being watched then leads to an internalization of power such that the students adhere to the discipline (Foucault 1975).

In such an understanding of discipline, the agency of those who are the objects of discipline is not addressed, and is in fact undermined. The assumption is that the institutional structure, be it through partitioning or through the exercise of surveillance, exercises power in such way that the individuals in the structure are in perpetual adherence to regulations.

Through this paper I have attempted to problematize this notion of docility and thereby highlight the constant manoeuvring taking place. This can be seen in the way the students negotiate with the teachers, and in their resistance to rules, thereby experiencing freedom within the structure of the school. Bourdieu's concept of "practice" (Bourdieu 1972: 72) can be used to further strengthen this argument. Practice is influenced by one's "habitus" (ibid) which he defines as, "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (ibid). Bourdieu's theory of practice formed a bridge between the dichotomous extremes of objectivism which over emphasises structural influence, and subjectivism which over emphasises individual action. What he attempts to achieve via habitus, is a dialectical relationship between these two poles, thereby proving that the individual, though influenced by a structure which gets internalized to a certain extent, also asserts agency via his/ her practice. This practice takes place within the structure, but also exerts influence on the structure (ibid). This paper attempts to elucidate the resistances by the students exerted upon the disciplinary structure of the school.

In Rishi Valley they do not follow a strict time-bound syllabus, and the students do not have any examinations until class 9, thus textbook teaching and rote learning is not the dominant form of learning. Teachers are guided by the syllabus which has been formulated by earlier teachers of the school, and they often transmit this syllabus with modifications. The teachers do come to the class with a class-plan in mind, but even while teaching, space is provided by them and they make it a point to let students express their creativity and think for themselves in relation to the work they are assigned. The teachers try to balance discipline and freedom by engaging in a dialogue regarding rules, so that disciplinary measures do not appear as flowing in an authoritative and unidirectional manner. Along with this, they engage in conversations with the students when and if they break a rule, or behave in an irresponsible manner. The

informality of interaction, and the close relation between the teachers and students aids this process.

Although the teachers try to provide freedom, I found out that the students still manoeuvre and attempt to find their space within the school structure. They constantly negotiate with their teachers, and in some spheres, find their way around rules that they perceive as unnecessary. Therefore the students are not just “docile bodies” (Foucault 1975: 135) who are acted upon by disciplining mechanisms to show unquestioning adherence to norms (ibid), but are active, thinking actors, who try to negotiate and find ways to circumvent the rules. Furthermore, an aspect of playfulness is intimately tied up with their circumvention. This shall be discussed further in the subsequent sections of the paper.

Method

The research was carried out over six weeks from June to July 2019. I arrived in the school a week prior to the arrival of junior school students, with whom my research was concerned. This time was spent familiarizing myself with the school campus, talking to teachers, and interacting with some senior students. After this, the five weeks were spent with the children of class 6, as a participant, as well as a non-participant observer. Along with this I conducted around 45 informal interviews with teachers and students.

I focused on this class because it made it possible to gather information from not only new students who took admission, but also those who have been in Rishi Valley for a few years and have learned to navigate the freedom which exists along with discipline, in the school. However, because their houses (as their hostels are called) have students from classes 4th to 7th living together, and activities like art and crafts, sports, dance and music take place with 7th grade students, my interaction went beyond just class 6 and brought me in contact with junior school students falling in the age group of 10-13 years.

I focused on the relation between discipline and freedom in the classroom and also in spaces outside the classroom. This included the sports field, music and dance rooms, the art rooms, and even their houses. The spaces I covered were guided by the formal schedule the students follow in their day—as provided by the timetable, and also the informal interactional spaces that permeated the timetable—this included their juice break visits to their houses, the sports field during games, the area outside their houses where they gathered to play in the evening, and also the dining hall in which I shared many meals with them.

In order to cover all these spaces, I followed the students through their day. Since class 6 has two sections owing to the intake of new admissions, I alternated my days between section A and B which have 20 students each.

This study seeks to highlight the agency of students, and to an extent-- of teachers, by looking at the relationship between freedom and discipline at Rishi Valley School. This is achieved through the centrality of dialogue in the communication of rules and guidelines of the school, as well as after the transgression of a rule. This is captured within the ambit of the informality which marks the teacher- student relationship. Further, the negotiations that takes place between teachers and students, and the constant attempts by teachers to provide space, are posited alongside the playful resistance of students.

Dialogue and Discussion around Rules

The students in the school are very happy, confident, and not hesitant in expressing their views to their peers, teachers or even their principal. Even though their classroom setting is one that may give the impression that the teacher is the authoritative figure-- with the students sitting at their desks and the teacher facing the class, the relationship and interactions between the students and teachers are in fact not unidirectional or rooted in a sense of absolute authority of the teacher. The interactions between them are not dictated by fear, and students are not hesitant in putting forth their views. Thus the physical set up of the classroom does not in any way hinder the two-way communication, and discussions and questioning is encouraged by the teachers. The teachers however do make efforts to regulate the class participation by encouraging raising of hands before talking, so that everyone can be heard.

This informality between teachers and students, “is characterized by a relative lack of authoritarian control: the pupils do not formally greet the teacher on her entrance, they are allowed to laugh both with and at her, they call some teachers by their first names...” (Thapan, 2006: 172). This forms the base and the potential for dialogue between the teachers and students.

A teacher whom I interviewed, expressed that an essential part of setting boundaries is having conversations and dialogue around them, without which they are arbitrary. Krishnamurti also spoke of the importance of dialogue as an effective tool of communication. For him, “a dialogue is a form of deliberation (Krishnamurti 1989), which has its roots in Greek *libra* that means ‘balance, weigh’.....Here one does not offer an opinion, but the participants weigh their ideas and beliefs to find the truth of them. It is a collaborative engagement like a conversation

between two friends, who have trust, affection, common interests, and a deep communication.” (Baniwal 2018: 135). Thus even though rules and norms are present, there is freedom to question and to know why a certain rule has been formed. This engages the students in a dialogue and treats them as thinking individuals.

Entering class 6 is a big moment for the students because this is when they start using a pen. In the first class of the session, the class teacher explains that it is compulsory to use an ink pen (fountain pen) as it is a rule. The students do not accept this demand unquestioningly and inquire the reason. The teacher then explains that ball pens and gel pens generate excessive plastic waste, which is reduced with the use of ink pens. She always makes it a point to address queries and concerns of the students, however minor they may seem.

There was a more detailed discussion in a Culture Class², where the students were in fact encouraged by their teacher to ask openly about the rules of the school, and not just accept them as they are. This created excitement amongst the students and they all began asking their questions at the same time, thereby making noise. The teacher settled them down and requested them to proceed in a systematic manner, by raising their hand and speaking one by one.

The first few questions taken up for discussion are as follows:

Student 1: “Why can we not bring food from home?”

Student 2: “Why do we have the silence bell?”³

The first question is answered by a student who is eager to answer. He says, “If some students bring food from home, then it will become a competition and also lead to a lot of plastic waste”. Another student adds, “It will become about who gets better food—that’s why birthday chocolate was stopped, because parents would get a lot of stuff to distribute”. The teacher agrees with them. Another student adds, “It was also for promoting healthy eating otherwise we would eat too much junk food!”

This shows that there has been conversation around this topic and the students are aware of the reasons behind the rules. In my conversations with teachers and students I found out that the

² Culture Classes are largely discussion-based and revolve around topics related to spirituality, good behaviour, or even any problems the students are facing.

³ A bell is rung before all meals-- indicating time for silence. After a minute or so, it is rung again to mark the end of the silence time.

students' parents, their House Parents⁴, and even their previous teachers have discussed some of the rules with them. This is why they know the reasons for having certain rules and norms.

The relevance of the silence bell according to a student was “So that people who want to pray can do it before eating.” The teacher responds, “Yes you could use that time to pray, but the idea was to quieten noisy children—to make them quiet and start the meal silently and together—ideally”. A student adds, “It is to know what you're eating, and to be aware of the food.” The teacher says “Yes that is also absolutely right.”

The next question raised is:

Student: “Why are wrist watches not allowed?”

Teacher: “They are not really required since there are clocks everywhere. They may also come in the way when you are playing in the games period.”

This is followed by the next question:

Student: “Why are parents visits not allowed for a longer time like 5-6 days?”

A student replies, “The Guest House would get crowded.” Then another student says, “My father cannot leave work for so many days and come.” The teacher adds, “Yes and your own school schedule would get disrupted as well.”

Other teachers also made it a point to speak to the students about the physical boundaries and other rules of the school. Thus there are efforts made to communicate rules and guidelines in a way that they do not appear as impositions that must be followed unquestioningly. Freedom is provided by teachers to discuss and inquire the rationale behind rules. This is important as rules are not expected to be followed just out of fear of punishment, but out of an understanding of their intent.

However, despite these discussions, children do break some rules and norms which they consider to be unnecessary restrictions, or simply because they want to have fun. When the teachers find out about this, scolding and imposing a punishment are avoided as far as possible, though if a consequence⁵ is introduced, it is to make the students reflect on their behaviour.

⁴ As the term suggests, House Parents are parental figures who are in charge of the children of their House. They manage their schedules—ensuring they do their work and reach their activities on time. They also help and counsel the children if any problem arises.

⁵ For a serious violation of a rule—like getting into a fight with someone, the student may be asked to miss their games period. Those who repeatedly violate a rule, can be asked to make small paper bags which are

While some disciplining is carried out in the class, by making the child aware that s/he must wait for his/her turn to speak, the more serious or repetitive behavioural issues are dealt with outside the class instead of scolding the child in front of everyone. A teacher explains that this is done to avoid bringing down the child's self-esteem and confidence.

A House Parent reveals that children need to be made aware that the repeated breaking of rules does not just affect them, but also others around them. They live in a community, hence must be considerate towards others. For example if a child is late for meals, he/she is told, "The Akkas⁶ have to serve the food and then clean the tables before the next meal. If you do not come on time they will get late and be troubled."

Such attempts are guided by Krishnamurti's idea of human beings as "ever evolving, yet rooted in web of relationships with others. Such understandings of the self emphasizes an enormous responsibility for every person..." (Baniwal 2018, 41). This notion is rooted in a rejection of individualism which treats freedom as one's ability and right to do whatever one wants. Instead, the reasoning behind such dialogues between teachers and students is to make the students think about their connectedness to others around them, and therefore spark sensitivity and consideration, which is expected to help them act more responsibly.

The students also speak of how the teachers try to understand them and help improve on their mistakes, and also talk about the consequences of their actions. They draw a stark comparison from their previous schools where the teachers would just scold and punish. Many even mention hitting as a form of disciplining in their earlier schools. One student says, "This school doesn't believe in violence—they believe that there are other ways of teaching."

The efforts of the teachers are closely related to Krishnamurti's idea that "...external, outward imposition of discipline makes the mind stupid, it makes you conform, it makes you imitate. But if you discipline yourself by watching, listening, being considerate, being very thoughtful - out of that watchfulness, that listening, that consideration for others, comes order." (Krishnamurti 1974: 25).

used in the school hospital to pack the medicines. After the students have had this quiet time to think about their mistakes, the concerned teacher will once again have a conversation with the child. These consequences are not repressive, but reflective.

⁶ "Akka" is a Telegu term used to refer to one's older sister. In Rishi Valley, the female teachers and female non-teaching staff are addressed as Akkas. Using the term Akka in addressing teachers aids the creation of an informal relation between the students and teachers. The Male teachers are addressed as "sir", but students often call them by their first names or nick names.

The existence of open dialogue creates a democratic ethos in the school which is an integral feature of the school culture⁷. Guided by Krishnamurti's views, teachers engage in discussions and do not dismiss the students and this forms the potential for open negotiation with between teachers and students.

Negotiation with Teachers and Attempts by Teachers to Provide Space

It always takes a few minutes for the teacher to make the students settle down at the beginning of a class. This is a moment when the students try to negotiate with the teacher and make requests for a playing period, or a story, or to avoid doing any written work and instead have a discussion. The teachers do not shoot down their requests or scold them to settle down. They use this time to joke with the students, hear them out, and try to incorporate their wishes into the teaching plan they had in mind. Sometimes when the noise gets too much and the students are refusing to listen, the teachers give them a glance expressing their dissatisfaction at their behaviour, ask them to observe a few minutes of silence, or firmly ask the students to quieten down. These actions by the teachers are not guided towards generation of fear, but “serve to bring in an element of command and assertion among the participants. This reflects how the teacher exercises authority in a way that does not induce fear among the students” (Sonkar 2018: 163).

Teachers put in constant effort to provide space to the students, be it in their openness to negotiations about the class, or attempts to encourage students to think and express themselves in the work that they are given. How this space is provided by the teachers and how they listen to the students could be seen clearly in a music class that I observed:

The excited students, bustling with energy file into the music room and make themselves seated on the floor. However, they are not in the mood for a music class so they ask their teacher to tell them a story instead. One student suggests, “Tell us when and how you joined Rishi Valley!” Then they start pleading with him and shout “Please” in unison. The teacher encourages them and says, “Very good! Now sing “*Saa*” with the same energy!” They instead sing “No-o” in the same way. The teacher follows and sings “No-o” in the same tune, while the children sing “Ye-s”. Thus the teacher plays along with the students, at the same time engaging them in learning a few musical notes. Subsequently giving in to their request for a

⁷ This refers to the culture of the school. As mentioned by Professor Thapan, “School culture may be understood in terms of certain fundamental values and norms, which are its basis, as well as the configuration of activities through which these are expressed” (2006: 54).

story, he starts the *tanpura*⁸ machine at a low volume as background music, and begins narrating a story of how he joined Rishi Valley, but he weaves this story into a fictitious plot where he is the protagonist and the descendent of a king. The students are thoroughly enjoying his animated recitation of the story. After engaging with the students in this manner, he sees an opportune moment to continue with the music class and says, “Okay now sit straight, let us start with the class.” He sings a chain of 2-3 *swars*⁹ which the students repeat. Then he sings a line from a song, and the students start singing with him. The music class thus begins!

The students are often seen having informal conversations with the same music teacher whenever they see him around the campus. Some even stay back after the music class to talk with him. The familiarity and informality in their relationship creates the space for negotiations in the class. The teacher is adept at managing the students’ demands by channelizing their restlessness and excitement into active participation.

In Art and Craft as well, as observed during my time spent with the children in the Batik/*Kalamkari* and Woodcraft classes, the students were not *told* what they had to make. The students were instead asked to sketch any design they liked. There were books and files with designs to choose from, and the students could pick any one of these designs, or make their own. The students were expected to make one Batik piece and one *Kalamkari* piece in the weeks they spend in the *Kalamkari* section. However, what they made was entirely up to them. Similar was the case with the Woodcraft classes where the students could make their own designs as long as they incorporated the required techniques like carving and shaving.

Thus it can be seen that while there is a structure that the students are expected to adhere to, teachers constantly attempt to provide creative freedom within the purview of the classes. “The underlying character of the school with its emphasis on freedom and vitality remains central to teacher’s definitions of school life and their own roles in it” (Thapan 2006: xv). Constant efforts are made by teachers to strengthen this quality of freedom by giving the children freedom to develop both academically and psychologically. There is no dictation of notes, and no instructions demanding answers to be copied from the prescribed text. The students are encouraged to think for themselves and phrase their answers in their own words.

⁸ *Tanpura* is an Indian string instrument. The *tanpura* machine is an electronic device that plays the sound of a *tanpura*.

⁹ *Swars* refer to musical notes.

The reason the teachers are able to provide this space is because they themselves have been given the freedom by the school-- to take classes at their own pace, and alter and execute the syllabus as they wish. This is the thought that guided Krishnamurti when he said, “When you as a teacher are free and orderly you are already communicating it, not only verbally but non-verbally and the student knows it immediately.” (Krishnamurti 1974: 71).

Teachers talk about the freedom and space they get, due to the absence of Board-issued textbooks for junior school¹⁰. The curriculum they refer to, has been in place as designed by a group of teachers of Rishi Valley School and this is used as the framework for their classes. For Hindi and English they use workbooks, in Mathematics they are given a book of assignments, and for Social Science they have two books, one on Ancient Greece and one on Varanasi, which have been prepared by teachers of the school. In addition there are many activity sheets and assignment sheets that are distributed during classes. There is a lot of freedom on how to conduct classes, which topics to cover and how much time to spend on a particular topic. This allows the teachers to make instantaneous connections and delve into class discussions that are not bound by a tight syllabus. As a teacher phrased the nature of the curriculum, “The kernel is there -- while some teachers follow, others also modify it”.

A teacher who had just started teaching in RVS speaks of her previous experience at teaching in a school as being dictated by a structured curriculum which had to simply be executed by the teachers. She mentions that even the execution had to be done in a particular way. The lesson plan was time- bound and it had to be completed in the stipulated class hours. If the teacher was unable to do so, the reason for the delay had to be given in writing to the school principal. On asking how her experience in Rishi Valley is different, she explains, “Since it is my first time here, I am going a little slow, but no one questions. If I am not able to complete, then I can do away with two topics also. There is much more freedom here, but as a teacher I should know my limit and my responsibility, and complete enough on time.”

The assessment system is also not standardized in the form of exams or a grading system. The teachers maintain a detailed record of every student’s progress for themselves, and there are regular meetings between teachers, so that they are able to gauge the level of each child and provide additional help if required.

¹⁰ Rishi Valley School is affiliated to ICSE (Indian Certificate for Secondary Education) and ISC (Indian Secondary) school board and the students begin following the Board syllabus and having exams when they enter senior school (from 9th grade onwards). Until then, the system followed is as described above.

The nature of assessment depends on the subject and the teacher. Some give assignments called review tests, while others check the level of comprehension by asking the students to write a summary of what was taught. Whenever the teacher gives an assessment activity, it is not announced as a test or exam. The students work on it just like they do with any other assignment. In activities like art and craft, music and dance as well, the students are not required to pass an examination, but are assessed on the basis of their overall involvement and effort through the term.

The review which is sent to the parents does not award any grades or marks to the students and is more qualitative than quantitative since teachers focus on the overall performance of the child in their classes and give detailed observations and comments on the same.

Students Finding their Way around Rules and Norms

It is important to understand that despite the dialogue around rules-- to aid an understanding among students of their importance, and despite the commitment of teachers to provide freedom to the students, the students do experience constraint. This constraint is felt as rules and norms for “appropriate behaviour and dress, of what is acceptable and possible, within the space opened up by the freedom in school life” (Thapan 2006: xvi). These are perceived as restricting the students and therefore leads them to manoeuvre around rules and norms. Students do not accept certain rules which they may conceive as unnecessary, and consequently seek courses of circumvention.

For all meals, the children move to the Dining Hall (DH). The students have House-wise fixed seating on working days and the House Parent sits with their respective House students for every meal. The students constantly feel they are being watched in the Dining Hall-- by members of the non-teaching staff who serve the students, the DH Manager, and all the House Parents.

Despite this constant surveillance, the children often giggle, or make funny faces at each other during the silence time (Silence Bell) in the Dining Hall. They are reprimanded by the DH staff for doing so, yet they repeatedly do this. The children are expected to eat everything that is served to them, but they have many ways of avoiding this. The most common practice employed is “dumping”, wherein the freshly served vegetable is emptied back into the serving bowl on the table. This practice requires patience and swiftness as one has to avert the gazes of all the adults around them. After dumping they look at their friends on the table and seek their reaction. Then they all giggle about this secret.

The Panopticon model works on internalizing discipline such that the inmates in a Panopticon prison adhere to discipline not because they are constantly being watched, but because they *may be* watched. This is because they have no way of knowing whether they are actually being watched. (Foucault 1975). However, the children in the Dining Hall, even under tight surveillance—knowing that there are high chances of getting caught since someone may be watching them from behind, or from a distant corner of the hall, still find ways to evade the rules. Such playful acts are observed more in spaces like the Dining Hall and in the Houses, which as mentioned by a House Parent, are often perceived as extensions of their homes.

As can be seen, even when the structural setting does not particularly provide space to the students, they carve out a space for themselves. In other schools¹¹, the architecture of the classroom is such that it allows for continuous surveillance-- for example an elevated teacher's desk to allow clear view of all students (Bhandari 2014) and in some, through the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras (Gogoi 2014). Even in these constraining and limiting circumstances, where even the punishment levied may be harsher, students still resist. For example they may follow the strict dress code during times of inspection—during the morning assembly, but later on wear it in a slightly different way (Bhandari 2014, Gogoi 2014). If caught in such an act, students may rebuked in front of their peers, and such reactions, according to Gogoi, indicate the will of the school to stay in control at all times (2014: 120).

The culture of Rishi Valley is such that these small acts of playful resistance are often not treated as an anomaly, but symptomatic of the expression and will of children. As mentioned, teachers have conversations with the students who are caught, but even they do not expect the children to have an unthinking sense of subservience to them or to the rules. What they expect is a sense of respect and kindness which ensures that the children do not harm anyone in any way. They are aware that their students are *children*, and that children seek to express themselves in such ways.

Another rule evaded with relation to food is the bringing of “Ille”. Ille is a common word in the school which is short for “Illegal Food” or “Illegal Grub”. It refers to any food item brought from home, which is neither permitted as per the handbook, nor available in the tuck shop¹².

¹¹ The schools mentioned here refer to a government school (Gogoi 2014), and a Christian Missionary School (Bhandari 2014).

¹² The students can purchase some snacks, additional stationary items, medical and other supplies from the tuck shop. They get to spend a fixed amount of money every two weeks. They purchase the goods by writing down their requirements in a list which is forwarded to the person in-charge of the tuck shop. The money is deducted from the student's accounts, and no currency is transacted.

During informal conversations and observations, I found out that getting ill was a common feature among the children. They would hide it in their cupboards, in their empty suitcases, in their dirty laundry baskets, or many other places. They ate it when they were sure that their House Parents were not around.

In their interviews, many students shared that they often used to venture out of the school boundary to play, however, after the school got fenced last year, this was proving difficult. They sometimes managed to go to day scholars'¹³ houses, which is also considered out of bounds. Apart from that, there are areas considered out of bounds within the fenced area of the school campus as well. On a Sunday while walking back to the Guest House where I was staying, I saw two girls cycling and stopped to talk to them. Since I knew this route was out of bounds I mentioned this to them and inquired how come they were there. The two girls started arguing and one girl remembered a teacher mentioning this in an assembly, so she suggested they turn back and go the other way. The other girl was confident that they were allowed to go on this route, so she continued cycling, while the other girl went back. Even though the rule barring this route had been spelled out quite clearly in the assembly, there are variations in the way the rule is retained, interpreted and followed according to the children's own understanding of it.

There are instances through which it can be seen how the students exercise their agency by constructing their own space within the school schedule. Physical Training (PT) takes place at 6.00 am, prior to breakfast. Long-run is the least liked PT activity. On days when this activity is scheduled, I was told by a girl that the children sometimes use this strategy to avoid it -- "You should run in the middle because one teacher runs in the front, and one at the back. While taking the turn near junior school, you go inside the round hut and hide. I lie down here. When PT is over, you join the rest of the class and go to the house." Similarly, the warm up exercises comprising rounds of the field-- which are taken before the Games period in the evening, are avoided sometimes by hiding behind trees and joining once the rounds are over. Some children also bunk games by faking an injury or by hiding somewhere. She recalled her strategies with a lot of excitement, and there was a playful secrecy and innocence with which she shared her tales of circumvention.

¹³ Day scholars are children of staff members who reside with their parents in school accommodation within the campus.

Sometimes the negotiation in the classroom can also take the form of resistance. One such important incident that took place was during a Science class when the students refused to listen to the teacher and take the class seriously. They kept talking despite the teacher's attempts to silence them and engage them in a discussion. Exasperated and helpless, the teacher walked out of the class and went to speak with their class teacher. While interviewing this teacher, it was surprising to see how introspective and sensitive he was to the students. When I inquired about this incident he said, "They (students) wanted to communicate something else, and I could not register that. They wanted to have fun and wanted me to tell a story. The unspoken also has to be understood."

This aspect of fun that the teacher mentions, in fact runs through all the circumventions of the rules. Robert Redfield mentions "play" (1956:365) as being an "expressive" activity. He defines it as, "doing what is fun, and what is done does not have to bring about some immediate useful result" (Redfield 1956: 365). The evasion by the students in Rishi Valley is closely tied up with play. Students do not resist discipline as a sign of outward rebellion, because they do not express anger or opposition to the school authorities, or their teachers. They instead do it out of playfulness.

All of the children I spoke to, accepted the importance of rules, accepted that they had a lot of freedom, and that this school is not strict like their previous schools¹⁴. However some rules and norms were considered as being unnecessary, and they relegated their behaviour to this aspect. I differ from Redfield to the extent that play is not entirely an individualized and impulsive act since it is influenced by the habitus of the students. Their habitus is a blend of various structural influences from outside and inside the school. The children's collective playful resistance is in one sense informed by the school culture of free thinking and expression, and also helps maintain and cultivate this culture of openness and fun. While their acts have a useful end-- which is the evasion of some rules, the resistance is often centred more around the thrill and enjoyment they derive from the doing of the act and retelling the story to their fellow peers, than as a sign of defiance against authority. In a context marked by the informality of authority and relaxed hierarchical relationships, their resistance is not implicated in totally rejecting the structure of the school and forming a "counter school culture" (Willis 1977:22). Therefore the resistance is not evidential of a peer culture which is at odds with the school structure and is

¹⁴ The school starts from grade 4. Hence all students have attended other schools prior to joining Rishi Valley. The children of staff members are however educated in Rishi valley itself even before grade 4. This is an exception, since other students only join in 4th.

better explained by the practice of playfulness, which allows spaces of play wherever leakages are possible, or by making the leakage possible.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been to examine the relationship between discipline and freedom in Rishi Valley School, and to study how the negotiation between these concepts takes place via “practice” (Bourdieu 1972: 72). Even though rules and norms are present, there is freedom to question and to know why a certain rule has been arrived at, and this can be credited to the informal relationship between teachers and students. This process engages the students in a dialogue and treats them as thinking individuals, rather than treating them as docile bodies to be disciplined (Foucault 1974). Along with this, teachers regularly endeavour to give the students the freedom to express their creativity even while adhering to the lesson plan they have in mind for the day. They are also open to negotiations with students, who make it a point to express their expectations from the class.

In addition, the paper highlights the conversations that take place if a rule is broken, or when the students behave in a less than desirable way. The first course of action is not to punish, but to have a discussion and encourage the students to reflect on their behaviour.

Despite these attempts by teachers and the school to provide freedom to the students, it cannot be said that the children do not resist. Students have their own ways of smartly finding a way out of what they perceive as unnecessary rules. It can thus be seen how the students manoeuvre between discipline and freedom, thereby creating a space of playfulness within the school’s structure.

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