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*Invited Article*

## Educational Interventions in Social Conflicts

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### INTRODUCTION

Social and inter-personal conflicts are almost everywhere. They can be over broad issues of public life like whether secularism or Hindutva should guide the policies of the state or the conflicts may have a deep structural character, like those within capitalism, where managers and owners need workers and the workers need the former, but one can increase their income only at the cost of the other. Every single organisation in the world has conflicts within it, for instance in dilemmas over whether a school should hire more teachers or more administrators. Conflicts are to be seen in politics, in the social structure and in every institution in the world. They come out in our everyday life as well, for instance, in whether we should have vegetables or chicken tonight for dinner.

Social theory has much to say on social conflict. However, there is relatively less on the opposite of conflict, which can be said to be concord or solidarity or affinity – our agreeing with what people say or our caring for their feelings and beliefs. This, too, is almost everywhere. For example, while there is a lot of conflict across the boundaries of those who believe in Hindutva and those who believe in Marxism, within their boundaries each of these display a great amount of affection and concern for those who share their respective ideologies. We cannot fully understand their mutual distaste by only paying attention to what they say about each other. We also need to understand their drive to protect their own. The study of communities and ethnicities shows that human bonding and concord is as important as conflict in understanding what is going on in today's world. People are hard-wired not just to have conflicts but also to form groups and to care for those within their boundaries.

People can bond and converge in a variety of ways and for a number of reasons. People working together, for instance, may soon begin to develop an affection for each other. This affection may extend in all directions and workers can become good friends of even their supervisors when they toil together for the same goals and tasks. Every organisation has found that one of the best ways of ensuring that things go smoothly and efficiently is to cultivate mutual friendships and affections between members of different functions and departments. The organisation benefits when everyone cooperates with each other and acts in a coordinated manner. Concords are part of even the prickly matter of what we like to eat. Our tastes may have come from our growing up in the bosom of our families where certain things are eaten and not others. Our affection and love for our current family members and friends may also lead us to agree to overcome this ingrained sense of taste and have vegetables tonight for dinner, foregoing chicken. This may have the effect of strengthening the social bond and, by avoiding conflicts on the dining table, focusing our energies on more important matters. Without too much exaggeration we can say that wherever there is conflict there also exists concord.

It is difficult to say once and for all whether conflicts are more important in our lives or concords. If I am a woman who is continually told that she should not dream of going to college, I may feel strongly in today's times that I should push back against this. In an interview conducted recently in Lucknow for admission to my university I met a 19 year old who told our panel how she was made fun of and taunted by the people of her village for saying that she wanted to study at the Bhopal campus of Azim Premji University. When she sat in our interview that day, she was going up against the prevailing common sense of her entire community in a determined and gritty way. In many cases, like this one, there may be good reasons to increase conflicts and to sustain them. But this is rarely a black and white issue of EITHER engaging in conflicts OR converging with what others say, with never the two meeting. It is true that some conflicts are such that only one party can win and the other has to always lose. Sometimes we may want to just wipe out the other point of view. We may believe the other party's actions to be so horrifying, as in the case of sexual assault, that it feels impossible to imagine any kind of accommodation or compromise with it. There can be many other situations, however, where we may slowly come to believe that the other party was at least partially correct. For instance, having grown up eating rice and wheat, we may be repulsed by the idea that eating millets is superior to both of these cereals. But after talking to friends about it and looking it up on the internet we may eventually try adding *kodo* to our meals.

Conflicts appear to be an inescapable and often desirable aspect of human life. At the same time, it can also be said that cooperation and agreement, too, are unavoidable and often much to be desired. Consider the example of how we struggle to overcome casteism. We may get very angry at those who justify caste-based discrimination. But we eventually want to get casteist people to agree with us that it is a very unhealthy social practice and must be stamped out. After all, we want them to change and not to kill them off. We want those who practice or support casteism to agree with us and to begin to cooperate with us. To be effective in our struggle against casteism we have to build networks of supporters. The more we agree with each other, the more powerful and effective we will be. We want not just destruction, but also agreement and concord. Eventually we shall triumph not when we have killed off all those who practice casteism, but when they come over onto our side, when they begin to believe in social equality and open societies. Thus, a viable strategy of overcoming casteism should include within it, along with ways of confronting and overpowering casteists, also a way of making friends with casteist folks and persuading them to give up their casteist and discriminatory habits. So even while engaging in conflicts we are seeking concords. Conflict and concord, it would seem, are two of the fundamental pillars of all our endeavours. It is important to keep in mind that eventually the purpose of most conflicts is to come to a concurrence. And that every concurrence will eventually see some conflicts. It is good to be prepared for both.

Needless to say, there can be better or worse ways of engaging in a conflict as well as of trying to come to an agreement. We can try to resolve differences with our friends by shouting at them and calling them fools or we can sit down and have a cordial discussion. We are most familiar with the former ways and who is to say that they do not sometimes actually work and have a good effect. But can we find ways of teaching and learning the second kind of way, as well, through the cultivation of empathy and dialogue?

Several questions come up: to what extent can dialogue and bonding be effective in resolving our conflicts? Can we take the path of empathy and dialogue even when there are deep structural divisions like those of casteism and patriarchy? What does one need to learn to successfully walk down the path of dialogue?

To begin with, let us acknowledge that the way we deal with conflicts and concords is cultural in nature and is not written in stone. It is learned from existing examples and narratives, through social experiences and from our reflections upon all these. It should be emphasised that we can learn better ways than just those which we habitually practice. Neither anger nor love nor indifference are purely biological and inevitable emotions. We now know that every emotion is culturally shaped and contoured. It is formed at least in part by our cognitive processes. We can learn to guide our emotions into better directions. We can learn better ways of disagreeing to come to better agreements and that is something everyone can benefit from. Putting forth contrary arguments to build a more complete understanding of an issue is at the heart of politics and our Constitution and is also at the heart of our family life, our work and our recreation. This is the core of citizenship education and indeed any kind of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. One of the goals of education in any kind of society is to prepare young people for living in their present times, both at their current age and also when they grow older. Learning to engage in conflicts and to build concords in a better way seems to be necessary for this and is hence a necessary element of all education.

### **THE CAUSES OF CONFLICTS**

If we want to understand (and learn and teach) better ways of engaging with our conflicts and concords, our learning must address their causes. While many of our conflicts and concords come from purely personal origins, there may also be systemic roots for them, which have developed over centuries and millennia. Take for example, the social roots of gender, caste, class, religion and ethnicity, each of which is responsible for forming group bonds and also social conflicts.

**GENDER** arguably rests upon the control of resources, the kinship and political systems prevalent in a society, its patterns of warfare and its prevalent cultural discourses. These lead to the social construction of gender and to giving greater power and legitimacy to certain genders and less to others. These processes are at the heart of the tensions between genders. Efforts to change or maintain their existing patterns are what can sustain or change a gender order. Behind the conflicts between genders there is a structural basis for concord within each of them, too, which comes from the bonding which comes amongst those who think they are similar to each other and in opposition with others. There is also a cultural narrative which promotes concord by accepting historically created narratives. Another way, however, of building concord could be to get rid of the resentment which comes from perceptions of injustice by removing the afore-mentioned pillars on which the conflict is based.

**THE CLASS STRUCTURE** of a society arguably rests upon the distribution of power in production, distribution and consumption. Conflicts emerge when different people struggle for control over each of these. There may be convergences within each social class that has a different kind of role in these processes and hence a different kind of power in them, for example between workers on the one hand and managers on the other. There may also be concords when the reasons for the conflict get dissolved, as in when the control of factories is no longer in the hands of a hereditary social group. Those who seek to build greater social solidarity across the dividing lines of class may find their goals achieved if power and control is redistributed into ways that people may find more acceptable. To be sure, there may also be an increase in social solidarity when other threats become more prominent in people's minds like those posed (in reality or in imagination) by different ethnic groups. Yet, the tensions between various social classes are unlikely to entirely go away until the root causes are eliminated.

**THE CASTE STRUCTURE** arguably rests on creating hereditary social groups which give advantages and disadvantages in the control of resources, power and respect. At the heart of

the conflicts between castes is that some get hereditary advantages over others, both in maintaining and in trying to change the distribution of power. Here one way of creating concords and social affection is by accepting the legitimacy of the systemic inequalities. In other words, if we just accept that different castes should have different degrees of power there would be no conflict! But since that seems to go against some basic intuitions of ours (like why should my child be denied the opportunities which others get?), there almost inevitably develops a lot of resentment and a perception of being oppressed. To move to a society where there is less resentment and oppression, we can try to create a more open social system where hereditary group advantages cease to matter. If we take the latter path (there can be others too) we need to create new institutional processes and also new everyday meanings and behaviour. The path to these new processes is one of many kinds of conflict and also one in which we have to create new friendships and new attitudes and affections, which overcome and transform the systemic aspects of the caste system.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ETHNICITIES AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS may be shaped by their having separate and distinct social and political organisations and their being in competition for scarce resources, political power or prestige. These may be also promoted by cultural narratives of violence and hate. Political entrepreneurs may use this situation to build their own careers by further fanning the conflicts. Peace and concord can be created here by one ethnic group completely dominating the other or these can also be created by building connections between disparate social and political organizations and strengthening cultures of dialogue and acceptance and by promoting politicians who support such processes.

There can be many other social figurations, too, which shape conflicts and the possibilities of concords. Alongside these social causes, there continues to be a purely personal set of factors like wanting to get respect or to feel in control. These may occur without reference to social structures. For example, one individual may like to wear a purple saree, but another may have a deep distaste for that colour. When confronted by a person wearing purple the second may express horror and revulsion. One way of creating peace is by the second person forcing the first to give up wearing purple sarees. This is obviously difficult to do and also clashes with the principle that we should all be free to express our own tastes. Here another and perhaps better way of creating concords is by promoting tolerance where we learn to live in a friendly way alongside things which we ourselves disagree with.

There are clearly many possible sources of conflict and also many different ways of moving towards concord. Just as there are systematic studies of conflicts there are also systematic studies of how we can move towards resolving them. Those working with children and youth can benefit from both.

### **THE GRAMMAR OF CONFLICT AND CONCORD**

What do we do when we are in a conflict, what does one seek from it, what are the different ways of engaging in it? Several scholars have tried to identify basic features of all ways of engaging in conflicts, from the early years of the social sciences down to the present times. Simmel ([1908] 2009), who was an early contributor to the discipline of Sociology, and Boulding ([1962] 1988), who was an early contributor to general systems theory, have both worked in this direction. A relatively comprehensive compilation of the basic set of forms of dealing with conflicts has been done by Donald Black (1993, pp 74 ff.). He distinguishes between (1) self-help or coercion where actors seek to impose their preferences upon others; (2) yielding, where actors accept the preferences of others; (3) negotiation, where the actors seek some way of accommodating all parties' preferences, with dialogue being a special form of this; (4) avoidance, where actors try to move out of situations of conflict without doing self-help or yielding or negotiating; (5) tolerance, where actors remain in the situation of

conflict, but do not take any action to transform or avoid it; (6) settlement or some kind of use of a third-party to help find a solution, ranging from a neutral, friendly mediator to seeking judgements from courts.

There can be different cultural styles and worldviews of engaging in conflicts, too. Black (ibid. p 6) distinguishes between (1) penal styles where punishment is sought, (2) compensatory styles, where compensation of the aggrieved is the goal, rather than punishing those responsible, (3) therapeutic, where the purpose is to “cure” the wrong-doers of their mistaken stand, (4) reconciliatory, where healing of both the parties takes primacy, (5) reform, where the wrong-doer’s institutions and cultures are sought to be transformed and (6) prevention, where the goal is to ensure that such conflicts never take place again.

Concepts like the above permit us to start distinguishing between different strategies and cultural assumptions which people consider while addressing their problems. They also allow us to start comparing different strategies and assumptions. For instance, we can see that the schoolteacher who beats the student that wants to do something else in the classroom while a maths class is going on is using a coercive approach and has the underlying assumption that punishments are the best way to get a person to like maths. On the other hand, the teacher who starts using examples and images which attract the student’s attention may be using a strategy of negotiation and has the underlying assumption that connecting with the student’s own interests is the best way to get it to like maths. It becomes possible to weigh which strategies and cultural assumptions are better here. We also become capable of weighing the strategies and cultural assumptions in a variety of social and inter-personal conflicts.

## **SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND WAYS OF DEALING WITH CONFLICTS**

Which approach do people take when struggling over issues close to their heart? Which approach should be taken? The answers lie partially in their contexts and in the prevalent cultures. Several structural and ecological factors lie behind what people do. Their actions are also shaped by everyday life and the emergence of dedicated institutions like the state, the judiciary, committees in schools and universities which try to mediate conflicts and so on. The constitution of a country and its legal codes are a formal and bureaucratized way of setting up the ways in these different contending social forces and groups are balanced or given priority over others. Embedded in these are several different, often contradictory cultural values, beliefs and practices, which use a mix of coercion and negotiation.

When I get irritated and begin to shout at a student, that is one way of dealing with conflict and getting the student to agree with me. It is partially culturally learned. Another kind of cultural learning is at play when I smile at the student and suggest a cup of tea after class where we can chat about things. This is all a kind of politics, as well, with the difference being that one is a politics of coercion and the other is a politics of dialogue. Harold Lasswell (1950) argued that this is what politics is centrally about - deciding in the face of contending claimants who gets what, how, when and to what effect. In this broad sense, politics, conflicts and concords underlay religion, philosophy and culture. There is a continuous tension between coercion and consent here. One of the most famous scholars to analyse culture in the last century, Antonio Gramsci, pointed that we will always inevitably have a lot of coercion in a society with high levels of production and complexity. The challenge is how to have the greatest possible amount of consent in it.

## **CHOICES AND STRUCTURES**

When do people seek which kind of option? Are we just trapped in our social situation to only respond with either violence or with passivity? What we do actually depends on a complex

mix of cultural assumptions and practices, situational compulsions and individual personalities and skills. Jeffrey Z. Rubin, Dean G. Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim (1994) have made one of the most elaborate syntheses of how people choose between different strategies. One factor is how much people value their own goals and how much they value the goals of the others. These can come together in several possible ways: (1) valuing only one's own goals highly, and not caring for the other's goals at all. This may lead to self-help or what Jeffrey, Pruitt and Kim call contending forms of action. (2) Not caring much for one's own goals but considering the other's goals very valuable. This may lead to yielding or to avoidance. (3) Considering both one's own and the other's goals very important, which may lead to problem-solving or negotiation-based strategies. There can be many combinations of these. People may also start with one kind of valuing of goals and end up at another. The valuation of goals is never a fully objective act. Perceptions may be mistaken and may change, too.

What strategies one chooses depends, along with how goals are perceived, on how one perceives their viability. When the viability is very high, then even when one values others' goals, there is a strong temptation to just steam-roll them. When the viability of confrontations appears negligible then one may give up contention-based strategies and choose submission or avoidance, even when one considers one's own goals to be very important. Assessments of one's own power and that of the others is an important factor in the choice of strategies, though it does not necessarily have the final word. There is an impact of personality types, too. Certain kinds of personalities may seek out confrontations, while others may shirk them, irrespective of how they view goals or see the viability of their actions.

All these factors are profoundly influenced by social structures and by cultures and different voices within them. Social structures create the external conditions that may make certain strategies more or less viable. Cultures shape how goals are seen and whether certain kinds of strategies are visible to actors and are thought to be viable (cf. Faure, 2009). They can also define what viability itself means. For instance, certain social groups may consider only punishment and humiliation of the other as a meaningful interpretation of justice. Some other groups may believe that accepting that one was in error and to proffer an apology was sufficient to say that justice has been attained. For the first viable strategies for dealing with conflicts will always call for strength and the capacity to perpetrate violence. For the second viable strategies may need only the ability to communicate and bond.

To see how people are influenced by social structures and cultures which make certain strategies and styles appear to be viable consider an example: what do people choose to do when a place of worship is emitting very loud sounds into its neighbourhood. A social structure with a professional administration and police force will create certain kinds of options. These may include formally informing these institutions and their staff coming to the place of worship to instruct a reduction of the volume of the sounds. A social structure where such institutions are lacking, but groups of toughs are active, will create other kinds of options. They can include contacting the gangs with which those offended by the sounds have good networks and the arrival of the gangs at the place of worship to threaten its priests and worshippers. A social structure where there are groups who have a friendly and fraternal relation with those controlling the place of worship will find a third set of options available. A few elders who enjoy a wide degree of respect in the community may come to request a reduction of the sounds while still assuring the worshippers of their continued friendship and support. Whether the people who are troubled by the noise will seek the intervention of the administration or the mediation of vigilante groups or of respected elders will depend upon the structure available to them. Further, when all three options are available, what they choose

may still depend upon what they culturally imagine will be normatively more acceptable, more effective and less troublesome to deploy. When an option is not available, it is again their cultural ability to imagine how to create an option that will affect what they will do. There is always the imponderable of human creativity and agency, which may sometimes seek completely new strategies from what a culture and structure are able to suggest. Social structure and culture thus play a big role in influencing what strategies are taken in situations of conflict. They form the context within which people weigh their own and others' preferences and work out strategies and styles of dealing with them. What they actually do will also be influenced by personality types and people's own abilities to create new solutions.

All the above cited arguments draw us inexorably to the idea that culture plays a very important role in how we deal with our conflicts. Culture is learnable and hence our systems of learning, the education we get – whether in formal or informal spaces - plays a key role in how we deal with issues. This deserves a lot more attention that it is getting at present.

### **FRATERNITY IS WHAT MAKES DIALOGUE POSSIBLE**

When people see others as fundamentally evil or as eternally hostile to themselves there is little space for dialogue. Cultural beliefs which demonise others and see them as always wanting to seize and take away something which is essential to one's own well-being – like one's land or self-respect – make it difficult to talk and try to find some common goals. Cultural ideals of empathising with others and seeing a common shared humanity in everyone, even in someone who wants to attack me, have for long been a counter to demonisation that enables conversations and finding some rational solutions to disputes. Most serious disputes have substantial issues at their core – who is worth respecting, whose land this really is, who deserves more money and so on. Concepts and theories of justice can guide us towards agreeing that certain solutions are right and good. When we are able to come to a moral agreement about at least some things that makes negotiations easier to conduct and their results easier to accept.

From time immemorial people have understood that the love of others in their community helps them to deal with issues and disagreements in a less violent and more normative way. Religious philosophies like those of Buddhism considered *maitri* or the love of all, even those who disagreed with them, to be essential for the monks who would walk their path. The French revolution used the term fraternity for something similar to that and after the restoration of a French state in 1848 fraternity was enshrined in their legal structure (Puyol, 2019). Fraternity or solidarity were considered to be the necessary glue to hold any society together. These were the reasons why Ambedkar's constitution drafting committee inserted fraternity into the ideals of our Constitution. Ambedkar understood quite well that without fraternity neither liberty nor equality could work. If people have only a blind hate for each other they will never accept their "enemy" being free or their equal. The promotion of fraternity then is one of the basic requirements of a democracy, without which it will degenerate into groups warring each other, with no desire for dialogue or justice.

### **THREE EDUCATIONAL DIRECTIONS**

Educational work towards dealing with conflicts in thoughtful and dialogic ways then must include fraternity in its scope. Learning fraternity calls for not just cognitive but also affective and practical learning. At its heart is the question of how to socialise people into having positive attitudes towards other social groups. Cognition is a key aspect of this, but clearly it cannot be restricted to cognition alone. There must also be a shift in people's non-conceptual perceptions, responses and practices. There are a number of curricular and pedagogic

approaches which seek to achieve such a change (for reviews of this see Stephan & Stephan 2006; Paluck & Green 2009; Paluck et.al. 2021), with varying degrees of success, of which I will here mention only three clusters:

**(1) Building Fraternity:** Our interaction with others takes place through cognitive, affective and practical schemas that guide how we “read” and respond to them. There has been extensive work on changing these schemas to see others as moral equals and build empathy, respect and acceptance for them. Such schemas can be created by many kinds of organised instruction, including through the use of literature, sports, cultural activities and so on. They are built through our experiences and our narratives. Creating suitable experiences and narratives which transform our schemas is thus an important direction of educational work.

A significant contribution has been made by contact theory (Allport, 1954), which relies not so much on direct instruction but on creating situations in which children learn by themselves. It is held that when children, youth and adults of different social groups find it beneficial to cooperate with each other, they tend to lose their mutual hostility and distrust. This works best when certain conditions are established, like their being of equal status and having support from their superiors. There is a decrease of mutual distrust and hostility especially when they agree on some common superordinate goals and discover that they can achieve them better when they all work together (cf. Pettigrew et.al. 2011 for critiques of contact theory).

The classic example of how this may work is the Robbers Cave experiment (Sherif et al., [1961] 1988) which became the canonical example of Realistic Conflict Theory. Twenty-two white boys of the age of eleven years and a similar socio-economic background were invited to a summer camp at Robbers Cave Park in Oklahoma. They were randomly divided into two separate groups, Snakes and Eagles, and separated from each other. Each group began to develop a bonding within itself. In the next step of the experiment the Snakes and Eagles began to play games in which one was pitted against the other. These were competitive games and animosity soon developed between the two groups. This eventually reached the level where the flag of one was burned by the other and where the two had to be physically pulled apart from a fight. After some time apart to cool off the groups were then set some tasks where they had to willy-nilly cooperate with each other, like being told that the truck carrying food to the camp had broken down and could be pulled only by the two groups working together. Slowly the animosity began to decline and friendships sprung up between members of the two groups.

A large number of efforts have been made to follow this basic model of bringing groups together to chase shared goals in situations as diverse as reducing prejudices between castes in India (Lowe, 2021) and building friendships between different religious groups in Iraq (Mousa, 2020). When direct contact is not possible, indirect contact has been shown to be effective in promoting fraternity. For instance, reading stories where members of other communities are depicted in a good light has been shown to reduce prejudices (Aboud, 2009). Viewing TV serials where members of different communities appear human and likeable and not as stereotypical “others” makes a big difference, too (Murrar & Brauer, 2017).

**(2) Reflective Actions:** Different from the building of fraternity is a cluster of educational work which focuses on conscious deliberation over conflicts and learning better patterns of interacting to resolve them. These, of course, rest upon fraternity and cannot go very far if there is no trust at all between the involved entities. The two kinds of educational work, of building fraternity and of conscious deliberations, respectively, must go hand in hand. This second cluster of educational work notes that prejudices and fear work in tandem with narratives and discourses, which rigorous social science can help to address by identifying the real rather than mythological causes of conflicts and by discussing realistic ways of



overcoming them. The school curriculum can play a very important role in this, supported by thoughtful and sensitive teachers. This kind of work includes learning to analyse and weigh different moral options. Children and youth can learn to improve their ways of moral reasoning and can learn to better understand and explicate certain normative principles and then order their priorities and work out their justifications and implications. These help to clarify which principle should be applied in a particular context (Noddings, 2002).

There is also a place for character education which emphasises patience, care, courage, respect and honesty. These are virtues which support being able to engage with diverse points of view in a dialogic manner (Berkowitz & Bier, 2008). Such habits of thought, feeling and action enable people to move faster towards understanding others' points of view and seeking fair and just solutions.

Critical and feminist pedagogies point out that reflective discussions over conflicts can only be possible when oppressed groups have been empowered with ways of getting the strength and vision to understand their own oppression and to speak up against it (Martin et al., 2017). In many social conflicts the politics of culture silences the weak or persuades them that their oppression is their own fault. It is impossible to have a realistic dialogue if this is the case. Educational work should include supporting the disempowered in recognising the structural causes of oppression and being able to stand up against it.

Underlying all of these are the concepts and skills of conflict resolution. Learning to better understand everyday conflicts and acquiring the skills and attitudes of engaging in negotiation and dialogue is essential (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). This includes learning to listen to the other party and being able to identify what they want, being able to articulate one's own wants and to find common grounds through which a conversation can begin. This forms the bedrock of being able to discuss different views rather than just keep endlessly butting heads or giving up.

**(3) Pressing the Levers of Power:** A third approach is that of learning to press the levers of power. The state, various institutions like banks, schools and so on are all involved in shaping and challenging the situations which lead to social conflicts. They may have biases in their functioning and may even promote narratives of hate and exclusion. Possible issues in the character and processes of social institutions must be both understood as well as acted upon. So, learning to deal with social conflicts must include learning ways of understanding institutional and cultural contexts that are creating them in the first place and learning ways of engaging with them to change them for the better. If banks, for instance, are unwilling to give loans to women entrepreneurs, then they need to be persuaded to change their policies. Young people need to learn how to increase their bargaining power and visibility in public matters. This would include understanding how democracy works and how to get it to work better, as exemplified in the textbooks developed by the NGO Eklavya in the 1990s (Madan, 2010). They benefit from learning how the government and courts function so that recourse to government machineries and legal measures can be taken, if necessary. Further, they should know how lobbying can be done and how movements can be organised so that institutional processes and rules get changed or activated. Learning to work with institutional power helps to move towards greater equality and justice.

The above three educational directions are generic in the sense that they are valuable in any kind of social conflict. Along with these, educationists would, of course, need to build the specifics of the kind of social conflict being against which the intervention is being designed – patriarchy, casteism, communalism, systemic class inequality and so on. So, work on casteism, for instance, would need to modify and adapt these directions to address the specific ways in which casteism expresses itself. This would entail dialogue aimed at weakening the

idea of caste endogamy and promoting acceptance and respect for the cultures of the less powerful castes amongst the more powerful and so on.

### **ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF MICROPOLITICS OF EDUCATION**

Many kinds of conflicts come out of a vast social structure and only a large-scale shift in the social structure will eventually resolve them. The social structure of patriarchy, for instance, is already gradually shifting and greater resources are slowly coming into the hands of genders other than men. This is a macro-level politics and is inevitably slow and calls for several kinds of social forces to act in tandem so as to make a difference, like changes in legal codes and the depiction of various genders in cinema and so on. This is a politics in the sense that how we deal with different points of view is fundamentally what politics is all about. In contrast with this macropolitics, educational work in daily life is a kind of micropolitics (Magnet et al., 2014) of culture. It can be initiated by individuals and small groups. It challenges and changes our ways of thinking, feeling and acting in every day situations. The students who learn not to react with fear and anger to a sexist or communal remark and to instead have a conversation with the perpetrators about why this remark should not have been made have changed themselves and are in the process of changing the others too. It is an action at a micro level and is also a politics since it pushes back against the power of a culture of sexism or communalism. Education is a site for micropolitics and is also best suited to learning such a micropolitics. Many such actions and learnings are within the reach of ordinary teachers and classrooms and can be initiated and accomplished there itself.

This micropolitics is essential and important, but has its limitations, too, particularly that it is not a macropolitics or often even a mesopolitics. For conflicts to lead to arrangements that are based on greater fraternity and consent and have lesser coercion, submission and withdrawal, it is important that social structures emerge which make it attractive for the key actors to support a shift to such social arrangements as a caste-free society and so on. The required necessary circumstances for the shift include cultures and everyday life meanings and practices that support reflection and consent, rather than coercion-based ways of dealing with conflicts. However, much more is needed too, like the redistribution of resources in society, changing the basic values and norms of institutions, changing patterns of kinship and marriage, changing the distribution of communities into separate neighbourhoods and so on. Politically powerful groups play a central role in all this and must be negotiated with, sometimes in a way which supports them and sometimes in a way which overthrows them. Despite not directly impacting the structure, educational institutions and youth groups can still play an important role in shaping cultural and everyday life meanings and practices that promote consent-based ways of dealing with conflicts. Through this they can contribute in many situations to substantially improving social relations. Eventually such a micropolitics can and has led in many instances, including in our own country, to creating a macropolitics, as well, that has created greater justice for all.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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