Exploring Shaming Practices in Classrooms: An Ethnographic Case Study of a Low-Fee Private School in an Unauthorized Colony in Delhi, India

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Abstract

This thesis examines shame-based discipline in a low-fee private secondary school located in an "unauthorized" colony in Delhi, India. Using an ethnographic case-study design, I draw on one year of participant observation, 45 semi-structured interviews with students, teachers (including the principal) and parents, and participatory visual methods (student drawings, explanations, and student-led tours) to analyze (1) how shaming is enacted in everyday classroom interaction; (2) the cultural and relational routes through which shame travels across school and home; and (3) its cumulative impacts on adolescent well-being, participation, peer relations, trust, and motivation. The findings show that shaming is routinized as a classroom-management tool. Teachers use a repertoire of public practices—scolding, derogatory labels, performative punishments, academic comparison, and fear appeals—that work through reputational exposure and peer witnessing.

Shame is further amplified through home–school linkages (threats to involve parents and guilt-tripping through parental sacrifice), as well as through gendered and classed moral expectations that render particular bodies, voices, and futures "out of place." Students describe predominantly harmful effects: humiliation and anxiety, strategic silence, withdrawal from participation, and strained peer relationships; repeated exposure also erodes trust in teachers and narrows motivation toward avoidance-driven compliance. While adults often rationalize shame as "tough love" and as necessary under high-pressure, under-resourced conditions, the data suggest that it produces a brittle form of order—costly even when it appears effective in the short term. Conceptually, I argue that in this case, shame functions as a form of affective governance in everyday schooling: it produces order by organizing classroom emotions and reputational risk but undermines dignity and the

relational conditions needed for learning and moral agency. The thesis concludes by outlining dignity-based alternatives and the institutional supports required to make them sustainable.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines shame-based discipline in a low-fee private secondary school located in an unauthorized colony in Delhi, India. Drawing on a year of ethnographic fieldwork (participant observation, interviews, and participatory visual methods) with students, teachers, and parents, it asks how shaming is enacted in everyday classroom interactions, how it is experienced and understood by participants, and what it means for well-being, dignity, and learning.

I use shame as the overarching analytic lens in this thesis because it was repeatedly enacted, anticipated, and negotiated in everyday classroom interactions in the case study school, and because it connects micro-level disciplinary encounters to broader moral expectations and hierarchies that organize schooling. Here I treat shame not simply as a private feeling but as a relational and often public process produced through evaluation by others—through being singled out, compared, or made visible before peers—and entangled with ideas of respectability, obedience, and "being a good student." Attending to shame helps explain how order is produced through reputational risk and peer witnessing, and why these practices can appear ordinary while carrying significant costs for dignity, trust, and well-being. Chapter 2 develops this conceptual framing and clarifies how I use "shame" analytically across the chapters that follow.

This research began with a simple but pressing question: how do children feel in school, and what happens when they feel excluded — emotionally, socially, or pedagogically? I entered the field seeking to understand the hidden forms of exclusion that students face, not just through institutional structures, but in the everyday practices that shape how they feel, behave, and see themselves. I was particularly concerned with how these experiences affect

children's health and well-being — not only in terms of mental health, but also in their sense of safety, identity, connectedness, and resilience. As an international WHO-led consortium suggests, adolescent well-being must be understood as a multidimensional construct, encompassing physical and emotional health, supportive environments, opportunities for learning, and a sense of agency and belonging (Ross et al., 2020). This led to a specific interest in the various modes of discipline used by educators, as these interactions are a primary site where student well-being is either supported or undermined. Ultimately, this study is not only about disciplinary practices in schools — it examines the emotional landscapes children must navigate and the implications for their development, dignity, and ability to thrive.

Scope of claims: This thesis is a single-site ethnographic case study of one low-fee private secondary school in an unauthorized colony in Delhi, India. The empirical claims in Chapters 4–6 describe practices observed and reported in this case study school and among the participants in this study; the study does not claim statistical generalizability. Where the thesis draws broader implications, it does so through analytic generalization—using this case to illuminate processes that may be relevant in comparable low-fee private school contexts in India and to contribute to theory on shame, discipline, and affective governance. For clarity, in the findings chapters, references to "teachers" and "students" refer to teachers and students in the case study school unless otherwise specified.

1.1 Background and Context

Stepping into the modest classrooms of the case study school for the first time, I was struck by how readily humiliation seeped into daily interactions. Having attended relatively well-resourced schools where open ridicule by teachers was rare, I found the contrast jarring. Even in the earliest days of fieldwork, it became apparent that public forms of discipline, such as scolding latecomers in front of the entire school, were not uncommon. These spectacles often produced visible emotional responses among students, hinting at the deeply affective dimensions of school discipline. Scenes like this were repeated often. In many Indian classrooms, shame functions as an implicit instrument of discipline (Jeffrey, 2010).

As I develop in Chapter 2, I use shame as the overarching analytic lens for this thesis. Teachers in low-income, under-resourced schools routinely resort to scolding, sarcasm, and public humiliation to manage student behavior. Such practices are especially prevalent in the low-budget private school sector serving marginalized communities, where strict discipline is often equated with educational quality (Härmä, 2011). Indeed, a large national survey by India's National Commission for Protection of Child Rights found that over 81% of students had endured teachers' denigrating comments (e.g., being told they are "not capable of learning") – a stark indicator of how normalized verbal humiliation is in schools (NCPCR, 2012).

One of the striking patterns that emerged early in my research was how commonplace and internalized shaming had become in the students' everyday school experience. Students often described being subject to public reprimands and derogatory comments by teachers. Publicly calling a child "useless" or comparing him to an animal, for example, spoils the student's identity in the eyes of others and even impacts self-concept. Early interactions during fieldwork suggested that some students began to believe these labels after hearing them

repeatedly, hinting at the powerful internalization of shame; one of the many aspects of school experience that I went on to explore later in my study. Such incidents effectively "mark" students with a negative label in front of their peers. This process reflects what sociologist Goffman famously termed "stigma": a powerful social label that spoils a person's identity, reducing them in the eyes of others from a "whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 2009, p. 3).

Importantly, these shaming practices do not arise in isolation; they are embedded in broader cultural and institutional contexts. Education in India has historically been influenced by hierarchical teacher–student dynamics and a belief in strict authority in the classroom (Jeffrey, 2010). Notably, corporal punishment was long considered a normal part of schooling until growing recognition of children's rights led to legal reforms. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (Government of India, 2009) explicitly bans physical punishment and "mental harassment" of students, reflecting an official stance that schooling should be free of fear and indignity. However, despite such legal prohibitions, both physical and psychological punishment remain widespread in practice. National surveys have documented that most children still experience punitive treatment by teachers.

To understand why such practices concentrate in schools like the one studied here, it is necessary to situate them within the structure of Indian schooling. India operates a sharply stratified school system. Government schools, which are free, coexist with a large and rapidly expanding private sector, and over the past three decades a distinctive tier has emerged between elite private schools and the state system: the low-fee private school (LFPS). These are modestly priced, often unrecognized or informally registered institutions that have proliferated in precisely the urban-poor and peri-urban areas where government provision is

weak or distrusted (Härmä, 2011; Srivastava, 2013). For families in informal settlements such as the colony in which this school sits, the LFPS represents an aspirational choice: parents pay fees they can ill afford, foregoing the free government alternative, in the belief that a private, English-medium education with visibly strict discipline offers their children a more credible route to mobility. The English-medium label and the reputation for order are central to the sector's appeal, and both, as this thesis shows, are bound up with the disciplinary culture that follows.

For instance, in a landmark nationwide survey by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India, covering 12,447 children across 13 states, 65% reported having been physically punished (beaten) by teachers in the previous year, while nearly 50% disclosed having experienced verbal or emotional abuse in school settings (Kacker et al., 2007). Invoking shame (Hindi *sharam* or *beizzati*, meaning dishonor or humiliation) has traditionally been a way to enforce social norms (Patel, 2018). Teachers, as authority figures, sometimes leverage this cultural script of honor and shame to control students, believing it will instill discipline and respect. My early field observations bore this out: I frequently sensed a tense atmosphere where students braced themselves to be singled out and shamed for any misstep.

These broader contexts also include the enduring stratification of Indian society along caste lines. Caste continues to shape access to resources, dignity, and educational opportunity, and it is historically entangled with class, language, and respectability. In this case study school, caste was not explicitly discussed by teachers, students, or parents, and caste categories were not explicitly invoked in the disciplinary interactions I observed. Nonetheless, the school's location in a marginalized urban colony must be understood within a wider caste–class

geography of the city, and this structural backdrop remains relevant for interpreting how reputations, worth, and "proper" conduct are morally evaluated through shame.

The local setting of this study further shapes these dynamics. The school under study is a privately-run, low-fee, English-medium school located in an unauthorized Delhi colony – essentially an informal slum community where government services and public schools are scarce. Families here pay modest fees to send their children to this school rather than to free government schools, hoping for better education and stricter oversight. Strict discipline is often perceived as a defining feature of a "good" school, particularly in contexts where academic achievement is seen as a pathway out of poverty. In such environments, parents may endorse authoritarian teaching practices, viewing scolding and rigid control as necessary for ensuring student seriousness and success.

This aspirational logic is intensified by the broader neoliberal marketization of Indian schooling. In a competitive, fee-paying environment, low-fee private schools must continually demonstrate their value to fee-paying parents, and they do so largely through visible markers of seriousness: examination results, disciplined conduct, and an atmosphere of rigor. This produces a particular set of pressures. Teachers, often poorly paid, minimally trained, and employed on insecure terms, are expected to deliver results that justify the fees, and discipline becomes one of the few levers of "quality" available to them at no cost. Parents, having invested scarce resources, transmit their own anxiety about return-on-investment onto their children, framing academic success as both a duty and the family's hope of escaping poverty. The effect is a vicious competition to "excel" within a narrow definition of success — marks, ranks, and obedience — in which shame becomes a readily available instrument for extracting effort from children and signaling rigor to parents. Shame-

based discipline, in this light, is not only a cultural inheritance but also a product of the structural conditions under which low-fee private schools operate.

Harsh disciplinary methods are sometimes seen as acceptable—even desirable—if they are believed to contribute to strong academic outcomes (Wiggers & Paas, 2022). Such attitudes create additional pressure on teachers to be authoritarian. Caught in this ethos, the school's staff often equate maintaining an appearance of order with effective teaching (Raj, 2011). In sum, by the time I entered the field, I found a school culture in which shame-based discipline was deeply entrenched and seemingly taken for granted by most parties. As an educational researcher and an outsider–insider (educated in India but in very different settings), I began to recognize that this normalized pattern of humiliation warranted critical scrutiny. These classroom experiences must be seen through the broader lens of adolescent well-being (Ross et al., 2020).

This includes emotional safety, relational connectedness, and a sense of inclusion in daily life — all of which are compromised in environments where shame is routine (Waseem & Firdous, 2025). For students in under-resourced school contexts—such as many low-fee private schools serving marginalized communities in India—the emotional toll of public humiliation may be compounded by social marginalization, making the question of well-being not peripheral but central to any examination of schooling. The focus on "shaming" as a phenomenon in this research emerged inductively from the field – a realization as I witnessed these practices and empathized with how they might impact students.

1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

Despite growing awareness that punitive discipline can be harmful, shaming as a daily disciplinary and troublingly normalized practice remains under-examined in many Indian school contexts, including low-fee private schools. The research problem at the heart of this thesis is the persistence of public humiliation as a tool of classroom management in a low-budget school, and the multifaceted impacts it has on those involved. As described above, this problem was not assumed at the outset but crystallized through initial fieldwork observations. I noticed early on that those moments of humiliation – a teacher's cutting remark, a child's head hung low in shame – were ubiquitous and consequential.

The problem is situated at the intersection of educational practice, child psychology, psychological well-being, behavior, academic engagement, sociocultural norms, and students' sense of safety and relationships in school. On one hand, teachers justify shaming students as necessary to maintain order and high performance; on the other hand, students silently bear the emotional costs, and parents feel conflicted between short-term pain and perceived long-term benefit. There is a critical need to understand these dynamics holistically: What forms does shaming take in this school, what beliefs sustain it, and what does it mean for the learners? Why do such practices persist in the face of potential harm?

These guiding questions arose from the field and framed the investigation. Conceptually, this study is aligned with the growing global recognition that health and well-being are critical outcomes of education, not just its preconditions. Research consistently shows that exclusionary and punitive school practices have significant negative consequences for students' mental health and prospects (Fazel & Newby, 2021). The impacts of shaming—on self-esteem, anxiety, sense of belonging, and emotional resilience—directly affect the five domains of adolescent well-being outlined by Ross et al. (2020): good health, connectedness,

safety, competence, and agency. Framing the research in this way around well-being and a culture of belonging, safety and connectedness highlights that the stakes of disciplinary shame go far beyond classroom order and touch on children's long-term capacity to thrive.

The rationale for this research is threefold. First, a humanistic rationale: mounting evidence suggests that harsh disciplinary methods including verbal abuse, humiliation, and public shaming can detrimentally impact children's psychological health and academic engagement. In India, corporal punishment has been associated with high rates of anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, and long-term emotional distress (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Shukla & Singh, 2013). Studies among adolescent girls in the northern Indian city of Lucknow reveal that feelings of shame tied to body image and perceived behavior correlate with significant anxiety and depressive symptoms (Singh et al., 2024). Moreover, the use of humiliation as a disciplinary tool has been shown to erode students' self-esteem and willingness to participate in learning, undermining both well-being and academic outcomes (Goodman & Cook, 2019; World Health Organization, 2021).

In extreme cases, severe classroom humiliation has even been implicated in student self-harm or suicide, underscoring the high stakes of this issue. For example, in 2017 a 12-year-old girl in Tamil Nadu died by suicide after a teacher allegedly shamed her over a menstrual stain in class (Nagaraj, 2017). Such extreme outcomes underscore the potential harm of what some teachers dismiss as "minor" verbal reprimands. Closer to the everyday, students in my case study frequently reported that the sting of a public scolding was more painful and lasting than any slap on the hand. Being scolded in front of peers can often leave a more lasting emotional impact on children than physical punishment, as research indicates the neurobiological and psychological effects of emotional abuse can be as, or even more, severe than those of physical abuse (Teicher & Samson, 2016).

These testimonies align with wider findings that psychological violence – ridicule, labeling, intimidation – instills fear and toxic shame in children, in turn diminishing their motivation for learning (Gusfre et al., 2023). Goodman and Cook (2019, p. 62) argue that shaming a student "shrinks the self and immobilizes action," ultimately undermining its intended educational purpose. Supporting this, a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found a strong negative correlation between shame and self-esteem, indicating that high levels of shame predict lower self-esteem over time (Orth et al., 2010). In other words, rather than correcting behavior, humiliation often leaves students anxious, disengaged, and convinced of their own inadequacy. By examining shaming practices as they unfold within everyday school settings, this study addresses the pressing need to expose the emotional costs of routine disciplinary methods, particularly for students in vulnerable circumstances.

It aims to give voice to their experiences and make the case that these ostensibly "mild" forms of punishment merit serious concern alongside overt physical abuse. As shown earlier, Goodman and Cook (2019), in their work examining shaming practices within "No Excuses" charter schools in the United States—a model known for its strict disciplinary codes, particularly in urban, low-income communities—observe that shaming practices by teachers can cause great psychological harm to children. In highlighting the lived experiences of the students, I seek to humanize statistics and demonstrate that behind every percentage of children "verbally harassed" in surveys, there is a child who feels that humiliation deeply.

Second, an empirical rationale: while corporal punishment in schools has been extensively studied (e.g., Rajshri & Pandey, 2023; World Health Organization, 2021) and condemned in research and policy (e.g., UNESCO, 2019), far less scholarly attention has been devoted to the lived experience of shame-based discipline. Most studies of school discipline in India primarily rely on cross-sectional surveys or legal-policy reviews that quantify how

widespread corporal punishment is or assess the adequacy of child protection laws. For instance, the Young Lives longitudinal study documents that over 90% of children aged eight in India experienced physical punishment, while national-level legal reviews (e.g., Government of India, 2009) underscore that although corporal punishment and mental harassment are officially banned, ambiguous terminology and weak enforcement persist (Kacker et al., 2007; Morrow & Singh, 2015; Ogando Portela & Pells, 2015).

These important contributions rarely disaggregate verbal/emotional abuse—such as public scolding, labeling, and intimidation—often referring to them collectively as non-physical or "mental harassment" without deeper psychological examination. The nuanced practices of shaming – how teachers deliver it, how students interpret and internalize it, and how it intertwines with local culture – remain poorly understood. There is a notable gap in qualitative, in-depth research that explores classroom interactions and power relations through the lens of shame and humiliation. Indeed, even in global research on school violence, the role of teachers as perpetrators of bullying or shaming is often overlooked. Gusfre et al. (2023, p. 332) observe that teacher-instigated bullying is "very rarely mentioned" in the academic literature, despite its significant emotional toll on students. While peer-to-peer bullying has received considerable scholarly attention, the role of teachers as perpetrators of psychological harm—through ridicule, humiliation, intimidation, or public shaming—remains notably under-explored. This gap is also evident in studies from the Indian context.

For example, a recent scoping review by Suresh and Vijaya (2024) analyzing school bullying research in India found that although peer victimization is well-documented, instances of teacher-led bullying are rarely addressed. Similarly, Thakkar et al.'s (2021) systematic review of adolescent bullying studies across India points out that while verbal and relational bullying

are frequently reported, teacher-inflicted emotional abuse—such as labeling or scapegoating—is largely overlooked. Together, these studies highlight a critical omission in the discourse on school-based violence: the persistent silence around the emotional harm inflicted by teachers, often under the guise of discipline or classroom management. This study addresses that gap by using an ethnographic case approach to capture nuances of shame-based discipline that surveys or legal analyses miss. By undertaking an ethnographic case study, this research addresses a fundamental limitation in the way school discipline is often studied—namely, the reliance on questionnaire-based methods that tend to abstract and flatten lived experience.

Such approaches may quantify incidents of punishment but fail to access the layered emotions, unspoken tensions, and shifting power dynamics that shape how shaming unfolds in everyday classroom life. In contrast, an ethnographic lens allows this study to capture the situated voices, affective responses, and relational meanings that are typically overlooked in large-scale surveys and policy reports. It extends the literature on school discipline by focusing not on physical punishment (already widely studied) but on everyday verbal and symbolic punishments that have gone under the radar. In doing so, it contributes to educational social psychology and anthropology by documenting how disciplinary shame operates within the cultural context of an Indian slum-community school. The rationale is that through rich description and analysis, I uncover why these practices persist – for example, what beliefs about learning, childhood, or social order underpin them – and how they impact teacher–student relationships and the learning environment.

This inductive inquiry, grounded in a multi-informant, multi-method approach, allows for the generation of new conceptual insights that might remain inaccessible through single-perspective or uniform methods. By drawing on diverse voices—students, teachers, and

parents—and employing a range of tools including interviews, classroom observations, and arts-based techniques, the study captures dimensions of shame-based discipline that single-method designs would likely miss. Given the relative paucity of India-based ethnographic work on this topic, the study helps fill a gap by providing contextualized knowledge of a type of school and community that is under-represented in research. My study offers insights into the everyday enactment of power in a low-budget school, thereby enabling a more nuanced understanding of discipline and authority than broad policy debates typically capture.

Third, a pedagogical rationale: understanding shaming practices is a necessary step toward improving school climates in line with child rights and pedagogical best practices. India's ban on corporal punishment and mental harassment will remain only on paper if teachers and administrators do not recognize less visible forms of harm. By shedding light on the subtle ways in which even well-intentioned teachers may be perpetuating a cycle of shame, this study's insights can inform teacher professional development and policy implementation. The research problem here is not aimed at vilifying teachers or parents, but was identified to critically examine the paradigms underpinning school disciplinary practices that are taken for granted. By exploring the perspectives of all stakeholders – students, teachers, and parents – the study sought to illuminate the rationales and constraints that lead to shaming, as well as any inner conflicts or discomfort stakeholders themselves might feel about the practices.

Early observations from the study indicated a noticeable tension in attitudes toward discipline. While some parents outwardly supported strict methods, they privately expressed concerns about their children's emotional well-being. Similarly, certain teachers appeared conflicted, acknowledging that persistent scolding could potentially undermine a child's self-confidence and emotional security. Investigating these nuanced viewpoints provides a more complete picture of the problem, which can ultimately support more empathetic and effective

interventions. If we understand why teachers resort to shaming – perhaps due to lack of alternatives, oversized classes, or unexamined cultural norms – interventions can be tailored accordingly (for example, professional development in positive discipline or efforts to shift community expectations around discipline). In sum, the rationale for this research is grounded in the belief that we cannot change what we do not fully understand. By deeply understanding shaming practices in context, we create the possibility for change in school climate – toward more positive and respectful forms of discipline that uphold students' dignity.

1.3 Research Aims and Questions

Building on the above problem and rationale, this study was guided by the overall aim of exploring how shame, as a disciplinary practice, is used, experienced, and understood in a low-fee private school in an unauthorized colony of Delhi. The research sought to generate a holistic understanding of these practices within their sociocultural context, giving equal attention to the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents. It also aimed to identify the implications of shaming for students' well-being and to consider possibilities for alternative approaches to discipline. To achieve this aim, the study addressed the following research questions:

- **Manifestation of Shaming:** *What forms do shaming practices take in the everyday classroom interactions of the case study school, and how are these practices embedded in the school's culture and routines?* This question examines the nature of shaming-as-discipline – the specific behaviors (e.g., scolding, name-calling, public ridicule) and the disciplinary moments in which teachers shame students, as well as

how frequently and openly these occur. It also considers how students experience and interpret such incidents in the moment. For instance, do certain offenses (like not doing homework or wearing the wrong uniform) more frequently result in public shaming? By documenting the manifestation of shaming, the study establishes a foundation of what is happening and how normalized it has become.

- **Underlying Beliefs and Motivations:** *What belief systems and motivations underlie teachers' use of shaming as a disciplinary strategy, and how do teachers and parents justify or contest these practices?* This question delves into the rationale behind shaming from the adult stakeholders' perspectives. It explores the beliefs, values, and assumptions that teachers invoke – for example, the notion that fear induces respect, or that public criticism motivates students to improve. It also examines parents' viewpoints: do they support teachers' use of shame, and if so, on what basis (cultural norms, their own upbringing, academic results)? Conversely, do any teachers or parents raise concerns or advocate alternative approaches to discipline? By answering this, the study uncovers the cultural logic and social pressures that sustain shaming.

- Initial observations indicated that many teachers see themselves as inculcating toughness and discipline necessary for success, often echoing the adage "spare the rod and spoil the child" – except that the "rod" in this case may be verbal humiliation rather than physical force. Parents often perceive strictness as a hallmark of a "better" school, reinforcing a broader community ethos that unintentionally legitimizes harsh disciplinary practices. In some cases, this belief translates into parents actively encouraging teachers to be firm with their children and mirroring those methods at home. Such alignment between school and domestic discipline can create a

continuous loop of shaming across settings, normalizing emotionally punitive practices in both environments.

- **Impact on Students and Responses:** *What are the perceived impacts of shaming practices on students, and how do students cope with or respond to being shamed?* This question focuses on the consequences of shaming for students' psychological well-being and academic engagement, as well as the strategies and coping behaviors students employ to navigate a shaming environment. It asks: How do repeated experiences of humiliation affect students' self-esteem, sense of safety, and relationship with school? Do students internalize the negative labels, or do they find ways to resist them (perhaps through humor, peer support, or quiet defiance)? Do some withdraw and participate less in class, or conversely, do some become desensitized over time?

- This inquiry is crucial for understanding the human impact of the phenomenon – moving beyond seeing shaming as just a classroom disciplinary tactic to seeing it through the eyes of those who endure it. Notably, the tendency of many shamed students to fall silent and avoid participation reflects what Freire would call a *culture of silence* among the oppressed (Freire, 2020). In this context, fear of humiliation effectively mutes some learners, discouraging them from asking questions or engaging fully in lessons. This self-censorship is not mere shyness but a defensive adaptation to shame – one that underscores how punitive classrooms can stifle students' voices and curiosity, ultimately undermining learning.

- **Broader Context and Envisioned Alternatives:** *What broader sociocultural factors such as gender norms, poverty, and school context influence shaming practices and experiences, and what alternatives or changes do participants envision for handling*

discipline? This question situates the issue within the wider context and looks toward the future. It considers, for example, whether gender plays a role – are boys and girls shamed for different behaviors, or do they react differently due to societal expectations? This study explores whether the context of an under-resourced, high-pressure school environment contributes to increased reliance on shaming. Specifically, I examine how factors such as large class sizes, intense exam competition, and the economic precarity of students' families can create conditions in which teachers feel heightened pressure to enforce discipline by any means necessary. Finally, this question explores whether teachers, students, or parents can imagine alternative disciplinary approaches. During interviews, participants were asked what an ideal teacher or classroom would do to maintain discipline without humiliation.

To address these four inter-linked research questions, a qualitative ethnographic case study design was adopted. Over a year of fieldwork, I immersed myself in the daily life of the school as a participant observer, taking detailed field notes on classroom interactions, disciplinary moments, and school routines.

I conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with key participants – including 21 students (Classes IX and X, ages 13–15), teachers (including the principal), and 10 parents – to gather diverse personal perspectives on shaming practices. In addition, participatory visual methods were employed: for example, students were invited to draw “a day at school” or diagram their feelings in class, which opened discussions about experiences of shame. These combined methods were deliberately chosen to capture the subtle nuances of shame-based discipline. The prolonged engagement and multiple-informant, multi-method data sources allowed me to triangulate observations with what participants said, lending depth and credibility to the findings. This ethnographic approach, rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, was crucial for

understanding not just what happens (the incidents of shaming), but how it feels and what it means to those involved – something a survey or brief visit could not reveal (Geertz, 2017). By embedding myself in the school and community, I aimed to see discipline through the participants' eyes, thereby clarifying why certain practices persist and how they might be changed (analyzed the data thematically and interpretively using Nvivo).

1.4 Thesis Contribution and Structure

This thesis makes four contributions. First, it offers an empirically grounded account of shame as a routine disciplinary practice in a low-fee private school serving a marginalized community in an unauthorized colony in Delhi. By centering students' accounts alongside teacher and parent perspectives, it shows how humiliation is enacted in ordinary moments of schooling and how its meanings travel across school and home. Second, it contributes conceptually by treating shame not simply as an individual emotion but as a social and institutional practice: I argue that shame functions as a form of affective governance in everyday schooling, producing compliance through reputational exposure and peer witnessing while reshaping participation, trust, and engagement. Third, it contributes methodologically through an ethnographic design that combines prolonged participant observation with interviews and participatory visual methods (drawings and student-led tours), enabling analysis of both interactional episodes and the wider relational and spatial settings through which shame becomes durable. Finally, it contributes practically by clarifying why shame-based discipline persists even when its harms are recognized, and by identifying the conditions under which dignity-based alternatives become thinkable and sustainable.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews interdisciplinary literature on shame, discipline, moral socialization, and well-being, and sets out the conceptual framework that informs the analysis. Chapter 3 explains the ethnographic case study design, site access, participants, data collection (interviews, observations, and participatory visual methods), analytic approach, and ethical considerations. Chapters 4–6 present the findings: Chapter 4 documents direct classroom shaming practices as they unfold in everyday interaction; Chapter 5 examines the cultural and relational routes through which shame travels across home and school and along gendered and classed moral expectations; and Chapter 6 analyzes the multi-layered impacts of shame on students' emotional well-being, participation, peer relations, trust, and motivation. Chapter 7 synthesizes the findings conceptually, showing how shame operates as discipline and moral socialization and why it persists despite its costs. Chapter 8 concludes by summarizing the thesis' contributions, implications, limitations, and future directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature relevant to understanding shame as a disciplinary practice in educational settings. The review is structured to build a multi-layered theoretical foundation for the present study. It begins by defining the core psychological and sociological concepts of shame, distinguishing it from related emotions like guilt and embarrassment. The chapter then examines the historical and cross-cultural use of shaming as a tool for discipline, with a specific focus on the Indian educational context. Following this, the discussion broadens to consider how disciplinary practices function as a form of school socialization, shaping student identity and reinforcing social hierarchies through a *hidden curriculum.* Finally, the review situates this phenomenon within the unique socio-educational landscape of low-fee private schools in India. By synthesizing these diverse strands of literature, this chapter identifies critical gaps in existing research and culminates in the presentation of a conceptual framework that guides the analysis of the ethnographic data.

2.1 The Concept of Shame in Education

Defining Shame vs. Guilt vs. Embarrassment: Shame is a self-conscious emotion arising from a negative evaluation of one's entire self, often linked to feeling exposed or fundamentally "deficient" in the eyes of others. A psychological analysis by Tangney and Dearing (2002) defines shame as an acutely self-conscious emotion involving a global negative evaluation of the self, while Menon and Shweder's (1994) ethnographic study in Odisha (formerly Orissa) describes shame as a social emotion rooted in feeling diminished in others' eyes.

Classic sociological theories further underscore shame's social nature. For instance, Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" suggests that individuals shape their self-concept based on how they imagine others perceive them – leading to feelings of pride or shame accordingly (Cooley, 2017). In other words, people learn to see themselves through others' eyes. Likewise, Goffman's analysis of stigma shows that when a person is marked with a demeaning label, it can transform their identity into a "spoiled" one (Goffman, 2009). They internalize society's negative judgments and often experience deep shame and diminished self-worth. In a classroom, being publicly branded as "lazy" or "weak" can function like a stigma that sticks to the student's identity. Over time, the student may start to believe this negative identity that has been imposed on them. Goffman's insight highlights that shame is not merely an internal feeling but a social process: a public reprimand can alter how a student is viewed by peers and how they view themselves. Thus, when I consider shame in school, I must remember it is fundamentally relational – arising from perceived judgments – and can reshape a child's social identity within the class.

By contrast, guilt is typically tied to a specific wrongdoing or behavior – one feels bad about an action rather than about one's core self. Lewis (1971) originally differentiated shame as a global negative self-assessment and guilt as focused on a specific behavior. This was reinforced in later empirical work by Tangney et al. (1996), while Kakar (2012), writing from an Indian psychoanalytic perspective, emphasized that the Indian ego is externally localized, suggesting a cultural tilt toward shame over guilt. For example, a student caught cheating might feel shame if they internalize the incident as "I am a bad person," whereas they might feel guilty if the focus is "I did a bad thing." Empirical psychological research supports this distinction: shame vulnerability correlates with defensive responses and withdrawal, while guilt proneness tends to spur reparative action and empathy. For example, Tangney et al. (1992) found that shame-prone individuals were more likely to respond to failure with

avoidance or aggression, while guilt-prone individuals demonstrated empathy and responsibility.

Embarrassment is related but typically milder and more fleeting; it usually occurs in response to a minor social misstep or awkward moment. People feel embarrassment as momentary discomfort (often blushing or nervous laughter) without the deep self-condemnation that characterizes shame. Notably, psychological research finds that embarrassment nearly always involves a real or imagined audience, whereas shame can be felt even in private when one merely imagines others' judgment (Crozier, 2014). Keltner and Buswell (1997) conducted a psychological study on self-conscious emotions and found that embarrassment has distinct antecedents and expressions (like blushing and fleeting discomfort) that set it apart from shame. In classroom scenarios these emotions can intertwine: a student stumbling through an answer may first feel embarrassment (a moment of social discomfort), but if the teacher's or peers' reaction is harsh, that embarrassment can deepen into shame about their ability or identity as a "capable student". Guilt, on the other hand, might arise if the student thinks they could have tried harder to avoid the mistake.

Dimensions of Shame in Education: Classroom shame has both individual-psychological and socio-cultural dimensions. Psychologically, shame is associated with a drop in self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and a tendency either to withdraw or to act out in anger. Tangney et al. (2007) – a U.S.-based psychological study on moral emotions – found that shaming experiences often lead students to defensiveness, aggression, or avoidance rather than positive behavior change. This large-scale study in the United States tracked correlations between proneness to shame/guilt and behavioral outcomes, showing that shame frequently led to unhealthy coping, whereas guilt more often led to constructive action. Similarly, a study of Indian students found that high levels of shame were significantly associated with

maladaptive academic behaviors such as academic self-handicapping, avoidance, and diminished performance (Nair, 2022). Research from a South-East Asian context echoes this pattern: Villavicencio and Bernardo (2013), studying Filipino university students, found that shame weakened the positive effect of self-efficacy on academic achievement, suggesting that shame undermines the motivational benefits of confidence.

These regional findings align with Tangney et al.'s (2007) conclusions, indicating that shame is generally detrimental to learning across both Western and Asian contexts. Additionally, Pekrun's (2006) control-value theory of achievement emotions classifies shame as a negative achievement emotion that typically impedes motivation and learning. This theoretical framework reinforces the view that shame has a broadly harmful impact on academic outcomes. A shamed student might start skipping classes or disrupting lessons to cope with or deflect the negative self-image. By contrast, guilt was linked to reparation: a guilty student (feeling "I did something wrong") is more likely to apologize and try harder next time, indicating that guilt can be instructional or "functional" in prompting improvement. Embarrassment usually has a shorter-term impact – for instance, a student might blush or fidget and then recover quickly – unless others' reactions escalate it into lasting shame.

Another term often used in educational contexts is humiliation, which is essentially shame imposed by others, especially in a public setting (Lindner, 2001). A student can be humiliated by a teacher's actions (e.g., being scolded harshly in front of classmates), but whether that humiliation leads to internal shame depends on the student's interpretation and resilience. As an illustrative anecdote, Nelson Mandela wrote about being humiliated by prison guards yet refusing to feel shame because he rejected their devaluation of him. *Mandela's (2008)* autobiography recounts numerous incidents of prison humiliation. For instance, Mandela describes being demeaned by guards but maintaining his self-worth, exemplifying how one

can experience public humiliation without internal shame**.** Likewise, a confident student with strong support at home might resist internalizing a teacher's insults, whereas a more vulnerable student might deeply absorb even mild criticism as shame.

Shame vs. Guilt Cultures – Educational Implications: Anthropological work often distinguishes "shame-oriented" contexts, where moral regulation is closely tied to public reputation and fear of losing face, from "guilt-oriented" contexts, where wrongdoing is expected to be regulated more through internalized moral codes (Cozens, 2018). In India, scholars have argued that shame is frequently mobilized in everyday moral socialization, with honor (*izzat*), family reputation, and community evaluation shaping how children learn what counts as "proper" conduct (Menon & Shweder, 1994; Patel, 2018). Within schooling, this makes public exposure and comparison especially powerful: shaming can be interpreted not only as discipline but also as moral correction and reputation management. At the same time, ethnographic work suggests that these practices can become normalized and even endorsed as necessary in high-pressure educational environments (Kaur, 2023). This literature helps explain why humiliating discipline can persist even when students describe its harms.

Educational Psychology on Shame: A robust finding in educational psychology internationally is that shame is generally detrimental to learning (Lee, Anderson, & Klimes-Dougan, 2016). Tangney et al. (2007) caution that student shame correlates with impaired academic performance and socio-emotional problems, whereas guilt can lead to constructive change. The reason lies in focus: shame causes a student to focus on their self ("I'm stupid" or "I'll never succeed"), often triggering anxiety or resignation, whereas guilt focuses on a behavior ("I didn't study enough this time") which feels more controllable and thus can motivate improvement (Christy & Mythili, 2020). Additionally, shame often involves a sense

of exposure – everyone sees my failure – which can be traumatic in a classroom community; embarrassment is essentially a milder form of this feeling of exposure (Huff et al., 2018).

In educational contexts, shame refers to a profound negative feeling about oneself triggered by experiences in a learning setting; it is distinct from guilt (a negative feeling about one's action) and embarrassment (social discomfort without deep self-condemnation) (Tangney et al., 1996). This thesis primarily uses shame to discuss emotionally charged disciplinary experiences that impact students' identity and participation. Where relevant, I note if an incident seems to elicit guilt (which may lead to different outcomes, such as a drive to correct the behavior) or mere embarrassment (which may pass quickly unless aggravated) (Tracy & Robins, 2006). Clarifying these definitions and dimensions is crucial before moving to how educators intentionally or unintentionally use shame in discipline (Woien et al., 2003). With this foundation, the thesis now turns to literature on how shame-oriented disciplinary practices have been viewed historically and in contemporary research.

2.2 Shaming as Discipline

Shame has long been wielded as a tool of discipline in educational institutions, both informally and as a matter of policy. This section reviews literature on how teachers and schools employ shaming or humiliation to control student behavior, the rationale behind such practices, and the historical and cultural perspectives on their use (Mumthas et al., 2014). It juxtaposes global research with studies conducted in India to illuminate common patterns and context-specific nuances, thereby addressing the first research question (RQ1) on the forms and manifestations of shaming in school discipline. This review also lays a foundation for the

thesis's conceptual framework by highlighting how disciplinary shame practices reflect underlying power dynamics and cultural norms.

Historical and Global Perspectives: Historically, many education systems embraced overtly shaming punishments – the classic image of a student wearing a dunce cap or being scolded in the front of the class illustrates how humiliation was once institutionalized in 19th- and early 20th-century schooling. For example, Bernstein (2018) notes in his sociological commentary on education that such public shaming rituals were common in earlier eras. The underlying logic of these practices was rooted in behaviorist ideas and social conformity: making an example of a misbehaving student was thought to deter that student and others from repeat offenses. Even as pedagogy evolved, remnants of these practices have persisted worldwide. Goodman and Cook (2019), in a conceptual analysis of school discipline in the United States, catalog several contemporary shame-oriented techniques used in strict "no-excuses" schools.

These include public behavior charts or "data walls" where each child's name is moved up or down based on conduct – a system that effectively labels some children as "bad" in front of their peers. A child whose marker is in the red (poor behavior) zone bears a public badge of shame, which can invite ridicule or ostracism. Educator accounts confirm that such data walls explicitly aim to motivate through embarrassment. Another documented practice is forcing students to issue public apologies in front of classmates for misbehavior – ostensibly to teach accountability, but often at the cost of intense embarrassment for the child. Goodman and Cook's (2019) review – which frames shame-oriented disciplinary practices as a human rights concern in education – argues that institutionalized shaming of students constitutes a violation of their dignity and fundamental rights.

They point out that techniques like public shaming, social isolation, and classroom ridicule carry severe psychological risks and tend to disproportionately target vulnerable students (such as those with disabilities or from minority backgrounds), thereby exacerbating inequities. In response to such concerns, some jurisdictions have begun to legislate against school shaming practices (Cooley, 2018). For example, 31 U.S. states by the late 2010s forbade certain forms of punitive humiliation in schools, and many states explicitly prohibit "walls of shame" that display student grades or behavior publicly. Yet, as educational sociologists observe, a "hidden curriculum" of shaming often persists informally even when official policies change – meaning teachers might continue subtle shaming tactics under the radar of administrators (Kumar, 2019).

Notably, shaming methods are not confined to Western contexts; they appear in various forms globally. In East Asian educational cultures, where maintaining group harmony and saving face are culturally emphasized, shame has traditionally been used as a disciplinary and motivational tool. Lewis (1995), writing on Japanese school practices, describes the concept of hansei – a ritual of critical self-reflection that students perform to acknowledge mistakes. In Japanese schools, a child who misbehaves or performs poorly may be asked to engage in hansei, essentially a guided experience of shame meant to cultivate humility and self-improvement. This practice reflects a cultural perspective that shame, when internalized constructively, can prompt personal growth (as opposed to Western views that often see shame as purely negative).

Anthropological studies of Chinese and Japanese classrooms have similarly noted teachers announcing a student's poor test score or class rank publicly to invoke a sense of shame and spur that student (and their peers) to work harder (Rao, 2022). Proponents of these practices argue that they inculcate a sense of responsibility and motivation – for example, a low-

performing student feeling shame may resolve to redeem themselves academically. However, critics highlight the fine line between reflective shame and outright humiliation. Even in cultures that value modesty, excessive public shaming can cause trauma and anxiety. An ethnographic study by Lewis (1995) in Japan noted that while hansei sessions are meant to be introspective, students sometimes experience them as ordeals of public humiliation if mishandled by the teacher. Thus, the effectiveness of shame as discipline is debated: some educators see a mild dose of shame as a useful corrective, while others view any shaming as potentially abusive.

Contemporary Examples and Ethical Debates: Modern educational research has begun documenting both the prevalence of shaming in schools and its effects on students. For instance, a study by Mehta and Pilania (2014) on bullying in Indian schools found that emotional shaming and exclusion are common disciplinary experiences, often causing severe psychological distress and long-term mistrust in the teacher-student relationship. Goodman and Cook's U.S.-based study (2019) is one such effort that takes a strong normative stance against shaming, equating practices like isolation corners or public humiliation with psychological maltreatment. For instance, they describe certain charter schools where misbehaving students must sit on an "isolation bench" during lunch, sometimes even wearing a special placard or a different uniform item to signify their transgression. The intention is to shame the student into compliance by literally setting them apart from the community. While teachers implementing such tactics might report short-term improvements in behavior, child psychologists voice concerns about long-term harm.

From a critical pedagogy standpoint, however, such shame-based methods are fundamentally problematic. Paulo Freire warned that authoritarian, fear-driven discipline — what he termed the "banking" model of education, where teachers deposit knowledge and students remain

passive — can suppress critical thinking and breed alienation in learners (Freire, 2020). In this view, when a teacher relies on shaming and instilling fear, students may comply outwardly but become disengaged internally. They are less likely to voice opinions or think independently, having learned that questioning authority invites humiliation. Freire's critique suggests that even if public shaming yields short-term obedience, it undermines the teacher–student relationship and the student's agency. An atmosphere of fear and humiliation runs counter to the kind of dialogic, respectful learning environment that fosters genuine understanding and growth. Thus, while some might argue "tough love" is effective, critical educators point out its less visible cost: it may produce silent, intimidated students rather than confident, reflective learners.

Indian research echoes these warnings, with findings linking bullying-related shaming in schools to anxiety and behavioral withdrawal among adolescents (Mehta & Pilania, 2014). Repeated experiences of public shame are linked with elevated anxiety and a breakdown in trust between student and teacher (Harter, 2015, as cited in Goodman & Cook, 2019). As a result of accumulating evidence, international bodies are now questioning whether shaming children is ever pedagogically justified. Goodman and Cook's (2019) paper concludes emphatically that shaming schoolchildren is incompatible with the respect for persons that education should embody, calling for schools to ban these practices just as many have banned corporal punishment. This ethical debate directly informs my thesis framework. As Indian child rights legislation evolves, gaps remain in addressing "mental harassment" — a form of non-physical disciplinary abuse that includes public humiliation and emotional degradation, which Mehta and Pilania (2014) argue remains widespread in Indian schools.

Shame as Discipline in the Indian Context: In India, the use of shame and humiliation as disciplinary tools has been both historically prevalent and, to an extent, culturally sanctioned.

Transferring Braithwaite's insight to schooling, if a student is constantly publicly shamed as "lazy" or "stupid," they may eventually adopt those labels as a form of resistance, rather than reform. Indeed, Mumthas et al. (2014) observed this pattern in Kerala: students who felt unfairly singled out by teachers responded with resentment and withdrawal from class engagement. Teachers – positioned as unquestionable authority figures in the classic *Guru–Shishya* (teacher–disciple) tradition – wielded near-absolute power over students. Public shaming was a routine feature of this dynamic. Well into the late 20th century, it was common for Indian teachers to slap or cane students (corporal punishment) and accompany it with harsh epithets like *nalayak* ("worthless") or *bewakoof* ("fool"), which are explicitly shaming labels attacking the child's character (Garg, 2017; Mumthas et al., 2014).

Such language aimed to instill obedience through fear of disgrace. These practices are rooted in a broader cultural ethos of reverence for the teacher and acceptance of strict discipline. A popular saying encapsulates it: "*Guru Devo Bhava*," meaning "the teacher is to be revered as God." In line with this, Indian society traditionally granted teachers an exalted status, and a teacher's scolding – even if harsh – is often interpreted as a legitimate exercise of authority done for the child's own good (Tiwari, 2015). Many parents explicitly tell children to "always listen to the teacher" and not talk back. Older generations even look back on school punishments with a degree of approval: being punished or shamed by teachers is remembered as how we learned discipline – an effective form of character-building in their view (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015).

Indeed, versions of "spare the rod and spoil the child" exist in numerous Indian languages, reflecting the belief that without some strictness – whether physical or verbal – children will not learn properly (Deb, 2018). A moderate amount of fear and shame has been seen as necessary to inculcate *sharam* (a sense of modesty and propriety) in the young. In many

communities, a child who shows no shame when corrected would be considered unruly, whereas a *sharmilee* (modest, shame-faced) child is praised as well-behaved. All of this creates a cultural backdrop in which teachers feel morally justified in using shame – they perceive it as caring "tough love" rather than abuse (Mumthas et al., 2014).

With the enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009, India legally banned corporal punishment and "mental harassment" of students in all schools – an acknowledgment by policymakers that shaming and humiliating students is harmful. However, research and field reports suggest that while overt physical punishment has declined in many areas, shaming and humiliation continue in subtler forms. This is supported by a study by Mumthas et al. (2014), which found that non-physical punishments like exclusion, isolation, and public shaming remained prevalent even after corporal punishment was banned, indicating that "mental harassment" is often overlooked by policy enforcement mechanisms. For example, a common practice reported in Indian schools today is to make misbehaving or underperforming students stand up for long periods, sometimes for an entire lesson, or even stand outside the classroom door where all passing students and staff can see them.

This serves as a public marker of disgrace (the student is literally "set aside" as an example of what not to be). Another practice is pinning notes to a student's uniform or sending them home with messages like "I did not do my homework today," thereby enlisting parents in the shaming process and ensuring the child's embarrassment carries beyond school. In extreme cases that occasionally make headlines – usually from poorly regulated schools in rural areas or urban slums – children have been made to wear placards around their necks with demeaning statements ("I am stupid," "I am a failure") as punishment.

While such incidents are condemned in the media when exposed, their occurrence attests that some educators still believe in the efficacy of humiliation as discipline. Kurian (2020), in her ethnographic study of a peace education program in India, illustrates this tension well. In a school actively attempting more empathetic, care-based approaches, she found that it was the children themselves – rather than the teachers, who voiced unequivocal opposition to corporal punishment – who defended fear-based discipline, with one student insisting "kindness isn't important, we need to be scared" (p. 199). This belief, held by many in India, is that without the threat of shame or punishment students will not behave morally or work hard.

The children in her study, reflecting on harsh discipline they had experienced, often rationalized it as for their own good and felt that being scolded or even hit was sometimes necessary. This internalization shows how normalized shaming practices have become – to the point that victims themselves may accept them as legitimate. My study's conceptual framework will engage with this phenomenon of "normalized" shame: how a practice widely understood elsewhere as harmful can be seen locally as a form of caring or "tough love." Indeed, sociologist G. Nambissan (2009) notes that in many Indian schools serving disadvantaged communities, there is a deeply ingrained culture of fear-based discipline, where strictness and shame are viewed as essential to maintaining academic standards and authority.

Academic literature specifically focusing on shame-oriented discipline in Indian schools is still emerging. However, as shown by Mumthas et al. (2014), students experiencing classroom ridicule or forced public apologies reported diminished self-worth and long-lasting emotional consequences, illustrating how shaming is embedded within broader disciplinary culture. Much of the existing research is subsumed under broader topics like school

discipline, classroom management, or corporal punishment. Nevertheless, a few studies shed light on shaming. Kurian's (2020) work (an ethnographic case study in North India) provides a vivid example of the cultural logic that can perpetuate shaming: both teachers and students invoked tradition ("I was also brought up this way") and outcomes ("it makes us stronger") to justify practices outsiders might label as abusive. Another perspective comes from Advani (2009), who has written about "mental punishment" in Indian schools – practices like ridicule, comparison, and public humiliation which leave no physical mark but can scar a child's psyche.

Advani's work traces how these practices persisted even as awareness grew that physical punishment is unacceptable; she argues that changing teachers' mindsets about shaming is as important as changing laws. This points to a gap in policy implementation: while India banned corporal punishment over a decade ago, enforcement is uneven, and "softer" forms of humiliation are often overlooked by authorities (Tiwari, 2019). The enduring prevalence of shaming in Indian classrooms, especially in low-income or under-resourced schools, forms a crucial backdrop for my research. It underscores why a study focusing on everyday shaming interactions – in a setting like a low-fee private school in Delhi – is both necessary and urgent. Such a study can document how far the reality on the ground has (or hasn't) shifted in response to legal and ethical calls for more respectful forms of discipline, thereby linking back to RQ1 (what shaming practices occur?) and RQ2 (why do teachers use them?).

Rationales Behind Shaming Practices: Understanding why teachers employ shaming is key to connecting this literature to my conceptual framework (which integrates psychological and cultural explanations). Several studies suggest that many teachers do not view shaming as cruelty but rather as a legitimate strategy for inculcating discipline and morality. Hand (2018) offers a controversial defense of moderate shaming in moral education: he posits that a "mild

dose" of shame, targeted at a bad behavior (and not the whole person), can instill a sense of right and wrong in students. In Hand's argument – influenced by virtue ethics – if a student never feels ashamed for misdeeds, they might not develop a conscience or sense of social responsibility.

Some teachers in Hand's interviews (drawn from UK schools) echoed this, saying essentially that some children will only behave if they are made to feel bad about misbehaving. This perspective resonates with traditional proverbs heard in India as well, such as "spare the rod and spoil the child"—a belief that persists even after policy reforms, as shown in Ramavath's (2016) analysis of discipline ideologies in Indian schools. In Indian teacher discourse, one often hears that fear keeps students in line. A survey of secondary-school teachers in India bears this out: many perceive strict, fear-based discipline as an effective way to maintain order and control indiscipline (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015) – reflecting an assumption that compliance and effort are driven more by fear of the teacher's disapproval than by intrinsic motivation.

A more nuanced take on shaming is provided by criminologist Braithwaite's theory of reintegrative vs. disintegrative shaming (1989). Though originally formulated in the context of criminal justice, this theory has been applied to schools by scholars like Morrison (2006) to distinguish between forms of discipline that condemn the deed versus those that stigmatize the person. Reintegrative shaming involves expressing disapproval of a wrongdoing while still making it clear that the offender is valued and can be redeemed (for example, a teacher saying, "Your behavior was unacceptable, but I know you can do better"). Disintegrative shaming (or stigmatization) labels the individual as bad or unworthy, offering no way back into the community's good graces.

In educational terms, a reintegrative approach might involve a private reprimand and an opportunity for the student to make amends, whereas a disintegrative approach might be yelling at the student in front of the class and calling them derogatory names. Brown and Clarey (2012), in a study on drug education programs in the U.S., provide a poignant example of disintegrative shaming's pitfalls. They examined "scared straight" style programs that tried to frighten youth away from drug use by shaming them (e.g., telling teens that using drugs would make them failures or criminals). Brown and Clarey found that such tactics often backfired, leading to cognitive dissonance and rebellion among the very students they were meant to scare straight. Teenagers who felt unfairly shamed would sometimes become defiant, embracing the stigmatized identity (e.g., proudly adopting a "bad kid" persona) or rejecting the authority of the adults altogether.

Transferring this insight to general school discipline, if a student is constantly publicly shamed as "lazy" or "stupid" they may eventually wear those labels as a badge of resistance — a pattern also observed by Mumthas et al. (2014) in Kerala, where students who felt unfairly targeted reported resentment and emotional withdrawal from classroom engagement. ("Yes, I'm the troublemaker, so what?") or disengage from school, believing they have no hope to be seen as good. The lesson here is that shaming can produce compliance in the short term but at significant risk to the student's long-term relationship with school and self-image. In later chapters, I draw on this distinction to analyze whether the shaming I observed in Delhi classrooms is practiced in a reintegrative or purely punitive manner (and what outcomes that this yields).

In summary, shaming as a disciplinary tool is a contentious practice. Globally, there is a trend toward recognizing its harms and seeking alternative approaches like positive discipline or restorative justice. Locally in India, while laws and progressive education policies discourage

humiliating methods, the ingrained culture among many teachers (and parents) keeps these practices alive. The literature reviewed above indicates a consensus that typical shaming tactics – public humiliation, ridicule, isolating students – carry significant risks for student well-being and can undermine the very goals (discipline or achievement) they purport to serve. At the same time, I observe that some educators and communities continue to argue that a degree of shame or fear is necessary in schooling. This tension sets the stage for my study. By examining shaming in a specific school context, I aim to understand how teachers justify these practices (linking to RQ2 on belief systems) and how students experience them (informing RQ3 on impacts). The conceptual framework – discussed in Section 2.6 – further elaborates on theoretical lenses (like power dynamics and cultural norms) to interpret my field findings on shaming.

2.3 School Socialization and Discipline

Schools are not just venues for academic instruction; they are key sites of socialization, where children learn societal norms, values, and expectations (Giroux, 1983). From a classical sociological perspective, school discipline is seen as essential to moral education and social order. Émile Durkheim argued that cultivating a "spirit of discipline" in students is a fundamental function of schooling. He famously remarked that "a class without discipline is like a mob," implying that without adherence to norms and respect for authority, chaos would undermine both learning and morality (Durkheim, 1961, p. 151). According to Durkheim, children find security in a well-regulated classroom where expectations are clear – "each one is in his place and finds it good to be there" (Durkheim, 1961, p. 152).

In this functionalist view, a teacher's authority and even the use of reprimands or punishment are largely legitimate, so long as they reinforce shared values and social cohesion. I can see echoes of this perspective in traditional Indian schooling norms: the ideal classroom is often described as one of "pin-drop silence," with an unwaveringly strict teacher in charge. Many Indian parents and teachers still hold that if students fear the teacher, they will behave and study more earnestly – an attitude noted in contemporary studies of Indian schools (Kurian, 2020). This mindset treats strict discipline (including shaming) as a form of character training, intended to inculcate self-control and respect.

Discipline practices, including shaming, are deeply intertwined with this socialization process. For instance, Kumar's (2019) longitudinal study of Indian classrooms highlights how daily disciplinary practices – from spatial arrangements to language use – convey implicit messages about hierarchy, obedience, and social roles. This section examines how the way teachers discipline students – particularly through shaming or public criticism – transmits messages about norms and identity. In doing so, it links the phenomenon of classroom shaming to the broader conceptual framework of the hidden curriculum and identity formation, thereby addressing how RQ1 and RQ3 connect: the forms of shaming (RQ1) are not only disciplinary tactics but also convey implicit lessons that shape students' self-concept and sense of belonging (RQ3). I draw on sociological studies that link classroom disciplinary climates to student identity formation and use these insights to inform my interpretation of the ethnographic data.

Classroom as a Socialization Arena: Every interaction in a classroom carries implicit lessons beyond the formal curriculum. The formal curriculum might teach algebra or grammar, but the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968) – a concept introduced by Philip Jackson in the 1960s – teaches a parallel set of lessons: obedience to authority, competition

with peers, respect for rules, and so on. For instance, Jackson's seminal observation was that things like waiting in line, raising one's hand to speak, and being punctual teach children how to function in structured organizations. Discipline is a major part of that hidden curriculum. When a teacher rewards certain behaviors and punishes others, students learn what their community (the school) values — a dynamic explored by Kumar (2019) in her ethnographic study of Indian classrooms, which shows how routine disciplinary practices reinforce values of obedience and hierarchy under the guise of neutral instruction.

For example, if a teacher consistently praises students who speak up and take risks in answering questions, the class learns that confidence and initiative are positive norms. Conversely, if a teacher frequently ridicules wrong answers or scolds those who make mistakes, students learn a different lesson: staying quiet is safer than trying and erring. In this way, disciplinary practices can either encourage students to engage (internalizing norms of participation and resilience) or discourage them (teaching norms of silence and fear). In the context of shame, a pattern of public shaming teaches a powerful hidden lesson about what is considered shameful in the eyes of authority. If getting a low score or mispronouncing an English word routinely results in scorn, students learn that academic failure or linguistic "impurity" is treated as disgraceful.

Over time, students may internalize these judgments, which contributes to their developing identity. Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development emphasizes that adolescents, in particular, grapple with identity vs. role confusion; consistent messages from school about one's worth can tip the balance. A student who is repeatedly made to feel ashamed may start to see themselves as a "bad student" or "not good enough," potentially embracing a deviant or outsider identity in the school context. On the other hand, a student consistently affirmed might integrate the "good student" identity into their sense of self. Thus, daily discipline

doesn't just manage behavior – it effectively sorts children into roles and communicates their place in the social order of the classroom.

Educational sociologists have documented this socialization effect in various cultural settings. For example, Adamson and Brown (2024), in a study of secondary schools in Tanzania, show how English-only classroom policies carried an implicit judgment: students who spoke in their native language (Kiswahili) were scolded or penalized, sending the message that their home language and by extension their cultural background were inferior in the school setting. This is an example of the hidden curriculum contradicting the explicit curriculum. While the explicit goal might be to teach English, the implicit lesson (through shaming of local language use) was that local culture has no place in education. Adamson and Brown (2024) found that rural Tanzanian students subjected to such discipline often felt alienated; they internalized the notion that to be "educated" one must distance oneself from one's home identity.

Similarly, Milligan et al. (2024) report how in Rwandan schools, girls in English-medium classrooms face a double bind: they are expected to learn in a foreign language and conform to gender norms of modesty. Teachers would sometimes shame girls for speaking up (if their English was halting or accented), leading those girls to retreat into silence. Kuchah and colleagues conceptualize this as "epistemic exclusion" – effectively excluding certain students from full participation in knowledge-sharing because the norms of the classroom (linguistic fluency, gender roles) are stacked against them. In their study, girls internalized the message that making mistakes in English was embarrassing, so many stopped trying to answer questions at all, reinforcing their marginalization in class. What these examples underline is that disciplinary shame can be a mechanism of social stratification within classrooms: it can delineate who is considered competent or "in," and who is "out." Children

left out of the valued group may develop coping identities (the quiet student, the class clown, etc.) that further shape their educational trajectory.

In India, the cultural norms transmitted via disciplinary practices can be quite complex due to the country's social heterogeneity. Schools often embody middle-class, "modern" cultural norms that may differ markedly from those of the students' home communities. Ingram (2011) and Reay et al. (2009), writing in the UK context, noted that working-class students often face a cultural mismatch between home and school – a theme that resonates in Indian urban schools serving first-generation learners. Jasrotia and Srivastava (2021), in a qualitative study of a marginalized community in North India, found that students from minority or low-income backgrounds felt formal schooling was "not aligned with their culture" (p. 192) and that success required them to imbibe the culture of the elite. One way this dynamic plays out is through discipline and shaming. A child from a low-income family might speak a dialect or use colloquial slang; if the school is oriented toward middle-class decorum, the teacher may scold or mock the child for being "uncouth" or "ill-mannered." The norm conveyed is that the child's home language or behavior is shameful, and only the middle-class way of speaking is acceptable for an "educated" person.

Educational anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) is useful here: the school, through subtle everyday practices, devalues the cultural capital of certain students (language, style, demeanor) and legitimizes that devaluation by making it seem natural or necessary. Discipline and shaming are among the blunt instruments of this symbolic violence. By shaming a student for their natural way of talking or dressing, a teacher communicates that the way you are is wrong. Over time, students receiving these messages can develop an enduring sense of inferiority or a fragmented identity. They may either try to hide their home culture (leading to internalized

shame about their background) or reject the school culture entirely (leading to oppositional behavior).

My ethnographic data illuminate instances of this dynamic, but the literature already provides clues. For instance, Kurian & Gruijters (2023) report that many teachers in disadvantaged Indian classrooms hold deficit beliefs about slum children – assuming such children are inherently undisciplined or less capable. These assumptions manifest in teaching practices that are more controlling and less engaging for those students, effectively drilling obedience rather than encouraging critical thinking. The hidden curriculum message to the students is that their role is to "know their place," listen and not question – quite opposite to the rhetoric of modern pedagogy that advocates inquiry and confidence for all children.

Impact on Student Identity and Agency: The ultimate outcome of school socialization through discipline is seen in student identity formation and agency. Educational psychologist Christine Halse (2018) argues that a sense of belonging is crucial for young people's identity in schools. When students feel they belong and are valued, they are more likely to adopt the school's values and see themselves as "good students." When they feel they do not belong – for instance, if they are constantly shamed or marginalized – they may develop oppositional identities or disengage from schooling. Research by Ellwood-Lowe et al. (2020) on children's nationalist attitudes in India provides an interesting angle on identity socialization.

This study (surveying Hindu and Muslim children in Indian schools) found that by age nine many majority-Hindu children had already internalized an "Indian = Hindu" narrative of national identity, whereas Muslim minority children did not. The researchers suggest that subtle messages in schools (along with family and media) socialize children into a dominant identity – in this case, a majoritarian understanding of who "counts" as truly Indian. In a classroom context, if teachers or textbooks implicitly equate good citizenship or normalcy

with the majority culture, minority students can experience a form of cultural shaming. They may feel pressure to hide or downplay their own identity to fit in, which is another manifestation of shame operating at a cultural level. Payal Shah and Ayesha Khurshid's ethnographic work (2019) on Muslim young women in India and Pakistan illustrates how students navigate these pressures in complex ways.

The participants in their study valued education and achieved academic success, but they also contended with community expectations (e.g., to remain modest, not appear "too modern"). Shah and Khurshid found that these women did not simply shed their cultural identity to succeed; rather, they crafted hybrid identities that integrated their education with their religious-cultural values. For example, a student might excel in class but also wear the hijab proudly – asserting that one can be an educated, empowered Muslim woman without assimilating into the dominant cultural mold. This kind of identity negotiation shows that students are not passive recipients of the hidden curriculum or of shaming; they exercise agency, sometimes even turning stigmatizing experiences into motivators for resistance or self-definition.

Applying these insights to my context: students in a low-fee private school in Delhi's unauthorized colony are likely receiving mixed messages. On one hand, the school is pushing "modern" norms (English language, formal discipline) that may implicitly shame elements of their local culture. On the other hand, students and their families might quietly resist or reinterpret these messages. Hem Borker's (2019) ethnography of a girls' madrasa in Delhi offers a counterpoint that when school and home culture align, even strict discipline can be seen as legitimate by students. In Borker's study, because the madrasa's values resonated with the community's (religious devotion, modest behavior), the girls did not view the

school's disciplinary strictness as alien or humiliating – it was part of a framework they believed in.

In contrast, in a low-fee private school serving a secular slum population, the school's ethos (aspiring to an English-speaking, middle-class standard) might conflict with the students' home culture (vernacular language, informal norms). Thus, when discipline is enforced via shaming in my case study, it may carry an extra sting – it's not just "you broke a rule," but often implicitly "the way you are is not good enough". Balagopalan and Subrahmanian (2003), who studied low-caste children's experiences in Indian schools, observed that the dominant culture in schools often "excludes or discredits all other cultures' worldviews," causing minority or lower-caste children to feel profoundly rejected. This literature suggests that students subject to such cultural shaming might either internalize shame (feeling bad about who they are) or develop oppositional attitudes (rejecting the school's authority altogether). Either reaction has implications for their educational path: internalized shame can reduce participation and confidence, while oppositional identity can lead to conflict or dropout.

Socialization into Roles and Hierarchies: School discipline also socializes students into certain roles within the classroom hierarchy. Teachers may (consciously or not) use praise and shame selectively, thereby anointing some children as "good" and others as "problematic." Over time, this entrenches roles: the "good student" – often a high achiever who is consistently affirmed – versus the "troublemaker" or "weak student" who is regularly reprimanded or shamed. Once these reputations solidify, they can be self-perpetuating. The good students may feel pressure to maintain their status, perhaps even aligning with the teacher in shaming the bad students (to distance themselves). The labeled bad students might band together or take pride in rebelling against rules, forming a kind of subculture.

Matias and Zembylas (2014), in their work on teacher emotions in the U.S., remind that teachers' own biases and feelings (like racial or class-based Prejudice) can creep into these interactions. In their study of predominantly white teacher candidates, Matias & Zembylas found that despite professed commitments to equity, some teachers felt an unconscious "disgust" toward students of certain backgrounds – a visceral emotional response that translated into differential treatment. In a school setting, a teacher who harbors classist or casteist biases might, for example, be quick to scold children from a slum community for minor infractions yet be more lenient with a more privileged-seeming child. Students are astute observers of such patterns. They learn, for instance, that "girls who speak English with an accent are laughed at by the teacher" or "boys from X neighborhood are always in trouble here."

These lessons can significantly limit what students believe is possible for themselves ("I'm from that neighborhood, so the teacher expects me to be trouble – maybe it's pointless to try to be otherwise"). Conversely, if a school cultivates a more inclusive disciplinary climate – say by handling misbehavior privately and respectfully – it can impart norms of mutual respect and personal growth. Unfortunately, as many studies of under-resourced schools note, maintaining order often takes precedence over nurturing individual development (Kumar, 2019; Kurian & Gruijters, 2023). In such schools, large class sizes and high pressures to cover the syllabus can lead teachers to favor expedient methods like public shaming ("Name and shame") to keep control, because it is immediately effective in quelling disruption (everyone falls silent when a peer is being berated). The longer-term socialization effects of this – fear, conformity, lack of trust – are often not considered in the moment.

In summary, disciplinary practices are a key vehicle for school socialization. Shaming practices specifically tend to transmit exclusionary norms: they signal to the shamed student

that something about them (their behavior, performance, or background) is unacceptable, and they signal to other students what not to be. The literature reviewed shows that this can have lasting effects on student identity – often negative, fostering feelings of inferiority, non-belonging, or the adoption of oppositional identities. However, it is also evident that students interpret and react to these messages in varied ways, sometimes showing resilience and creating counter-narratives (as seen in studies of marginalized groups carving out pride in their identity despite school pressures).

For my study, which was situated in a low-fee private school in Delhi, these insights framed what to look for: How do students in this context internalize or resist the shaming they experience? Do they accept the school's judgment of them, or do they push back in subtle ways? How do teachers' disciplinary styles reflect broader cultural values, and what hidden curriculum are they conveying to these children of an unauthorized colony? These questions bridge RQ2 and RQ3, linking belief systems (teachers' perspectives on discipline) to outcomes (students' self-concepts and agency). Before turning to my findings, the next section (2.4) examines the unique context of low-fee private schools in India, as this context critically shapes the socialization and discipline dynamics discussed here.

2.4 Low-Fee Private Schools in India

The setting of my study is a low-fee private school in an unauthorized colony in Delhi, India. Understanding the socio-educational context of such a school is essential for interpreting any classroom practices – including shaming – observed there. Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS) are a distinctive phenomenon in India and other developing countries: they are privately run schools that charge minimal tuition fees, making them accessible (in principle) to lower-

income families who often perceive government schools as inadequate. In urban areas, especially unauthorized colonies (informal settlements lacking official recognition and basic services), LFPS often flourish because government school provision is insufficient or non-existent (Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2020; Srivastava, 2007). This section provides an overview of LFPS characteristics, challenges, and community dynamics, drawing on relevant studies. By situating the disciplinary and shaming practices within this context, I address why my research is needed (RQ1–RQ3 in a context not well studied) and how the context might produce specific local patterns, thus directly linking to the identified literature gaps (section 2.5) and my conceptual framework's attention to power and culture.

Overview of Low-Fee Private Schools: LFPS are typically set up by local entrepreneurs, NGOs, or sometimes former teachers, and operate with very limited resources. They charge fees that are a fraction of those in elite private schools – hence "low-fee" – and often even lower than the informal costs of "free" government schooling (such as uniforms, textbooks, or tutoring costs). Despite their financial constraints, these schools have become popular in many Indian cities and villages. Parents choose LFPS for various reasons documented in research: perceived better discipline and accountability compared to government schools, the promise of English-medium instruction (a major draw for aspirational families), and a hope that these schools will offer their children upward mobility (Härmä, 2009; Tooley & Dixon, 2007).

Educational economists Tooley and Dixon (2007) conducted a census of private schools in East Delhi's slums and found dozens of unregistered schools tucked away in alleyways, serving thousands of children who would otherwise be out of school or in ill-equipped state schools. They argue that these schools fill a gap left by the public system, often achieving basic learning outcomes despite shoestring budgets. Tooley and Dixon noted that in an area

like Sangam Vihar (one of Delhi's largest unauthorized colonies), one can find a private school on almost every other street. The schools often operate out of rented buildings or improvised structures – for example, a few cramped rooms above shops or in courtyard residences – with basic furniture and scant facilities. Teacher salaries are low (sometimes less than the minimum wage), and many teachers are young women or men from the local community, often without formal training or qualifications (Kingdon, 2020).

Because many LFPS are unrecognized (not officially registered with the government education department), they are not always held to the standards that public or recognized private schools are. This is a double-edged sword. On one hand, operating outside strict regulation gives these schools flexibility to innovate or adapt to community needs. On the other hand, they may evade rules intended to protect students – for example, the ban on corporal punishment or requirements for qualified staff. Gilbertson and Dey (2023a), who studied equity issues in Indian private schooling, highlight a broader tension: even policies designed to help poor students (like India's Right to Education (RTE) Act mandate that private schools reserve 25% seats for disadvantaged children) often encounter resistance or subversion.

In their study of Delhi schools, they found that privileged school actors prioritized "access" over "integration." In other words, elite private schools would nominally take in some poor children (access) but then keep them socially separate or treated differently (not truly integrating them). This phenomenon, which Gilbertson and Dey term "benevolent undermining," can manifest in LFPS as well. In a homogeneous LFPS (where nearly all students are from underprivileged backgrounds), the segregation is not within the school but rather between the LFPS sector and the better-resourced schools in the city. Nonetheless, lowered expectations and a watered-down curriculum can occur internally.

Well-meaning LFPS principals or teachers might think they are doing what's best for "these poor kids" by keeping things basic – an attitude which can inadvertently entrench inequalities. For example, a principal might decide not to teach higher-order skills because she assumes slum children "can't handle more," thereby denying those students opportunities available elsewhere. This context likely influences disciplinary styles too. Teachers may adopt a paternalistic stance: being extra strict or using shaming "for the child's own good," under the belief that tough love is needed to compensate for the supposedly deficient home environment of slum children. Indeed, community elders and parents might endorse this approach, thinking that discipline fills a gap left by busy or illiterate parents.

Underlying Cultural Notions of Honor (Izzat): Discipline in many low-fee private school communities is entangled with moral ideas of respectability, *sharam* (a sense of shame/modesty), and *izzat* (honor). In this moral economy, children's school behavior and academic standing can be read as reflections on the family, making public correction culturally legible as a way to "keep children in line" and protect reputation. Anthropological work on honor and face highlights how fear of public devaluation can function as a powerful mechanism of social control (Wikan, 2008). In under-resourced schooling contexts, where teachers are under pressure to deliver "results" with limited support, this honor-based logic can converge with institutional demands, making naming-and-shaming practices appear efficient and justified (Kurian & Gruijters, 2023). This context is important for interpreting why students and parents may sometimes accept humiliating discipline as normal or necessary, even as students describe its harms.

LFPS also often market themselves on having "good results" and "good discipline." In interviews with low-fee school principals and parents in Delhi's slums, Mousumi and Kusakabe (2020) found that parents value discipline highly – they want their children to be

neatly dressed, respectful, and well-behaved, seeing this as a marker of quality education (perhaps because it contrasts with the perceived disorder of some government schools). Thus, LFPS feel pressure to "produce" disciplined students to satisfy parental expectations and compete with other schools. A principal might explicitly instruct teachers to ensure silence in the halls and absolute obedience, even if it means instilling fear. Some schools conduct daily assemblies where any student infractions are announced or scolded publicly as a show of strictness to observers.

This creates an element of performative discipline – the school is demonstrating its toughness as a selling point. Unfortunately, this can lead to children being humiliated not only as a byproduct of discipline but sometimes intentionally to show parents that the school brooks no nonsense. Kurian (2020) notes that in traditional mindsets (held by some parents and even students in her study), "a bit of fear is necessary in education." In my study's setting, it would not be surprising if parents occasionally side with teachers in shaming incidents, believing it to be for the child's benefit. For instance, if a child is publicly scolded for not doing homework, some parents might approve, thinking it reinforces the importance of studying. This complicates the picture: the teacher is not a lone actor but part of a network of adult expectations that endorse strict discipline.

Teacher–Student Dynamics in LFPS: Teachers in LFPS often come from modest educational and social backgrounds themselves, sometimes only a few steps above their students in terms of class or caste. Many are young and either grew up in similar neighborhoods or even the same community. This can create a paradoxical dynamic. On one hand, there's a level of relatability – teachers understand the community's language and struggles, which could foster empathy. On the other hand, some teachers may

overcompensate for casual familiarity by asserting authority even more strongly (to avoid being taken lightly by students who see them as a neighbor or older sibling figure).

Gilbertson and Dey (2023b), in a chapter on post-pandemic education in India, discuss how the concept of a "neighborhood school" – ideally an institution integrated with the local community – often doesn't pan out in practice. Even in community-run LFPS, they found there can be a desire to mimic the hierarchical, stratified ethos of the broader education system. For example, many English-medium LFPS insist that students speak English as much as possible and may shame those using the local language, like what elite convent schools do, to brand themselves as proper English-medium institutions. This is essentially the microcosm of postcolonial language politics: teachers who themselves might not be fluent in English enforce an "English Only" rule with zeal.

Mohini Gupta (2024) calls this dynamic postcolonial shame – an internalized bias that equates being educated with rejecting local languages and ways. In my context, a teacher might write "Speak English" on the blackboard and chastise any child caught speaking Hindi, perhaps even making them wear a badge that says "I spoke Hindi" as a form of mild shaming. While the intent is to create an English-rich environment (a selling point for the school), the effect can be that students feel their home language is inferior or a source of embarrassment. Gupta (2024) argues that such practices contribute to a lingering sense of inferiority about indigenous culture among students – a continuation of colonial-era attitudes where English was associated with superiority.

Another aspect is the proximity of teachers and students' lives in unauthorized colonies. Often, teachers live in or near the same colony; they might know students' families personally or see them in the marketplace. This can cut both ways in terms of discipline. A teacher might show extra empathy knowing a child's difficult home circumstances (e.g., not

shaming a child for incomplete homework if they know the child has no electricity at home). Conversely, familiarity can become a tool in shaming: a teacher might say, "I know your mother; what would she say if she knew how you act in school?" – invoking community and family in the reprimand. Patel (2018), in a study of Indian social attitudes, discusses how in shame-oriented societies, the gaze of the community is a powerful force in regulating behavior.

In a tight-knit community school, that gaze is ever-present. A student who is scolded in class might fear that news of their shame will reach home by evening through local gossip, doubling their humiliation. Thus, the community context can amplify the impact of school shaming. On the flip side, if the community disagrees with the school's methods, it can moderate the impact: for instance, if some parents feel a teacher was too harsh, they might console the child at home and dismiss the teacher's scolding as unwarranted, thereby buffering the child's shame. My research will be attentive to these nuances – do students feel their school life and home life are continuous or separate worlds? Do teachers leverage community relationships to discipline (for better or worse)? Understanding these dynamics is key to interpreting incidents of shaming I might observe.

Curriculum and Values in LFPS: Low-budget private schools often follow the official state curriculum (especially if their students aim to take standardized board exams), but the implementation is usually less rigorous due to resource limits. Shah and Khurshid (2019) have shown that education can be empowering for marginalized groups only when curriculum and pedagogy acknowledge and include their identities. In many LFPS, however, curriculum delivery is rote-based and disconnected from students' context. Maithreyi et al. (2022) describe this as "decontextualized schooling" for Adivasi (indigenous) communities – and the concept holds for urban poor contexts too. Children are taught content that often feels

irrelevant to their lives, in a language and manner alien to them. In such an environment, discipline often becomes about forcing engagement with material that students privately find meaningless.

Instead of the school adapting to the child, the onus is on the child to adapt or be shamed for not adapting. Maithreyi et al. (2022) highlight that teachers in such settings may misinterpret a lack of student response or achievement as personal failing or lack of effort, rather than questioning if the teaching method or curriculum is at fault. This leads to punitive responses – for example, if students don't answer questions (perhaps because they genuinely don't understand the language or the abstract content), a teacher might label them "dumb" or "lazy" and double down on strictness, rather than seeking a better instructional approach. The literature suggests that teacher training for LFPS staff is minimal, so many rely on their own experiences of schooling (often traditional) to shape their classroom management. If a teacher grew up being disciplined through shame, they may replicate it, believing it's effective because "I turned out fine." This underscores a cycle where the value of empathy or modern pedagogical techniques hasn't been introduced to break the pattern.

Typical Disciplinary Culture in LFPS: Putting it all together, what does literature suggest is "typical" in a low-fee private school classroom in an unauthorized colony? Suvasini Iyer's ethnographic case study (2013) of a primary classroom (not specifically LFPS, but a comparable low-cost school) observed that discipline was maintained through a strict regime of praise and blame, and that teachers sometimes unknowingly humiliated slower learners by publicly comparing them to faster peers. I can extrapolate that in LFPS, where formal teacher education is lacking, such practices might be even more common. Children may be seated or grouped by perceived ability or behavior (with the so-called "backbenchers" receiving less attention or more scolding).

Those labeled as weak might face more frequent reprimands. If the school posts exam results or rankings publicly – a common practice – the top performers are celebrated, making the absence of others on the list painfully conspicuous. Gilbertson and Dey (2023a) noted that even a discourse of "benevolence" in education can result in isolating weaker students – for instance, pulling them out for remedial classes might unintentionally mark them as "the slow kids," inviting stigma. Students in LFPS are usually keenly aware of these hierarchies. They often know that, in the wider scheme, they are at the bottom of the educational hierarchy (not being in the prestigious schools).

This awareness can breed both gratitude and anxiety. Mousumi & Kusakabe (2020) found that students in unauthorized colonies often feel grateful to simply have a school (since their parents pay fees with great sacrifice), but also anxious about whether the education they're getting is "good enough" to change their futures. In such a psychological state, teacher feedback carries tremendous weight. A word of praise can greatly boost a child's confidence, while a word of shame can cut very deep. A student who disappoints their teacher might feel they are also letting down their family who invested in their schooling – a heavy burden for a child.

To summarize this section: Low-fee private schools in India, especially in unauthorized urban colonies, operate under unique conditions that shape teacher-student interactions. Resource limitations, lack of oversight, community expectations for strict discipline, and the drive to emulate elite schooling norms all contribute to a disciplinary environment that often leans heavily on control and shaming. The literature on these schools highlights their role in expanding access to education for the poor but also points to issues of quality and equality. What has been less examined – and what my study addresses – is how these contextual factors translate into day-to-day classroom culture. Specifically, I investigate whether

shaming practices are indeed as prevalent in LFPS classrooms as anecdotal evidence suggests, and how they affect the very students these schools aim to uplift. This contextual understanding sets the stage for identifying gaps in the literature (section 2.5) and for analyzing my case through the conceptual framework (section 2.6), which integrates the micro-level of classroom interactions with the macro-level forces of culture and policy.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

The literature reviewed in Sections 2.1–2.4 establishes that shame matters for learning, relationships, and identity formation, and that discipline is a key site where shame can be produced and normalized. However, across educational psychology, sociology of education, and scholarship on Indian schooling, there remain gaps that limit what is currently understood about shaming as a routine disciplinary practice in everyday school life. The study identifies five gaps that directly motivate the focus and design of this study.

Gap 1: Shaming as an explicit focus of study. Much research examines discipline broadly (including harshness, punishment, classroom control, and strictness), but shaming is often treated as incidental rather than as a central analytic object. Where humiliation appears, it is frequently absorbed into broader measures of punitive climate or teacher harshness, which can obscure the specific social mechanisms through which shame operates (e.g., public exposure, ridicule, reputational labeling, and peer witnessing). A clearer focus on shaming practices as such—how they are enacted, justified, and experienced—is still comparatively limited (e.g., Goodman & Cook, 2019; Stearns, 2017).

Gap 2: Context of low-fee private schools and unauthorized colonies. Although low-fee private schools have been studied in India, much of that work focuses on market dynamics,

school choice, and learning outcomes rather than on the emotional and moral textures of discipline in everyday classrooms (e.g., Härmä, 2021; Srivastava, 2008). Even less is known about how shaming practices operate in unauthorized-colony settings, where economic precarity, reputational concerns, and high-stakes aspirations converge, and where school–community proximity can intensify the social consequences of classroom humiliation.

Gap 3: Student voice and interpretation. A recurring limitation in discipline research is that it privileges adult perspectives (policy, teachers, and parents) and under-centers how students interpret and navigate humiliating discipline. Student-voice scholarship argues that students are not only recipients of schooling but also meaning-makers whose interpretations matter for understanding how school practices shape identity and belonging (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2002). More research is needed that treats students' accounts and meanings as primary analytic evidence rather than as supplementary commentary.

Gap 4: Cumulative and relational impacts of shaming. Many studies examine immediate outcomes of shaming (momentary distress, short-term compliance, or isolated episodes), but less is known about how repeated humiliation accumulates over time to shape participation, trust, peer relations, and educational engagement—especially during adolescence when identity and belonging are particularly salient. Ethnographic work is well suited to tracing these cumulative dynamics because it can capture repeated interactions, normalization processes, and coping strategies as they unfold.

Gap 5: Intersections of shame with gender, religion, caste, class, and language. Scholarship has addressed educational marginalization along axes such as caste, class, gender, religion, and language, but fewer studies connect these intersectional dynamics directly to shaming as a disciplinary practice inside classrooms. Some work gestures toward these intersections (e.g., Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003; Mathew, 2018; Nambissan, 2009; Shah &

Khurshid, 2019), yet there remains a need for careful, context-specific analysis of who is most exposed to humiliation, how it is justified, and how it shapes educational inclusion and exclusion.

In identifying these gaps, the purpose of the present study becomes clear: this thesis offers an ethnographic account of how shaming is enacted and rationalized in everyday school discipline within a low-fee private school in an unauthorized colony in Delhi, how students experience and interpret these practices, and how shame functions in processes of moral socialization, authority, and educational engagement.

2.6 Conceptual Framework Summary

Building on the literature reviewed in this chapter, this thesis employs an interdisciplinary conceptual framework to analyze shaming practices as both (i) an emotion-laden interpersonal experience and (ii) a socially organized disciplinary practice embedded in institutional and cultural contexts. The framework is designed to support analysis across multiple levels: the intrapersonal (how shame is felt and interpreted), the interactional (how shame is produced through public relations and witnessing), the institutional (how discipline operates as power and pedagogy), and the cultural (how honor, respectability, and moral socialization shape what is thinkable as "discipline"). This multi-level lens also supports the thesis' broader argument that shame can function as a form of affective governance in everyday schooling—producing compliance by reorganizing classroom emotions and reputational risk.

Rather than rehearsing again the bodies of theory reviewed above, this section proposes how they are combined into a single analytic apparatus for the chapters that follow. Each of the

four levels is paired with the theoretical resource that does most work at that level: the intrapersonal level draws on the psychology of self-conscious emotion, and in particular the distinction between shame and guilt (Tangney et al., 2007); the interactional level draws on theories of face, audience, and stigma (Goffman, 2009); the institutional level draws on theories of disciplinary power and the hidden curriculum (Foucault, 2012; Freire, 2020; Jackson, 1968); and the cultural level draws on accounts of symbolic violence and of honor, *sharam*, and moral socialization in South Asian worlds (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Menon & Shweder, 1994). Two further tools cut across all four levels. Braithwaite's (1989) distinction between reintegrative and disintegrative shaming provides a means of evaluating the quality of any shaming episode—whether it condemns an act while preserving the person's membership, or stigmatizes the person and degrades them. The literature on belonging and adolescent identity (Erikson, 1968; Halse, 2018) explains why shame bears with particular force on the young people in this study, for whom peer evaluation and identity are heightened. Throughout, these concepts are treated not as a fixed template but as sensitizing tools (see Chapter 3), prioritizing participant meanings while enabling comparison across interviews, observations, and the students' drawings.

The purpose of assembling the framework in this way is to make possible the synthesis developed in Chapter 7, where the four levels are brought together to show how shaming operates as a coherent mode of affective governance—what the thesis terms *shame-based discipline*. The framework is therefore best read not as four separate lenses but as a single structure whose components interact; that structure, and the way the levels converge, is set out in Figure 12 and analyzed in full in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the research design, methodology, and ethical considerations that guided my qualitative inquiry into classroom shaming practices in a low-fee private school located in an unauthorized colony in Delhi. I present the epistemological and methodological foundations of the study, followed by a detailed account of the research site, participant selection, data collection methods, analytical strategies, ethical protocols, and my positionality as the researcher.

This study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which understands knowledge as co-constructed and socially situated (Agee, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Schwandt, 2014). Accordingly, I adopted an ethnographic case study design to allow for deep immersion into the everyday life of one school community. Ethnography, with its emphasis on participant observation and cultural interpretation, enabled me to witness naturally occurring disciplinary practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The case study framework offered a bounded context within which the phenomenon of shaming could be examined in depth and *in situ* (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

I begin by justifying the selection of the research design and site. I then describe the process of gaining access to the school and building rapport with participants. The following sections detail the data collection methods I employed: semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, parents, and the principal; classroom observations; and student-participatory visual techniques (such as drawing activities and guided school tours). I also explain how I analyzed the data thematically and interpretively using Nvivo.

Additionally, I give particular attention to the ethical complexities of conducting fieldwork with minors on a sensitive topic. I describe how I addressed informed consent,

confidentiality, and emotional safeguarding, and how I ethically navigated moments of tension in the field. I also include an extended discussion of my reflexivity and positionality, given my unique role as both an insider to Indian schooling and an outsider as a doctoral researcher from a UK university.

Finally, I acknowledge the limitations and delimitations of the study, clarifying its scope and analytic boundaries. Together, these methodological choices support the integrity of the study and prepare the ground for the empirical findings discussed in the following chapters.

3.1 Research Aims and Methodological Orientation

My study explores how shaming practices are enacted and experienced in a low-fee private school classroom in an unauthorized colony of Delhi, India. These aims are well suited to a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist tradition, which prioritizes understanding participants' meanings and experiences within their specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Within the specific context of this low-fee private school, my objectives were to document the forms of "shaming" used by teachers, to understand how both students and teachers perceive these practices, and to interpret how cultural and institutional contexts shape these interactions. To guide this inquiry, I organized the study around the following research questions:

- What forms do shaming practices take in the everyday classroom interactions of the case study school, and how are these practices embedded in the school's culture and routines?

- What belief systems and motivations underlie teachers' use of shaming as a disciplinary strategy, and how do teachers and parents justify or contest these practices?
- What are the perceived impacts of shaming practices on students, and how do students cope with or respond to being shamed?
- What broader sociocultural factors such as gender norms, poverty, and school context influence shaming practices and experiences, and what alternatives or changes do participants envision for handling discipline?

Despite caste discrimination being a lived reality in Indian schools (Nambissan, 1996), it was not explicitly discussed by teachers, students, or parents in the interviews, and caste categories were not explicitly invoked in observed disciplinary interactions in the case study school. For this reason, this thesis does not make claims about caste-based differences within the case; instead, the analysis foregrounds the axes that surfaced consistently in participants' accounts (such as gender, class, language, and respectability), while treating caste as a background structural context to schooling in India. Recent scholarship on the ethics of researching corporal punishment and related disciplinary practices in Indian schools highlights how power, positionality, and caste dynamics can shape what is visible and discussable in the field (Chandras, 2025).

The unit of analysis in my study is the practice of shaming within the school context—specifically, teacher-initiated comments or actions that students perceive as insulting, humiliating, or emotionally wounding. This includes both verbal and non-verbal practices (e.g., public reprimands, sarcastic remarks, visible symbols of punishment), and I focus on how students understand and experience these events. While the broader case includes parents and teachers, the analytic core of my study centers on how students interpret,

internalize, or resist experiences of shame in their everyday school life. I use this definition consistently throughout the research to guide both data collection and interpretation.

Given these aims, I situated my research within an interpretivist qualitative paradigm, which holds that social reality is not a single objective truth but is socially constructed through multiple subjective meanings (Schwandt, 2000; Tisdell et al., 2025). Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring prevalence, I used an interpretivist approach to understand phenomena from participants' viewpoints in their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This inquiry prioritizes depth over breadth, aiming for rich "thick description" (Geertz, 2017; Ponterotto, 2006) of classroom life that reveals the meaning of shaming practices to those involved. This approach is especially well-suited for exploring sensitive social processes like teacher-induced shame, particularly when the goal is to capture nuanced perceptions and culturally embedded experiences (Coffey, 2018; Geertz, 2017; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Pink, 2015), rather than to generalize broadly.

I adopted an ethnographic case study as the methodological orientation for this research. This approach combines ethnography's emphasis on prolonged immersion in the field to understand cultural practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) with the case study's focus on a bounded system—in this case, a single school—for in-depth analysis (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Rooted in anthropology, ethnography involves the researcher engaging in the daily life of a group to gain deep insight into their social world (Geertz, 2017). In this study, I spent approximately one academic year embedded in the school—observing and participating in everyday activities—to interpret how shaming functions as a sociocultural practice among teachers and students.

At the same time, treating the school as a case study provided a focused lens on a specific setting, recognizing it as a unique instance bounded by time and place (Hyett et al., 2014;

Stake, 1995; Tisdell et al., 2025; Yin, 2018). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). In this research, the phenomenon—classroom shaming—is deeply embedded in the school's specific context, including community norms, institutional structures, and teacher–student power dynamics. By combining these approaches, I gained both the holistic, contextual understanding of ethnography and the focused analytical structure of case study design.

Choosing an ethnographic case study was well aligned with my research aims. This design allowed me to develop a contextualized, holistic understanding of shaming practices: ethnography offered an interpretive, immersive exploration of participants' meanings, while the case study frame enabled a systematic examination of the school as a singular, bounded unit of analysis. This approach aligns with an interpretivist epistemology—it does not aim to produce statistically generalizable findings but instead seeks to generate deep insights and theoretical understandings from a single, detailed case. These insights may resonate with similar contexts through naturalistic generalization in the reader's mind (Stake, 1995), but the focus is on analytical transferability rather than broad generalization. Throughout the study, I adopted a qualitative and inductive orientation, allowing findings to emerge from the data rather than imposing predefined theories. I continually calibrated the research design and methods to ensure that participants' voices and local realities shaped my understanding of "shame" in this setting, consistent with the social constructivist stance that underpins this work (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Ethnographic Case Study Design

Research Design: I chose an ethnographic case study design to align directly with my central aim: to explore how shaming is enacted and experienced in everyday school life from the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents. Ethnography, with its emphasis on immersion, meaning-making, and cultural interpretation, allowed me to engage deeply with participants' lived experiences in context. The case study approach, which focused on a single bounded setting—one low-fee private school—enabled me to examine the phenomenon intensively and holistically within its real-life environment. Taken together, these methodological traditions supported an interpretivist inquiry into the cultural logics of discipline and shame, rather than the pursuit of generalizable claims. This layered approach was essential for capturing the complexity, emotional tone, and contextual specificity of shaming practices as they unfolded *in situ*.

I designed this study as an ethnographic case study of a single school community (Mills & Morton, 2013; Yin, 2018). A case study design was appropriate because my research questions required an intensive examination of a specific context—a low-fee private school in an unauthorized urban colony—over an extended period. Case studies involve in-depth examination of a bounded system, which in this case is one school, allowing me to explore a phenomenon within its real-life context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). This approach also enabled me to collect multiple forms of data and capture the complexity of the phenomenon in context. The strength of a case study lies in depth rather than breadth; it allows researchers to explore the “how” and “why” of processes in their natural setting (Yin, 2018).

I defined the case by place (the school), time (approximately one academic year of fieldwork), and focus (disciplinary shaming practices). Setting these boundaries helped me maintain a manageable scope while still allowing rich exploration. I deliberately chose to

focus on a single school rather than conduct a comparative study across several schools to prioritize depth over breadth. This design decision aligns with qualitative traditions that emphasize contextual richness over statistical representativeness (Flyvbjerg, 2011). It also reflects the ethnographic ethos that a deep understanding of one setting can offer insights into social processes that broader but more superficial studies may overlook (Thapan, 2006). While the findings are context-specific, they can still illuminate patterns or generate hypotheses relevant to similar environments through analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization.

I layered an ethnographic approach onto the case study design, which served as the guiding framework for both data collection and analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Ethnography involves immersive, long-term engagement with participants' daily lives and social interactions. I spent approximately one full academic year at the school, assuming the role of a participant-observer and engaging in the school community's routine activities and events. This prolonged engagement was essential for building trust, observing naturally occurring behavior, and understanding the tacit cultural norms surrounding shaming. As classic ethnographic scholars have noted, immersion allows the researcher to observe ordinary behavior and interactions as they unfold and to interpret their meaning within the cultural context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). In my study, immersion meant being present in classrooms, staff rooms, corridors, and the playground—everyday spaces where teacher–student interactions take place—not only to witness formal disciplinary events, but also to grasp the informal social atmosphere in which shaming practices are embedded. Prolonged presence in the field also helped reduce reactivity (the Hawthorne effect; McCambridge et al., 2014), as participants gradually became accustomed to my presence.

The ethnographic case study design I used is inherently interpretive and naturalistic (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mills & Morton, 2013). I did not use any experimental manipulations or contrived tasks; instead, I observed and interacted with participants in their real environment. My stance shifted between observer and participant, depending on the situation: I maintained enough detachment to systematically document events, while also participating when appropriate—for example, by assisting with minor tasks or engaging in informal conversations—to gain insider insight. This reflects qualitative research guidance suggesting that ethnographers often adopt an observer-as-participant role, where they participate openly in people's daily lives over an extended period, watching, listening, and asking questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

In practical terms, the unit of analysis for this research is the case—the school as a whole—and, within it, the key actors: teachers, students, and parents, along with their engagement in shaming practices. These practices include comments or actions that students perceive as insulting, humiliating, or emotionally wounding. This design allowed me to gather multiple data sources—observations, interviews, and visual artifacts—to construct a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. By using a multi-method ethnographic approach, I was able to triangulate data, which enhances the credibility of findings through convergence of evidence from different perspectives (Denzin, 2017; Flick, 2018).

Site Selection and Access: I selected this school as the case based on both theoretical and practical considerations. The school—a low-budget private institution located in an unauthorized colony—offered a context in which disciplinary practices are shaped by resource constraints, local cultural norms, and limited regulatory oversight. This is consistent with findings from Delhi schools showing that local socio-economic conditions and attitudes influence disciplinary methods (Tiwari, 2019). This setting provided fertile ground for

exploring shaming as a potentially normalized disciplinary strategy in an underprivileged urban environment. Gaining access to the site required careful negotiation through both formal and informal gatekeepers. I initially approached several schools (both private and government), but gaining entry proved difficult due to administrators' concerns about having an external researcher observe their practices. Eventually, I secured access through an existing community connection—my family's acquaintance with the school manager—which helped establish initial trust. My background as an Indian male researcher who had studied in similar environments also reduced resistance from the school leadership, who saw me as culturally familiar and non-threatening.

This illustrates a pragmatic reality of ethnographic fieldwork: trust and rapport are often essential for access, especially when researching sensitive topics like teacher behavior and classroom discipline. Researchers in similar Indian school contexts have highlighted the value of leveraging local networks and cultural familiarity to gain entry (Borker, 2019). Once I received permission from the school management, I integrated into the school gradually. During the first month, I focused on preliminary engagement—visiting classrooms informally, attending school events, chatting with teachers during breaks, and helping with small tasks—to become a familiar, non-intrusive presence. This slow, relational approach helped reduce suspicion and anxiety. Over time, teachers and students came to accept me as part of the everyday school environment. By the time formal data collection began, I had built enough rapport for participants to feel more at ease—a critical factor for collecting authentic qualitative data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010).

Role of the Researcher: In the field, I took on an overt role as a doctoral student conducting academic research, with the school's permission. I made it clear to participants that I was independent of the school administration—an important clarification, since the school

owner's initial introduction had unintentionally led some staff members to mistake me for an inspector or authority figure. Through repeated conversations and transparent communication, I emphasized my scholarly role and the confidentiality of the findings, which gradually eased staff concerns. My activities in the school included observing lessons (usually from the back or periphery of the classroom), taking detailed fieldnotes, assisting with minor classroom tasks when invited (e.g., distributing materials or supervising briefly), and engaging in informal conversations with teachers and students during lunch or free periods.

This approach reflected the ethnographic ethos of reciprocity and relationship-building in the field. In contemporary ethnographic research, reciprocity is increasingly viewed as both an ethical and methodological imperative for building equitable, trust-based relationships with participants, especially in marginalized settings (Ellis et al., 2011). By occasionally assisting teachers—for example, substituting in a class when a teacher was absent or helping troubleshoot a computer issue—I reciprocated the school's openness and built goodwill among the staff (Whyte, 2012). I balanced these participatory acts with maintaining an observer stance during critical moments. For instance, if a teacher was scolding a student publicly, I quietly took notes and did not interfere, so as not to alter the natural setting or overstep my role. This non-interventionist stance (discussed further under ethics) was a conscious ethical decision intended to minimize disruption while observing potentially harmful interactions.

Methodologically, framing my study as an ethnographic case study also influenced how I approached the writing process. I used vignettes, excerpts from fieldnotes, and verbatim quotes from participants—practices that are consistent with ethnographic traditions. These strategies are not merely stylistic; they are epistemological choices that reflect my

interpretive stance and my commitment to representing participants' voices with fidelity. By grounding interpretation in concrete, contextualized moments of interaction, these narrative techniques convey the emotional and relational texture of school life. This type of narrative and situated representation is central to ethnographic writing (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 2011). In the empirical chapters, I present fieldnotes and observations in a way that balances analytic insight with contextual immersion, allowing readers to more fully experience the school world in which shaming practices unfold.

3.3 Data Collection Methods: Interviews, Observations, and Visual Participatory Techniques

To capture the phenomenon of classroom shaming from multiple angles, I employed three primary data collection methods: qualitative interviews, participant observations, and visual participatory techniques with students. Using multiple methods allowed me to develop a more comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the research problem, as each method offered a distinct type of insight—interviews provided personal accounts and interpretations; observations captured behaviors and interactions *in situ*; and visual methods elicited students' perspectives through creative, non-verbal forms. In the sections that follow, I describe each method in turn, explaining the rationale for its use, how I implemented it in practice, and how I adapted it to the specific context. I selected and carried out all methods in alignment with best practices in qualitative research, ensuring both rigor and ethical sensitivity throughout.

3.3.1 Interviews

Rationale for Interviews: In-depth interviewing was a cornerstone of my data collection strategy because it allowed me direct access to participants' experiences, beliefs, and reflections in their own words (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014; Seidman, 2019). Interviews are

among the most common and powerful tools in qualitative research for understanding the meanings people ascribe to their experiences. As Kvale (2007, p. 7) describes, a qualitative research interview is essentially "a conversation that has structure and purpose," designed to elicit the participant's perspective. Interviews enabled participants to articulate thoughts and feelings that were not directly observable, offering insights into motivations, interpretations, and the subjective impact of events (Patton, 2015).

In this study, interviews with teachers, students, and parents served as a vital complement to observations: while observations revealed what happened, interviews helped me understand why it happened and how participants felt about it. These interviews focused specifically on shaming practices—understood as actions or comments that students perceived as humiliating or emotionally wounding. My aim was to explore how participants interpreted these practices, the meanings they attached to them, and the ways they internalized or challenged such moments. Because shaming is a sensitive phenomenon with emotional and social nuances that may not be visible through observation alone, interviews provided a private, confidential space for participants to discuss these potentially uncomfortable experiences. This was especially important for students who might not openly react in class but could express their feelings one-on-one.

Methodologically, I chose semi-structured interviews as the primary format. A semi-structured interview uses a flexible guide of open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their experiences while giving the interviewer the freedom to probe and adapt (Adams, 2015; Bryman, 2016). This format ensured that key topics were addressed while still allowing participants to steer the conversation and introduce new insights. It was particularly well-suited to my interpretivist approach: I could explore core research themes—such as experiences of being shamed, rationales for using shaming, and perceptions of its impact—

with every participant, while also giving them the space to emphasize what they felt was most important. Such flexibility is especially valued in interpretivist paradigms, where the goal is to uncover participants' subjective meanings in naturalistic settings (Galletta & Cross, 2013). According to Kallio et al. (2016), the main objective of a semi-structured interview guide is to prompt participants to respond openly and in their own terms.

In practice, I conducted the interviews in a conversational manner, following up on participants' responses to probe more deeply or clarify meanings. For instance, during a group interview with two girls, one student initially stayed silent while the other described a shaming incident. I gently turned to her and asked, "Did anything like that ever happen to you?" She nodded and said quietly, "Yes, but I don't like talking about it." I thanked her and did not press further—but later, she shared her story during the drawing session.

In another case, a teacher interview began with a broad prompt like, "Can you describe how you typically handle misbehavior in your class?" I then used follow-up questions to explore any mention of scolding or public discipline, such as: "Earlier you mentioned calling a student out for not doing homework—can you tell me more about that incident and what you hoped to achieve?" This approach kept the interview focused on relevant themes while respecting the participant's framing and vocabulary. It also allowed me to be responsive to each person's cues—pursuing meaningful tangents or emotional responses—which is essential for generating rich qualitative data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2019).

Participants and Sampling for Interviews: I conducted interviews with multiple stakeholder groups to capture diverse perspectives on shaming: teachers, students, parents, and the school principal. I used a purposive sampling strategy to select participants who could provide rich, varied insights. In total, I interviewed 14 teachers, representing a cross-section of grade levels and subjects taught. Of these, 12 teachers also provided written

consent for classroom observation. This group included both junior and senior class teachers, women and men, and individuals with different levels of teaching experience. By including teachers with varying disciplinary approaches—from strict disciplinarians to more empathetic teachers—I aimed to capture a broad range of viewpoints on shaming practices.

Students were also key informants. I interviewed a subset of 21 students from the upper grades (Classes IX and X, typically ages 13–15), intentionally focusing on slightly older students who could articulate their experiences more fully and reflect on several years of schooling. With input from teachers, I selected students with a range of academic and behavioral profiles, including high achievers, struggling learners, quiet and compliant students, and those who were more outspoken or frequently in trouble. This strategy ensured that I captured the perspectives of both students who were frequent targets of scolding and those who might rarely be shamed but often witnessed it happening to peers.

Additionally, I interviewed 10 parents of participating students (in some cases both mother and father together; in others, one parent). These interviews provided the home perspective—how parents viewed teacher discipline and whether they themselves used shaming or scolding as a form of behavior management. Finally, I interviewed the school principal to understand the official stance on discipline and the institutional context, including any relevant policies or philosophies regarding classroom management.

This diverse sample—teachers, students, parents, and administrator—enabled triangulation of perspectives, which is essential for understanding a phenomenon like shaming. Because shaming is deeply interpersonal, it may be interpreted very differently by adults versus children, or by those enacting it versus those experiencing it.

Table 1 summarizes the interview participants across the three groups, together with the characteristics and sampling rationale described above.

Participant group (n)	Year level / composition	Range of characteristics and background (as documented)	Primary focus in the analysis
Students (n = 21)	Classes IX–X; ages 13–15	Purposively selected with teacher input to span academic and behavioral profiles — high achievers, struggling learners, quiet and compliant students, and outspoken or frequently disciplined students; deliberately included both frequent targets of scolding and students who mainly witnessed it. Interviewed in Hindi, individually or in small friendship pairs.	How shaming is experienced, interpreted, and coped with (RQ1, RQ3); also produced the drawings.
Teachers, including the principal (n = 14)	Cross-section of grade levels and subjects; women and men	Varied teaching experience, from junior to senior class teachers, and a range of disciplinary styles from strict disciplinarians to more empathetic teachers; 12 of the 14 also consented to classroom observation. The principal additionally provided the official	Rationales and belief systems underpinning shaming, and institutional context (RQ2, RQ4).

Participant group (n)	Year level / composition	Range of characteristics and background (as documented)	Primary focus in the analysis
		stance on discipline and the institutional context.	
Parents (n = 10)	Parents of participating students	Interviewed individually or as mother–father pairs, on school premises or, in a few cases, at home; generally shorter interviews providing the home perspective on discipline.	Home–school alignment around discipline, and generational norms (RQ2, RQ4).
Total (n = 45)		Forty-five semi-structured interviews in total; some students were interviewed in pairs and some parents as couples, so the number of interview events was slightly lower.	

Table 1: Overview of interview participants and their characteristics

Interview Protocols and Procedure (summary): I used semi-structured interview guides tailored to teachers, students, and parents, with prompts designed to elicit concrete incidents, meanings, and emotional responses rather than abstract opinions. The guides covered (i) what teachers and parents considered "discipline," (ii) specific practices used in response to misconduct or poor performance, (iii) how students experienced and interpreted these

practices, and (iv) perceived short-term benefits and longer-term consequences. I treated the guides as flexible tools—using follow-up questions to pursue emergent themes—while ensuring that each interview addressed the core topics relevant to the research questions.

Most interviews were conducted in Hindi, the language in which most participants were most comfortable, though some teachers and the principal occasionally code-switched into English for specific terms or expressions. Using participants' native language enabled them to express themselves more fully and with greater nuance. This was especially important given the cultural specificity of certain concepts. Audio recordings were later transcribed, and relevant portions were translated into English for the purposes of analysis and reporting, as detailed in Section 3.4.

Adaptations and Challenges in Interviewing: Interviewing on a sensitive topic like shaming required building trust and carefully navigating power dynamics, particularly given the age and status differences between me and some participants. With student participants, I was aware that a formal one-on-one interview with an unfamiliar adult could feel intimidating. This concern aligns with child-centered research literature, which emphasizes the need for flexible, creative, and power-sensitive interviewing techniques with young people (Christensen & James, 2017; Greene & Hogan, 2005). Such situations may lead students to give very brief or socially desirable responses—for example, denying that they felt bad about being scolded to appear "tough" or to please the adult interviewer.

To address this, I made the interview setting as child friendly as possible. In a few cases, instead of one-on-one interviews, I conducted student interviews in pairs or very small friendship groups (two students together), especially when a student seemed shy or hesitant alone. Allowing a friend to be present created a more relaxed, peer-supported environment—like a mini-focus group, but small enough to maintain conversational depth. In these joint

interviews, students often triggered each other's memories ("Remember that time when…") and felt more comfortable agreeing with or adding to one another's accounts, which generated richer data. I made sure everyone had space to speak, and that one friend did not dominate or speak on behalf of the other. Notably, the presence of a trusted peer often reduced anxiety and encouraged more candid reflections about teachers. For instance, two girls interviewed together ended up recounting an incident that one of them had initially hesitated to share. When her friend chimed in, "It's like when Ma'am made you stand and everybody laughed—tell that one!", it created an opening for the story.

I was also careful in how I phrased questions to avoid implying judgment or expecting a particular answer. For example, instead of asking, "Do you think it's wrong for teachers to shame students?"—which frames the issue in terms of right or wrong and might put the student on the spot—I asked more open-ended questions like, "How do you feel when a teacher scolds or criticizes a student in front of others?" and "Why do you think the teacher did that?" These questions invited students' perspectives without framing the practice as an ethical test. This approach follows recommendations for interviewing children and adolescents about sensitive experiences, emphasizing non-judgmental, open-ended prompts (Greene & Hogan, 2005).

With teachers, a key challenge was overcoming initial defensiveness. Some were understandably cautious during interviews, possibly fearing they might be portrayed negatively—as cruel or unprofessional—if they acknowledged using harsh disciplinary practices. I approached these interviews as opportunities for teachers to share their professional experiences and dilemmas, not as evaluations of their behavior. I maintained an empathetic and non-judgmental tone, often acknowledging the real challenges of managing

large classes and meeting academic targets. This approach helped teachers open about why they sometimes resorted to strict or emotionally charged reprimands.

As trust developed—especially since, by the time of interviews, I had already spent several months regularly present at the school and had helped in small ways—many teachers began speaking more candidly. One methodological advantage was that these interviews took place after extensive classroom observations. By that point, I had witnessed classroom dynamics firsthand, which allowed me to ask more specific and informed follow-up questions. For instance, after observing a teacher frequently use nicknames for misbehaving students, I asked, "I noticed sometimes you call students by certain nicknames when they cause trouble—can you tell me more about that and what you intend?" This kind of iterative process, where observation informs interview questions, is a classic ethnographic technique that deepens the quality of the data (Spradley, 1979/2016). It grounds the conversation in concrete examples and signals to the teacher that I was familiar with their context, which often prompted more honest and thoughtful responses.

With parents, scheduling and brevity were practical constraints. Many were only available for short periods—for example, while picking up their children from school. I conducted most parent interviews on school premises during these windows, or in a few cases, at their homes amid family routines, which occasionally limited the depth of discussion. To ensure comfort and sensitivity, I conducted interviews with mothers myself, and in one case where the father was hesitant, the mother joined, resulting in a joint interview. Some parents gave brief or guarded responses, possibly due to unfamiliarity with being interviewed or reluctance to criticize teachers openly.

To address this, I used concrete, scenario-based questions to elicit opinions—for example, asking, "If you found out a teacher called your child 'lazy' in class, what would you do or

feel?" These kinds of questions helped generate clearer and more reflective answers. Although parent interviews were generally shorter and less detailed than those with teachers or students, they provided valuable insight into home-school alignment around discipline. For example, one parent shared, "I also scold my son at home when he doesn't study. So, if the teacher does the same in school, I feel it is for his good" (PS3, parent interview), revealing a cultural norm of accepting harsh discipline as corrective. Such perspectives helped me understand how shaming may be normalized or contested within families.

Across all interviews, I made it clear that my goal was to learn from participants and that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers. I was mindful of the power dynamics at play—whether as an adult interviewing a child, or as an outsider questioning a teacher about their classroom practices. To help mitigate these imbalances, I used strategies such as active listening, adopting a neutral and respectful tone, and occasionally sharing small details about myself to build rapport. For example, with students, I might say, "I remember feeling scared when my teacher shouted at me too, when I was in school," if the moment felt appropriate, to signal that it was okay to admit difficult feelings (cf. Greene & Hogan, 2005, on interviewing minors). With teachers, I often positioned myself as a learner, sometimes asking, "What do you think someone in my position should know about handling a class?" This gave teachers a sense of authority and helped reduce defensiveness. These rapport-building techniques are widely supported by best practices in qualitative research, especially when interviewing across power differentials (Greene & Hogan, 2005).

In summary, the interview method generated a wealth of qualitative data. It allowed teachers to articulate their intentions and reflections—for example, many explained that they used shame "for the student's benefit, to correct them," a perspective that might not be evident through observation alone. Interviews also gave students a voice to describe the emotional

impact of shaming and their coping responses. Some students shared that repeated scolding made them feel "numb," while others said it made them "determined to do better." One student candidly stated, "When Sir insults me, I stop trying because I think he's already decided I'm useless" (S7, student interview), illustrating how shaming can backfire by discouraging the very effort it is meant to encourage.

Parent interviews added another layer, often revealing generational or cultural norms. A few parents noted that they themselves had been strictly disciplined as children and "turned out fine," which led them to tolerate similar practices at school. These insights, captured through careful and culturally sensitive interviewing, form a major part of my study's evidence base. Interviews were central to answering several of my study's core research questions. Student interviews directly addressed RQ3 by exploring how students experienced, made sense of, and coped with being shamed. They also contributed to RQ1 by eliciting detailed accounts of shaming incidents from students' perspectives. Teacher and parent interviews were crucial to RQ2, revealing the motivations and belief systems underpinning the use and acceptance of shaming. These interviews also informed RQ4 by illuminating the broader cultural norms and institutional pressures that shape disciplinary practices. Overall, interviews complemented and contextualized my observations, providing a fuller picture of both the "what" and the "why" of school-based shaming.

3.3.2 Observations

Rationale for Observations: Direct classroom observation was essential for capturing shaming practices as they naturally occurred in real time—a key strength of ethnographic fieldwork (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). While interviews provide participants' reported experiences and interpretations, observations allowed me to witness actual behaviors, interactions, and contexts as they unfolded. Because my focus was

on practices—what teachers say and do to shame, and how students react in the moment—observation was the most direct way to document these events *in situ*. This included verbal acts (e.g., scolding, sarcasm), non-verbal gestures (e.g., pointing, staring), and spatial markers of shame (e.g., making a student stand at the back of the room)—all of which I interpreted through the lens of what students perceived as humiliating. Observation enabled me to access behaviors, non-verbal cues, and environmental contexts that may not have been fully captured through interviews alone (Angrosino, 2007).

In ethnography, participant observation is a core method that places the researcher within the social setting to experience and document events as both an "insider" and an "outsider." This method aligned with my study's interpretivist orientation by enabling me to understand actions in context—seeing not just isolated incidents of shaming, but how they fit into the broader flow of the classroom and everyday life at school (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schwandt, 2000). Moreover, observation helped mitigate some of the biases of self-report: teachers might underplay how often they scold, or students might omit subtle forms of shaming, but as an external observer, I could note these practices directly. Observation also allowed me to capture important non-verbal and interactional dynamics—for example, the tone of voice a teacher used, the facial expressions of a student being shamed, or classmates' reactions such as snickering, going silent, or looking shocked. These contextual details enriched my analysis of how shaming functions as a social process beyond the spoken word alone.

I engaged in extensive participant observation over the academic year (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This included sitting in on classes across different subjects and grade levels, as well as observing school assemblies, recess breaks, staff meetings, and occasional extracurricular events such as Sports Day. Most of my observation time was spent in

classrooms, where instructional and disciplinary practices are most visible. I rotated among classes to ensure I observed those teachers and students who participated in interviews, while also gaining a general understanding of the school's overall environment. Over the course of the fieldwork, I logged more than 100 hours of classroom observation, covering both mornings and afternoons, a range of weekdays, and various types of lessons—including lectures, group work sessions, and examinations. By sampling a wide variety of contexts, I was able to observe how shaming practices manifested differently—for example, from a teacher's quick, sarcastic comment during a routine lesson to a more public form of admonishment, such as naming and scolding low-performing students during a school assembly.

During classroom observations, I took on the role of a non-intrusive observer. I typically sat at the back or along the side of the classroom, where both students and the teacher could see me, but I was not in the central line of sight or causing a distraction. Initially, my presence did have some reactive or performative effects—for example, teachers were more formal or strict during the first few sessions, possibly to make a good impression, and students were curious or occasionally attempted to interact with me during class. However, as noted earlier, my presence gradually became normalized, and participants began to behave more naturally.

On occasion, I participated in minor, non-disruptive ways when invited—such as helping distribute worksheets or joining a student group to listen in on a class activity—but I generally refrained from engaging directly in the lesson. Importantly, I never intervened during shaming behavior I witnessed, as doing so would have altered the natural classroom environment and compromised my observer role. This non-intervention stance was also an ethical decision (see Section 3.6): while it was sometimes uncomfortable to witness a student being publicly berated, intervening could have embarrassed the teacher or student and

jeopardized both the trust I had built and the integrity of the data. In such cases, I offered support after the fact, where appropriate, and always with sensitivity.

Fieldnotes and Recording: I took detailed fieldnotes throughout the observation period to document what I witnessed. Given the importance of capturing the exact language used during shaming incidents, I recorded verbatim quotes or key phrases used by teachers whenever possible—particularly insults or scolding remarks. I jotted these notes as unobtrusively as possible during the lesson, using a notebook. Immediately afterward, I expanded these shorthand notes into full narrative accounts while the events were still fresh in my memory, following guidance from Emerson et al. (2011) on transforming jottings into rich fieldnotes. Each observation entry included a description of the setting (e.g., class size, seating arrangement, my position in the room), the flow of the lesson, and a detailed account of any notable disciplinary interactions.

In a few instances, I was permitted to audio-record full lessons, particularly when teachers explicitly granted permission. These recordings were transcribed and used to verify the accuracy of key dialogue captured in my fieldnotes, helping ensure quotes were correct rather than paraphrased. However, because continuous recording was not allowed by all teachers and could be intrusive, most classroom data relied solely on written notes. I did not use video recording, to respect participants' privacy. The only exception was a few photographs taken during student-led school tours (discussed in the next subsection). Even then, I only photographed empty classrooms—never including identifiable images of students or teachers.

My observations focused on teacher-student interactions involving discipline, correction, or feedback, with particular attention to those that had a shaming component—such as public criticism, sarcasm, ridicule, or punitive displays. However, I also made a point to observe everyday teaching and positive interactions to understand the overall classroom climate. I

noted how frequently shaming occurred in relation to praise or neutral feedback. This allowed me to identify certain patterns. For instance, some teachers used mild shaming comments almost daily for minor infractions, while others only resorted to shaming when provoked by repeated misbehavior or serious disruptions.

I also observed student behavior closely—how they responded to being shamed (e.g., staying silent, complying, talking back, tearing up, or appearing indifferent) and how their peers reacted (e.g., laughing, avoiding eye contact, joining in, or remaining silent). These dynamics helped me understand the peer context of shaming—for example, whether public humiliation created stigma or led to later teasing. Observations extended beyond classrooms as well. In hallways and staff rooms, I occasionally heard teachers discussing students, sometimes using dismissive or demeaning labels—for example, referring to a child as "that lazy boy" in informal conversations. I recorded these moments as well, as they revealed how shaming attitudes can permeate teacher narratives and extend beyond direct teacher-student interactions.

Student-Led Tours as Observational Adaptation: One valuable methodological adaptation was the inclusion of student-led school tours (discussed further in Section 3.3.3). These were essentially participant-guided observations, where students walked me through the school and pointed out places that held meaning for them. This approach allowed me to see the school environment through students' eyes, complementing my own adult-centered observations. In these tours, students identified spaces they associated with discomfort or anxiety—such as areas where punishments were regularly delivered or where public reprimands occurred. Although unplanned in the original design, this method enriched my understanding of the physical spaces and emotional atmosphere of the school.

Limitations and Reflexive Positioning: Naturally, there were limits to what I could observe. I could not always be in all places, and it is possible that some of the most severe shaming incidents occurred when I was not present. However, by remaining embedded in the school over an extended period and building trust with participants, I was often told about incidents I had not witnessed. Teachers and students occasionally recounted these episodes, allowing me to document and triangulate them with interview data. There was also the possibility that my presence moderated some teachers' behavior—particularly early on. A few may have softened their disciplinary tone during observations. Although long-term immersion helped reduce this observer effect, it cannot be eliminated entirely. As a result, the data may under-report the most extreme forms of shaming. I recognized this limitation and addressed it through triangulation with student accounts of "off-camera" incidents, as discussed in Sections 3.5 and 3.8.

Overall Contribution of Observations: Observation offered critical contextual grounding for the study. It ensured that my analysis of shaming was based not only on what participants said about it in interviews but also on what I witnessed in real time. Observations informed interviews iteratively, creating a feedback loop between seeing and asking. Because I was present for both ordinary routines and exceptional events, I developed a deep familiarity with the school's social fabric. This contextual knowledge strengthened my interpretations. For example, knowing that a particular class was usually lively and noisy helped me notice when a heavy silence followed a teacher's scolding—a subtle but telling shift that a short-term visitor might have missed.

Participant observation allowed me to capture the lived reality of classroom shaming practices. It provided concrete examples and narrative vignettes that I later analyzed alongside interview data. The combination of observation and interviews proved powerful:

observations grounded the study in actual behavior, while interviews illuminated the meanings and intentions behind those behaviors. By using both methods, I was able to gather both behavioral evidence and personal insight—creating a more robust and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Observations were central to addressing **RQ1**, as they documented the everyday forms of shaming used in classrooms—from overt verbal rebukes to more subtle performative gestures. They also contributed significantly to **RQ3**, by capturing students' emotional and behavioral responses in real time, including body language, peer reactions, and post-incident behaviors. Additionally, observations informed **RQ4**, by revealing institutional norms and cultural scripts—for instance, how discipline was discussed among teachers or modeled during assemblies. Although less central to **RQ2**, which focused on adult rationales, observational data sometimes revealed discrepancies between what participants said and what they did—for example, a teacher who claimed to avoid public shaming but frequently used sarcasm or ridicule. In this way, observations not only grounded the study in lived interactions but also enabled cross-validation and triangulation across data sources.

3.3.3 Visual Participatory Methods

Rationale for Visual Methods: In addition to interviews and observations, I incorporated visual participatory methods to engage students in expressing their perspectives through creative means. I made this decision based on the understanding that children and adolescents often communicate ideas and emotions more openly through drawings and other visual forms than through formal interviews alone (Clark & Moss, 2011; Literat, 2013; Mitchell, 2011; Punch, 2002). In educational ethnography, participatory visual techniques—such as drawing, photo essays, mapping activities, and "draw-and-talk" exercises—have gained recognition as

child-centered tools for eliciting students' lived experiences (Clark & Moss, 2011; Mitchell, 2011).

Visual methods are especially well-suited for exploring affective and subjective concepts like shame, fear, or safety—emotions that can be difficult for participants, particularly younger ones, to verbalize. As Mannay (2016) argues, visual techniques help access the emotional and tacit dimensions of experience in research with children. Involving students in an activity like drawing also helps to reduce the adult–child power differential: rather than positioning myself solely as an interviewer asking questions, I became a facilitator of an expressive activity. This shift in dynamic allowed greater narrative and expressive agency and reflects work that treats children's participation in research as an emotional and relational encounter, rather than merely a technical means of generating data (Einarsdottir, 2007; Hadfield-Hill & Horton, 2014).

Given the study's focus on shame and space—how the school environment serves as a site for public discipline and emotional experiences—a visual approach was particularly appropriate for uncovering how students perceive and navigate their school surroundings. It allowed me to see the school through their eyes, including where and when shaming occurs from their perspective.

Art-Based Activity – *Mera Aas-Pados* (My Surroundings): The primary visual method I used was an art-based drawing activity called *Mera Aas-Pados*, which translates from Hindi as "My Surroundings" or "My Neighborhood." This activity invited students to illustrate their experiences of both school and home environments. Specifically, they were asked to draw two scenes: one depicting their school (focusing on spaces or moments they found important) and one of their home or neighborhoods. The aim was to explore how students represent their

everyday worlds, especially any elements relevant to the study's theme—such as teachers, peers, or disciplinary artifacts like a stick or CCTV camera.

The drawing activity was conducted with 12 students—8 girls and 4 boys from Classes IX and X—who had also participated in individual interviews. Selecting students already familiar with me helped ensure they were comfortable and had contextual understanding of the research. To make the task feel relaxed and non-threatening, students worked in small groups of 2–3 friends, producing six group drawings in total. This collaborative setup transformed the activity into a social, creative exercise rather than a test of artistic skill. Group-based visual methods have been shown to mitigate power imbalances and encourage collective meaning-making in child research (Gubrium & Harper, 2016). I provided large A3 drawing sheets, colored pencils, markers, and crayons. Students were excited about the materials—it felt like a break from routine and more like an arts-and-crafts session.

The activity took place in the school library, which offered a quiet yet informal atmosphere. I introduced the task casually, explaining that there was no "right way" to draw their experiences, and that abstract or symbolic representations were welcome. Allowing for symbolic expression is crucial in arts-based research, as it honors children's preferred modes of communication and eases performance pressure (Mannay, 2016). To model this, I quickly sketched a simple, messy drawing of my own neighborhood on scrap paper. This helped break the ice and conveyed that artistic skill didn't matter. The students laughed, relaxed, and began their drawings with confidence. Some even played soft music on a phone as they worked, making the session feel informal and enjoyable.

As students drew, I took on the role of observer-facilitator. I moved between groups, quietly observing and occasionally asking open-ended, non-intrusive questions—such as, "Oh, I see you drew a camera here—can you tell me about it?" or "That's an interesting color for the

classroom walls—is there a reason?" Often, students narrated what they were drawing to each other, producing rich, spontaneous data. This kind of emergent narration supports existing research that highlights how creative, group-based activities can generate co-constructed insights in informal settings (Bagnoli, 2009). For instance, in one group, two boys were drawing a classroom scene. One drew a small stick figure in the corner with a sad face and said aloud, "This is me when Ma'am scolded me." His friend nodded and added, "Make the others laughing." These on-the-fly comments were immediately recorded in my fieldnotes. The group format allowed students to express emotions and stories they might hesitate to share in one-on-one interviews. The dynamic felt more like friends swapping memories while doodling, with me as a quiet and respectful listener.

After the drawing activity, I conducted a short follow-up conversation with each group, giving students a chance to explain their drawings. With their consent, I audio-recorded these group interviews and asked open-ended questions such as, "Can you walk me through your school drawing? Who are these people? What's happening here?" This served as a form of visual elicitation, where the drawing acted as a prompt to spark discussion and reflection (Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Rose, 2022). The students took turns narrating different parts of their pictures. This process was crucial—it allowed me to interpret the drawings based on the students' own explanations, rather than imposing my assumptions as an adult observer.

Following the drawing activity, a few students proposed another idea—they wanted to physically show me the places they had drawn. This spontaneous suggestion led to an impromptu but highly illuminating method: student-led tours of the school. Two students (a boy and a girl from Class IX) volunteered to act as "guides." I accompanied each student on a separate walk through the school, during which they pointed out significant locations and explained why those places mattered to them. For example, the girl led me to her classroom,

showing me where she usually sits and pointing out the seats where “troublemakers” are placed. She then took me to the corridor corner where students are made to stand as punishment, and finally to the staff room door, which she described as “the scariest place to be called to,” since being sent there—or to the principal’s office—typically signaled serious trouble. With the students’ consent, I audio-recorded these tours and took a few photographs of the key locations they identified, ensuring that no individuals were captured in the images to maintain anonymity.

This approach is akin to what has been described as “walk-along interviews” or participatory spatial tours—methods that allow participants to guide the researcher through physical spaces to elicit contextually grounded insights (Carpiano, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011). It also resonates with work in children’s geographies showing that young people’s everyday movements through space are socially and emotionally meaningful, rather than merely functional (Horton et al., 2014). These mobile conversations revealed spatial and emotional meanings that might not have emerged in a static interview setting. The tours added powerful contextual depth to earlier data. For instance, when a student described feeling “small and scared” while standing at the front of the classroom, and then physically brought me to that exact blackboard to recount the story, it gave me a visceral sense of the spatial dynamics of her shame experience.

These embodied interactions helped me better understand how place, posture, and environment contribute to the affective experience of shaming. I also collected visual data—such as photographs of the corner where a student might be made to stand facing the wall—as a form of environmental documentation. These images (with all identifying details removed) are included in the thesis to help readers visualize the setting in which key events occurred.

The student-led tours ultimately expanded the methodological richness of the study by integrating students' spatial knowledge and agency into the research process.

Strengths and Challenges of Visual Methods: The use of visual participatory methods added significant value to this study. These techniques engaged students in ways that were both enjoyable and empowering, and they likely yielded insights that would have been difficult to access through verbal questioning alone. The visual data also helped triangulate and validate findings from other methods. For example, when multiple students independently drew a teacher's stick as a notable item, it reinforced the salience of physical discipline in their school experience—complementing interview accounts of fear associated with such objects. The drawings and student-led tours offered a kind of reality check by revealing whether students' verbal narratives aligned with how they symbolized their experiences. In many cases, there was a high degree of consistency. For instance, a student who said in an interview that she felt constantly watched at school drew a large CCTV camera looming over students in her picture.

One of the clearest strengths of the visual data was its emotional resonance. Seeing a drawing of a child crying in a corner or hearing a student say during a tour, "This spot is where I felt so humiliated I wanted to disappear," conveyed the affective intensity of shame in ways that purely textual data could not. The visual methods also surfaced subtler dynamics. For example, one student's drawing included peers laughing while another student was being scolded. This sparked a conversation about how classmates can compound the shame by teasing the student afterward—an aspect that hadn't emerged clearly in formal interviews, possibly because students were reluctant to admit being mocked by friends. In this way, visual materials spotlighted the peer dimension of shaming more vividly than other methods.

That said, these methods also posed certain challenges. Interpretation of drawings is inherently subjective, and I had to be careful not to impose my own assumptions on the children's artwork. To mitigate this, I consistently centered participants' explanations. Rather than interpreting visual elements myself, I would ask open-ended questions like, "I notice this person is drawn very small—can you tell me about that?" to allow students to provide their own meanings. Another consideration was student comfort. Not every participant enjoys drawing or feels confident in their artistic ability. To address this, I structured the activity as a group effort and explicitly emphasized that the drawings were not being evaluated. One boy, for instance, initially hesitated and said, "I draw badly," but eventually contributed by writing labels and commentary on his friend's drawing instead of sketching. This was fully encouraged—my goal was expression, not artistry.

Ethical concerns also required close attention. Visual data can inadvertently disclose identifying information or include sensitive depictions. To manage this, I treated all drawings as confidential personal expressions. I collected the drawings immediately after the activity and did not share them with other students or teachers. In reporting, any reproduced drawings were anonymized (e.g., names removed), and students gave separate consent for the use of their visual and photographic contributions. Similarly, the photographs taken during the student-led tours avoided capturing faces, signage, or other identifiable features. These precautions followed ethical best practices for conducting visual research with children and youth (Prosser & Loxley, 2008).

In conclusion, I found that the visual and participatory methods enriched the data corpus by adding multimodal layers of evidence. These approaches allowed students to reflect on and communicate their experiences of school life, discipline, and shame in ways that went beyond verbal accounts, aligning with inclusive, child-centered research practices (Clark, 2011;

Mitchell, 2011). The visual data complemented interview and observational findings and were analytically integrated — for example, recurring visual themes of visibility and surveillance in the students' drawings echoed broader analytical patterns around the *panoptical* sense of being constantly watched. Incorporating these creative methods reflects a commitment to capturing the phenomenon of shaming in a nuanced and ethically attuned way. In research involving young participants, diverse methodological tools often elicit deeper and more embodied insights than a single method can yield alone (Mitchell, 2011).

Observations played a central role in addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1), by documenting the everyday enactments of shaming in classrooms — from overt verbal rebukes to subtle performative gestures like eye-rolling or calling out students sarcastically. Observations also contributed to answering RQ3, as I recorded students' real-time emotional and behavioral responses to being shamed, including body language, tone of voice, peer reactions, and subsequent behavior. Furthermore, observations supported RQ4 by revealing institutional norms, cultural routines, and teacher discourses — such as how discipline was talked about in staff rooms or publicly modeled during assemblies.

While less central for RQ2 (which focused on adult rationales and justifications), observations still provided supportive evidence. For instance, I sometimes noted discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs in interviews and their classroom conduct — such as a teacher who claimed to avoid public shaming but routinely used sarcasm and ridicule. Overall, observations grounded the study in lived interactions and enabled triangulation across data sources, which enhances interpretive validity in qualitative research (Carter, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017).

Table 2 below presents a mapping of each data collection method – interviews, observations, and participatory visual methods – to the research question(s) that it chiefly addresses. This mapping makes explicit which methods were designed to answer which questions, demonstrating that each research question is supported by appropriate data sources. By laying out these links, the table provides a clear rationale for why each method was chosen and assures the reader that all aspects of the inquiry (from the manifestations of shaming to underlying motivations, impacts on students, and broader context) are systematically investigated.

Data Collection Method	**Research Questions Addressed**
Interviews (with students, teachers, parents)	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 – Interviews provided personal accounts and reflections from multiple stakeholders, illuminating the forms of shaming (RQ1), the beliefs and rationales of teachers/parents (RQ2), students' experiences and coping strategies (RQ3), and even perspectives on context and disciplinary alternatives (RQ4).
Participant Observations (in classrooms and school)	RQ1, RQ3, RQ4 – Observations captured real-time classroom interactions to document **what happens** – the actual shaming practices and their frequency (addressing RQ1) – as well as students' immediate reactions and the classroom context (contributing to RQ3 and the contextual aspects of RQ4). Observational field notes also provided insight into environmental factors (e.g. class size, gender dynamics) relevant to RQ4.

Data Collection Method	Research Questions Addressed
Participatory Visual Methods (student drawings & other visual elicitation)	RQ1, RQ3 – Visual methods enabled students to express experiences of shame in non-verbal forms, complementing interviews. For instance, student-created drawings of "a day at school" surfaced examples of shaming incidents (supporting RQ1 by identifying forms of shaming as remembered by students) and revealed students' emotions and viewpoints (addressing RQ3 on the impacts of shaming and how students feel/cope). (These techniques primarily facilitated student expression and did not directly target RQ2 or RQ4.)

Table 2: Alignment of Data Collection Methods with Research Questions

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Observations played a central role in addressing RQ1 by documenting the everyday forms of classroom shaming—from overt verbal rebukes to subtle, performative actions. They also contributed directly to RQ3 by capturing students' real-time emotional and behavioral responses to being shamed, including shifts in posture, gestures, peer reactions, and follow-up behaviors. In addition, observations informed RQ4 by revealing institutional patterns, teacher norms, and broader cultural scripts—such as how discipline was discussed in staff rooms or modeled during school assemblies. While observations were less central to RQ2 (which explored adult rationales), they still proved useful in assessing the consistency between what teachers and parents said and what they did. For instance, a teacher who claimed to avoid

public shaming might still use sarcasm or ridicule—discrepancies that emerged more clearly through direct observation. Overall, these observations grounded the study in lived, situated interactions and allowed me to triangulate findings across methods. They provided crucial context for interpreting interview and visual data and enriched my understanding of how shaming unfolds within the daily fabric of school life.

3.4.1 Analysis of Interview and Textual Data

Transcription and Familiarization: I audio-recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim in the language in which they were conducted—primarily Hindi, with occasional English phrases as used by participants. I completed the transcriptions myself, using Devanagari script for the Hindi portions to capture the precise words, tone, and cultural nuances. Transcribing in the original language helped preserve idiomatic expressions and emotional inflections, aligning with best practices in multilingual qualitative research that emphasize the importance of maintaining linguistic and contextual integrity during transcription and translation (Temple & Young, 2004; van Nes et al., 2010). For example, retaining a phrase like *"yeh to dheet bachche hain"* was critical, as *dheet* conveys more than "stubborn"—it implies a lack of shame, a significant idea in the teacher's moral reasoning.

Once the transcripts were complete, I engaged in a deep familiarization process by reading each one multiple times while listening to portions of the audio. This helped me absorb not only the content but also the emotional and tonal dimensions of the data. During this phase, I made margin notes capturing initial impressions and flagged compelling or significant excerpts. These early memos—such as "Teacher justifying shame as care" or "Student describes somatic response to scolding (e.g., tears, heart racing)"—helped surface emerging insights. Memoing at this stage is a foundational step in both grounded theory and thematic

analysis (Birks et al., 2008), and these annotations laid the groundwork for the formal coding process.

Coding Process: I then coded the interview transcripts using a multi-step coding process influenced by grounded theory methodology, which involves open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In practice, this unfolded as follows:

- **Coding and theme development (summary):** I analyzed interview transcripts and fieldnotes through an iterative thematic process that combined inductive coding with theory-informed sensitizing concepts relevant to shame, discipline, and moral socialization. After transcription and familiarization, I generated initial codes closely tied to participants' language (including in NVivo codes where appropriate), wrote analytic memos throughout (reflective notes recording emerging interpretations, recurring patterns, and decisions made about the data and coding), and progressively refined codes into higher-order categories. I used NVivo to organize coding across stakeholder groups (students, teachers, parents, and the principal) and to link claims back to specific excerpts. This process remained iterative: as new data were added, codes and categories were revised and consolidated until the thematic structure stabilized.

  Ultimately, I distilled the analysis into a set of major themes:

- **Forms of Shaming Practices** – with sub-themes including *Verbal Humiliation*, *Non-Verbal and Symbolic Shaming* (e.g., standing outside class, gestures), and *Peer-Involved Shaming* (e.g., classmates laughing or teasing).

- **Teachers' Motivations and Beliefs about Shaming** – including sub-themes such as *Shame as Discipline Tool*, *Shame as Care/Concern*, and *Challenges Prompting Shaming* (e.g., class size, syllabus pressure).

- **Students' Emotional and Behavioral Responses to Being Shamed** – including immediate reactions (tears, withdrawal), coping mechanisms (e.g., acting indifferent), and longer-term impacts (e.g., reduced motivation).

- **Parent Perspectives and Cultural Norms** – including attitudes that reinforce or challenge shame-based discipline.

- **Negotiating Shame: Coping and Resilience** – how students resist, reinterpret, or endure shame experiences, and how some even derive motivation from them.

  These themes allowed me to build a nuanced understanding of classroom shaming as a lived phenomenon shaped by practice, perspective, and power—embedded in institutional and cultural contexts. Each theme included a range of voices, conflicts, and interpretations, which I analyze in detail in the findings chapters that follow.

To ensure that each theme was grounded in the data, I returned to the transcripts and fieldnotes to extract vivid quotes and concrete episodes that exemplified each theme. I also actively sought out negative cases—instances that did not fit the emerging pattern—to refine and challenge my thematic definitions. For example, when analyzing the theme *"Shaming as motivation can backfire,"* I looked for participants who offered contrasting views. One student explicitly said that being scolded helped them "get serious" about studies, while one teacher in the sample consistently avoided shaming altogether and maintained classroom control with a calm, respectful demeanor. I included this teacher's approach as a significant counterexample in the findings to demonstrate that alternatives to shaming were not only

possible but already in practice. Incorporating deviant cases in this way enhances the credibility and analytic depth of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013).

Throughout the coding and analysis, I prioritized maintaining participants' voices. I used in NVivo codes wherever possible and anchored each theme in participants' own language and expressions. Even as I moved toward more abstract conceptualization during selective coding and theming, I ensured that the final themes still closely mirrored the lived experiences participants described. My goal was for readers to see a clear trail from raw data to analytical claims, thereby enhancing confirmability and trustworthiness of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Importantly, I analyzed classroom observation data in parallel with the interview transcripts. I applied open coding to my fieldnotes, tagging instances of shaming, reactions, and relevant contextual factors. I then integrated these codes with interview-based codes during the axial coding phase. For instance, a fieldnote such as "Teacher T5 calls student S3 'useless' in front of class" was coded under the same label as interview data where students reported similar experiences.

This process allowed me to triangulate themes across data sources from the outset. Early integration of multiple data types enhances both the credibility and thematic richness of analysis (Flick, 2018). NVivo software enabled this by letting me filter codes by source type—helping me track whether a particular theme was supported by observations, interviews, or both. In some cases, the absence of supporting data from one source was analytically meaningful. For example, the idea of *"private shame"*—the notion that one-on-one scolding is less humiliating than public discipline—surfaced primarily in student interviews. Because such episodes often occurred outside class or after school, they were difficult to observe directly. This asymmetry between data sources was noted and discussed explicitly in the analysis.

Once the major themes were finalized, I translated selected quotes from Hindi to English for use in the thesis. I translated only those quotes that were chosen to illustrate key findings, to preserve the integrity and nuance of the broader dataset. This selective translation approach is consistent with best practices in multilingual qualitative research, as it balances transparency in reporting with fidelity to original meaning (Squires, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004). When necessary, I retained key cultural terms in italics (e.g., *izzat* for "honor") and added explanatory brackets to convey contextual meaning. Throughout the analysis, I constantly referred to the original Hindi to ensure that subtle connotations were not lost in translation.

By the end of my analysis of interview and textual data, I had developed a coherent set of themes that synthesized the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents on classroom shaming practices. One major theme, *"Normalization and Contestation of Shaming,"* brought together contrasting views: while many teachers and parents framed shaming as culturally accepted and even necessary (reflecting a "spare the rod and spoil the child" mindset), students often questioned its fairness or effectiveness. This theme captured the intergenerational tension between adult rationalizations and youth resistance. Another key theme, *"The Spatial Dimension of Shame,"* illustrated how specific school spaces—such as the front of the classroom, the principal's office, or the assembly stage—carry emotional weight for students. I identified this theme by integrating observational data (e.g., a student trembling outside the principal's office) with interview insights (e.g., students reporting dread at being summoned there). These layered examples highlighted how physical spaces become emotionally charged in relation to disciplinary experiences.

The outcome of this multi-level, iterative coding process was a thematic framework that structures the findings presented in subsequent chapters. I relied on well-established qualitative techniques, including open and axial coding, constant comparison, and negative

case analysis. I used NVivo software to organize and manage the data, which improved the clarity and coherence of coding across sources. These methodological choices strengthen the credibility and dependability of my analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure transparency and confirmability, I maintained an audit trail throughout the process. I documented how codes evolved, recorded analytic memos to capture my reasoning, and saved relevant NVivo queries and outputs. This audit trail allows another researcher to trace how specific conclusions emerged from the raw data, thereby reinforcing the trustworthiness of the study's interpretive claims.

3.4.2 Analysis of Visual Data

The visual data—student drawings and photographs from the participatory school tours—required a somewhat different analytical approach than the textual materials. Nonetheless, I incorporated the insights from the visual analysis into the overarching thematic framework. I used a combination of content analysis and interpretive strategies for the drawings, and contextual analysis for the photographs, drawing on established approaches in visual research methodology (Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Rose, 2022).

Visual analysis (summary): I treated the drawings and tour photographs as data in their own right while prioritizing participant-informed interpretation. I digitized and annotated each visual artifact, recorded students' explanations from follow-up conversations, and then identified recurring motifs and spatial patterns across the six drawings and the tour photographs (e.g., disciplinary spaces, authority symbols, and peer witnessing). I then integrated these visual insights into the broader thematic framework alongside interviews and observations, treating convergence and divergence as analytically meaningful.

In conclusion, my visual analysis approach emphasized **c**areful description**,** participant-informed interpretation, and theme-level integration. I recognized that drawings and photos can express insights that complement or even extend beyond verbal data. For instance, a drawing showing a child rendered extremely small, or crying in a corner while others laugh, viscerally conveys the felt experience of shame in a way that words alone might not. Integrating this visual material into the thematic analysis ensured that the study reflected not only what participants said, but also what they showed and symbolized—providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of classroom shaming practices in the case study school.

3.5 Integration and Synthesis of Methods

With multiple data sources—interviews, observations, and visual artifacts—I took care to integrate and synthesize the findings into a coherent whole. The strength of a multi-method qualitative approach lies in its capacity to triangulate evidence and illuminate the phenomenon from multiple angles, thereby enhancing the credibility, depth, and nuance of the conclusions (Patton, 2015). Triangulation in qualitative research involves using diverse methods or sources to corroborate, enrich, or challenge findings (Carter, 2014; Patton, 2015). In this study, triangulation occurred both during the analysis phase (e.g., coding observation data alongside interview transcripts) and in the interpretation and write-up phase, where I constructed themes to encompass all forms of evidence.

For each major theme that emerged, I cross-checked how it was supported by the different sources:

- **Interviews** offered self-reported insights into participant perspectives, beliefs, and motivations—what people *say* about their experiences.

- **Observations** provided behavioral and contextual evidence—what I *saw* happening, including tone, non-verbal cues, and environmental dynamics.

- **Visual artifacts** (drawings, photographs) conveyed symbolic, spatial, and emotional insights—how participants *depicted* their experiences and which physical spaces they associated with shame, fear, or safety.

This convergence of sources strengthened confidence in each theme. For instance, consider the theme of "Public Verbal Humiliation as a Common Disciplinary Practice." Interviews revealed that teachers openly acknowledged shouting or scolding students in front of others—sometimes justifying it as necessary. Students described feeling humiliated or embarrassed when scolded publicly, and even a few parents rationalized it as a motivational tactic. My observations confirmed the prevalence of this practice: I frequently witnessed teachers scolding students harshly in front of peers. Visual data—especially student drawings—reinforced this further. Some illustrations depicted classroom scenes with angry teachers and laughing classmates, showing how public discipline was emotionally internalized. By combining these strands, the analysis confirms both the existence of this practice and its emotional consequences for students.

The different data sources also contributed distinct facets of each theme. For example:

- Interviews clarified motives (e.g., teachers claiming they use shame to "teach a lesson").

- Observations provided contextual insight (e.g., when and how public shaming typically occurred).

- Visuals illuminated the internalized experience (e.g., students drawing themselves shrinking or crying, illustrating their emotional response).

In other instances, one method compensated for blind spots in another. For example, non-verbal shaming practices—such as making a student stand for an entire period or using intimidating body language—were captured primarily in observation notes and student drawings. Teachers rarely mentioned these tactics in interviews, possibly because they didn't view them as "shaming." Similarly, students often alluded to these experiences obliquely in interviews ("He made me stand outside—it was worse than yelling"), and only through observation and visual data did these practices emerge as significant. Once I identified this theme, I revisited some interviews and recognized indirect references that had initially been overlooked. This iterative, cross-source integration allowed me to construct a richer, more layered interpretation. Each method highlighted something unique, and together they revealed how shaming practices function systemically and experientially—not just as isolated acts, but as embedded in classroom routines, cultural norms, and the charged spaces of the school.

Addressing Discrepancies: Triangulation is not only about identifying consistent patterns—it also involves examining discrepancies and divergent accounts to generate deeper insight. When different sources or participant groups offered conflicting perspectives, I treated those contrasts as analytical findings, not as problems to be resolved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). For instance, many teachers minimized the emotional impact of shaming. They often said things like, "Students these days aren't that sensitive," or "They forget it by the next day," suggesting that such disciplinary acts were trivial. In stark contrast, student interviews—and even more vividly, their drawings—revealed emotional distress and lingering effects.

Rather than attempting to reconcile these opposing views, I foregrounded the gap as a theme in itself: "Mismatches in Perception – Intent vs. Impact." This disparity echoes findings from

Indian school ethnographies – for example, teachers often justify harsh discipline as necessary, while students internalize it as humiliation (Iyer, 2013). This theme captures how teachers often frame shaming as minor or even well-intentioned, while students experience it as painful and damaging. The disconnect between adult intent and child impact emerged as a crucial dynamic. This was reinforced through triangulated data, including teachers' justifications, students' narratives, and their visual expressions (Maxwell, 2013).

In some cases, what was seen but not spoken, or spoken but not seen, also revealed important insights. For example, peer teasing appeared infrequently in student interviews—perhaps because it felt normalized or outside the scope of what they thought they were supposed to discuss. However, it showed up repeatedly in student drawings: laughing classmates, isolated figures, or depictions of ridicule. This contrast suggested that peer dynamics are a significant but under-acknowledged dimension of classroom shaming. By integrating data across modalities, I was able to uncover tacit experiences of shame that students may not have verbalized but nonetheless symbolized through visual expression (Clark & Moss, 2011; Mannay, 2016; Mitchell, 2011).

Interweaving Data in Writing: In writing the findings (Chapters 4–6), I made the integration of data evident in how I presented the evidence. Under each theme, I included quotations from interviews alongside summarized observations and references to visual data. For example, to illustrate a teacher's public scolding practice, I quoted a teacher explaining why she does it ("Sometimes naming them in assembly is the only way to make them work"), followed by a brief narrative of a specific incident I observed of that teacher publicly scolding a student (as recorded in my fieldnotes), and even a reference to a student's drawing that mirrored that kind of incident (e.g., a drawing of a student on stage with others laughing). This weaving of evidence painted a fuller picture and demonstrated that my interpretation

was grounded in multiple sources. It also made for a more vivid and convincing narrative, offering the reader a "3D views" of the phenomenon: what it looked like, what people said about it, and how it felt to those involved.

The synthesis was akin to assembling a puzzle—interviews provided some pieces, observations others, and visuals yet others. Only when combined did the full picture of the social process emerge. This kind of narrative integration across multiple modes is central to thick description and interpretive case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Geertz, 2017). For instance, the concept of a "culture of shame-based discipline" in the school was supported by teacher statements (some teachers said they were themselves taught that way and see it as normal), parent attitudes (several parents expected strictness and saw shaming as part of education), observational evidence (e.g., daily rituals like announcing low exam scores publicly), and visual depictions (students drew it as a normal part of their school life). This synergy allowed me to make more nuanced claims—not just "teachers shame students," but why they do so (due to cultural scripts, lack of training in alternatives, pressure to maintain order), how it is sustained (through peer dynamics, parent complicity, institutional inertia), and with what consequences (such as students' coping strategies, potential resentment or disengagement, or in some cases, compliance and acceptance).

I also reflected on how the different methods influenced each other over the course of the study—sometimes integration occurred on the fly during fieldwork (e.g., an observation informed a new interview question, or something a student drew clarified a puzzling comment a teacher had made). This iterative interplay between data collection and interpretation is typical of flexible qualitative designs (Charmaz, 2014; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). By the end of the study, it became difficult to silo findings by method, which I see as a sign of successful integration: the conceptual findings stand on their own,

supported by all methods, rather than as separate "findings from interviews" and "findings from observation." This approach aligns with best practices in case study research, which advocate for using multiple sources of evidence to develop convergent lines of inquiry (Yin, 2018). When all methods point to the same conclusion, confidence in the findings increases; when they diverge, understanding the divergence often leads to deeper insight.

Validity and Trustworthiness: Integrating methods significantly enhanced the credibility of my findings. When different methods pointed to the same insights, it reduced the likelihood that any one conclusion was merely a product of methodological bias. This kind of methodological triangulation improves internal validity by offsetting the limitations of individual methods and allowing for more holistic interpretation (Carter, 2014; Flick, 2018). It also strengthened confirmability, as readers could see that claims were supported by multiple forms of evidence—for example, when a statement appeared both in interview data and as an observed classroom incident. Convergence across data sources increased the credibility of my interpretations by demonstrating consistency between what participants said, what I observed, and what they depicted visually (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, the richness of insights generated from these multiple angles enhanced transferability. Because I described the phenomenon in thick detail and in context, readers can assess whether and how the findings might apply to other settings. I was also careful not to force artificial consistency. Throughout the analysis, I remained transparent about outliers or deviant cases. Incorporating disconfirming evidence enhances analytic rigor and credibility (Maxwell, 2013). For example, I explicitly included outlier instances where teachers used private, dignity-preserving correction rather than public humiliation, to demonstrate that alternative approaches were possible, even if uncommon in this setting. By highlighting such cases, I avoided presenting an overly homogenized account and resisted the temptation to

generalize beyond the data. Reporting deviant cases helps guard against selective reporting bias and strengthens the study's trustworthiness (Maxwell, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017).

To offer a concrete example of how integrated analysis worked in practice: one of my key findings was that shaming sometimes backfires by disengaging students rather than motivating them. This conclusion was supported by evidence from all three data sources. A student said in an interview, *"When Sir insults me, I just switch off—I stop participating because I feel he's already decided I'm no good"* (S4, student interview). I also observed a student who, after being publicly reprimanded, became silent and withdrawn for the rest of the lesson (fieldnotes, observation, p. 14). In addition, a student drawing depicted a figure seated alone at the back of the class with a thought bubble reading *"I won't answer anymore,"* immediately following a scolding. Triangulating these pieces of evidence allowed me to develop a robust argument in Chapter 6 about how shaming can damage student engagement—an insight that one method alone might not have revealed so strongly.

In summary, the integration and synthesis phase ensured that the final analysis was coherent, credible, and comprehensive. I drew on the complementary strengths of qualitative interviews, ethnographic observation, and participatory visual methods to build a nuanced understanding of classroom shaming in the case study school. This methodological integration aligns with longstanding recommendations in qualitative research for examining a social issue through multiple lenses (Denzin, 2017; Flick, 2018; Greene, 2007). The result is an account that not only gains validity through triangulation but is also enriched by the different dimensions that each method was able to reveal. The next sections, focused on ethics and reflexivity, further support this account by detailing how I attempted to implement each method responsibly and how I managed my own positionality throughout the research process.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this study, given that it involved minors (school students), a potentially sensitive subject (experiences of shame and harsh discipline), and inherent power imbalances between me, as an adult male researcher, the child participants, and institutional gatekeepers (teachers and school authorities). Researching shame—particularly among children—poses significant emotional and ethical challenges. Shame is a powerful emotion that can evoke feelings of worthlessness, vulnerability, and internalized stigma. Asking participants to recall or reflect on such experiences risks triggering distress, anxiety, or re-traumatization. This concern was especially relevant in a school context, where students may fear repercussions for speaking candidly. For teachers, being observed or asked about practices involving shaming could provoke defensiveness or concern about judgment. These concerns echo recent discussions of power, positionality, and caste dynamics in the ethics of researching corporal punishment and discipline in Indian schools (Chandras, 2025).

Acknowledging these risks, I designed the research project with safeguards to support emotional safety. These included trauma-sensitive interviewing techniques carefully considered observation protocols, and reflexive decision-making during ethically ambiguous moments. My aim was not only to comply with formal ethics procedures but also to foster a fieldwork practice rooted in empathy, trust, and the minimization of psychological harm. The research was reviewed and approved by the University of Oxford's ethics committee and followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) Ethical Guidelines, as well as university policies on research with human participants.

This section explains how I addressed core ethical issues, including informed consent (and child assent), confidentiality and anonymity, protection from harm (especially emotional distress), and my responsibilities when witnessing sensitive incidents. It also discusses specific ethical dilemmas encountered—such as observing questionable practices and negotiating the boundary between observer and potential intervenor—and how these were navigated in accordance with ethical principles and ongoing reflexive judgment.

Informed Consent and Assent: Obtaining voluntary informed consent was a multi-layered process due to the involvement of a school institution, adult participants (teachers, parents, principal), and child participants (students). This layered approach aligns with ethical guidelines emphasizing voluntary, informed, and ongoing consent, especially when working with children and institutional gatekeepers (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; UNICEF Innocenti, 2013). I followed a stringent opt-in consent procedure at all levels:

- **Institutional Consent:** I first obtained permission from the school's management. I met with the principal and school manager to present a formal information sheet and consent form outlining the study's purpose, methods, and ethical safeguards. Although their agreement was necessary to proceed, I made it clear that this did not oblige any teacher or student to participate. The principal's consent allowed me to approach prospective participants, but it did not act as proxy consent—every participant still had to consent or assent individually.

- **Teacher Consent:** I provided all teachers who might be observed or interviewed with detailed information sheets and consent forms (in English, with a verbal explanation in Hindi when needed). These explained what participation would involve: classroom observations, a possible interview, and general background questions (e.g., years of experience). I emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and that declining

would carry no negative consequences. Teachers could withdraw at any time or ask me to leave their class if they felt uncomfortable. I assured them their data (fieldnotes and transcripts) would remain confidential and used only for research purposes. Ultimately, 12 teachers gave written consent for classroom observation. Although I had general permission from the principal to be around the school, I still checked in with teachers each time I entered their classrooms—sometimes informally. For instance, if a teacher appeared stressed, I would ask if it was okay to observe or skip that class out of courtesy. This ongoing communication aligns with the principle that consent is a process, not a one-time event (BERA, 2024).

- **Parent Consent and Child Assent:** For student participation, I followed a two-step process: parental consent followed by student assent. The school helped distribute an information sheet and consent form to parents (translated into Hindi and available in English). These explained the study in accessible terms and clarified what participation involved—an interview about school experiences, possibly a drawing activity, and observation in classrooms. The forms emphasized that participation was voluntary and confidential, and that the school would not know which students opted in or out. To maintain privacy, forms were returned to me directly via a sealed envelope dropped off at the school office.

I also held an information session for parents during a scheduled parent-teacher meeting, with help from a Hindi-speaking assistant. Some parents voiced concerns—for instance, whether interviews would take away class time or if students could safely speak about teachers. I addressed these by explaining that interviews would be scheduled during free periods or lunch breaks, and that teachers would not see individual responses. In a few cases, where literacy or hesitation was a barrier, I obtained oral consent in a one-on-one meeting, with

assistance from a teacher-translator. These instances were documented per ethics board protocol. Ultimately, all targeted parents (around 10) gave consent for their children to participate.

With parental consent secured, I then sought assent from each student individually. I visited the classes of selected students and explained the project in an age-appropriate, friendly way. I emphasized that it was entirely the student's choice whether to take part. I addressed students in small groups or individually rather than in front of the whole class to avoid peer pressure. They were told that saying "no" was perfectly fine and that even if they said yes, they could skip any question they didn't want to answer or stop the interview at any time. Essentially, their participation was voluntary and ongoing. All students who had parental consent agreed to participate when asked privately. A few were shy but agreed after I offered the option of having a friend with them (as I implemented in some interviews). This process respects the principle that children's autonomy should be honored, and that research participation is a choice, not an obligation, even if adults have consented on their behalf (BERA, 2024).

Throughout the research, I constantly engaged with consent before starting an interview and the drawing activity, I would confirm with the student, "Do you still feel okay doing this today?" and remind them of their rights (withdraw or not answer). In one case, a student who completed the interview and drawing later chose not to do the school tour; I accepted that choice without any coaxing. This mattered not only procedurally but relationally, since children's participation in research is shaped by the emotional atmosphere and by how free they feel to withdraw in practice, not merely in principle (Hadfield-Hill & Horton, 2014).

My overall approach to consent followed the guideline that informed consent involves adequately informing participants of what the research entails, ensuring they understand it,

and obtaining voluntary agreement without any form of coercion (BERA, 2024). In the school setting, I took special care to communicate clearly in the local language (Hindi) and avoid academic jargon. I also navigated cultural contexts; for instance, because students in Indian schools are accustomed to obeying adults, I made a concerted effort to create an environment where they felt genuinely free to decline participation or speak openly. In Indian classrooms, students are generally expected not to question the teacher's authority. Ethnographic research confirms that pupils seldom challenge or refuse adult directives in school; they tend to comply out of respect and habit (Kumar, 1989; Sarangapani, 2003). This power dynamic informed my approach, as I needed to actively encourage students to voice dissent or decline participation. I did this by clearly separating my role from the school's authority structure and by repeatedly reassuring participants—especially children—that honesty was welcome and would not get them in trouble.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Protecting the identity and privacy of participants was paramount, especially since the research involved sensitive accounts of teacher behavior that could be embarrassing or damaging if revealed. I implemented strong measures to ensure that all data were kept confidential and reported anonymously:

- All participants were assigned codes and pseudonyms. Actual names do not appear in any transcripts, fieldnotes, or analysis files. Instead, I used a coding system (e.g., Teacher T1, T2, …; Student S1, S2, …; Parent of S3 = PS3) throughout the data and analysis stages. Only I held the key linking these codes to real identities, and I stored it securely and separately from the data. In cases where a participant accidentally mentioned a real name (for instance, a teacher referring to a student), I redacted it or replaced it with a pseudonym to protect third-party confidentiality.

- I followed data security best practices. Audio recordings, consent forms, and fieldnotes were stored securely. Digital files (audio and transcripts) were kept on an encrypted drive and backed up to a secure university cloud server. Physical notes were stored in a locked cabinet and promptly digitized. I was the only person with access to raw, identifiable data. Any discussions with supervisors or peers used anonymized summaries or masked quotations. These practices adhered to data protection standards such as GDPR and university policy and are consistent with qualitative research ethics (British Psychological Society, 2021).

- Within the school, I took extra steps to preserve confidentiality. Student interviews were conducted in discreet locations and in a way that did not attract attention. For instance, a student might be excused from class under a general pretext like "helping with a survey," so other students or staff would not question the nature of the discussion. Teacher interviews were held after school hours or in private rooms to avoid being overheard. I did not discuss any individual's participation or responses with anyone at the school. If a teacher casually asked, "So what did the kids tell you?" I would keep responses general ("They shared a range of experiences") and never reveal names or specific comments.

- In the thesis and any future publications, only pseudonyms or generic identifiers are used. The school is not named; instead, I describe it generally as "a low-fee private school in Delhi." Direct quotes are attributed to anonymized codes (e.g., "One teacher reflected, 'Sometimes you must be strict, or they won't listen' [T5, teacher interview]"). This means that even someone familiar with the school would not easily identify who said what, since the codes are not traceable to specific names or class sections. I also avoided overly specific identifying details in writing. For example,

rather than saying “the math teacher with 22 years of experience scolded a student named X on Tuesday,” I would generalize to “an experienced teacher scolded a student” and alter non-essential details. This deliberate obfuscation preserves the core insight while protecting participants’ identities.

I strictly followed the BERA guidelines, which emphasize the dignity, rights, and privacy of all research participants. One ethical challenge I anticipated was that teachers might recognize their own quotes or described scenarios if they happened to read the thesis, thereby indirectly identifying themselves. To mitigate this, I sometimes combined similar anecdotes or created composite examples when illustrating incidents—ensuring that no identities could be deduced while preserving the factual integrity of the data. This approach allowed me to present rich, accurate insights while protecting participant anonymity. Additionally, I invited participants—especially teachers—to review a summary of findings at the end of the fieldwork (see *Member Checking* in the Reflexivity section), giving them a chance to raise concerns and ensure they felt comfortable with how their perspectives were represented.

Minimizing Harm and Managing Sensitive Information: I faced a key ethical tension in this study: observing and later reporting on potentially harmful practices—such as shaming by teachers—which could risk casting those teachers in a negative light. My ethical responsibility was to avoid causing harm to participants, including reputational harm, while still presenting an honest account of the classroom practices under study. I approached this through several strategies:

- **Respectful Framing:** In both my analysis and writing, I ensured that any critique targeted the practices and systemic or cultural conditions that support them—not the individuals themselves. I was deliberate in avoiding judgmental language about teacher participants. For example, instead of stating, “Teacher X was cruel in how she

shamed students," I framed the incident as "Teacher X employed a harsh reprimand, reflecting the norm at the school where teachers feel such strictness is necessary." I contextualized teacher behavior within broader pressures—such as overcrowded classrooms, exam-related stress, and teachers' own experiences as students. Many teachers genuinely believed they were acting in students' best interest, even if the impacts were painful. This nuanced, empathetic critique aligns with ethical principles of non-maleficence and with guidance that qualitative researchers should critique practices, not individuals (Iphofen, 2009; Tracy, 2010). When writing about particularly harsh incidents, I also noted the teacher's stress levels or intentions, rather than assuming malice. This approach allowed me to honor the dignity of teacher participants who had generously allowed me into their world.

- **Feedback to Participants:** After analyzing the data, I shared a summary of general findings with the school in a constructive, non-threatening way. Ethically, I believed that participants deserved to hear the results of the study and that the research could potentially benefit them. The summary emphasized broad patterns and suggestions for supportive practices—such as noting that "Students report that gentle encouragement motivates them more than public scolding"—and recommended teacher training on positive discipline. I carefully avoided attributing any feedback to specific individuals. I also held a debrief session where interested teachers and the principal could engage with the findings. To my surprise, several teachers were reflective and appreciative, noting that the study helped them consider students' emotional responses more deeply. This kind of member-checking and reflective dialogue turned a potentially evaluative process into a collaborative opportunity for professional reflection. It aligns with BERA's (2024) emphasis on ensuring that research should, wherever possible, benefit participants—or at the very least, not harm them.

- **Handling Disclosures:** I also prepared for the possibility that students might disclose experiences of serious emotional harm or abusive situations that would require breaking confidentiality for safeguarding reasons. This protocol was clearly explained in the consent and assent processes. Although no such disclosures occurred that warranted intervention, one student did describe feeling "very depressed" and "hating life." Concerned, I gently followed up to gauge their safety. With the student's permission, I referred the case to the school counselor, without sharing detailed interview content. This reflected my ethical duty of care and adhered to safeguarding principles outlined in child research ethics (Graham et al., 2013; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC], 2025). A related consideration concerned the accounts, reported in several interviews, of physical punishment at home — for example, children describing being slapped or beaten by family members when a teacher's complaint reached the household (discussed in Chapter 5). I treated these accounts as potential safeguarding matters and assessed each against the threshold I had agreed in advance with my supervisors and set out in the consent and assent materials: where a child appeared to be at risk of significant harm, I would, with care for the child's wishes and safety, raise the matter through the school's designated safeguarding and pastoral channel and, where appropriate, signpost external support. In the cases I encountered, the punishments children described — while serious as a matter of children's rights and central to my analysis of how shame travels between school and home — were recounted as past or routine disciplinary events rather than as situations of immediate danger meeting that threshold, and the children did not indicate that they were currently unsafe. I nonetheless remained alert to this possibility throughout fieldwork, did not probe these accounts in ways that might cause further distress, and was prepared to act had any disclosure indicated that

a child was at risk. This stance followed the same duty of care and child-protection principles applied to emotional harm above (Graham et al., 2013; NSPCC, 2025), and reflects the tension, widely noted in childhood research, between respecting children's accounts of their everyday lives and the researcher's protective obligations.

- **Managing distress and safeguarding (summary):** Because the topic involved potential emotional harm, I adopted a "do no harm" stance throughout data collection and treated consent as ongoing rather than one-off. If a student became visibly distressed during an interview or activity, I paused, offered the option to stop or take a break, reminded them they could skip any question, and followed up afterwards to ensure they felt safe. If I witnessed an incident that met a safeguarding threshold (i.e., serious risk of harm or an immediate protection concern), I prioritized the child's safety and followed the school's safeguarding route while maintaining confidentiality as far as ethically possible. To reduce identification risk in visual data, drawings and photographs were handled carefully and any identifiable details were anonymized in write-up.

Overall, my ethical approach was characterized by rigorous consent procedures, strict confidentiality, sensitivity to participant well-being, and careful, reflexive decision-making throughout fieldwork. I constantly weighed risks and benefits, aiming to ensure that the study was respectful, emotionally safe, and just to those who participated. This ethical rigor not only upheld the principles laid out by BERA (2024) but also contributed to the trust participants placed in me. When participants feel safe and respected, they are more likely to share honestly, and the resulting data are both richer and more reliable enhancing the credibility and integrity of the study.

3.7 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

Qualitative research, particularly ethnography, demands continuous reflexivity—that is, a critical self-examination of how my own background, assumptions, and actions influenced the research process and the knowledge that emerged from it. Reflexivity is not an optional step but a foundational principle of interpretive qualitative inquiry. It requires researchers to remain aware of how their identities shape every stage of the research process, from gaining access to interpreting data (Berger, 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

In this study, I brought a hybrid insider–outsider positionality to the field. I am an Indian male researcher now pursuing doctoral research at the University of Oxford, and my background includes being educated in both elite and low-fee private schools in Delhi. This background placed me in a dual position: I shared cultural and linguistic familiarity with participants while also holding institutional distance and academic privilege. I understood the daily rhythms, pressures, and emotional codes of Indian school life from lived experience—but I also entered the field as an outsider in terms of my academic affiliation, social capital, and gendered authority. This dual positioning shaped how I was perceived by participants and how I interpreted what I observed. It also required ongoing reflexivity—to remain attuned to both the empathy that my shared background allowed and the critical detachment necessary for rigorous analysis.

Navigating this dual positionality is a well-documented challenge in qualitative research, especially in home-country or cross-cultural fieldwork (Holmes, 2020; Sultana, 2007). In the sections that follow, I reflect on how my identity influenced rapport, data collection, and interpretation—both positively and problematically—and the strategies I used to remain analytically self-aware, including keeping a reflexive journal and seeking peer debriefs throughout the fieldwork.

Insider Perspective: Sharing cultural background, language, and certain lived experiences with participants proved to be largely advantageous. My familiarity with Delhi's educational context allowed me to enter the field with an intuitive understanding of local norms and school culture. I speak Hindi fluently and understand regional dialects, which helped immensely in building trust. Teachers and students didn't need to explain concepts like *beizzati* (humiliation) or *board exam pressure*—I grasped those meanings instantly. This cultural competence enabled smoother conversations and likely encouraged participants to speak more openly.

That said, I remained reflexively aware of the risks of over-identification. My emotional attunement was a strength, but it also carried the danger of assuming too much or projecting my own experiences onto participants. I used a reflexive journal to track these moments and critically analyze how my positionality shaped interpretations. Such emotional responsiveness can build rapport and encourage disclosure, but it also requires safeguards to prevent bias (Etherington, 2007; Pillow, 2003). Indeed, teachers often switched between Hindi, Punjabi, and English during interviews, referencing their own school days or quoting cultural proverbs. My insider knowledge allowed me to follow these shifts seamlessly, maintaining the conversational flow without interrupting to ask for clarification. This helped keep interviews natural, relational, and context sensitive.

However, my insider status also required careful reflexivity to avoid projection and bias. I had to continually remind myself that my own school experiences, while similar in broad strokes, were not identical to those of the participants. I recalled feeling deeply alienated by certain teachers' scoldings during my own school years, and that emotional residue made it tempting to interpret every raised voice as harmful. To guard against this, I relied on reflexive journaling to disentangle my reactions from those of the students.

I maintained reflexive notes throughout fieldwork and analysis to monitor how my positionality shaped access, interpretation, and relationships.

Outsider Attributes and Reflexive Balancing: At the same time, I occupied an outsider position in other respects. I was not a member of this specific school community prior to the research. My status as a DPhil student at the University of Oxford—a young academic from a globally renowned institution—initially set me apart, and even above, in the eyes of some participants. This brought a certain prestige or authority that was a double-edged sword. On one hand, teachers and school leaders treated the study very seriously and with respect. The principal, in fact, was proud to host a researcher from Oxford, which helped facilitate access and cooperation. On the other hand, a few teachers were nervous or suspicious. One asked candidly whether I would report back to the school owner or the education department. While most students quickly saw me as friendly and relatable, a few—particularly the school prefects and high achievers—initially interacted with formality and deference, as if I were an examiner or inspector.

I had to consciously downplay the power imbalances that stemmed from my outsider and privileged credentials. I dressed in simple attire, like what the teachers wore, to avoid appearing overly "foreign" or elite. I introduced myself to students in Hindi as "a student, like you all, who is here to learn from you," emphasizing my role as a learner rather than an authority. Over time, I engaged in everyday school routines—joining teachers for chai in the staff room, eating the school lunch with students—which helped me become a familiar presence rather than a lofty guest. This gradual, participatory immersion helped mitigate the Hawthorne effect, allowing participants to act more naturally around me.

Reflexively, I found it interesting that my earlier identity as a student in an Indian school sometimes overshadowed my Oxford affiliation. For example, older teachers would say,

"You know how it is, when we were in school…"—implicitly including me in a collective experience of Indian schooling, despite my current academic standing. This insider camaraderie helped build rapport, but I had to be cautious not to over-identify with teachers or lose my analytical stance. At one point, I found myself sympathizing deeply with their hardships—large class sizes, limited resources, low salaries—and began internally justifying their use of strict discipline. During a supervisory meeting, this bias surfaced as I defended one teacher's behavior. My supervisor gently reminded me that while empathy is important, it must not obscure the ethical implications of participants' actions.

This reminder prompted me to revisit those fieldnotes with a more balanced perspective—holding space for the structural challenges teachers face, while remaining committed to centering students' emotional experiences. External checks such as discussions with supervisors and peers served as peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017), which helped strengthen my reflexivity. It reminded me to maintain a critical stance, balancing understanding for teachers with ethical responsibility toward the children who bore the impact of their actions.

Navigating Personal Emotions: The research topic—shaming—had deep emotional resonance for me. I had personally experienced both scolding and public embarrassment in school, and at times, I found myself internally siding with students, feeling anger or sadness when a teacher made a particularly harsh remark. At other times, I empathized with the teacher's frustration, especially when trying to manage a large class or respond to noncompliant behavior. I documented this emotional oscillation in reflexive memos throughout fieldwork. Rather than suppress these reactions, I acknowledged them as part of my positionality and worked to prevent them from skewing the analysis.

For instance, I made a deliberate effort to observe and interview strict teachers, even when I felt uncomfortable around them. I also reflected critically on moments when I found certain teachers particularly "likable" and asked myself whether that affinity was affecting the depth of my probing. These moments became opportunities for reflexive pause and course correction—sometimes prompting a return visit or a follow-up question to clarify ambiguity or revisit data that felt emotionally charged.

Positional Power Dynamics: My relationship with the school administration also demanded ongoing reflexivity. As mentioned earlier, I gained access to the school through a personal connection—a family friend of the school owner. This positioned me, at first, somewhat aligned with the administration in the eyes of teachers. Aware of this, I worked consciously to reposition myself as independent and neutral.

I was transparent with teachers from the outset, assuring them that their input was confidential and would not be shared with the owner or principal. I also made intentional choices to distance myself socially from management—choosing to spend break times with teachers in the lunchroom rather than in the principal's office. Gradually, this helped shift how I was perceived. Teachers began to treat me more like a junior colleague or former student rather than a management insider. This was evident when some began to share more candid reflections, such as: "Off the record, sometimes I also feel bad scolding them, but what to do…"—something they likely wouldn't have said if they still saw me as aligned with the administration.

Throughout, I embraced the idea of the *human-as-instrument*—recognizing that my subjectivity was both a strength and a potential source of distortion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). I used my empathy and insider familiarity to ask better questions and interpret subtle cues (for example, recognizing when a student's downcast eyes signaled

something unsaid and gently following up). At the same time, I put safeguards in place to counteract bias: maintaining a reflexive journal, holding regular supervisory discussions, and conducting member checks to ensure factual accuracy (such as confirming with a teacher that I had correctly understood an incident's context). These reflexive practices helped ensure that the analysis was rooted in participants' realities, not my projections. Transparent reflexivity enhances analytic trustworthiness by making the interpretive process visible and accountable (Nowell et al., 2017; Tracy, 2010).

Reflexivity in Analysis and Writing: Reflexivity continued well beyond data collection and into the phases of analysis and writing. I regularly revisited my reflexive journal to trace how my interpretations evolved and to ensure that I wasn't selectively attending to data that confirmed my early assumptions. For example, early in the study, I hypothesized that "shaming always has negative effects on students." However, as the fieldwork progressed, I encountered students who said that being scolded sometimes pushed them to work harder or improve—a more ambivalent picture. This prompted me to critically reassess my initial framing. I recognized that my hypothesis was too rigid and normatively framed, and I adapted my analysis to reflect this complexity. Some students reported feeling hurt but also motivated, indicating that responses to shaming were not uniformly negative.

I deliberately addressed this complexity in the findings, making clear to readers that I remained open to interpretations that challenged my expectations. This transparency aligns with calls for reflexive writing practices that foreground the evolving nature of qualitative interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). By explicitly noting that not all students responded the same way—and that some perceived benefits in strict discipline—I resisted the temptation to impose a uniformly negative interpretation of shaming. This strengthened the credibility of the analysis.

In writing this reflexivity section itself, I aim to be honest about my positionality. By disclosing how my background—as a former student within India's schooling system and now a doctoral researcher at Oxford—shaped the research process, I allow readers to understand the lens through which the data were viewed and interpreted. This openness gives readers the ability to critically assess the study's findings considering my positional context. For instance, my insider knowledge of Indian schooling might have helped participants open to me (a strength) but could also have predisposed me to assume cultural continuity (a potential bias). Acknowledging this helps readers weigh my interpretations, accordingly, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the study.

In conclusion, my dual positionality as both insider and outsider was carefully managed through sustained reflexive practice. My insider status (emic perspective) enriched the research with cultural insight, built rapport, and helped me intuitively interpret emotionally nuanced situations. My outsider status—as a university-based researcher—offered critical distance and allowed me to ask probing questions with analytic detachment. This toggling between empathy and inquiry enabled deeper interpretation while avoiding over-identification.

Reflexive strategies such as journaling, peer debriefing, member checks, and constant self-questioning were employed to ensure that neither my biases nor blind spots unduly shaped the findings. This reflexive journey was not only an ethical and methodological imperative, but also a personally illuminating one: I developed a clearer understanding of my own schooling history and how it intersected with those of my participants. That said, my central commitment remained to authentically represent participants' voices and experiences. Although my perspective shaped the research, I consistently worked to foreground their narratives, not my own.

Ultimately, these moments of over-identification—whether with students or teachers—served as reminders that empathy must be balanced with analytical rigor. Reflexivity, for me, was not just a safeguard against bias, but a generative tool that deepened my understanding of others' perspectives.

3.8 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Every research design involves trade-offs. This ethnographic case study prioritized depth, context, and meaning, which strengthens interpretive insight but also places boundaries on the kinds of claims that can be made.

Limitations: First, as a single-site case study, the findings are context-specific; the aim is analytic insight and transferability through thick description rather than statistical generalization. Second, the student interview sample was concentrated in Classes IX and X, and participation depended on parental consent and student assent; perspectives from younger students are therefore less represented. Third, as with all ethnographic work, my presence may have influenced behavior to some extent, particularly early in fieldwork, even as participants became more accustomed to my role over time. Fourth, interview data is subject to social desirability and retrospective framing; I addressed this through triangulation with observations and visual methods, and by treating divergence between accounts and observed practice as analytically meaningful. Fifth, although conducting fieldwork and interviews in Hindi supported rapport and depth, translating selected quotations into English for the thesis introduces interpretive choices; I aimed to preserve meaning through careful translation and by retaining key Hindi terms where relevant. Finally, my positionality shaped access and

interpretation; sustained reflexivity and supervisory discussion were used to identify and mitigate bias.

Delimitations: This study is intentionally delimited to discipline and shaming practices in the school context (and how these connect to home–school relations), rather than aiming to map all forms of child well-being. It focuses primarily on verbal, symbolic, and relational forms of shaming (rather than physical punishment as the central analytic object), and it examines one low-fee private school located in an unauthorized colony in Delhi to prioritize ethnographic depth over breadth. The study is observational and analytic rather than an intervention evaluation; it does not test a specific program to reduce shaming, though implications for practice are discussed in later chapters.

3.9 Chapter Summary

In this methodology chapter, I have detailed the research design and processes that underpin this ethnographic case study on classroom shaming. The chapter opened by situating the study within an interpretivist paradigm and justifying the choice of a single-case ethnographic approach (Section 3.1), which enabled deep, context-rich insights into the lived realities of one school. This approach aligns with interpretivist traditions that emphasize meaning-making within bounded social environments (Tisdell et al., 2025; Yin, 2018).

In Section 3.2, I outlined the field setting, access negotiations, and my dual role as a participant-observer. I highlighted how prolonged immersion, cultural familiarity, and trust-building were essential for studying emotionally sensitive issues like classroom shaming. These elements are central to ethnographic validity, as they support the observation of tacit

practices and the development of authentic participant relationships (Emerson et al., 2011; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Section 3.3 detailed the multi-method data collection strategy: semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, parents, and the principal (3.3.1); extensive classroom and school observations recorded in fieldnotes (3.3.2); and participatory visual methods, including student drawings and guided neighborhood tours (3.3.3). For each method, I provided both a theoretical rationale and a description of how the technique was adapted for the local context — for instance, by conducting some student interviews in pairs to reduce power asymmetry, and by handling visual data with confidentiality and care. These practices align with ethical standards for visual research and participatory methodologies (Clark, 2011; Wiles et al., 2008). Using diverse methods allowed the study to capture a fuller picture of shaming as a social, emotional, and institutional practice — expressed through language, behavior, and visual representation. This method of triangulation enhanced the study's credibility and depth (Carter, 2014).

Section 3.4 described the data analysis procedures. I applied thematic analysis to textual data, drawing on grounded theory techniques for open, axial, and selective coding (3.4.1). Visual data were analyzed using content-interpretive strategies to ensure student drawings and spatial accounts were meaningfully integrated into the analytic framework (3.4.2). I used NVivo software to organize codes and maintain transparency. Throughout the analysis, I employed reflexive journaling, peer feedback, and member checks to enhance trustworthiness. The resulting themes — which are presented in subsequent findings chapters — were developed iteratively and grounded in participant accounts across multiple data sources. This process followed best practices for qualitative theming and reflexive interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

In Section 3.5, I focused on the integration and synthesis of methods, illustrating how triangulation was achieved and how convergent evidence from interviews, observations, and student drawings was used to build a coherent narrative. I also addressed how divergences were analytically productive — for example, differing perspectives between teachers and students became findings on perception gaps. This methodological strategy strengthened the study's trustworthiness by showing that conclusions were not drawn from a single data stream and that the complexity of classroom shaming was acknowledged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Sections 3.6 and 3.7 covered the ethical and reflexive dimensions of the study. I detailed the extensive measures taken to obtain informed consent from all participants, to safeguard anonymity, and to handle sensitive material in accordance with BERA guidelines (BERA, 2024). I also discussed the moral tensions I encountered in the field — such as witnessing emotionally harmful interactions without intervening — and how these were managed with a commitment to minimizing harm while still pursuing valid research aims (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). In Section 3.7, I reflected on my dual positionality as both insider (in terms of language and cultural background) and outsider (due to institutional privilege) and described the reflexive strategies I used to manage potential bias, including journaling and peer debriefing (Berger, 2015; Holmes, 2020).

In Section 3.8, I identified the study's limitations — including its single-site focus, limited generalizability, and potential participant bias — and clarified its design delimitations, such as focusing on verbal shaming in a low-fee private school rather than physical punishment or multi-school comparisons. By drawing clear boundaries around what the study does and does not claim, I aimed to promote transparency and contextual accuracy (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995).

Overall, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that the research was conducted with methodological rigor, ethical care, and sustained reflexivity. The unit of analysis remained consistent throughout: shaming practices within a school setting, defined as verbal or non-verbal acts by adults that students experience as humiliating, insulting, or emotionally painful. Each methodological choice — from a year-long immersion to a multi-modal data collection strategy — was made to authentically capture the layered and often subtle dynamics of shame in school life. As Tracy (2010) suggests, rigor in qualitative research is judged not by standardization, but by transparency of process and reflexive integrity — both of which this chapter has aimed to uphold.

Chapter 4 begins the findings by describing the school setting and the everyday "architecture" of shaming as it appears in classroom routines and disciplinary language. Chapter 5 then traces the cultural and relational routes through which shame circulates between school and home, and Chapter 6 examines how students experience, interpret, and respond to these practices emotionally, socially, and academically.

Chapter 4: Direct Classroom Shaming Practices: Verbal, Performative, Comparative and Fear Based Tactics

Following the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, this chapter addresses RQ1 by presenting the core in-class techniques teachers use to induce shame as a disciplinary tool. It brings together four recurrent mechanisms: public verbal humiliation and name calling, physical or performative punishments that make discipline a spectacle, peer comparison and academic shaming, and fear appeals about future failure. Each section provides thick description and triangulated evidence from observations, interviews, and student artifacts, showing how these tactics produce immediate compliance while shaping what I later describe as a climate of strictness—an atmosphere of apprehension that suppresses authentic participation. By focusing on the techniques as they unfold within the classroom—what is said, staged, and signaled in front of peers—the chapter clarifies how *beizzati maarna* (to "hit with humiliation") operates as a routinized pedagogy in this school. It thus addresses RQ1 in relation to "mechanisms of practice" before turning, in the next chapter, to the relational and sociocultural channels through which shame travels beyond the classroom.

4.1 Public Verbal Humiliation and Insults

Description and Manifestations: The most pervasive form of shame-based discipline is public verbal humiliation, wherein a teacher openly scolds or insults a student in front of the entire class (Advani, 2009; Ramavath, 2016; Singh & Singh, 2025; Thakkar et al., 2021).

This practice involves raised voices, harsh scolding, and often name-calling that attacks the child's character or abilities (e.g., calling a student "lazy," "stupid," or "useless"). The intent is to make the student feel ashamed to correct their behavior. As one teacher put it, "Sometimes I just shout at them and say they are being lazy or useless in front of the whole class" (T1, teacher interview).

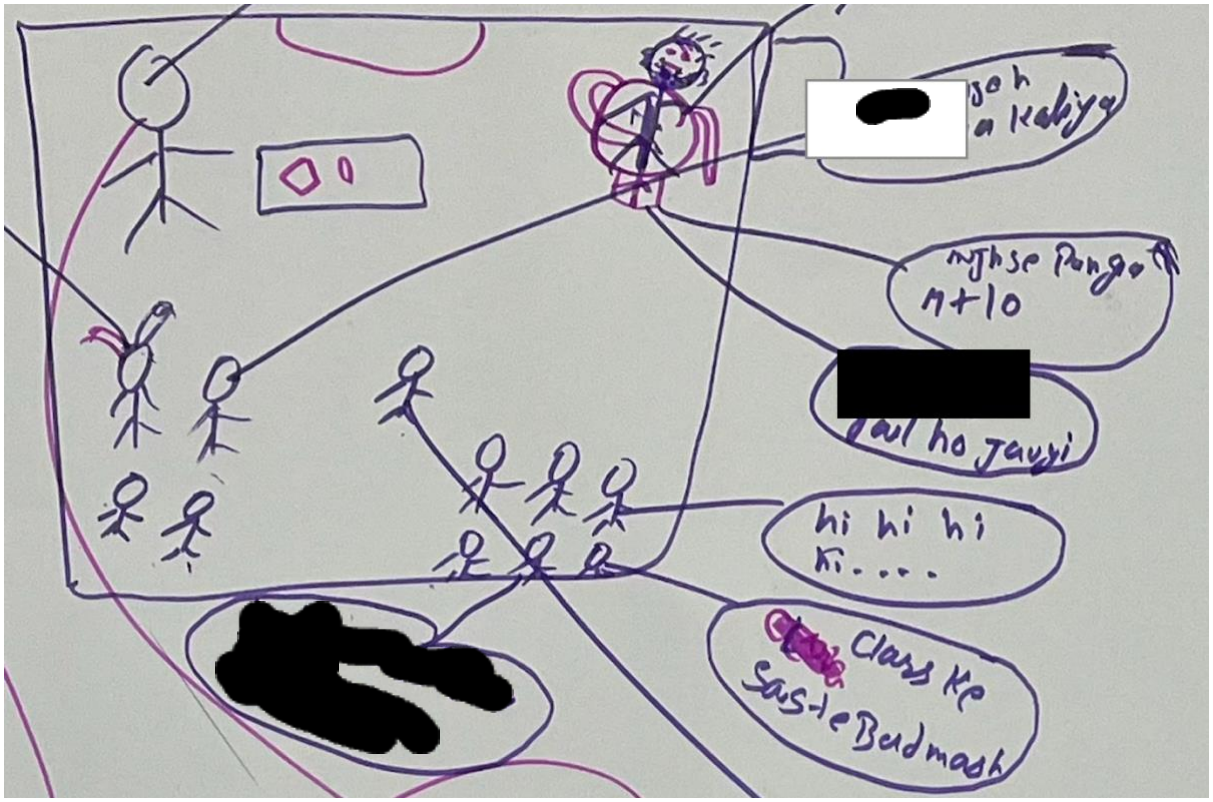


Figure 1: Classroom scene with teacher addressing one student

Description: *The teacher, positioned in the upper-right, faces the class and points toward a student by naming them while several classmates look on from their desks.* ***Speech*** *bubbles convey the teacher's remarks, and* ***speech*** *bubbles above students show their internal responses and thoughts. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

The above illustration, Figure 1 is vividly captured in a student's drawing above, which conveys the essence of being publicly shamed by a teacher. At the heart of the scene, the teacher stands in front of the class, looking directly at one student, calling her by name, and pointing out that if she does not listen or tries to act smart, he will ensure she fails. This

public singling out, becomes a central moment in the classroom. As these words are spoken, the entire class turns their attention toward the student—some laughing, others making comments at her expense—while a sense of discomfort and exposure spreads throughout the room. This depiction, created by a student who was present during the incident, powerfully conveys the collective witness that amplifies the sting of public shaming. The arrangement in the classroom, with the student set apart and subjected to the scrutiny of both teacher and peers, makes her isolation and vulnerability tangible. It reinforces how such moments transform discipline into a spectacle, leaving an enduring emotional impact and deepening the sense of alienation described in the preceding discussion. The text the student inscribed in the drawing makes the exchange explicit. The teacher's speech bubbles read "*mujhse panga mat lo*" ("Don't mess with me") and, addressed to the girl by name, a warning that she "will fail," while the surrounding peers are given bubbles of muffled laughter ("hi hi hi…") and cutting asides — one calling the singled-out children "the class's cheap troublemakers" (*class ke saste badmaash*) and another concluding "nothing will come of them, for sure." That the child chose to record not only the teacher's threat but the peers' mockery confirms the analytic point that the audience is part of the punishment (full transcription and translation in Appendix A).

Such public tongue-lashings are so common that students have a colloquial term for it – "बेइज्जती मारना" (*beizzati maarna*), meaning "to hit with humiliation." This implies that words can "slap" a student's dignity just as physically striking them would. Indeed, students reported that a severe verbal dressing-down can reduce them to tears even without any physical contact (Singh & Singh, 2025). For instance, one Class IX student explained that a certain strict teacher's words alone could bring pupils to cry: "[The teacher's] words alone make you cry; she doesn't need to hit you" (S1, student interview). In other words, the sting of a public scolding is perceived as punishment enough. Public verbal humiliation functions

as a psychological form of discipline, which students themselves equate to being slapped – but with shame instead of a hand (Endow, 2018; Nambissan, 2016).

Insults and Name-Calling: Teachers' reprimands often go beyond critique of behavior and turn into character assaults. Common insults reported by students include terms like "shameless," "idiot," or "ढीठ बच्चे" (*dheet bachche*) – meaning "shameless" children who are uncaringly defiant. For example, if a child repeats a mistake even after being scolded once, some teachers dismiss them as incorrigible: "ये तो ढीठ बच्चे हैं… कुछ भी बोल लो, कुछ नहीं होता" – "These kids are shameless; say whatever you want, nothing affects them" (S1, student interview). Being publicly branded as "बेशर्म" (*besharm*, shameless) in front of peers is deeply humiliating because it implies the student lacks the capacity to feel shame and is therefore beyond reform.

Such language effectively "spoils" the student's identity in the eyes of classmates, invoking Goffman's notion of a "spoiled identity" – a stigma attached to the child. Furthermore, teachers sometimes scapegoat well-known troublemakers for any mischief in class. One student (S1) bitterly remarked that whenever something went wrong, "definitely I must have done it" (S1, student interview), reflecting how she was automatically blamed and shamed even when innocent. Publicly targeting a particular child as "the bad one" reinforces that student's stigma and can lead to a self-fulfilling reputation.

The Affective Toll of Verbal Shaming: From the student perspective, being yelled at or insulted in front of everyone is a direct attack on self-worth. Students frequently described feeling "small," "worthless," or "as if my value decreased" when a teacher hurled taunts at them (S5, student interview). In one extreme incident, after a group of students failed to answer a question, a teacher shouted in Hindi: "लानत है… डूब मरना चाहिए कि आप ये चीज़ नहीं कर पा रहे हो" – "Shame on you; you should just go drown for not being able to do this" (S5, student

interview). A Class X girl who received this scolding said she felt like “my worth has decreased” because of one academic failure.

Such remarks illustrate how public academic shame can make a student feel fundamentally deficient. Researches on school bullying and emotional abuse supports that public humiliation can inflict lasting harm, leading to lowered self-esteem and school avoidance (Tangney et al., 2007). In the study, some students reported wanting to disappear or avoid class after being shamed. Others reacted with quiet resentment, masking their hurt to avoid giving the teacher further satisfaction. A few even laughed it off externally, attempting to show they were “immune,” but later admitted that the pain lingered internally. This aligns with psychological findings that shame often leads to defensive coping or withdrawal rather than constructive change. Similar responses were documented in Indian and Malaysian educational settings, where shame induced emotional suppression, withdrawal from academic engagement, and avoidance of help-seeking (Baharuddin & Ashari, 2018; Patel, 2018).

Crucially, public shaming in front of peers amplifies the impact. The presence of classmates turns the reprimand into a performance – essentially a “spectacle of shame.” The embarrassed student not only absorbs the teacher’s harsh words but also endures the gaze and potential giggles of peers, which intensify the humiliation. As one student explained, the worst part of being scolded publicly was seeing classmates’ smirk, which “broke me from inside” (Fieldnotes, group discussion). The audience effect means that shame is socially constructed in the moment – it is because others are watching that the child feels utterly disgraced. This dynamic reflects broader cultural patterns in which losing face in public is among the most intense forms of shame in collectivist societies.

Despite its harshness, public verbal shaming is normalized by teachers and many parents as a disciplinary tactic (Maiter, Alaggia, & Trocmé, 2004). Teachers often rationalize it as

necessary to "teach a lesson" or instill discipline. One teacher defended her strict approach by saying if her scolding makes a student cry now, "better they feel a little shame now than a lot of shame later in life" – suggesting that a short-term humiliation is seen as an inoculation against larger failures (T2, teacher interview). This perspective resonates with the idea of shaming as "tough love," albeit it risks underestimating the emotional toll on children. Parents in the community generally do not object to teachers shouting at their children; some even interpret a strict, scolding teacher as a sign that the teacher cares enough to discipline (Irfan, 2008). However, a few parents quietly expressed concern that constant verbal belittlement might crush a child's confidence rather than build character (Sangar, 2018). The data thus reveal a tension: public humiliation is intended to enforce discipline and improve performance, but it can also engender fear, anger, or despair, potentially backfiring in the long run.

Notably, students who were repeatedly subjected to verbal humiliation sometimes became desensitized – or at least acted like they were. A Class X boy who was often singled out shrugged, "After a point, you stop feeling it," indicating that he learned to put on a stoic front (S3, student interview). Yet even he acknowledged that deep down, it still hurt; his apparent apathy was a mask developed to survive the daily shaming. This coping mechanism – feigning shamelessness – is itself a telling outcome of chronic humiliation. It echoes Tangney et al.'s (2007) observation that shame experiences often lead to avoidance and defensive numbing rather than genuine accountability. In sum, public verbal humiliation is pervasive and culturally ingrained as a disciplinary method, but it carries significant emotional costs. In the following sections, I show that verbal shaming is only one part of a broader repertoire of shame-based discipline in the school—one often intertwined with physical demonstrations, threats involving parents, and other tactics.

4.2 Physical and Performative Punishments

Description and Classroom Manifestations: Beyond words, teachers frequently employ physical or performative punishments that carry an element of public humiliation. These practices range from comparatively mild physical discipline (e.g., a light slap or ruler-tap) to forcing students to assume demeaning postures or roles in front of their peers – effectively turning punishment into a "shame spectacle." A common example is making a misbehaving student stand for a long period in class or even stand outside the classroom door, explicitly marking them out for everyone to see.

One student explained that if a child disobeys, the teacher will loudly order them to stand up and then announce to the class what the child did wrong, so that "everyone knows" the offense (S7, student interview). By physically isolating the student and focusing the class's attention on them, the teacher expects the child to feel "शर्मिंदा" (sharminda, ashamed) and thus be deterred from repeating the behavior. The offender is literally put on display as an example. Students noted that this routine is so ingrained that most comply immediately – the moment a teacher barks "Stand up!", the accused student will rise with head bowed, bracing for the public lecture and the eyes of their classmates.

Beyond simple standing, some punishments involve more extreme body postures explicitly meant to ridicule. Several students described the dreaded "मुर्गा बनाना" (*murga banana*) punishment – literally "making [someone] a rooster." This traditional school penalty in South Asia entails squatting down, looping one's arms behind the knees, and holding one's ears – an awkward, painful pose resembling a rooster. "Sometimes they make us do the *murga* position," reported one Class IX student (S8, student interview), noting that it was used as a

consequence for serious misbehavior. Having to crouch like a rooster in front of one's peers is highly degrading; it often provokes laughter or jeers from classmates, thereby magnifying the target child's shame. Other performative punishments mentioned included standing with arms raised in the air for an extended time, or holding one's earlobes (a sign of repentance) while half-squatting. These actions become physically painful as well as embarrassing. One teacher recounted seeing children from another class made to stand outside holding their ears as punishment – a sight that merged pain with public humiliation (T1, teacher interview).

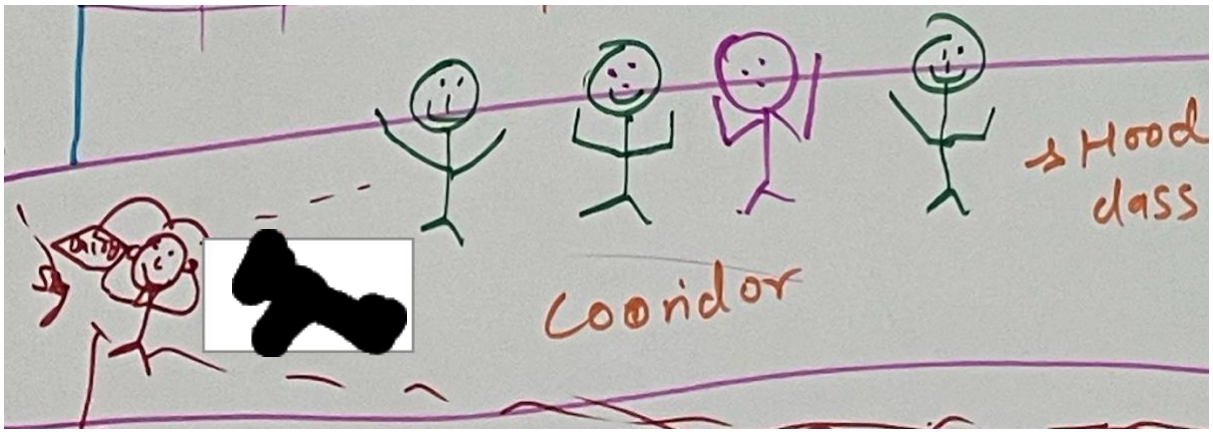


Figure 2: Corridor punishment—students standing with hands raised

Description: *Outside their classroom, several students stand in the corridor with arms raised as a disciplinary measure. A passing student smirks at them, while the open doorway situates the scene and underscores the public nature of the punishment. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

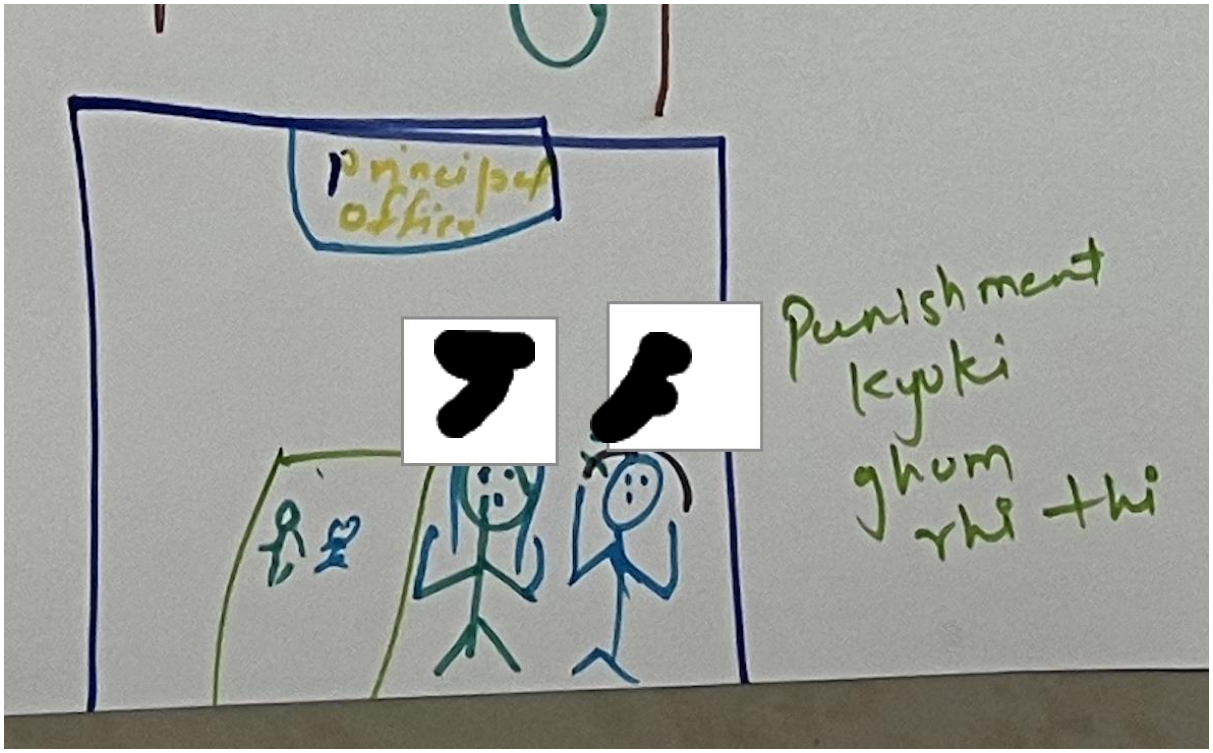


Figure 3: Outside the principal's office—students with hands raised

Description: *Two students stand outside the principal's office with arms raised as a disciplinary measure. The principal is visible at the desk. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

This dynamic is captured in the student-drawn image above in Figure 2 and Figure 3, which depicts several children standing outside the classroom and principal's office, heads bowed, shoulders slumped, their posture alone signaling both their isolation and the gravity of their transgression. The power of this visual lies in its ordinariness: being made to stand in the corridor (Figure 2) or outside Principal's office (Figure 3) is a daily reality for many students, an almost routine response to various infractions. In the scene, the students are unmistakably on display, positioned in a liminal space – no longer part of the classroom community, yet not entirely removed from its gaze. Peers passing by may cast glances, some curious or pitying, others judgmental or amused, further deepening the sense of exposure. The students' own annotations reinforce this reading. In Figure 2 the child has labeled the space itself — "corridor" — and drawn a passing classmate turned toward the punished row with a smile, a

detail the child explained as her laughing at them; the corridor is thus marked, in the student's own hand, as a stage for public exposure rather than a neutral thoroughfare. In Figure 3 the drawing carries its own caption — "Punishment *kyuki ghum rahi thi*" ("Punishment because we were roaming about") — written beside the two girls standing with arms raised outside the labeled "Principal office," naming both the offense (moving about during class) and its disproportionate, highly visible sanction, staged at the most trafficked point in the school (full descriptions of both drawings in Appendix A).

The act of physically separating the punished child from the group, while still ensuring their visibility, transforms the hallway or threshold into a stage of public accountability and stigma. The presence of the principal's office in the image intensifies the implied seriousness of the offense, evoking a chain of authority and the looming threat of escalation. This illustration thus powerfully embodies the dual nature of performative punishments: the student's body becomes both the site and the signifier of shame, while the school's architecture – its doors, corridors, and offices – literalizes the mechanisms of surveillance and exclusion described previously. In this way, the image stands as a concrete, affective representation of how disciplinary practices operate not only through words or pain, but through spatial and social choreography that marks, separates, and publicly shames the child.

In all these cases, the body itself becomes a site of humiliation – the imposed posture signifies "I have done something wrong" to any onlooker. Such punishments blend corporal discipline with symbolic shaming, delivering a dual message: the student should feel both physical discomfort and disgrace for their misdeed (Morrow & Singh, 2014).

Corporal Punishment and Shame: Although official school policy (and Indian law) forbids corporal punishment, students – and even some teachers – admitted that physical hitting still occurs on occasion, albeit covertly. A few teachers candidly stated in interviews that they

have “at times given a slap or two” to unruly students despite knowing it is against the rules (T3, teacher interview). Students likewise recounted being hit with sticks, rulers, or a teacher’s hand. They often downplayed these incidents as infrequent or “only for serious offenses.” “कभी स्टिक से मारते हैं” – “Sometimes they hit with a stick,” one girl noted matter-of-factly (S8, student interview), describing it as something that happens if a student does something especially bad.

While the primary intent of such hitting may be to inflict pain or instill fear, the findings make clear that it also induces shame. Being struck in front of one’s peers is inherently humiliating – it dramatically reinforces the power difference between teacher and student in a public setting. Many students in the study conflated “मारना” (*maarna,* to beat) with “बेइज़्ज़ती” (*beizzati,* humiliation) when describing these incidents – for them, the physical sting and the sting to their pride were one and the same. In effect, corporal punishment in the classroom is rarely a private matter; it is usually a public event that labels the child as deserving of being beaten (Kacker et al., 2007).

This intertwining of physical punishment and humiliation underscores why India formally banned corporal punishment in schools in 2009 (through the Right to Education Act, RTE) and why numerous studies have decried its negative effects on children’s well-being (Gershoff, 2017; Kacker et al., 2007). Nevertheless, as both the data and other research attest, such practices remain endemic in many Indian schools despite the ban. In the case school, severe beatings are uncommon, but light slaps and the punitive use of stress positions persist as “culturally accepted” disciplinary tactics. Teachers often rationalize them as acceptable because they themselves grew up with similar treatment – a form of intergenerational normalization of shame and violence.

Punishment as Public Spectacle: Teachers sometimes deliberately turned punishment into a performance involving other students, thereby intensifying the shame through peer participation. A striking (though relatively rare) example was provided by one teacher (T4), who described an incident where the entire class was led in a chant of "shame, shame" directed at a chronically disruptive child. In such a case, the teacher essentially enlisted the peer group to co-shame the student. More commonly, teachers use subtler methods to harness peer influence: for instance, a teacher might sarcastically ask the class to "give a round of applause" after a student mess up or pointedly have everyone turn and look at a "defaulter" standing outside the door.

Even without explicit prompting, the presence of peers amplifies the effect – giggles, whispers, or the simple fact of dozens of eyes watching all contribute to a "theater of shame." Students said they felt especially mortified when their punishment sparked any reaction from classmates. One boy recalled that the worst part of being made to do *murga* was hearing others snicker: "That really broke me from inside," he shared (Fieldnotes, group discussion). These performative elements show how shame is socially magnified: it is not solely the teacher's action but the collective reception that delivers the emotional blow. In these moments, the classroom becomes akin to a stage where the punished child is the unwilling protagonist of a ridicule scene.

The Affective Toll of Performative Punishment: Students subjected to physical or performative punishments reported a mix of fear, pain, and deep embarrassment. In the immediate moment, most comply silently – standing stiffly or contorting into the required pose with head lowered – because resistance would only prolong the ordeal. Internally, however, they described feelings of humiliation and even anger. Being physically singled out or made to do something ridiculous triggers feelings of public ridicule ("everyone is looking

at me and laughing"). "It's more traumatic than just getting scolded," said one boy, "because your friends laugh, and you feel totally ashamed." Several students noted that even the threat of these punishments – a teacher reaching for the stick or ominously saying "Do you want to go stand outside?" – was enough to make their "heart skip a beat" and compel immediate obedience (Classroom observations, Class IX).

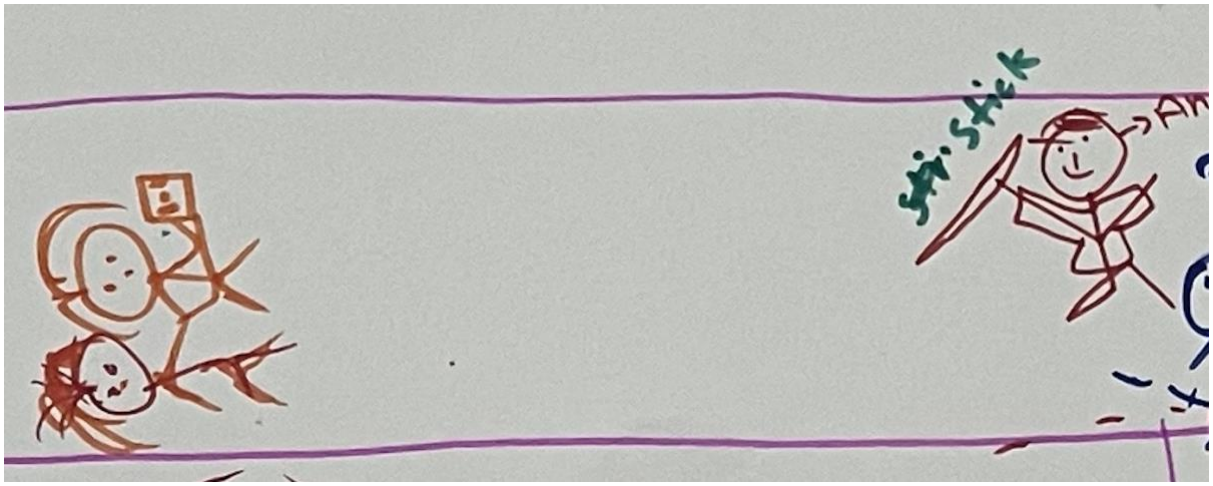


Figure 4: Teacher awaiting students with stick in corridor

Description: *Two students walk down a corridor toward a teacher who stands at the far end holding a stick with a smirk. The students' hesitant posture conveys fear and the imminence of punishment. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

This atmosphere is captured in a student's illustration in Figure 4, depicting two children seated at their desks, their postures tense and eyes wide with apprehension, as a teacher stands nearby clutching a stick. The teacher's expression—a knowing smirk—signals a conscious awareness of the power he wields in that moment. The intent behind this pose is unmistakable: the teacher is not simply holding the stick as an idle threat, but as a deliberate tool, weaponizing dread and expectation to control behavior. The children's body language—shoulders hunched, hands gripping the edge of their desks—makes visible their inner turmoil, the silent fear that the stick could be used at any moment. This visual narrative distills the practice described above: punishment does not always need to be enacted physically to exert

its full force. The student has labeled the object in the teacher's hand — "sir['s] stick" — leaving no ambiguity about what the raised implement is, and has drawn the teacher with a smirk while the two children approach with visibly fearful faces. The labeling turns the stick from a background detail into the focal threat the drawing is about, underscoring how the mere display of the cane governs behavior without a blow being struck (see Appendix A).

The mere presence of the stick, combined with the teacher's calculated look, is enough to keep students in a state of anxious vigilance. In this classroom tableau, discipline operates through both the overt threat of violence and the psychological manipulation of fear, transforming the everyday act of sitting in class into a fraught experience. The image thus encapsulates how authority is performed and internalized—how children are conditioned to self-police, constantly attuned to subtle cues from adults, and how teachers, in turn, maintain control not only through enacted punishments, but through the ever-present possibility of shaming and pain. This reinforces the larger argument that classroom discipline in this context is as much about managing emotion and expectation as it is about actual acts of reprimand or violence.

Over time, an atmosphere of constant anxiety can set in – students become perpetually afraid of inadvertently triggering such punishment and shame. One parent (PS4) recalled that in his own school days, classmates who were repeatedly beaten and shamed eventually became "psychologically paralyzed" – they lost all confidence and learned only to comply meekly (PS5, parent interview). The student interviews suggest that while not every child reaches that extreme, many do experience heightened stress and caution in class due to these practices. Some students attempt to cope by numbing themselves – for example, those labeled "shameless" might begin acting as if they truly don't care, since they've been shamed so

often. However, even these students, when probed, confessed that it does hurt; their stoicism is a result of having been embarrassed too frequently, not a sign that the practice is harmless.

Rationalizing Performative Punishment: Many teachers at the school believe that strict punishments and a dose of fear are necessary to maintain order, especially in large, lively classes. They often frame these methods as being "for the child's own good." Some even discuss them with a hint of pride or humor, indicating how normalized they are in staff culture. For instance, one senior teacher (T3), known for her toughness, bluntly stated that if instilling discipline requires making a student stand out or even giving a slap, "I am willing to do it" (T3, teacher interview). She described how with one particularly unruly boy, she kept him under near-constant watch and made him stand up at the slightest provocation – a strategy of perpetual surveillance and intimidation to rein him in.

In her words, if the child feels "24-hour eyes" on him, half his mischief is already curtailed. This reveals a deliberate use of omnipresent shame as a behavior management tool – the idea that the anticipation of being singled out at any moment will itself deter misbehavior. Other teachers echoed similar tactics: one recounted making a noisy student do a mock "fashion show walk" in front of the class to demonstrate how to enter properly (T3, teacher interview). The teacher narrated this anecdote with a chuckle, suggesting she viewed it as a clever, lighthearted way to teach a lesson. However, this mirth hints that teachers might underestimate the humiliation the child experiences – what seems like a brief, humorous incident to the teacher might be a scarring moment for the student (Deb, Chatterjee, & Walsh, 2010).

For their part, teachers generally claim that these methods "work" – at least in the short term. They observe that a student who is made to stand or endure embarrassment often quiets down immediately, and that others also fall in line after seeing a peer punished. In line with cultural

norms of strict discipline, teachers see this as proof that fear, and shame are effective deterrents. Indeed, teachers in traditional settings often conflate student silence or compliance with successful discipline. However, they may not see the longer-term consequences – such as reduced participation, resentment, or emotional distress – since those manifests subtly or later. Some teachers did show a degree of reflection: one admitted that "sometimes we say so much [to a child] that they become emotional," acknowledging that she has seen students tear up or shut down after a prolonged scolding about their parents (T2, teacher interview, informal comment). Yet, she interpreted the tears as a sign the message "hit home" rather than as an indication to change approach. In essence, most teachers calibrate their use of shame-based punishments by immediate classroom control outcomes, not by the emotional well-being of the student.

In summary, physical and performative punishments in this school serve as both corporeal and symbolic enforcement of authority. They leverage the body and the social setting to communicate shame. While effective in commanding instant obedience, these practices raise serious concerns about their impact on student well-being. Numerous studies have condemned corporal punishment and public humiliation for eroding trust and psychological safety in learning environments (Kacker et al., 2007). The findings echo those critiques. Students may outwardly conform, but the internal consequences – fear, humiliation, loss of confidence – can be far-reaching. Nonetheless, within the school's cultural context, these methods persist, bolstered by beliefs in their necessity and by the memories of parents and teachers who endured the same. This highlights a pattern of intergenerational normalization of shame and violence as discipline. In the next section, I shift focus to a different in-class tactic: using peer comparisons and academic performance to shame students.

4.3 Peer Comparisons and Academic Shaming

Description of Practice: Another prevalent shaming practice is the use of peer comparisons to spur better performance or behavior. Teachers frequently juxtapose one student against another – praising a high-achieving or well-behaved student to implicitly criticize those who are lagging. This can occur in academic contexts (e.g., comparing test scores or answers) or behavioral contexts (e.g., comparing attentiveness or neatness). The effect is to create a sense of competitive shame: the underperforming student feels embarrassed for not measuring up to the peer who is held up as an example. Instead of a direct insult, it is an indirect but clear invidious comparison that communicates disapproval.

One common manifestation of this in the school is the public display of academic rankings or results. One teacher (T7) described how they would post the names of the top three exam scorers on a chart at the front of the class. Interestingly, this practice was initiated due to some parents' pressure – a few high-achieving students' parents wanted public recognition for their children. "Parents themselves said, 'Our child came first, why didn't you write it on the board?' So, we do it – we show first, second, third," the teacher explained (T7, teacher interview). The intent might be to reward excellence, but the flip side is that those not on the list inevitably feel inferior. Students who rank lower are confronted daily with the conspicuous absence of their name from the "honors board" – a constant reminder of their lower status.

The teacher confirmed that even a student who came fourth or fifth (just missing the cut) felt embarrassed and disappointed seeing their name omitted. She recounted an incident where a teacher pointed out to a child, "देखो, तुम्हारा नाम नहीं है बोर्ड पे" – "Look, your name isn't on the board," – clearly to chide the child for not performing well enough (T7, teacher interview). In this way, academic ranking becomes public shaming: success is made visible, and by

contrast, others' lack of success is also made visible. A practice meant as positive reinforcement for some unavoidably serves as negative reinforcement for others. This resonates with broader critiques that rank-order systems in schools often breed unhealthy comparison and shame in those left behind (Garvin, 1967).

Teachers also employ verbal comparisons during lessons. One student (S5) recalled a scenario where a normally quiet, average student managed to answer a question correctly while many others could not. The teacher then said to the whole class (in Hindi), "तुम्हें इससे कुछ सीखना चाहिए… देखो उसने बता दिया और तुम लोग कुछ नहीं कर पाए" – "see how he effortlessly answered while you lot managed nothing/achieved nothing" (S5, student interview). The student recognized this as a form of humiliation – albeit milder than an outright insult – because the teacher's praise of that one peer carried an implied rebuke to everyone else. The message was essentially: "Even he could do it, why can't you? You should be ashamed that you didn't even try."

She noted that such public comparison "happens and is tolerated to some extent" – students see it as a common motivational tactic, though it still stings (S5, student interview). Another more extreme example of comparison shading into insult was mentioned earlier: a teacher scolded a group of underperformers by saying they should be so ashamed that "a kid like him answered, so you all should go down." In that case, the teacher not only elevated one student to shame the others (implying "even this child managed it") but also delivered a direct humiliation on top ("go drown"). This illustrates how teachers can weaponize comparisons with harsh language to intensify the shame – effectively combining peer comparison with verbal abuse (blending the tactics of Sections 4.1 and 4.4).

Beyond academics, teachers compare students' behavior and virtues as well. Several teachers mentioned using an "ideal student" as a model. "हम दूसरे बच्चों का एक्ज़ाम्पल देकर उनको समझाते हैं" – "We

give the example of other children to make them understand," said one teacher about managing a disrespectful student (T7, teacher interview). For instance, a teacher might publicly say to a misbehaving child, "Why can't you behave like X, who sits quietly and listens?" Here, a well-behaved peer becomes the benchmark. Another teacher (T3) would often contrast a troublesome student with obedient ones: effectively saying, "Look how nicely Y and Z are doing, and look at you." This peer benchmarking is intended to make the miscreant feel ashamed for standing out as "the bad one" and to encourage them to emulate the "good" peers. It's a more indirect shaming than yelling "you're bad," but it can be quite potent, especially when done publicly – the targeted student is made to feel "less than" their classmates.

The Affective Toll of Comparative Shaming: Being unfavorably compared to a peer can evoke feelings of inferiority, resentment, or discouragement among students (Li et al., 2024). Some internalize the criticism – feeling, as S5 did, that their worth has diminished or that they are failing not just in that task but "as a student overall." This can lead to reduced participation (some children withdraw to avoid further comparison) or a hit to self-confidence. For instance, a child who constantly hears "Why can't you be like so-and-so?" may start believing they are inherently less capable. On the other hand, a few students react with quiet resentment or rationalization. One student in an interview muttered that when a teacher compared him to a classmate who did better, he thought to himself, "Of course he could do it, he has tuition classes and I don't," but he would never say this aloud (fieldnotes, student interview). He just swallowed the comparison silently. This indicates a potential hidden curriculum of shame: students learn to compare themselves and sometimes feel bitterness or unfairness, but they keep it inside, which can breed cynicism or disengagement. It is worth marking precisely what these students were being shamed *for*. Unlike the conduct-based triggers that prompted much verbal and performative discipline — talking out of turn,

incomplete homework, disruption — comparative and academic shaming was overwhelmingly triggered by *capability*: being unable to answer, scoring poorly, or failing to grasp a concept. This is an important distinction, because the two collapse in practice. When a child is shamed for misbehavior, the implicit message is "you made a bad choice"; when a child is shamed for inability, the message slides into "you are deficient." This helps explain why students subjected to comparison so often reported feeling they were failing "as a student overall" rather than at a particular task: the shame attached to the self rather than the act, precisely because it targeted what they could not yet do rather than what they had chosen to do.

Socially, public comparisons can also strain peer relationships. If one student is constantly held up as the example, others might develop jealousy or label that student the "teacher's pet," isolating them. Conversely, the student who is shamed may begin to resent or dislike the peer who was praised (even though that peer did nothing wrong). "It's not that kid's fault, but I still felt upset with them," one girl admitted about a top-ranked classmate who was always praised (Teacher focus group discussion, Class X). Thus, teacher-driven comparisons can unintentionally pit students against each other, undermining camaraderie and peer support.

Notably mild comparison as a motivational tool is so ingrained that many students have come to accept it as normal. S5's comment that such humiliation "happens to some extent" and is "chalta hai" (tolerable) reflects a degree of cultural acceptance of competitive shame. If the teacher's language isn't too harsh, students often grin and bear it – and some even say it pushes them to improve. A few conceded that while they disliked being compared, it sometimes spurred them to study harder "out of pride." They wanted to prove they could also get their name on the board next time or avoid being the only one without homework done when others were praised. This suggests that for some, the impact of shame-based

comparison is double-edged: it can hurt self-esteem, yet it can also ignite a performance-driven motivation to avoid future shame (Li et al., 2024). In educational psychology terms, it may foster performance-avoidance goals (trying not to perform worse than others to save face), which can yield short-term results but at some cost to intrinsic motivation and healthy learning habits (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

Rationalizing Comparison as Motivation: Teachers consciously use peer comparisons because they believe it can spur competition and effort (Syukur et al., 2025). In their view, some students need a "push," and seeing a peer succeed might either inspire them or at least shame them out of complacency. Many teachers feel it's only fair to publicly praise the achievers and simultaneously point out others' lack of effort – essentially a one-two strategy of commendation for some and critique for others. They generally do not view this as cruel; rather, they frame it as "setting standards" and being transparent about who is doing well and who isn't. One teacher (T3) mentioned that after she publicly reprimands a student, she often explicitly notes how others were doing the right thing – a carrot-and-stick approach where the "stick" of shame for one serve as a warning to all, and the "carrot" of public praise for other serves as the goal for the rest (T3, teacher interview).

Interestingly, parents also engage in and recognize this practice, creating continuity between school and home. One mother (PS9) admitted that she has at times echoed the teacher's approach by comparing her son to other children. She recounted that in moments of frustration over her son's grades, she might say, "Look at that other child, see how well they are doing," essentially shaming her son for lagging. When asked directly if she uses the Hindi phrase "देखो, दूसरे बच्चे को…" ("Look at the other kid…"), she laughed and said, "हाँ, कभी-कभी ग़ुस्से में बोल देती हूँ" – "Yes, sometimes I do say that when I'm angry" (PS9, parent interview).

This candid admission shows that the shaming-by-comparison tactic is mirrored at home. Parents have culturally learned this technique as well – often because they themselves experienced it growing up. Another father (PS5) noted that teachers often compare a struggling student's marks to a brighter peer or sibling, and he reflected that such lofty comparisons tend to demotivate more than inspire: it "just makes them feel bad about themselves," rather than showing them how to improve (PS5, parent interview). He gave an example: telling a child "You got 60 and someone else got 80, why can't you be like them?" only embarrasses the child and might breed bitterness, without offering any constructive help. This parental perspective underlines that shame via comparison can backfire, instilling feelings of inadequacy instead of motivation.

In the classroom, these comparisons foster a somewhat hierarchical atmosphere. High achievers may enjoy the praise but also feel pressure to maintain their status ("If I drop from the top 3, I'll feel ashamed after being celebrated"). Lower achievers may disengage or internalize a negative self-image as "the dumb one" or "the bad one." At home, when parents use similar comparisons ("Your classmate won a prize and you didn't," "Your cousin does his homework on time, why don't you?"), it can create sibling rivalry or the sense that parental love is conditional on achievement. A child might feel that both teacher and parent agree that they're not good enough, which is quite demoralizing.

On the positive side, some students do channel the pressure into harder work – essentially to "save face." This aligns with certain cultural values where family honor or personal honor is a motivator; a student might think, "I don't want to look like a failure next to my peers, so I must push myself." Indeed, a few students in the study nodded that while they disliked it, being compared did spur them at times to "work harder out of shame." This complicates the picture: shame as motivation can "work," but it often comes with stress and potential damage

to one's emotional well-being. Educational literature notes that performance-avoidance goals (trying not to perform worse than others) are linked to anxiety and lower intrinsic interest in learning (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). My field data exemplify this: students were motivated to avoid the negative feeling of shame, not necessarily to pursue genuine mastery of material.

In sum, peer comparison and academic shaming is a deeply ingrained practice in the school. It leverages social comparison – a powerful psychological force among adolescents – to regulate behavior and effort (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). While it can yield short-term compliance or heightened effort (nobody wants to be the only one left off the "good" list), it carries risks: resentment, anxiety, and a sense of inferiority can take root (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). This theme highlights how the classroom becomes not just a learning space but a site of constant social evaluation, where children measure themselves against each other under the teacher's direction. The practice reflects broader societal norms of competition and honor: as one teacher reportedly put it, "If one boy can do it, the rest should feel shame and try too." This practice is a double-edged sword—largely accepted as normal by the school community, even as some thoughtful voices (e.g., a few parents or educational counselors) caution against overusing it. In the next section, I examine a more emotional form of shaming: fear-based appeals to future consequences (and sometimes invoking family honor) to alarm students into compliance.

4.4 Fear Appeals and Threats of Future Failure

Complementing the shame-based tactics described above, teachers (and some parents) use fear appeals about students' futures – even invoking family sacrifice or honor – to discipline in the present. In this theme, the shaming comes from vividly describing the kind of low-

status job or hardship the child will end up in as an adult due to their current failings, thereby shaming them with the prospect of future social humiliation and regret. The underlying message is: "If you don't study/behave now, you will become a nobody and bring shame upon yourself (and your family) in the future." This technique instills present shame by painting a picture of the student's "shameful" future self. This reflects the psychological mechanism of "fear appeals," where negative consequences are highlighted to motivate action (Putwain & Remedios, 2014).

Students recounted hearing many such scenarios. Common refrains from teachers included lines like "तुम आगे चलके कुछ नहीं बनोगे" – "You will become nothing in life," or more concretely "आगे चलकर सब्जी बेचोगे/ऑटो चलाओगे" – "In the future you'll be selling vegetables or driving an auto-rickshaw" if you don't focus on studies. One striking classroom example involved a teacher taunting a boy from a vegetable-seller's family: "आपके पेरेंट्स सब्जी बेचते हैं, तो अच्छा टमाटर ही बेचना है क्या तुमको?" – "Your parents sell vegetables, so do you also just want to sell tomatoes for the rest of your life?" (S1 & S2, art-based Activity).

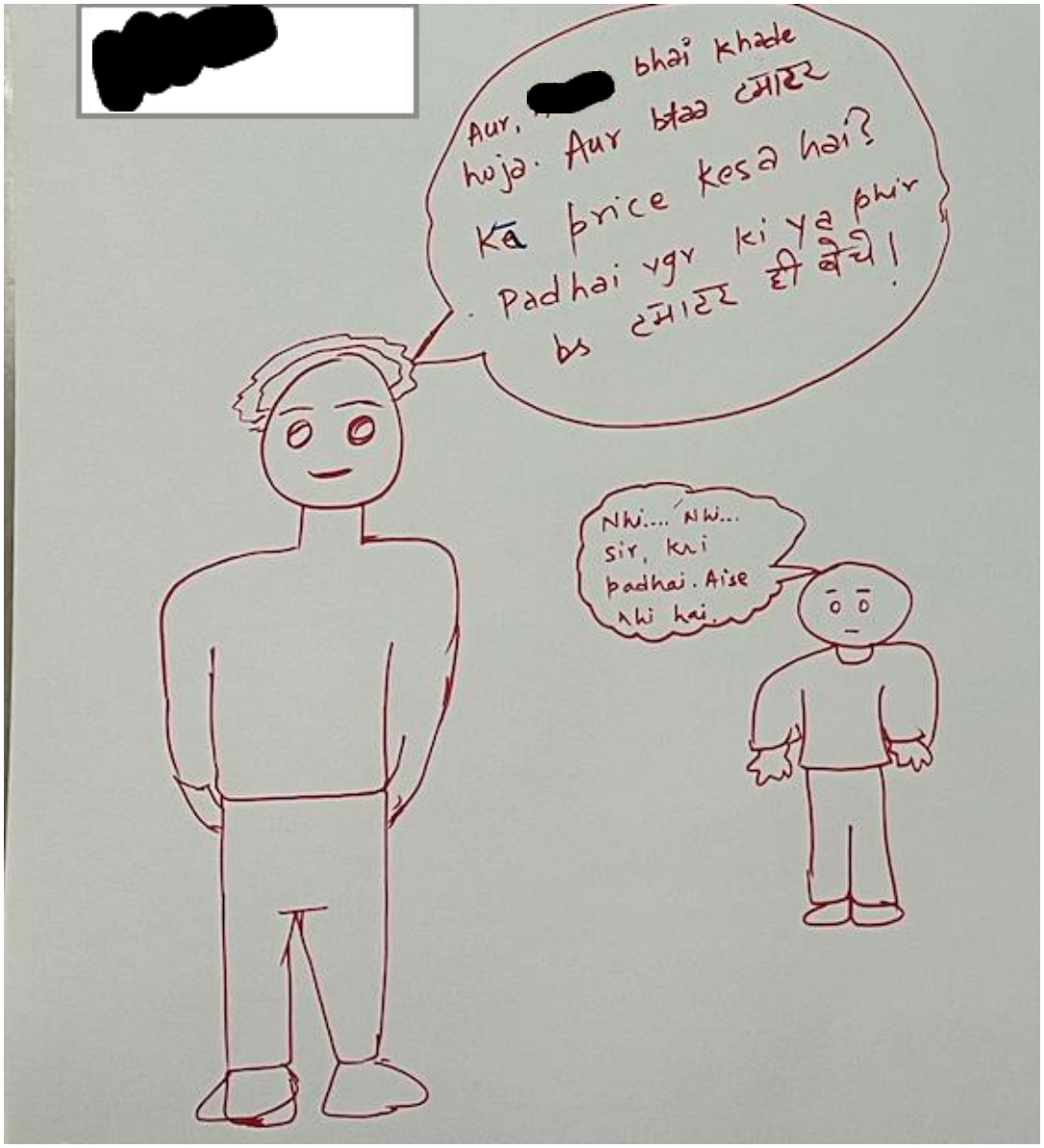


Figure 5: Class-based taunt— "study or sell tomatoes?"

Description: *A teacher has a student stand, asks the price of tomatoes, then presses, "Do you want to study or sell tomatoes for the rest of your life?" The exchange invokes the student's family occupation to shame perceived underperformance, contrasting "becoming something" with selling vegetables to coerce compliance. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

Another striking illustration, contributed by a student and shown in Figure 5, captured the same motif of future shame tied to family background. In this scene, a teacher calls out to a boy in class, pointedly asking, "What's the price of tomatoes these days?"—a question loaded with implication, since the child's father is a vegetable vendor. The student, taken

aback and confused, hesitates to answer. The teacher presses further: “So, were you busy selling tomatoes at home, or did you actually study?” The subtext, delivered in front of peers, is painfully clear: the teacher is insinuating that the child’s destiny is limited to selling vegetables, rather than achieving academic success. The words the student gave the teacher in the drawing make the taunt explicit: *“Aur bhai khade ho ja. Aur bata, tamatar ka price kaisa hai? Padhai-vagairah ki, ya phir bas tamatar hi beche?”* (“So, brother, stand up. Go on, tell me — how’s the price of tomatoes? Did you study and all, or did you just sell tomatoes?”). The teacher — drawn larger, with a smirk, facing a smaller, fearful student — ridicules the boy by invoking his family’s trade, fusing academic underperformance with the stigma of vegetable-selling (full transcription and translation in Appendix A).

This scenario not only singles out the boy’s family occupation as a mark of shame but also frames his academic standing as evidence of being “fit” only for manual labor. The power of this moment lies in its immediacy and specificity—an everyday exchange that swiftly transforms a classroom interaction into a public lesson on social hierarchy and the weight of inherited status. Such illustrations underscore the recurring pattern in which shaming is personalized, connecting the present classroom moment to the broader anxieties about social mobility and family honor, and setting the stage for the deeper analysis of how these practices shape identity and aspiration in young learners.

This comment not only insulted the student’s current family occupation (tying into Theme 5.4 on socioeconomic shaming), but also directly warned the child that he is headed for that same menial future – framed as a shameful fate – if he doesn’t change his ways. The teacher essentially portrayed the student’s potential future working in the vegetable market as a kind of doom that the student should be ashamed to fall into. This scenario illustrates a blend of present shaming and future threat: the student is shamed in the moment (“you’re doing

nothing now") and simultaneously made to fear a lifetime of shame ("you'll never rise above your parents' low status").

Teachers often paint these future-failure scenarios in lurid detail. Parents reported, for example, that teachers would say things like "तुम बर्तन धोओगे, ईंटें ढोओगे, मज़दूरी करोगे" – "You'll be washing dishes, carrying bricks, working as a laborer," if you don't study. By invoking such manual, low-paying jobs – which in the local context are considered undesirable and embarrassing for someone who had the chance to be educated – teachers tap into socioeconomic stigma. Fear appeals are more harmful when students have lower academic self-efficacy, amplifying distress especially in socioeconomically marginalized contexts (Belcher et al., 2022). No parent in this school community wants their child to end up a daily wage laborer after paying for education. In effect, the teacher is saying: "Not only will you fail yourself, but you'll also fulfill society's low expectations by ending up in a shameful situation." The humiliation is projected forward in time but is felt in the present as a strong rebuke.

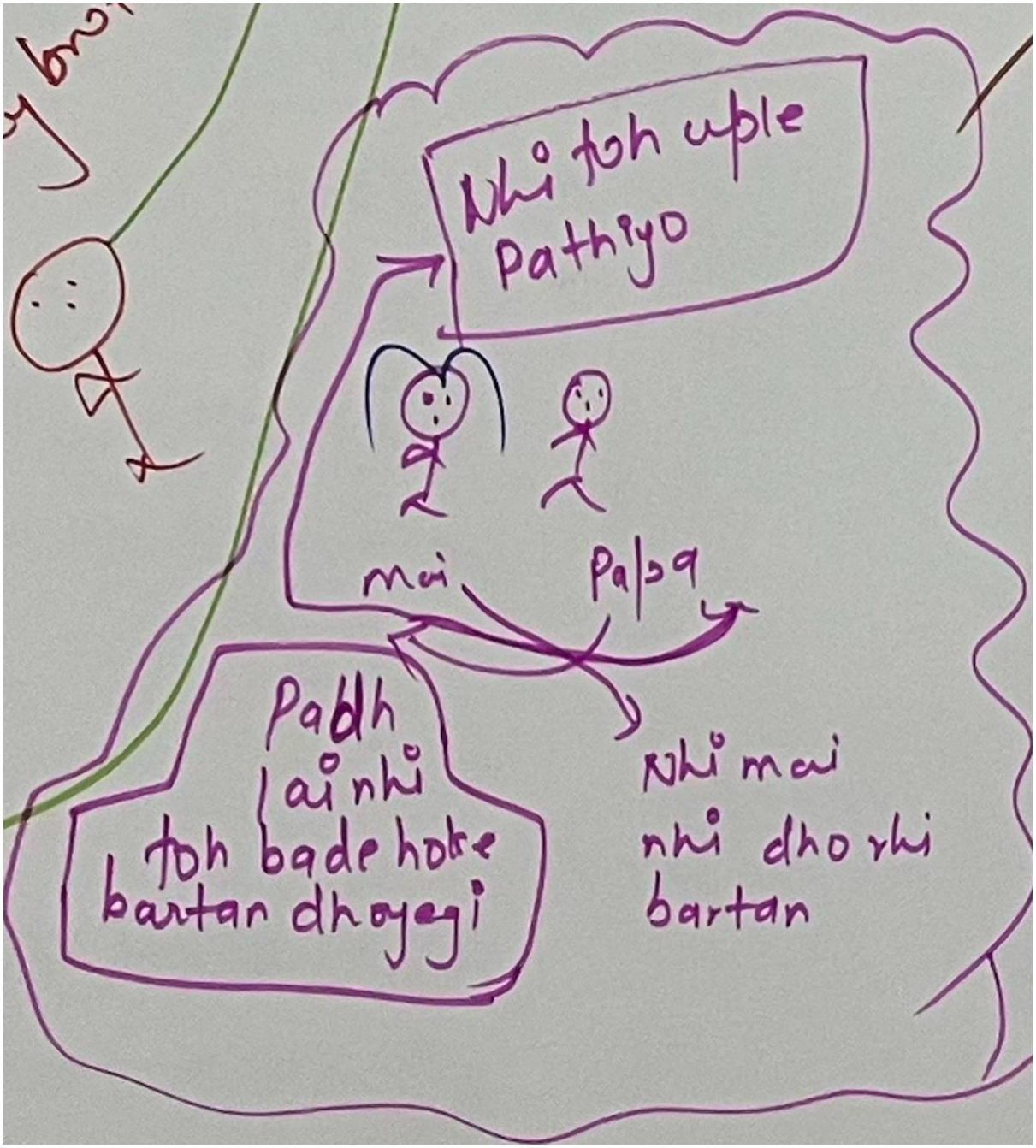


Figure 6: Parental threat invoking gendered domestic labor

Description: *A parent warns a daughter to study or "you will end up washing utensils for your in-laws." When she resists, the parent escalates: "then you will be putting upla (cow-dung cakes) on the wall," invoking rural domestic labor to shame and coerce compliance. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

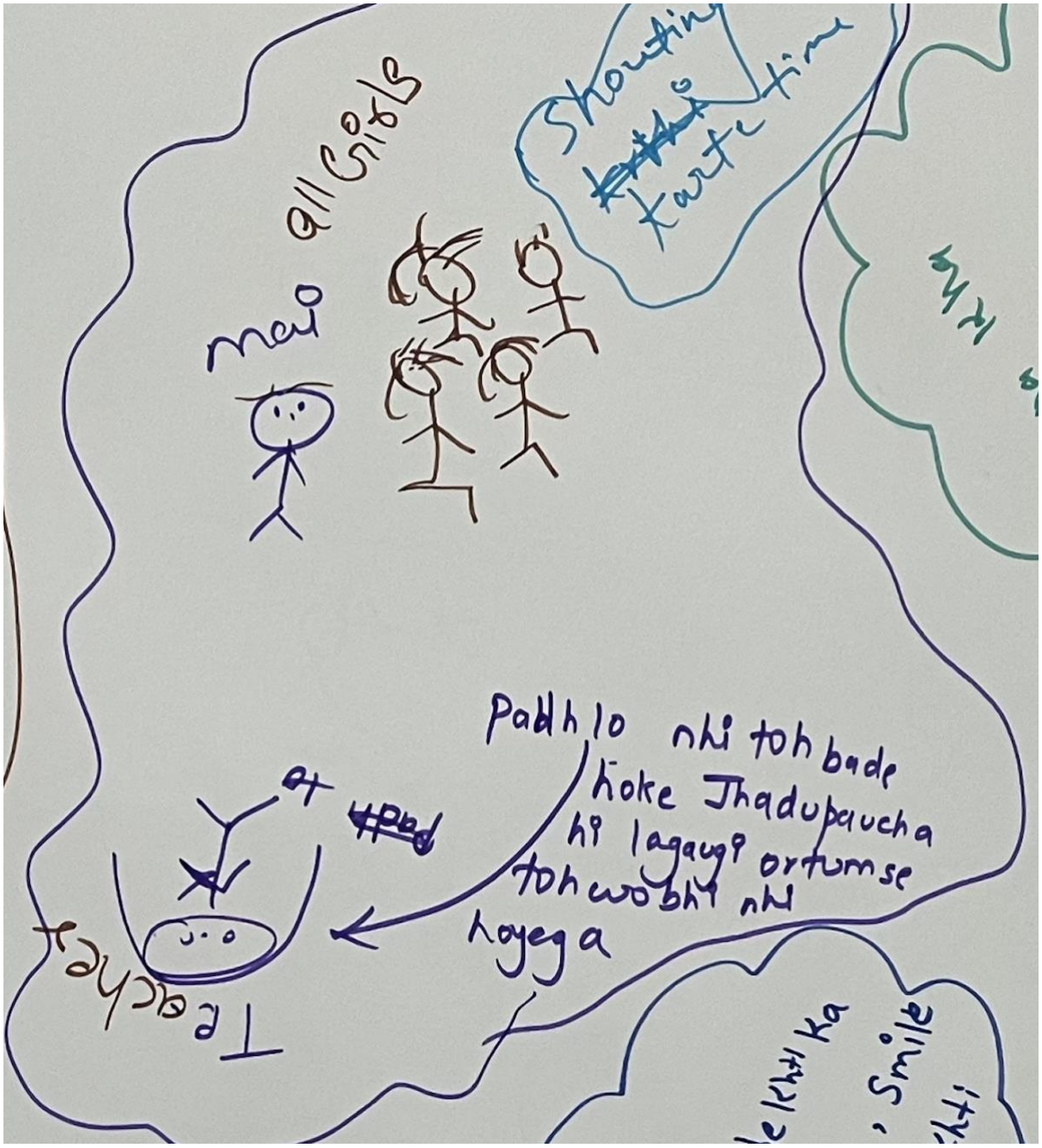


Figure 7: Gendered threat— "cleaning at your in-laws' homes"

Description: *A female teacher addresses students who are talking loudly, warning that if they do not study, they will end up cleaning and sweeping houses—specifically at their in-laws' homes. She escalates that they "might not be good enough even for that," deploying gendered, class-coded shame to enforce compliance. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

Two student illustrations, Figure 6 and Figure 7, further capture how these gender-based and moral shaming messages are brought to life in everyday discourse. In Figure 6, a parent is

depicted admonishing their daughter: “If you don’t study, you’ll end up washing utensils,” unmistakably referencing the fate of being married off young and consigned to menial domestic work in her husband’s household. The comment carries an implicit warning that academic failure will strip her of autonomy, relegating her to the lowest rung of household respectability—a message saturated with both gendered expectation and shame. In Figure 7, a teacher is shown telling a student that if they don’t apply themselves, they will be “good enough to clean houses.” In the child’s own hand the exchange reads: *“Padh le, nahi to bade hoke bartan dhoyegi”* (“Study, otherwise when you grow up you’ll be washing utensils”); the daughter answers back, *“Nahi, main nahi dho rahi bartan”* (“No, I’m not going to wash utensils”); and the parent escalates, *“Nahi to uple poatiyo”* (“Otherwise you’ll be plastering cow-dung cakes”) — a child who talks back rather than simply absorbing the threat (see Appendix A).

Here, the classroom scene crystallizes the teacher’s authority to define—and limit—a student’s future, mapping a lack of academic achievement directly onto a social status marked by servitude and stigma. Both images not only reveal the content of these shaming remarks but also how they are visually internalized by students, exposing the ways in which gendered roles and moral judgments are repeatedly invoked to discipline, warn, and ultimately define what is considered a respectable future. These everyday exchanges, made tangible through the students’ art, highlight how shaming is not merely a fleeting verbal reprimand but an enduring narrative that shapes identity and aspiration in ways both explicit and deeply personal. The teacher’s line, as the student wrote it, reads: *“Padh lo, nahi to bade hoke jhadu-pocha hi lagaogi, aur tumse to wo bhi nahi hoga”* (“Study, otherwise when you grow up you’ll end up only sweeping and mopping — and you won’t even be good enough for that”). Addressed to a group of girls the child labeled *“shouting karte time”* (shouting and

making a ruckus), the remark welds a gendered, class-coded future to a further humiliation — that they would fail even at that (full transcription in Appendix A).

Fear Appeals in the Home: This technique is mirrored, and sometimes amplified, by parents at home. One mother (PS9) provided a vivid account of how she herself used a real-life fear appeal to jolt her son into realizing the importance of education. Noticing he was neglecting his studies; she physically took him outside and pointed to a teenage boy pulling a cycle-rickshaw on the street. She told her son that this boy likely had no education and that's why he was forced to do such hard labor. Then she asked her son pointedly if he wanted a similar future for himself (PS9, parent interview). She recalls telling him in essence: "देखो, वह लड़का रिक्शा चला रहा है… शायद उसे पढ़ने का मौका नहीं मिला, इसलिए उसे यह करना पड़ रहा है. अगर तुम्हारे पास मौका होते हुए भी तुम नहीं पढ़ोगे, तो तुम्हें भी ऐसा ही करना पड़ेगा." – "Look, that boy is driving a rickshaw… perhaps he didn't get a chance to study, that's why he must do this. If you have the opportunity and still don't study, you'll have to do the same." The mother noted that this real-life demonstration terrified her son; he immediately imagined the loss of dignity and hardship that would come with such a life. She effectively shamed him by associating his current laziness with a future identity he would find shameful. This aligns with research showing that Indian parents often use real-life fear appeals to enforce the value of education (Mak, 2021). Studies also show that while fear appeals can temporarily boost compliance, they may harm intrinsic motivation and well-being if overused (Putwain et al., 2021).

Another parent, a father (PS2), similarly mentioned using this strategy. He would ask his children, "क्या तुम हमारे जैसे ज़िंदगी बिताना चाहोगे?" – "Do you want to live a life like ours?" (PS2, parent interview), referencing the struggles he and the mother face to make ends meet. The insinuation is that if the child doesn't excel, they'll be stuck in the same cycle of hardship (or worse). In this way, parents join teachers in conjuring the specter of a bleak, shame-laden

future to spur the child. It's noteworthy that parents who use this approach often come from the very backgrounds they're warning about – they know first-hand how hard a life of physical labor or menial jobs is, and they genuinely don't want their children to endure the same. So, there is authentic concern and urgency behind their words, even if it manifests as a harsh fear tactic. Studies show that while fear appeals can temporarily boost compliance, they may harm intrinsic motivation and well-being if overused (Putwain et al., 2021).

The Affective Toll of Fear Appeals: Fear appeals about the future often hit students hard, especially those in higher classes (IX or X) who are on the cusp of important exams and decisions. Many students admitted these warnings do make them worry. Some described lying awake at night thinking, "What if I do end up like that?" The immediate emotional reaction is usually a mix of fear, anxiety, and indignation. Such emotional responses align with findings that fear appeals—particularly when they focus on possible life failures—can increase stress and internal conflict in students, especially adolescents (Rožman, Vrečko, & Tominc, 2025). The student may feel frightened – the image of themselves as a struggling, ridiculed adult is scary – and at the same time feel insulted that the teacher thinks so poorly of them.

One student said he initially felt angry – "I won't become that, why is Sir saying it?" – but later understood it was meant to make him serious. This indicates a kind of cognitive dissonance such tactics create: on one hand, the student wants to reject the notion that they'll fail ("I'm not that hopeless!"), but on the other hand, they can't fully shake the doubt the teacher has planted ("But what if I don't improve?"). It forces them to confront an uncomfortable possible self. This phenomenon is consistent with psychological models showing that negatively framed future outcomes can evoke cognitive dissonance, which, if

unmediated by support, often results in anxiety and decreased academic motivation (Putwain & Remedios, 2014).

In class, when a teacher delivers a future-threat message, it often silences the student deeply – typically they won't talk back, just lower their eyes. Arguing might seem to prove the teacher's point that they are not respectful or serious. The shame here is somewhat different from immediate scolding – it's prospective shame: the student is made to feel embarrassed in anticipation of what they might become. It's almost existential, causing the student to question their life trajectory and identity. Some students described it as haunting, because it's not just a momentary scold that passes, but an idea that sticks in their head: "Sir said I'll be nothing… what if that's true?" Research in moral education suggests that when shame is tied to one's future identity or worth, its psychological impact can linger, affecting students' self-concept and behavior long after the event (Li, 2025).

The impact on well-being can include significant stress and demotivation if overdone. A few students expressed that constantly being told they'll be failures made them feel fatalistic or depressed. One confided, "Sometimes I feel maybe I really won't become anything, then I lose hope." (S3, student interview). This is the flip side – instead of motivating, it can sap a child's confidence if they start to believe the doomsday scenarios. Ideally, such warnings might be used sparingly and paired with encouragement ("You don't want that future, so come on, you can do better"), but if a child mostly hears the negative without support, it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy by crushing their spirit. This echoes research on performance pressure, which shows that repetitive negative messaging can lead to learned helplessness and performance-avoidance behavior, particularly when not balanced with positive reinforcement (Samaratunga & Kamardeen, 2025). The data show both effects

occurring: some students are challenged by the fear appeal ("I'll prove them wrong"), while others feel threatened and overwhelmed ("Maybe I am doomed").

Rationalizing Fear as Motivation: Teachers use fear appeals because they tap into a culturally salient fear of downward mobility. In this community, as in many places, not "becoming something" – i.e., failing to attain a respectable profession or at least a stable livelihood – is indeed a source of shame for both individual and family. Teachers, especially veteran ones, have likely seen former students who failed exams or dropped out and ended up in unskilled jobs, so they present these real cautionary tales to current students. They might say, "I've seen alumni who didn't listen and now they're doing odd jobs and earning nothing."

This gives weight to their warnings. One senior teacher mentioned he sometimes even brings up examples of older siblings or neighbors who wasted their education and struggled later, as a concrete illustration. Teachers tend to justify this as "brutal honesty"; they believe they are showing students a truthful mirror of the future to jolt them out of complacency. Some even phrase it as a kindness: "Better they feel a little fear/shame now than a lot of shame later in life." In their eyes, instilling a bit of fear and shame about the future is a preventative measure – a tough love approach that will save the child from a worse fate. This echoes the logic behind certain "scared straight" programs (though those are controversial in research).

Parents, as shown by the examples above, similarly feel that scaring children about their future can be necessary. Many parents in the study did not have highly educated backgrounds themselves, and they keenly feel the difference that education (or lack thereof) made in their own lives. By warning their children "Do you want to end up struggling like us or worse?", they hope to instill ambition and urgency. The parental perspective often has an emotional

tinge: it's not just about societal status, but the fear that their beloved child will suffer or be looked down upon.

Thus, when parents use these appeals, it often comes from a place of concern and even desperation – they need their child to seize the opportunities they perhaps never had. PS4, who is himself a teacher, reflected on this dynamic: he said when he was young, some teachers used so much fear that one of his classmates basically gave up on himself; thus, he cautions moderation – "Fear should be there, but not to this extent." (PS4, parent interview). He understands the intent of such warnings but is wary of "overkill," having seen the negative impact on a peer. This parental reflection aligns with research that while fear appeals can motivate some, they can also paralyze others.

Classroom and Home Dynamics: In the classroom, fear appeals—a psychological mechanism where negative consequences are highlighted to motivate action (Putwain & Remedios, 2014)—can sometimes unite students momentarily – they all share the same boat of anxiety about the future. When a teacher says, "you'll all end up selling vegetables," even if it's directed at one kid, others feel the sting by association (especially if they too are not doing well academically). It reinforces a general competitive urgency: nobody wants to be left behind in life, so they all strive harder, or at least worry collectively. This type of fear-based messaging is closely tied to performance pressure, a major source of student stress that negatively impacts mental well-being and academic performance if not balanced with support (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015).

However, it can also reinforce stigma toward certain professions. By consistently using "vegetable seller" or "rickshaw puller" as synonyms for failure, the school discourse is teaching children to view those jobs with disdain. Such comparisons not only reinforce stigma toward manual labor but also exacerbate academic anxiety among students by linking

social identity with failure (Rahman et al., 2025). Research shows that schools, as agents of moral socialization, can reproduce societal prejudices and marginalize manual laborers by framing their work as undesirable or shameful (Goodman & Cook, 2019). In essence, a disciplinary practice meant for individual motivation also transmits a message about social hierarchy and respectability, which is problematic.

At home, such fear-based shaming can cause tension in parent-child interactions. A child might retort (if bold enough) to a parent, "Why do you always say I'll be nothing? Have some faith in me." This could embarrass the parent (for being so harsh) or escalate into an argument. On the other hand, if the child heeds the warning and improves, the parent-child dynamic might improve as well – the parent may praise the child for avoiding that feared outcome, essentially using fear as the stick and then love as the carrot when the child complies. One mother noted that after her "rickshaw" talk, when her son's grades improved a bit, she made sure to acknowledge it and say, "Good, keep this up and you won't have to worry about that." So, it can also become a narrative of redemption: you were headed for shame, but now you're on track for pride. It's a high-pressure narrative, however.

Overall, fear appeals about future failure function as a forward-looking shaming practice. They extend the lens beyond the here-and-now, using the potential of future stigma to enforce discipline in the present. This theme shows how notions of shame are not only tied to current behavior but are leveraged as a preventative measure: "Behave now or you will be ashamed later." It's a powerful psychological strategy that taps into both personal fears and cultural expectations about success. However, it must be calibrated carefully. The findings, in line with educational psychology research, suggest that such appeals can motivate students who interpret them as a challenge to overcome, but can demoralize those who feel overwhelmed by the threat. Studies emphasize that fear appeals may be motivating for some students when

framed as challenges, but they are more likely to demotivate when perceived as threats (Putwain & Remedios, 2014). The school's use of these fear appeals reflects an environment very much focused on outcomes and the future – unsurprising in a context where education is seen as the ticket to upward mobility. Yet it also underscores an atmosphere of anxiety, where even childhood missteps are framed in terms of dire adult consequences.

4.5 Summary

This chapter documented the immediate, in-class repertoire of shame-based discipline in the case-study school: (1) public verbal humiliation and insults, (2) physical and performative punishments that publicly display students' bodies, (3) peer comparisons and academic shaming, and (4) fear appeals about future failure and social devaluation. Together, these core in-class techniques show that shame is produced through what is said, staged, and signaled in front of peers, helping to sustain a climate of strictness in everyday classroom life.

Across these four practices, a consistent mechanism recurs: public exposure turns discipline into a reputational event. Teachers leverage peers as an audience—through laughter, comparison, and witnessing—which intensifies emotional impact and encourages students to manage risk through silence, strategic compliance, or avoidance. These practices can deliver immediate order and short-term task completion, which helps explain why adults often rationalize them as "necessary" or even as care. Yet the same mechanisms also create the conditions for later harms traced in Chapter 6: withdrawal, reduced help-seeking, strained peer relations, and eroded trust. These are the foundations of what I later describe as a brittle form of order.

A further pattern cuts across all four mechanisms and warrants reflection: the question of difference and ability. The students most frequently and harshly shamed were, by teachers' own accounts, the "weak" students — those who struggled academically, were slow to grasp material, or repeatedly fell short of expectations. In a setting with no formal assessment for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), no learning-support provision, and large classes under intense exam pressure, there was no mechanism by which a learning difficulty, an undiagnosed disability, or simply a different pace of learning could be recognized as anything other than laziness or incapacity; a child who could not keep up was identified not as a child who learned differently but as a "dull" or "weak" one, and disciplined accordingly. This matters because it means shaming fell disproportionately on precisely those students least able to alter the behavior for which they were shamed — a dynamic the wider literature associates with the targeting of vulnerable learners, including those with disabilities, and the compounding of existing disadvantage (Cooley, 2018). This study did not set out to identify SEND among its participants and makes no claim about how many frequently-shamed students may have had unrecognized needs; that absence is itself part of the finding. In a school without the means to distinguish *won't* from *can't*, shame became the default response to both.

By establishing how shame is enacted moment-to-moment as a classroom management technology, Chapter 4 provides the empirical foundation for Chapter 5, which examines the cultural and relational routes that extend shame beyond the classroom—through home–school linkages, gendered expectations, and classed moral economies.

Chapter 5: Cultural and Relational of Shame

Building on the core in-class techniques described in Chapter 4—what is said, staged, and signaled in front of peers—this chapter examines the relational and sociocultural channels through which shame is amplified and normalized beyond the immediate lesson. In doing so, it shows how shame-based discipline is culturally scripted and reinforced across school and home. It assembles four vectors. First, threats to involve parents extend the moment of humiliation into the home, creating a "double exposure." Second, guilt-tripping via parents' sacrifices draws on family moral economies to compel obedience. Third, gendered moral expectations shape how boys and girls are policed and shamed. Fourth, socioeconomic positioning surfaces in class-coded taunts that stigmatize working-class identities.

Together, these routes show how shame flows across school and home and along social axes, reproducing authority, propriety and hierarchy. By shifting from technique to context, the chapter complements the previous taxonomy of tactics and addresses RQ2 by examining how cultural logics and power relations carry shaming into students' wider lifeworlds. In the episodes that follow, teachers are identified by code (T1–T14) and parents by the code of their child (so that PS2, for example, is a parent of student S2); the composition and characteristics of each participant group — the teachers' range of subjects, experience, and disciplinary styles, and the students' year groups and profiles — are summarized in Table 1 (Chapter 3). This coding allows the three perspectives brought together in many of the episodes below — those of the student, the teacher, and the parent — to be read in relation to one another.

5.1 Threats to Involve Parents (Extending Shame to Home)

Description of Practice: Another common disciplinary strategy is for teachers to invoke students' parents as enforcers of shame – typically by threatening to inform parents about the child's misbehavior or poor performance. This practice merges the school and home spheres: the teacher leverages the child's fear of parental disapproval as a tool for control in class. The most frequent form is the ominous warning, "I will call your parents," delivered in a stern tone. Students universally dread hearing "फोन कर दूंगा" – "I'll make a phone call [to your parents]." One student (S1) recounted that some teachers even performatively reach for the class register or the child's diary (which contains parent contact information) in front of everyone, announcing something like, "Let's take down your father's number now."

This very public gesture sends a wave of apprehension through the targeted student: not only are they being chastised now, but the incident may soon be broadcast to their family, multiplying the shame. In fact, students so fear this escalation that a few admitted to preemptive tactics: for example, intentionally "forgetting" to bring their school diary or ID card so the teacher cannot easily find their parent's phone number. As one student explained, "We rarely bring the diary on days we get in trouble, just in case Ma'am decides to call home" (S1, student interview). This small act of resistance speaks volumes – it shows that to students, involving parents is perceived as the "ultimate punishment." Even the threat is enough to induce compliance: students would often immediately apologize or plead when a teacher reached for the phone.

Teachers sometimes follow through by writing negative remarks in the student's diary or sending a formal note home. One teacher (T5) explained that for chronic issues like incomplete homework or repeated disruptions, she makes it a point to document the problem in a note to parents. "Writing a note in the diary about misbehavior… creates an external

avenue of shame – the child knows their failing will be revealed to their parents," she said (T5, teacher interview). The mere knowledge that a written record of their misconduct will reach home often makes the student feel guilty and anxious, even if the in-class scolding was brief. In more severe cases, teachers directly call parents or request that they come to the school for a meeting. One teacher described instance of telephone call to a boy's father multiple times for repeated misbehavior, eventually summoning the parent in person. This extended the sphere of punishment from the classroom to the household – it was no longer just a threat, but a reality that the child had to face at home as well.

By involving parents, the teacher essentially "outsources" the shaming – enlisting the family to reinforce the disciplinary message. A Class X student put it bluntly: "अगर घर फोन गया, तो घर पे भी बेइज्जती होगी" – "If a call goes home, I'll get humiliated at home as well" (Observations, fieldnotes). In the child's mind, a teacher's call means a double punishment: first the embarrassment at school, then a second round of scolding (or worse) by parents at home. This captures the essence of how parent-involvement threats function as a two-pronged stick. The student not only fears immediate discipline but also anticipates the shame of having "let down" their family (Tangney et al., 2007). The dread of parental involvement is so intense that some students said they would rather accept any school-based penalty – extra homework, standing in class, even a slap – over having their parents called. They know that a phone call will exponentially increase their troubles.

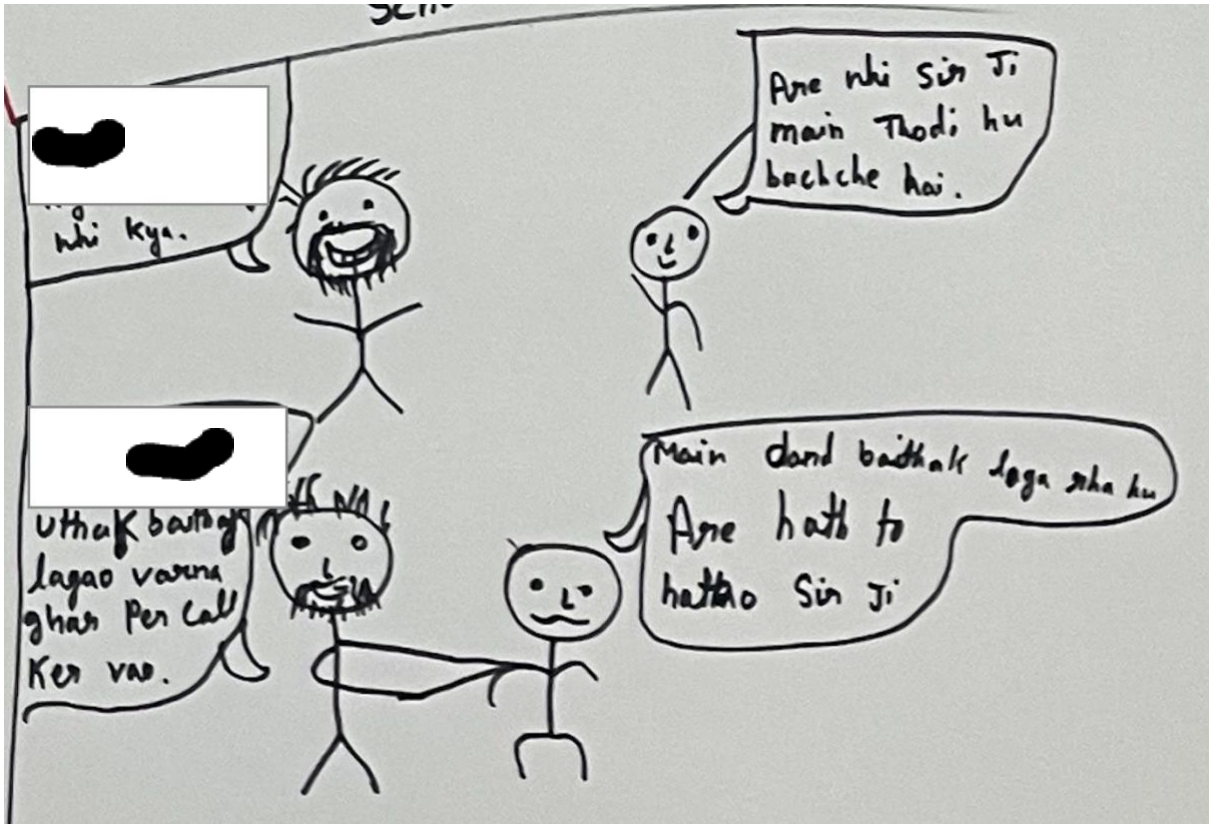


Figure 8: Two-panel conversation—coercion via parental threat

Description: *In the first panel, a teacher instructs a student to perform sit-ups, and the student refuses. In the second panel, the teacher threatens to call the student's parents and holds the student's hand; the student, visibly upset, agrees to comply. The sequence highlights how invoking parents is used to enforce obedience. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

The poignancy of this disciplinary dynamic is vividly brought to life in a child's illustration in Figure 8, which captures the moment-by-moment escalation of shame and anxiety surrounding the threat to involve parents. In the drawing, a boy is depicted mid-conversation with a classmate, unaware that the teacher stands looming behind him. The teacher's stern expression and pointed finger signal that the child has been caught. The next scene unfolds before the entire class: the teacher demands that the boy stand up and perform "sit-ups holding your ears"—a familiar punishment, both physically taxing and deeply embarrassing in its performative display.

Crucially, the illustration details the boy's initial resistance. His posture is stiff, arms crossed, his gaze lowered in defiance or perhaps muted shame. The teacher, escalates the situation: "If you don't do it, I'll call your parents right now." The threat of parental involvement pierces the student's resolve, overriding whatever minor bravado he had mustered. In the next panel, he is shown complying with the teacher's order: performing sit-ups while holding his ears, his body rigid with discomfort and humiliation. His mouth set in a grim line—not the face of a child learning a lesson from within, but one submitting out of fear that the shame will extend beyond these classroom walls and into his home. The two panels carry the escalation in the child's own words. In the first, the teacher presses, *"Ji matlb kya hai? Manoge nahi kya?"* ("So what do you mean? You just won't listen?"), and the boy protests, *"Are nahi sir ji, main thodi hi bachche hai"* ("Oh no, sir, I'm not a little kid"). In the second, the teacher's tone hardens to a threat — *"...uthak baithak lagao, varna ghar per call ker dunga"* ("…do your squats, or I'll call home") — while gripping the boy's arm, and the boy, now complying, pleads, *"Main dand baithak laga raha hu, are hath to hatao sir ji"* ("I'm doing the squats — please let go of my hand, sir"). The drawing captures the precise hinge of the episode: the moment the threat to telephone home converts resistance into submission (full transcription and translation in Appendix A).

What the illustration so effectively conveys is not just the mechanics of discipline—the sequence of command, resistance, and capitulation—but the emotional logic underpinning it. The threat to call one's parents is not a mere disciplinary formality; it is a powerful psychological lever that transforms a momentary wrongdoing into a source of enduring anxiety. The child's compliance is achieved not because he accepts the fairness of the punishment, but because he dreads the compounded shame of disappointing his parents and facing their potential anger or sorrow. In the act of performing the punishment before his

peers, the child is doubly exposed: shamed by the teacher's authority and by the imagined, looming presence of his family's judgment.

In this visual and narrative sequence, the child is anything but happy—his actions are forced, his expression somber, and the lesson imparted is less about self-improvement than about the power of adult alliances and the reach of shame. The teacher's threat to "call your parents" thus becomes the fulcrum of compliance, illustrating how discipline, surveillance, and parental authority are woven together to extract obedience, often at significant emotional cost to the child.

The Affective Toll of the Parental Threat: In interviews, many students admitted they would immediately apologize or promise to behave if a teacher even pretended to reach for the phone, begging the teacher not to call. One boy said, "I'd rather be hit once by Sir than have him call my father. At least the slap is over quickly, but if he calls home, it becomes an endless thing." (Fieldnotes, student recounting incident)Where students referred, as here, to being physically punished at home or at school, I treated these as potential safeguarding matters and responded in line with the disclosure protocol set out in Section 3.6 — monitoring for any account indicating that a child was at risk and, where appropriate and with the student's agreement, involving the school counselor without disclosing interview content (Graham et al., 2013; NSPCC, 2025). This sentiment illustrates how involving parents transforms a transient school issue into a prolonged episode of shame. The presence of this threat in the classroom also has a wider deterrent effect: even students not currently in trouble tend to behave more cautiously when they see a peer's parents being contacted. It sends a message that anyone's misdeed could be relayed to Mom or Dad, creating a climate of surveillance that spans school and home (Helker & Wosnitza, 2014).

Students begin to feel that their two worlds (school life and family life) are colluding to monitor and discipline them. From the child's perspective, this can be quite stressful; it removes any "safe space" to process mistakes. An error at school no longer stays at school – it follows them home, where it may escalate into an even bigger issue. Some self-described "backbenchers" in the study even said they would accept a zero on a test (or some other school penalty) if the teacher did not inform their parents – illustrating that the social-emotional cost of parental shame was higher for them than the academic consequences of failure (Parmar & Nathans, 2022).

When a teacher follows through and involves the parent, students often face additional repercussions at home: being harshly scolded, punished (loss of privileges, extra chores, or even a beating in some cases), or sternly lectured by family members. (the ethical handling of these accounts of punishment at home, including the safeguarding threshold I applied, is discussed in the Handling Disclosures part of Chapter 3.) Students described this as "दोहरी सज़ा" – a double punishment. They must endure the teacher's anger and then their parents' anger. Furthermore, the mental burden of knowing "I made my parents ashamed of me" can weigh even more heavily than the initial misbehavior. Some students also mentioned feeling ashamed in front of siblings if their parents were informed – for example, an older brother might tease them, or the news might spread in the extended family, compounding the embarrassment. Essentially, the teacher's threat mobilizes the whole family's authority against the student, amplifying a single classroom infraction into a much larger ordeal.

One student vividly described the moment a teacher called his mother: "When Ma'am called my mother, my heart was racing. I was scared not just of punishment, but that my mother would be so disappointed. After the call, I couldn't even look her (this is referring to the mother and not the lady teacher) in the eye at home" (Fieldnotes, student recounting

incident). This quote illustrates how profoundly shameful it is for a child to have their parent hear negative things about them – it strikes at the child's sense of being a "good son/daughter" in their parents' eyes. In some cases, experiencing this kind of shame did spur students to temporarily improve their behavior or study harder, driven by guilt and the desire to win back parental approval. But in other cases, it led to negative feelings: a student might become resentful of the teacher for "dragging my parents into this," or feel a lingering sense of defeat and anxiety.

Rationalizing Parental Involvement as Discipline: From the teachers' perspective, involving parents is seen as a strategic extension of discipline. Teachers understand most students are highly sensitive to their parents' opinion and dread getting in trouble at home. Thus, many teachers wield the threat in a calculated way – interestingly, often the mere mention suffices; they rarely must call (Helker & Wosnitza, 2014). Teachers view parents as allies in enforcing rules. The underlying thinking is that if a student fears their father or mother knowing about their misbehavior, they will behave better. For instance, teachers commonly say to a defiant student, "Let's see what your father has to say about this," believing that the embarrassment of having one's parent informed will compel the child to comply. In field observations, I noted teachers using this line matter-of-factly, almost as part of the discipline script (Fieldnotes, Class X). In interviews, teachers implied that when school and parents present a united front, students "have nowhere to escape accountability" (T2, teacher interview).

However, teachers also tread somewhat carefully, knowing that involving parents can sometimes backfire or become messy. Some parents react unpredictably. As one teacher (T5) recounted, she once called a mother about her son's repeated failures, only for the mother to break down crying and beg the teacher not to fail her child. In that case, the shame and stress

shifted onto the parent, who then pressured the teacher to relent, rather than solely on the student to improve. Conversely, occasionally a parent might not support the teacher – for instance, they might respond by blaming the school or claiming the teacher is picking on their child. T5 mentioned a case where a parent complained to the principal that she was being too hard on their daughter after receiving multiple notes home. Such instances illustrate that contacting home can escalate the situation beyond the teacher's control.

Despite these complications, most teachers still view parent contact as effective overall. It "reverberates beyond the classroom" and ensures the child is admonished in another environment, reinforcing the lesson (T5, teacher interview). Many teachers said they reserve this step for more chronic or serious issues – they know that overusing it could lessen its impact or alienate parents. They also noted that while minor daily misbehavior can be handled within class, major academic failures or repeated defiance warrant parental involvement – partly because parents have a right to know, and to pre-empt parents later accusing the school of keeping them uninformed (T1, teacher interview). In summary, teachers use the threat of involving parents as a powerful psychological "stick," extending the reach of school discipline into the student's home life. It is a way of outsourcing shame – essentially doubling down on consequences by enlisting parents to co-shame the child.

Impact on Home and Parent–Child Dynamics: The convergence of school and home discipline can significantly affect family dynamics. When a teacher calls home or sends a note, they are indirectly telling the parent, "Your child has done wrong and must be corrected." Many parents, upon receiving such communication, react with disappointment or anger toward the child, thus continuing the chain of shame. In the eyes of the student, the teacher's authority suddenly echoes through their mother or father. Some parents even feel embarrassed themselves – worried that the school might judge them as bad parents for having

an undisciplined child. This can make their reaction toward the child even harsher, driven by a sense of familial shame (Scarnier et al., 2009).

For example, a parent might scold the child, "You've shamed us in front of your teachers," conveying that the student not only broke school rules but also tarnished the family's honor (Fieldnote, parent meeting). The child, in turn, often feels intense guilt for having "betrayed" their parents' expectations. Over time, if a particular student is frequently the target of such teacher-parent exchanges, it can strain the parent–child relationship (Gershoff et al., 2010). Interactions at home may become dominated by discussions of failures and discipline rather than support or encouragement. One mother (PS9) noted that after a couple of calls from a teacher about her son, he became quieter at home and avoided talking about school, as if he expected only criticism (PS9, parent interview, summary).

However, there are cases where parent reactions diverge from the expected pattern. A few parents in interviews mentioned that if they felt a teacher was too strict or unfair, they would comfort the child at home and privately resent the teacher's methods. For instance, one mother said her child showed signs of stress and withdrawal after constant complaints from a particular teacher; the mother then reassured her son that "he is not a bad kid" and that she believed in him (PS6, the mother of student S6, parent interview). This indicates that involving parents can sometimes backfire by eliciting parental empathy for the child, especially if parents suspect the teacher overreacted. But more often, given the cultural context of the school, the result is that the home becomes an extension of school discipline. The child effectively loses a refuge – even at home they feel under the shadow of their school reputation.

In sum, threats to involve parents function as a shaming practice that wields the power of family approval as a disciplinary tool. It leverages children's strong desire not to disappoint

their parents (and not to be embarrassed in front of them). This practice is undeniably effective in enforcing compliance; nearly all students in the study took it very seriously. But it also heightens students' anxiety by bridging two spheres of their life that they normally keep separate. It underscores how discipline in this school is a collaborative endeavor between teachers and parents – one that can create a consistent framework of accountability, but also a reinforcing loop of shame that follows the child everywhere.

These findings echo observations in other collectivist cultural settings that a child's misbehavior is often seen as a reflection on the family, so shame is used collectively to maintain social order. The downside, as I have seen, is the emotional fallout: children felt they had "nowhere to hide" when both teacher and parent aligned to scold them. Nonetheless, from the viewpoint of teachers (and many parents), this strategy is sometimes deemed necessary to "set kids straight." The next theme examines another parent-related strategy – how teachers invoke parents' sacrifices to guilt students, shifting from directly involving parents to leveraging familial obligation as a source of shame.

5.2 Guilt-Tripping via Parents' Sacrifices

Description of Practice: A prominent theme across many interviews was teachers shaming students by invoking the sacrifices and hardships of their parents. This tactic is essentially a form of emotional manipulation aimed at guilt-tripping the child into working harder or behaving better. Rather than focusing on a specific rule broken or a poor grade, the teacher makes the student feel morally indebted by highlighting how much the parents are doing for the child – and implying the child is letting them down. The core message is: "Your parents

work so hard and sacrifice so much for you, yet you are squandering their efforts." This shifts the frame of shame from "you did a bad thing" to "you are an ungrateful son/daughter."

Students gave multiple examples of this approach. One girl (S1) noted that whenever students showed poor results or lack of effort, certain teachers would remind them of their parents' toil and dreams for them. Teachers would say things like, "देखो, तुम्हारे पेरेंट्स तुम्हारे लिए कितना स्ट्रगल कर रहे हैं… और तुम कुछ नहीं कर रहे हो" – "Look, your parents are struggling so much for you… and you are doing nothing" (S1, student interview). Such statements, especially when delivered in front of the class, publicly cast the student as lazy and ungrateful considering their parents' dedication. The shame here is rooted in moral guilt: the child is made to feel that by not performing, they are betraying their hard-working parents' hopes. This often strikes a deep chord, as most children in this school are acutely aware of the financial and personal hardships their families endure to send them to a private school. The student above (S1) said that upon hearing these comments, she felt a wave of guilt and embarrassment – the subtext she received was that she was being selfish and making her family "शर्मिंदा" (sharminda, ashamed).

Teachers sometimes get quite specific and vivid in these guilt-inducing lectures. One parent (PS6) offered an illustrative example of the kind of speech a teacher gave her daughter: "वो तुम्हारे लिए बहुत मेहनत कर रहे हैं… इतने कमा नहीं रहे हैं कि वो तुम्हारी फीस दे सकें, पर फिर भी दे रहे हैं. वो तुम्हें सरकारी स्कूल में नहीं भेज रहे हैं ताकि तुम पढ़-लिखकर कुछ बनो." In English: "They [your parents] aren't earning enough to pay your fees but still are paying. They're not sending you to a government school so that you can study and become something in life." (PS6, parent interview).

In this narrative, the teacher explicitly contrasts the parents' financial struggle ("not earning enough but still paying for your education") and sacrifice ("not sending you to a free

government school so you can make something of yourself") with the child's current lack of effort. The implication is crystal clear: the parents are going above and beyond for the child's future, so any laziness or failure on the child's part is a grave disservice – even a dishonor – to the parents' sacrifice. By pointing this out publicly, the teacher transforms an academic failing into a moral failing. The child is shamed not just for, say, failing a test, but for "repaying" their parents' love with indolence.

One teacher even painted a dire picture of parents' dreams being crushed if the child fails: telling a student something like, "Your father is working day and night doing manual labor to pay for your studies, and if you don't study, all his effort and hopes will go to waste." The weight of such statements on a young mind is heavy – the student is made to feel they carry the entire burden of the family's aspirations, and that in failing, they are not just a bad student but a bad son or daughter.

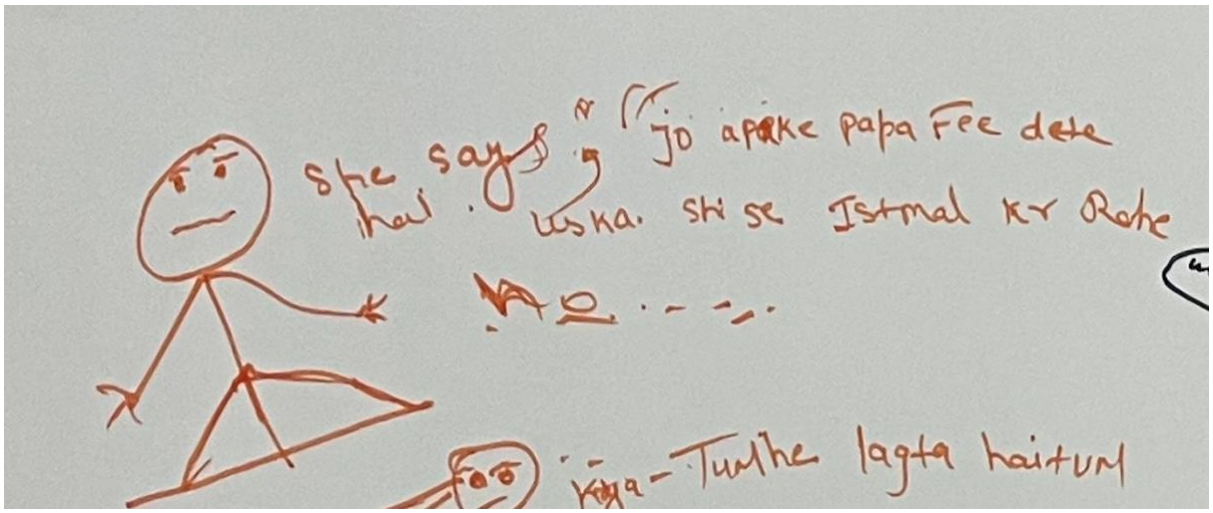


Figure 9: Teacher invoking parents' sacrifice as discipline

Description: *A teacher addresses a student, asserting that their parents pay for schooling and the student is letting them down. The message frames education as a precious, paid-for opportunity and accuses the student of wasting their parents' hard-earned money. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*



Figure 10: Teacher querying fees to shame performance

Description: *A teacher asks a student how much their parents pay in school fees. After the student answers, the teacher taunts them— "then why aren't you studying?"—linking payment to academic effort and using financial/moral pressure to shame the student. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

Two illustrations in Figure 9 and Figure 10 contributed by students further reinforce these findings, depicting the mechanisms of guilt-tripping through reminders of parental sacrifice. In Figure 9, a teacher is shown directly telling a student that by neglecting their studies, the money invested by the child's parents is essentially being wasted—a comment that transforms academic disengagement into a form of financial betrayal. In Figure 10, the illustration goes even further, with the teacher not only referencing the parents' financial commitment but specifying the exact sum they are paying to the school, making the cost tangible and the guilt more acute. Both examples exemplify how teachers invoke the concrete reality of parental sacrifice to heighten a child's sense of obligation, thereby intensifying the emotional pressure

and linking academic performance to moral worthiness and familial duty. This underscores how guilt-tripping tactics are not just abstract lectures but are often personalized and vividly brought home in everyday classroom interactions. The student wrote the teacher's habitual line into a speech bubble beside her firm, unsmiling figure: *"Jo aapke papa fee dete hain, uska sahi se istemal kar rahe ho?"* ("Are you making proper use of the fees your father pays?"), followed by an emphatic *"nahi"* ("No") drawn in thicker, darker strokes than the rest — the child's way of marking how forcefully the rebuke landed (see Appendix A for the full description). Here the child transcribed the exchange in full: the teacher calls the student out — *"Bahar aao, tumhare mahine ki fees kitni hai?"* ("Come outside — how much is your monthly fee?") — the boy answers *"Sir, 1650 rupaye"* ("Sir, 1,650 rupees"), and the teacher delivers the barb, *"To fir padh kyun nahi rahe ho?"* ("Then why aren't you studying?"). By naming the exact fee in the drawing, the student conveys how the teacher made the family's payment tangible and turned it into a public reproach (full transcription in Appendix A).

Manifestations at Home: Interestingly, this guilt-tripping theme appears not only in teacher-student interactions but also in how parents themselves discipline at home. Several parents indicated that when their child was slacking off, they too reminded the child of the family's efforts and sacrifices. One father, for instance, acknowledged using this approach: "हम तुम्हारे लिए इतना कुछ कर रहे हैं… पैसा खर्च कर रहे हैं… और तुम पढ़ाई नहीं कर रहे" – "We are doing so much for you… spending money on your education… and you still aren't studying!" (PS2, the father of student S2, parent interview). He knows this is basically shaming the child by guilt, and he partly learned it from seeing teachers do it. Another parent, a mother, explicitly described this approach as "थोड़ा सा इमोशनल ब्लैकमेल करना पड़ता है" – "having to do a bit of emotional blackmail" (PS6, parent interview).

Her phrasing "have to do" suggests she sees it as a somewhat necessary evil – not ideal but sometimes required to motivate a stubborn child. This reveals that parents knowingly engage in the same shaming practice, effectively reinforcing what the teachers say at school. A child might hear at school, "Your parents sacrifice so much for you," and then at home hear, "See how much we sacrifice for you." The consistency of this message across home and school makes it a powerful shaming force, as there is truly no escape for the child from the sense of familial obligation. It creates a unified front of moral pressure: the child is constantly reminded of their "debt" to their parents' sacrifices.

The Affective Toll of Guilt-Tripping: The impact of this guilt-tripping on students is profound. Many students reported feeling a strong sense of remorse and shame when teachers bring up their parents. Unlike a direct insult (which might provoke anger or defiance), this tactic often makes students turn the blame inward – they feel guilty. A common reaction described was the student falling silent, head down, sometimes to the point of tears, not because the teacher was yelling but because what was being said resonated with their conscience. One teacher described a boy who immediately stopped arguing and looked ashamed when she said, "Your mother works so hard for you, and you do this?" The boy later told a friend that it made him think of how his mother comes home tired every day – he felt he had indeed done something wrong by misbehaving (fieldnote from teacher interview).

This illustrates how guilt-based shaming can induce self-reflection and sincere regret in the student (Rote & Smetana, 2017). On the surface, one might argue this could lead to positive change – and sometimes it does (students resolve to do better so as not to let their parents down). However, the emotional burden can be excessive for a child. Students might start to feel constant pressure and anxiety about performance, believing that any slip-up means they are hurting their family. Over time, carrying this weight can affect mental well-being, leading

to heightened stress or a fear of failure so intense it hampers their academic engagement (Pienyu et al., 2024). For instance, a child may avoid telling parents about any difficulties at school, or even dread going to school, for fear of not living up to expectations and feeling that guilt again.

In the classroom setting, when a teacher guilt-trips one student, others also take note and may feel a pang of secondhand guilt thinking of their own parents (Parikh et al., 2019). It reinforces a narrative that "if we don't succeed, we are betraying our families." For students from low-income backgrounds (like those in this school), this is already a pervasive thought, and the teacher's words amplify it (Parikh et al., 2019). There is a potential adaptive outcome: a student might indeed become more diligent after such a scolding, driven by a desire to honor their parents' sacrifices.

In interviews, a few students nodded when asked if these comments motivate them – "हमें बुरा लगता है, फिर हम और मेहनत करते हैं" ("we feel bad, then we work harder"). But there's also a potential maladaptive outcome: some students feel overwhelmed – one student lamented privately, "No matter what I do, it's never enough compared to what my parents do for me." This can lead to a sense of helplessness or even quiet resentment (in rare cases, a student might think "I didn't ask for these sacrifices," though voicing that is taboo). Essentially, it can create a scenario of toxic stress, where the child is always anxious about not fulfilling their familial duty.

Rationalizing Guilt as Motivation: Teachers employ this tactic because it taps into deeply ingrained cultural values of filial piety and gratitude. In the context of this Delhi community (and broadly in Indian culture), children are often raised with an appreciation of their parents' struggles and an expectation to show gratitude by doing well (Parikh et al., 2019). Teachers know that students are aware of how hard their parents work and how much they aspire for

their child's success. By explicitly referencing it, teachers invoke a moral authority greater than their own – the authority of the family and the virtue of gratitude. One teacher described it as making the child realize "why they are here [in school]."

From the teacher's perspective, if reminding a student that his father is a rickshaw-puller who skips meals to pay fees might guilt him into studying harder, then it's worth doing. They may not see it as "shaming" in a cruel sense, but rather as instilling responsibility through guilt (Solhi, 2025). Some teachers even spin it as a kindness: "Better they feel a little shame now than a lot of shame later in life," meaning it's better the child realizes the value of parents' efforts now than regret wasting opportunities later (T2, teacher interview, summary). However, teachers do sometimes acknowledge the intensity of this method.

One commented, half-jokingly, "कभी-कभी बच्चे को इतना सुना देते हैं कि वो भावुक हो जाता है" – "Sometimes we say so much [about the parents] that the child becomes emotional" (T2, teacher interview, informal remark). This indicates teachers see the emotional impact (students tearing up or looking genuinely contrite) and take it as a sign the message hit home. There's a fine line, though: teachers want to spur guilt enough to motivate, but not push a child into despair. It's a difficult balance, and likely not always achieved. This reflects prevalent beliefs in India that discipline, even if harsh, is an act of caring – many teachers and parents hold that fear and shame are necessary for children's success (Sarangapani, 2003; Tiwari, 2019).

Parents, as evidenced by their own admissions, understand why teachers do this and often approve. The mother who labeled it "emotional blackmail" (PS6) showed she knows it's manipulative, yet she didn't condemn it – she shrugged it off as part of motivating children. In fact, some parents expect teachers to inculcate gratitude in their children (Menon et al., 2024). There were instances mentioned where a parent privately told a teacher, "Please make him understand how hard I work for him; he doesn't listen to me at home." In such cases, the

parent is effectively authorizing the teacher to shame the child using the parent's struggles as ammunition.

This dynamic shows a kind of collaboration: teachers and parents forming a united front to guilt-trip the child into discipline. Not all parental views are uniform, though. PS2 offered a more reflective take. While he admitted to using this tactic himself, he worried that overemphasizing sacrifices could instill a kind of fear or fatalism in the child. He shared that he once told his daughter, "किसके लिए कमा रहा हूँ? अपने बच्चों के लिए." – "For whom am I earning? For my children." (PS2, parent interview). It made her study that night, but later he wondered if it was fair to put that burden on a child. He expressed that children deserve some freedom from the weight of adult problems (PS2, parent interview). This is a less common viewpoint but highlights an awareness that piling adult burdens onto children can be unfair and emotionally taxing. It's an important counterpoint – showing not all parents are entirely comfortable with this dynamic, even if they participate in it.

Classroom and Home Dynamics: In the classroom, when a teacher invokes a parent's sacrifice, the atmosphere often shifts to a more solemn tone. Students generally become quiet, and even the usual giggles that might accompany a scolding subside – no one finds it funny when a classmate is being shamed as ungrateful to their parents. It touches a vulnerable spot for everyone. This can lead to a collective moment of reflection; in some cases, students described that after such a lecture, the whole class became unusually subdued for a while, each perhaps thinking of their own parents. However, if used too often, this tactic can lose impact – one student cynically noted, "ये रोज़ वाली बातें" – "these everyday talks" – tend to be tuned out if repeated incessantly (Classroom Observations, fieldnotes, Class IX). The student implied that if teachers harp on the same "your parents do so much" theme every day, students eventually roll their eyes internally. That said, it still implants a narrative in the

classroom culture: school success is equated with repaying parents, and school failure with moral guilt.

At home, a child who has been shamed at school via their parents might alter their behavior toward their parents – sometimes positively (temporarily being more helpful or studious, knowing their parents were invoked) or negatively (avoiding parents out of a sense of guilt or embarrassment). Moreover, when parents themselves use this theme, it shapes the parent-child relationship to be heavily centered on duty and expectation. Some children reported feeling that their worth in the family was tied to academic success because of constant reminders like "हम तुम्हारे लिए इतना कर रहे हैं" ("We're doing so much for you"). This can create a transactional feeling: "My parents invest in me; I must 'repay' them by achieving. If I don't, I am a bad child." While this mindset can produce diligent, obedient students, it can also cause emotional strain and make the child feel that love is conditional. One student, a girl in Class IX, said quietly, "When I don't do well, I feel like I don't deserve my parents' love" (S10, student interview). That is a heartbreaking sentiment, showing how profoundly this type of shaming can affect a child's self-concept and sense of being valued.

In conclusion, guilt-tripping via parents' sacrifices is a shaming practice that leverages family devotion as a disciplinary tool. It blurs the line between encouragement and shaming: it's framed as a reminder of love and sacrifice, yet it induces shame by highlighting the child's perceived failings in reciprocating that love through effort. It is undeniably powerful in shaping behavior – many students do respond by trying harder, at least for a time, because the last thing they want is to let their parents down. However, it places a heavy emotional load on students, intertwining their academic performance with their sense of moral worthiness in the family.

This theme exemplifies how classroom practices can penetrate deeply into a student's personal life, affecting their psyche and familial relationships. It also resonates with global observations that shame is used in collectivist cultures to enforce role obligations (e.g., in Chinese child-rearing) – a dynamic noted in India's familial socialization as well (Patel, 2018). This finding invites critical reflection: while the intention is to motivate, the potential collateral damage to a child's mental health and parent-child trust must be considered (Peng et al., 2023). The next theme shifts focus from the familial domain to gender and morality – examining how teachers shame students by enforcing gender norms and moral expectations.

5.3 Gender-Based and Moral Shaming

Description of Practice: An important, though somewhat less frequent, shaming dynamic in the school revolves around gender norms and perceived moral conduct. In this co-educational setting, some teachers use students' interactions with the opposite sex or their adherence to traditional gender expectations as opportunities to shame or control behavior. Additionally, teachers (and even non-teaching staff) sometimes act as moral guardians, shaming students – especially girls – for behavior deemed immodest or inappropriate by local cultural standards. This category of shaming is distinct in that it is not about academics or routine rule-breaking, but about upholding societal norms and protecting "reputation."

One manifestation is relatively mild and even seen by teachers as a clever classroom management trick: using gender as a tool to discipline boys. A male teacher of senior classes described a strategy where if a boy was misbehaving (being too rowdy or not paying attention), the teacher would seat him next to a girl as a form of subtle shaming. The teacher explained that this idea draws on what he perceives as a key adolescent social dynamic: at this age, many boys behave better because they care what girls think of them. "Boys value girls' opinions, so if a boy is acting up, I make him sit with the girls and he immediately

tones down," he noted (T2, teacher interview). The act of being placed among well-behaved girls carries an implicit stigma for the boy – it signals that he's being treated like a child who needs a calming female influence, and it also puts him in a situation where he may feel embarrassed to act out in front of female peers.

The teacher observed that even if the boy isn't good in academics, "at least his manners become more civilized" when he must sit with girls (T2, teacher interview). In essence, this is shaming by enforced propriety: the boy is indirectly shamed into behaving by the mere presence of girls, leveraging the societal norm that boys should not look foolish in front of girls (and the sexist notion that behaving "like a girl" – i.e., quiet and polite – is an improvement for a boisterous boy). Teachers saw this as a positive practice of shaming; one teacher called it a "good method" of discipline since it wasn't an outright insult but created the necessary discomfort to correct behavior. Indeed, it's somewhat ingenious: the teacher doesn't have to yell or punish, he just changes the seating and lets gendered social anxiety do the work.

On the other end of the spectrum is the moral shaming of girls for perceived impropriety. A stark example came from one Class IX girl (S1). She recounted an incident where she was seen talking to a boy from her class outside school – an interaction that was innocent, but in the conservative context of the community, a teenage girl and boy chatting can be viewed with suspicion. A female staff member (and who monitors students outside class) spotted them and even pulled CCTV footage as evidence. The next day, the girl's class teacher publicly taunted her in class with a thinly veiled threat: "Should we tell your भैया (*bhaiya*, brother) what's going on?" – implying that the teacher might report her behavior to her family (S1, student interview).

The teacher sarcastically referred to the boy as her "brother" to underline the inappropriate nature of the encounter and insinuated informing her real brother or parents about it. The entire class witnessed this exchange, which was loaded with the suggestion that the girl had behaved in a shameful way. The girl described feeling immediate panic and mortification – the teacher was effectively branding her as indecent and threatening to expose it to her family, which in their culture could seriously damage her reputation. This is a form of character shaming: implying a girl is of "loose" character or not a "good girl" simply for being seen with a boy. The student's face "burned with shame," she recalled, as some classmates snickered and whispered. She felt as though she had been labeled a "bad girl" in front of everyone.

After that incident, the girl drastically changed her behavior to avoid any further moral shaming. She stopped speaking to or even walking near that male friend altogether, out of fear that any interaction could be misinterpreted and used against her. Like documented cases of school-based slut-shaming, such morally loaded labeling can cause lasting psychological harm and reinforce gender inequality within educational settings (Goblet & Glowacz, 2021); indeed, Indian reports note that slut-shaming and moral policing of girls are common in schools as well (Mehra, 2019). The combination of the surveillance (literally citing CCTV) and the teacher's loaded comments created an atmosphere where she felt constantly judged for her conduct as a girl.

Even when the teacher later privately told her that she knew the student was a "good girl" and that the staff had overreacted, the public damage was already done (S1, school tour interview). The student had burst into tears after the class taunting, feeling both humiliated and fearful that her mother would hear a distorted version of events and lose trust in her. This example illustrates how moral shaming can deeply affect a student's sense of security at

school, especially for girls who already navigate a minefield of expectations regarding modesty and propriety.

Other instances of gendered shaming were mentioned anecdotally by students: for example, a teacher might tease a boy who gossips or chats too much by saying, “Why are you talking like ladies?” – implying it’s shameful for a boy to behave like a girl (playing on the stereotype that gossip is a feminine trait). Or a teacher might admonish a girl for her posture or uniform with, “Sit properly, you’re a girl,” shaming her into conforming to expected feminine decorum. While these instances were not the focus of interviews, they surfaced enough to establish a pattern that gender norms are used as a basis for shaming. It’s often done in passing remarks rather than extended tirades, but it reinforces traditional ideas: boys being compared to girls as an insult (feminine = inferior in that context), and girls being held to higher standards of modesty (with the threat of shame if they deviate).

The Affective Toll of Gendered and Moral Shaming: The impact of gender-based and moral shaming varies by the student’s gender and the nature of the incident. Boys who are subjected to the seating-with-girls tactic generally complied, albeit sometimes with blushing or sheepish looks. They might feel momentarily awkward, but since it isn’t an explicit insult, some later downplayed it: “Yes, I behave when sitting with girls; otherwise, Ma’am will think I have no manners,” one boy said with a half-smile. It’s an interesting mix of shame and pride – the boy is shamed into behaving but then takes a bit of pride in showing he can be courteous. This suggests that, used in this limited way, the gender-peer tactic might achieve discipline without long-lasting stigma for the boy (aside from reinforcing the idea that being associated with girls is punitive, which has its own problematic implication for gender attitudes).

For girls, moral shaming incidents like the one described can be far more distressing. The emotional toll on the Class IX girl was severe: she felt violated by the insinuation and her dignity attacked on a personal level that academic scolding never reached. She expressed that it wasn't just embarrassment but a sense of shame on her character – as if her very reputation as a "good girl" was sullied publicly. This kind of shaming led to anxiety and self-policing in her behavior – as seen, she curtailed normal interactions (like talking to male friends) to avoid any suspicion. It can also breed resentment or loss of trust in teachers.

The girl confided that she looked at the teacher differently after that; even though the teacher later tried to comfort her, the student felt that the teacher had been ready to assume the worst about her without giving her a chance. That sense of betrayal by a teacher (who should protect students, not publicly humiliate them on moral grounds) affected her overall comfort at school – she said for weeks she was afraid to be herself, worrying someone was watching or judging (S1, student interview). Such public moral disciplining practices reflect broader gendered power dynamics often embedded within Indian school cultures, where female students are held to stricter moral standards, as discussed in studies on school-based gender bias (Thasniya, 2022).

Moreover, moral shaming incidents often become talking points among students, which can prolong the humiliation. In the above case, some classmates teased the girl privately afterward, asking if she was "in trouble for having a boyfriend," which she had to vehemently deny, feeling further indignity (fieldnotes, Class IX). This shows how a teacher's single comment can snowball into peer gossip and stigma that the student must deal with beyond the initial moment. Similarly, a boy who is teased by a teacher for being "like a girl" might find that nickname following him into the schoolyard. This reflects a broader cultural trend where femininity is constructed as inferior and mockable, and where boys are shamed through

association with feminine behavior, reinforcing patriarchal norms from an early age (Nag et al., 2025).

Rationalizing Moral Shaming as Discipline: Teachers who engage in moral shaming likely feel they are upholding discipline and decorum according to societal expectations. In many traditional contexts, teachers see themselves as responsible not just for academics but also for the moral development and propriety of children. The teacher's public comment to the girl suggests she perhaps thought the student needed a reminder of boundaries, or maybe she intended it half in jest to make a point. The fact that she delivered it with sarcasm and even a hint of laughter (as the student noted) indicated the teacher outwardly treated it lightly – perhaps to not seem too accusatory – but the content was serious for the student. This indicates teachers might not fully grasp how mortified the student feels; they might think "I just teased her a bit in front of everyone," not realizing the depth of the shame caused.

In other cases, teachers explicitly believe in gender-differentiated discipline. For example, several teachers mentioned they would never hit a girl (hitting a girl is taboo), but they might scold her more sharply on issues of propriety; whereas for boys they might use physical discipline but not impugn their moral character publicly. This indicates a double standard in how shame is applied: girls are protected from certain punishments (like beating) but are more vulnerable to moral shaming, while boys are more likely to be physically punished or shamed as "rowdies" but rarely labeled immoral or "immodest" (Thasniya, 2022). It reflects broader societal norms – girls' virtue is vigilantly guarded; boys' toughness is expected. One teacher summarized informally, "With girls we have to be stricter about behavior, with boys we have to be stricter about discipline."

Implicitly, behavior for girls often translates to things like modest dress, not mingling with boys, etc., and the enforcement mechanism is shame (e.g., "Don't you have shame, sitting

like that / talking to boys?"). For boys, discipline translates to not being naughty or defiant, enforced by physical or verbal correction but rarely about morality unless it's about respecting elders. This differentiation was evident in the observations and even corroborated by some student remarks – e.g., one boy said, "Madam doesn't scold us for talking with girls; she scolds the girls or tells our moms," highlighting that girls bore the brunt in mixed-gender issues. The teachers themselves may see this as normal: one said it's not appropriate in their culture to yell at a boy about modesty (because modesty is not a boy's virtue in the same way), and not appropriate to ever strike a girl, so they naturally employ different tactics.

As for the practice of seating boys with girls, teachers see it as an innovative and less overtly punitive approach – leveraging peer influence without shouting or hitting. The teacher who described it did so with a tone of amusement, as if proud of this psychological trick (T2, informal communication). He even noted that it was discussed among colleagues, implying it's an accepted strategy, not just his own idea. They likely do not label it as "shaming" per se, but they know it creates a bit of embarrassment that leads to self-correction. It again shows teachers thinking creatively within cultural bounds: since publicly yelling at a boy that he's "behaving like a girl" might be too direct or frowned upon, instead they make him sit with girls and achieve a similar effect indirectly.

The Absence of Gender in Parental Accounts: In the interviews, parents didn't directly bring up gender-related shaming, possibly because the questions didn't explicitly probe that and because many parents might not be aware of specific incidents unless they were "big." However, I can infer some context. In this conservative community, it can be inferred that many parents themselves would be concerned if their daughter were seen socially with boys; they might appreciate a teacher calling that out to "protect" the girl's reputation. For instance, had the Class IX girl's (S1) mother (PS1) heard about the incident (through gossip or the

teacher), she might have scolded her daughter too, even though nothing improper happened – simply because being seen with a boy is taboo. Thus, teachers enforcing these moral norms could be aligned with implicit parental expectations.

On the other hand, if a parent felt their child's innocence was wrongly questioned (for example, if that girl's mother knew the context and believed her daughter), they might be upset with the teacher for making her cry. It really depends on the specific family's values and interpretation. None of the parents explicitly mentioned "I expect the school to keep boys and girls in check," but given the setting, such expectations are often unspoken. One mother mentioned that she tells her daughter to focus on studies and not "roam around," implying she relies on the school to enforce the same standards. Such parental approval of school-enforced modesty reflects entrenched gender expectations in India, where girls' social interactions are closely monitored to preserve family honor (Nambissan, 2005).

From a broader perspective, gender-based shaming underscores how social and cultural norms permeate school discipline. It reinforces traditional ideas: boys must act "gentlemanly" (or at least not unruly) when around girls – effectively shaming them into self-control; and girls must guard their modesty and reputation at all costs – with teachers quick to shame any perceived slip to reinforce that. These dynamics have long-term implications for how students view gender and relationships. Boys might internalize that female peers are somewhat an authority of propriety – that they must put on a respectful front for girls (which could be positive in terms of learning respect but is achieved via fear of shame rather than genuine gender equality).

Girls might internalize that any misstep in behavior (even an innocuous one) could earn them a damaging label, which can lead to hyper-vigilance and perhaps stunted social growth (e.g., being afraid to engage in normal teenage interactions). On a positive note, the co-ed

environment combined with such tactics could inadvertently foster some mutual respect – some boys did say that sitting with girls made them more polite, which could translate to seeing girls as deserving of respect (not just as people to fear shame from). But that respect is built on a foundation of gender normativity and shame rather than true understanding.

For student well-being, being shamed on moral or gender grounds can impact one's identity and sense of self. Academic or behavioral scolding targets what a child does; moral shaming targets what the child is or might become (e.g., a "bad girl" or "not a man"). That can have a stronger influence on self-esteem. The Class IX girl's (S1) case shows it can constrict a student's freedom and comfort in the school environment. It also highlights how girls navigate an extra layer of scrutiny – beyond grades and general conduct, they must manage perceptions of virtue. This adds stress and can affect their participation (for instance, a girl might avoid speaking up or interacting with boys for fear of drawing the wrong kind of attention). Research shows that moral shaming tied to gender can undermine adolescent girls' sense of identity and lead to reduced participation or heightened self-censorship (Nambissan, 2005; Thasniya, 2022).

Although this type of shaming is not among the most common daily occurrences, it is significant as an outlier that reveals the school's role as a moral regulator and exposes the extra layer of shame that female students must navigate. This example demonstrates that shaming in school is not only about academics or misconduct – it can also be about conforming to societal expectations of gendered behavior and morality.

5.4 Socioeconomic Shaming

Description of Practice: A unique but noteworthy form of shaming that emerged in the data is the shaming of students based on their socioeconomic background – particularly their family's financial difficulties or occupational status. In a low-fee school serving families of modest means, one might expect sensitivity around money and status. However, the findings show instances where teachers (and on occasion, school staff) inadvertently or deliberately shame children for their family's poverty or social class. This includes publicly calling attention to unpaid school fees and making disparaging remarks about the jobs or lifestyle of a student's family.

One of the most direct forms is what I might term financial shaming. A parent (PS1) recounted that some teachers would publicly confront students over pending school fees. Rather than handling fee issues privately with parents, these teachers put the child on the spot in class by demanding, "फीस कहाँ है?" – "Where is the fee? Why hasn't it been paid?" (PS1, parent interview). The child is thus made to answer for their parents' inability to pay on time – something entirely out of the child's control. This practice effectively transfers the guilt of a debt to the student, making them feel embarrassed that they are the cause of a financial issue. The entire class becomes aware that "so-and-so hasn't paid fees," tagging that student with a lower economic status in a public way.

The parent who described this was quite upset by it, noting that the child feels guilty and ashamed, as if they or their parents have done something wrong or inferior (PS1, parent interview). It undermines the student's sense of security because ideally school should be a place where a child from a poorer family isn't judged for what they have or don't have. But here, the child's poverty becomes a spectacle, and they may be looked at with pity or teased by peers as a result. Essentially, a matter that should be a private administrative discussion

becomes a public shaming event for the child – a clear breach of professional boundaries and of the child's right to be treated with dignity.

Another aspect is teachers ridiculing a family's background or occupation, which was mentioned in earlier sections (e.g., the vegetable-seller comment in fear appeals) but is worth consolidating here. One student (S5) provided a vivid example: a teacher knew that a certain boy's father was a *sabzi-wala* (vegetable vendor). In class, whenever that student made a mistake or acted out, the teacher would deliberately call him "सब्जीवाला" ("vegetable-seller") instead of his name, and ask sarcastically "टमाटर के रेट क्या हैं आज?" – "What are the prices of tomatoes today?" (S5, student interview).

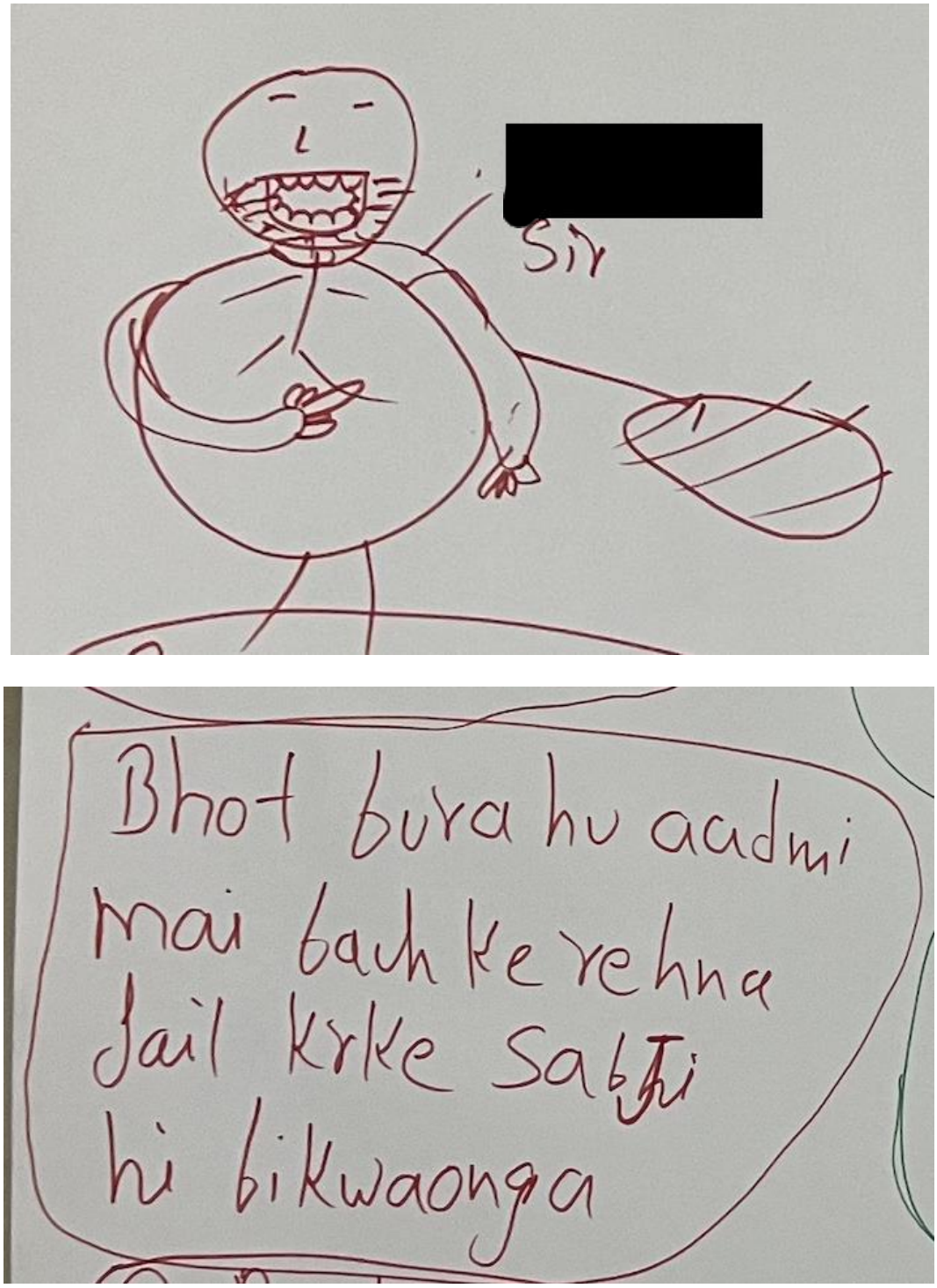


Figure 11: Caricatured teacher with recurring threat— "I will fail you and make you sell vegetables"

Description: *A cartoonized portrait of a teacher appears above a speech caption that reproduces a line he often uses with students: "I am a very bad man—I will fail you and make you sell vegetables." The phrasing links academic failure to stigmatized work to shame students and coerce compliance. (See Appendix for the detailed description of this image).*

Beneath the caricatured, laughing portrait the student wrote the line the teacher was known

for repeating: *"Bahut bura hu aadmi main, bach ke rehna — fail karke sabji hi bikwaunga"* ("I'm a very bad man, beware — if you fail, I'll make you sell vegetables"). The child's note explains this was aimed especially at students whose parents were vegetable sellers, weaponizing the family's livelihood as a threatened future — the starkest instance of the class-coded shaming traced in this chapter (full transcription and translation in Appendix A).

Another example emerged through a student's drawing. In Figure 11, a teacher is shown pronouncing at a boy, "I will make you a vegetable seller—you're good for nothing else," while the rest of the class looks on. The student's illustration, simple yet powerful, conveys the humiliation of being reduced to one's family's occupation in front of peers. Upon further inquiry, it became clear that this was not a hypothetical scenario: the comment was directed at a student whose father worked as a vegetable vendor. For the child, the teacher's words did not just undermine his efforts in school, but also stigmatized his family's honest livelihood, signaling to everyone present that such work is something to be mocked or avoided.

This was a blatant attempt to belittle the student by referencing his family's livelihood. The message was that selling vegetables is something to be mocked, and by extension the student should be ashamed since that's his background. The student noted how uncomfortable this made not just that boy but others as well – it crossed a line of basic respect. The boy would shrink in his seat, clearly humiliated that a part of his identity (his family's work) was being derided before the class.

Similarly, another student mentioned a teacher making a comment like, "इसके घर में भी ऐसा माहौल होगा, तभी ये ऐसा behave कर रहा है" – "His home environment must be like this too, that's why he behaves this way" (S5, student interview). That remark suggested that because the child's family background is presumably uncultured or "low-class" (*aisa mahaul*, meaning "such an atmosphere"), his misbehavior or poor performance is almost in his blood. This is both a

shaming and a fatalistic insult – it tells the child (and everyone else) that he comes from a "bad" family, hence he is bad, attaching a stigma that can be hard to shake. It essentially labels the student as inherently deficient due to his origins.

These instances of socioeconomic shaming appeared less often in my observations and interviews than the parental-threat and sacrifice-based forms of shaming described earlier in the chapter, but they are striking because of how overtly they target a child's identity beyond school. In an environment where many children are from low-income families, one would expect teachers to be particularly cautious about not embarrassing students over things like fees or parents' jobs. Yet, stress or bias sometimes overrides that caution. Such dynamics are echoed in recent research showing how students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often experience stigmatization in school settings, affecting their psychological well-being and class participation (Ghosh, 2024).

Intent and Administrative Pressure: It's important to note that outright socioeconomic shaming is generally not a deliberate policy but rather the result of individual lapses in judgment or perhaps frustration. For instance, when teachers ask about fees publicly, it might be because they are exasperated with non-payment and lack proper administrative channels to follow up with parents directly. They resort to pressuring the child as a conduit to the parent – but in doing so, they fail to consider the emotional cost to the student. Research on low-fee private schools in India highlights that fee collection pressures often lead teachers to resort to public reminders due to inadequate administrative systems and tight budgets (Srivastava, 2013). Some teachers might think a bit of discomfort will prompt the child to remind their parent more urgently to pay. However, this clearly places the child in an unfair position and violates the principle that children should not bear the brunt of adult financial issues.

In my data, explicit mockery of occupations or family background appeared relatively rare and was often followed by the teacher framing it as "a joke" or as something said in frustration (Analytic memo, coding notes). This implies teachers know it's inappropriate and might backtrack if challenged – they might say "Oh, I was just joking with him" if someone questioned the comment. But the fact that it occurs at all shows how a teacher under stress or harboring bias can cross boundaries. The teacher who used "vegetable-seller" as an epithet probably thought it would shame the student into trying harder – basically saying "Don't you want to be better than that?" In their mind, they might rationalize it as pushing the student to aspire beyond his current station. Yet the effect is to demean the honest labor of the parents and deeply hurt the student. Some teachers, especially if they come from a higher socioeconomic background than their students, may carry class prejudices (consciously or not), and those can slip out in moments of frustration. Experimental evidence from Delhi shows that teacher expectations and grading can reflect socioeconomic bias, disadvantaging students from lower-status families (Parashari, 2024).

It's also possible that in the school culture, certain insensitive practices had been normalized to some degree – for example, public fee reminders might have been tacitly allowed or overlooked by administrators if they too were frustrated about collections. Low-fee private schools often operate on tight budgets and rely on timely fee payments, so teachers/administrators can get anxious about it. However, none of that justifies shaming a child – it simply provides context that the teachers' intents were not so much to bully a child for being poor, but rather a misdirected attempt to solve a practical problem (fees) or to motivate (in the case of mocking an occupation).

The Affective Toll of Socioeconomic Shaming: Students who experienced or witnessed socioeconomic shaming reacted with a mix of hurt and indignation. There was a strong sense

of injustice – feeling that one's background, which one cannot change, was being unfairly attacked. Two students (S1, S2, art-based Activity) commented that targeting a parent's job or a family's poverty is "बहुत गलत" ("very wrong") and not something a teacher should do. It violates the trust that school is supposed to be a neutral ground. Those students noted that when such things happened, it left a lasting scar: these were personal insults they remembered long after other scoldings were forgotten. It also lowered their respect for that teacher; one student said after a teacher made a classist remark, she never looked at that teacher the same way again, thinking "Madam doesn't respect people like us." (Student reflection, group interview). This indicates that socioeconomic shaming can severely damage the student-teacher relationship. The student no longer feels the teacher is on their side but rather sees them as looking down on their kind of family.

From the parent side, the father (PS1) who spoke about the fee harassment was clearly disturbed by it. He likely felt both protective (not wanting his child shamed for something that is the parent's responsibility) and personally ashamed (as a father, hearing that a teacher had to ask his child about fees made him feel he failed in his duty). If parents heard that a teacher mocked their occupation in class, it could strain the parent-teacher relationship immensely. I did not have a direct account of a parent confronting the school over such an issue, but one can imagine a proud father being very angry if he learned a teacher called his son "garbage collector" or similar in a derogatory way.

It could even deter parents from engaging with the school or make them feel alienated – thinking, "This school looks down on people like us." Essentially, socioeconomic shaming is dangerous territory for the school to tread, as it attacks the very inclusivity and mutual respect needed in an educational environment. Socioeconomic disparities in communication and engagement between schools and families can erode mutual trust and student well-being.

Research has emphasized the emotional toll this takes, particularly when lower-income families feel marginalized or judged by teachers (Ankrum, 2016).

Shame Without Remedy: Being shamed for one's financial situation or family background can cause a student to feel deep humiliation and powerlessness. Unlike misbehavior or low grades, which a student might feel they can improve (and thus redeem themselves), they cannot change who their parents are or how much money they have. So, it's a shame without remedy, which can breed either resignation or bitterness. Public shaming based on socioeconomic status can cause deep psychological harm, particularly in school settings where students are developing their sense of identity. A systematic review found that socioeconomically disadvantaged children are up to three times more likely to experience mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders (Reiss, 2013).

This impact is exacerbated when stigma and exclusion are present in school environments (Reiss, 2013). A child subjected to this might withdraw socially, fearing classmates see them as "inferior." It can also instill a kind of class-consciousness and even self-directed shame – feeling embarrassed of one's own parents or home. This is very damaging in terms of psychological well-being and identity formation. Some students might react oppositely and become determined to prove the teacher wrong (studying hard to "rise above" their background), but others might internalize the stigma and think, "I'm just a poor kid; no wonder they think less of me." That can undermine their academic drive and self-esteem.

In the peer context, when socioeconomic shaming happens publicly, it can affect how classmates treat the targeted student. Some might pick up on the teacher's cue and use it as a new angle to tease – e.g., calling him *sabzi wala* on the playground (children often mirror what authority figures do). It effectively marks the student with a label. On the flip side, sometimes it can generate empathy – a few students mentioned feeling bad for the peer who

was shamed for being poor, realizing it could just as easily be any of them. In such instances, the class might feel the teacher was out of line. But children being children, there's always the risk someone will latch onto the teacher's insult and repeat it.

The broader implications tie into the role of education in social mobility. Ideally, school should uplift and empower students from all backgrounds. If a school instead reinforces classist attitudes, it's failing that ideal. The fact that these incidents were "rare" suggests the school isn't routinely shaming kids for being poor, but even a few instances contradict the inclusive mission of education. It also reflects how wider societal attitudes (stigma toward certain jobs or poverty) can creep into the classroom: in Indian society, jobs like vegetable seller or garbage collector unfortunately carry stigma due to historical caste/class biases, and here I see a teacher weaponizing that stigma.

In conclusion, socioeconomic shaming stands out as an egregious outlier among the shaming practices – less common but highly corrosive. It shows that shaming in this school context is not only used to address behavior and performance, but at times misused to target a child's identity and family circumstances. The implications for student well-being are severe when this happens, highlighting a need for greater awareness and sensitivity among teachers regarding economic diversity and respect for all backgrounds. Notably, such practices violate not only ethical norms but also legal protections; for instance, India's Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (Government of India, 2009) explicitly prohibits any physical punishment or mental harassment of students, which would include shaming a child over their socioeconomic status. Similarly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms the child's right to dignity and protection from humiliation (United Nations, 1989). Indeed, a national child-rights survey found over 80% of students

had heard demeaning remarks from teachers (NCPCR, 2012), indicating how common such practices remain despite the RTE Act.

5.5 Summary

This chapter traced four relational and sociocultural routes through which classroom shaming is extended and intensified beyond the immediate interaction: (1) threats to involve parents, (2) guilt-tripping through parental sacrifice, (3) gendered moral shaming, and (4) socioeconomic shaming. Taken together, these findings show that discipline is embedded in wider moral economies of family, gender, and class, creating a culturally scripted home–school continuum that helps sustain a climate of strictness in which humiliation can travel across settings.

Threats to involve parents function as a form of "double exposure": a public warning that "I will call home" carries the promise of a second reprimand and collapses the boundary between classroom and home. Guilt-tripping draws on moral narratives of hardship and repayment, converting academic performance into a test of filial duty and worthiness within the family. Gendered shaming relies on culturally salient scripts of modesty and masculinity, policing girls' respectability and boys' toughness in distinct ways. Socioeconomic shaming is particularly stark when it occurs: it ties underperformance to a stigmatized future and reproduces class contempt within pedagogical talk by treating certain occupations and backgrounds as "shameful."

Across these vectors, shaming is sustained not only by individual teacher choices but by shared adult beliefs and community pressures—strictness as care, fear as necessary, honor/respectability, and aspiration—that make humiliation appear legitimate and effective. This helps explain why students can experience shaming as pervasive and inescapable: the same incident can be amplified through home–school alignment, while silence and strategic invisibility become rational self-protection.

Chapter 6 turns to students' accounts of how these practices shape emotional well-being, participation, peer relations, trust, and motivation. Chapter 7 then synthesizes these findings conceptually, examining how shame functions as discipline and moral socialization in this setting and why it persists despite its costs.

Chapter 6: Understanding the Impacts of Shaming on Students

In this chapter, the focus turns to the impacts of classroom shaming on students, addressing Research Question 3 ("What are the impacts of shame-based disciplinary practices on students in the case study school?"). Drawing on student, teacher, and parent perspectives, as well as field observations and student-created drawings, the chapter presents eight interrelated themes of impact. These range from emotional and psychological effects on individual students, to changes in classroom dynamics and relationships, to broader patterns of normalization. Throughout, student voices are centered to illustrate how shaming is experienced *in situ*, while also triangulating these experiences with teacher and parent insights. The findings are interpreted in light of wider socio-cultural context – including stigma (Goffman, 2009), critiques of oppressive education (Freire, 2020), disciplinary power (Foucault, 2012), and symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Importantly, while evidence – including prior studies – highlights that shame-based discipline has predominantly harmful effects on students' well-being (for example, a Kerala school survey found punitive practices were linked to low self-esteem and emotional distress among students; Mumthas et al., 2014), a counter-narrative is also present: some teachers and parents still perceive shaming as a beneficial or even necessary method of maintaining discipline (Plan International, 2006). This nuanced approach avoids casting teachers in a simplistic "deficit" light; instead, it acknowledges their intentions and cultural context even as it critically examines the effects on students. The eight sections below correspond to the key impact themes identified.

Chapters 4 and 5 showed how shame is produced through core in-class techniques—what is said, staged, and signaled in front of peers—and how these practices are reinforced through culturally scripted routes beyond the classroom. This chapter examines what it is like to live and learn within this climate of strictness, and how it can secure outward compliance while producing only a brittle form of order.

6.1 Emotional Distress and Lowered Self-Esteem

Emotional Toll Across Perspectives: Across interviews and observations, students, teachers, and parents frequently described shame-based discipline as emotionally painful for children – a finding echoed by research suggesting that humiliating or harsh verbal punishment by authority figures can cause significant emotional harm to students. In an Indian context, Deb and Walsh (2012) found that students subjected to frequent verbal or psychological punishment exhibited poorer emotional adjustment and well-being compared to their peers. Students recount feelings of acute humiliation, sadness, and lingering hurt when they are shamed publicly. For instance, one Class IX student (S1) described the intense pain of being singled out: "पहले मुझे बेइज्जती होती थी तो मैं रो देती थी" – "Earlier, whenever I was humiliated, I used to start crying" (S1, student interview).

Such incidents "बहुत बुरा लगता है" – "hurt a lot," leaving students feeling embarrassed and unworthy in front of peers (S1, student interview). Over time, some children learn to mask their hurt, but the "emotional scars" of repeated humiliation may linger and contribute to internalized shame. Research in psychology has shown that when students experience frequent shaming, it can significantly erode their self-esteem. For instance, Solomon and Serres (1999) demonstrated that even verbal aggression by parents – a form of shaming –

contributes to lower self-esteem in children. Likewise, a recent meta-analysis by Budiarto and Helmi (2021) found a strong inverse relationship between shame experiences and self-esteem across numerous studies, indicating that chronic shame consistently undermines one's self-worth.

One girl reflected that public ridicule made her feel "छोटी नज़र आने लगी हूँ खुद की नज़रों में" – "I began to look small in my own eyes" (S2, student interview). In other words, being repeatedly shamed caused her to devalue herself – a poignant example of diminished self-worth. Parents in the study described these impacts at home: children who are frequently scolded or compared may become withdrawn and start to doubt their abilities. This parental perception accords with research on child maltreatment – emotionally abused children often exhibit social withdrawal, anxiety, and low confidence in their abilities. For example, an Indian school-based study by Deb and Walsh (2012) noted that students facing regular verbal humiliation showed significantly more social withdrawal and self-doubt than other students.

Such findings underscore that frequent scolding or belittling can instill a sense of helplessness and low self-worth in a child (Erickson, Egeland, & Pianta, 1989, as cited in Deb & Walsh, 2012; Solomon & Serres, 1999). For example, one father noted his son's silence and low confidence after frequent scolding, saying the child now seems to feel "हम कुछ नहीं हैं" – "I am nothing" compared to others (PS12, parent interview). Even teachers sometimes acknowledge the emotional toll. A usually strict teacher (T1) admitted that seeing a student cry or lose confidence "thoda bura toh lagta hai" – "feels a bit bad," even as she believes she is doing it "for their own good" (T5, teacher interview).

In sum, these accounts suggest that public shaming in school can inflict significant emotional distress, leaving children feeling hurt and demoralized. This conclusion aligns with a growing body of research on school bullying and teacher aggression: students who suffer public

humiliation report higher levels of anxiety, shame, and despair. Indeed, Durrant and Ensom (2012) – reviewing global evidence on punitive discipline – note that shaming or humiliating a child can instill feelings of worthlessness and depression, rather than motivating improvement. Such emotional outcomes underscore why educators increasingly condemn public shaming as harmful practice, not just in India but worldwide.

Stigma and Self-Worth: Erving Goffman's concept of stigma offers a useful lens for understanding this emotional distress. In Goffman's terms, public shaming tags the student with a "spoiled identity" – a lasting mark of disgrace – as if a derogatory label ("lazy," "weak," "useless") becomes attached to them in front of others (Goffman, 2009). In other words, the child comes to be seen as the shameful trait, both in others' eyes and their own. Students like one boy (S4) eventually start to believe the negative labels: "शायद मैं सच में निकम्मा हूँ" – "maybe I truly am useless," he thought, if teachers say so repeatedly (S4, student interview). This process of internalizing shame vividly demonstrates how repeated shaming can undermine a student's self-worth.

Indeed, extensive psychological research confirms that frequent experiences of shame are linked to lower self-esteem and greater psychological distress (such as anxiety and depression) in youth. For example, Tangney and Dearing (2002) – in a comprehensive analysis of self-conscious emotions – note that shame-prone children often struggle with feelings of inferiority and heightened emotional distress. Likewise, a recent study of adolescents by Kumar et al. (2023) reported that high exposure to shaming and emotional abuse correlates with symptoms of low self-esteem and internalizing problems (e.g., sadness, fear) in Indian students. These findings solidify the link between chronic shame and poor mental well-being, as referenced in the text. One parent in the study even used the term

"inferiority complex" to describe her child's demeanor after persistent humiliation, observing that her daughter had become excessively shy and self-doubting (PS10, parent interview).

Over time, shame can chip away at a student's confidence and identity. Social-emotional learning experts warn that such negative reinforcement can harm children's emotional well-being and hinder the development of a positive self-concept. Indeed, chronic shame may lead students to struggle with anxiety, depressive feelings, or a sense of unworthiness. In the present case, a common refrain from students was that "ये सबके साथ होता है" – "this happens to everyone" – yet knowing that did not lessen the personal hurt. Rather, it sometimes compounded a sense of helplessness, as students felt they had to accept these indignities as part of schooling. In sum, the evidence paints a picture of profound emotional distress among students subjected to routine shaming, manifesting in tears, embarrassment, self-blame, and loss of self-esteem. This emotional harm is the first and perhaps most direct impact of shame-based discipline.

Symbolic Violence and Gender/Cultural Nuances: These emotional impacts can also be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), wherein authority figures use symbolic means (words, gestures) to assert dominance and the child internalizes a sense of inferiority. For example, a female student noted feeling "small in my own eyes" after being shamed (as quoted above), reflecting how the power dynamic made her see herself as lesser. In this way, shaming enacts social hierarchies in the classroom: the teacher's criticisms carry the weight of authority, and the student, lacking power, comes to accept the negative characterization. This dynamic may be even more pronounced in contexts like my case study school where deference to teachers is culturally ingrained. Students often described having to show outward respect even when they felt deep hurt (a point expanded in Section 6.4).

Additionally, gender norms can intersect with shaming – for instance, girls in this study sometimes felt shamed for assertiveness (being told they were "too bold" or not "modest"), whereas boys were often derided for academic failure or unruliness as signs of future inadequacy. These nuances suggest that the emotional impact of shaming is not monolithic; it is filtered through societal values of honor, obedience, and gender propriety. Nonetheless, across the board, the immediate effect is similar: emotional pain and a blow to the student's self-worth. As one student succinctly put it, "It's like a wound on the inside – no one sees it, but it hurts every time I think about it" (S1, student interview). This section highlights that shame-based discipline harms children's emotional well-being and sense of self, raising serious ethical concerns given that protecting students' dignity is both an educational duty and a legal obligation (Government of India, 2009, which prohibits "mental harassment" of students).

6.2 Suppression of Student Voice and Participation

Fear and Silence: Shame in the classroom casts a long shadow over student participation. Across interviews, many students indicated that the fear of being humiliated made them hesitant to speak up or participate, a pattern also observed in other contexts (Adamson, 2022). One student's experience illustrates this vividly. S1, a typically eager Class IX girl, used to actively assist one of her teachers (T8) with classroom tasks in hopes of praise. But after that teacher made a sarcastic public insult toward her, the student withdrew completely. She recounts how she "used to actively assist [the teacher]", but after being belittled in front of everyone, she resolved, "अब उनके काम कुछ भी नहीं करूँगी" – "Now I won't do any work for her" (S1, student interview).

Later, when the same teacher asked S1 to come write an answer on the board, the student openly refused – a bold act of defiance born of hurt: "मैंने कहा, मेरी ड्यूटी किसी और को दे दो" – "I said, give my duty to someone else" (S1, student interview). This open refusal was entirely uncharacteristic for her and demonstrated how shaming backfired: a once-engaged student became determined not to participate. Ironically, her act of refusal translated into further silence – she chose non-participation as a way to avoid being hurt again. Classmates confirm that this pattern is common. Another student (S2) observed that after witnessing a peer get taunted for asking a question, "बाक़ी क्लास फिर कुछ नहीं पूछती" – "the rest of the class doesn't ask anything else" (S2, student interview).

Even a single public humiliation can have a chilling effect, sometimes quieting the class as students fear being the next target (Freire, 2020). This finding aligns with reports from other contexts; for example, in Nepali schools with strict English-only rules, public shaming of a student can lead many classmates to "remain silent" and avoid participation to escape similar ridicule. Consistent with reports on some Indian schools, the fear of becoming the next target can make students withdraw – keeping their heads down and disengaging – resulting in a classroom climate of constant anxiety (Nambissan, 2009). What should be an open arena for questions and ideas instead became, in many students' words, an environment of "हर समय डर" – constant fear.

Teacher Intent vs. Student Withdrawal: Notably, although teachers may use public scolding in hopes of improving attentiveness, research shows this tactic is often counterproductive for real engagement, frequently shrinking students' participation instead of enhancing it (Goodman & Cook, 2019). Several teachers in my study justified harsh scolding as a way to keep students focused. For example, one teacher (T9) argued that the "threat of public humiliation" makes disruptive students think twice before misbehaving; in her words,

students “will think once… ‘at least study something’” to avoid being shamed (T9, teacher interview). On the surface, this suggests that shaming can coerce compliance – indeed, many students do become quiet immediately after a public rebuke.

Field observations, however, revealed that while shaming can enforce silence, it simultaneously suppresses genuine participation and curiosity. Two Class X students (S13 and S14) described an incident in biology class where a boy’s sincere question was met with an embarrassing joke from the teacher. The boy’s face fell and he “said nothing” afterward; according to S13 and S14, neither he nor anyone else was willing to ask further questions in that class after the teacher’s ridicule (S13 & S14, art-based activity, Part 1). From the teacher’s perspective, the immediate silence might look like obedience or “restored order.” But in reality, a chill had fallen over the classroom – students were complying outwardly out of fear, not engaging out of interest.

One teacher (T7) later reflected on this trade-off: over-reliance on fear might yield “students who answer when asked, but [who] might not venture any ideas if they fear censure for stepping out of line” (T7, teacher interview, summarized in field notes). In educational terms, this is a loss. In such fear-bound classrooms, students may appear compliant (sitting quietly) but are often mentally disengaged – present in body but absent in mind – and unlikely to take the academic risks needed for deep learning (Harber, 2004). Research on student-centered learning corroborates this pattern: a climate of fear stifles the very dialogue and inquiry that are crucial for meaningful learning (Freire, 2020; Harber, 2004). In my case, self-censorship became the norm.

One piece of student-created art poignantly depicted this: a drawing showed a classroom full of students with tape over their mouths – symbolizing how shame had effectively muted them (Student Visual Data, Drawing #5). The common pattern is clear: students choose to stay

silent to survive the class without incident.I even noted a divergent case of subtle resistance – one boy, after being scolded harshly, intentionally gave absurd wrong answers aloud as a form of protest. But even he eventually lapsed into sullen silence when the teacher doubled down on scolding (Field observation, Class IX). Overall, this theme reveals a troubling equation: shame = silence. Practices meant to instill discipline end up discouraging students from active participation, undermining the openness and trust required for an inquisitive learning environment.

Suppressed Voice = Lost Learning: From an educational standpoint, the silencing of student voice has direct consequences for learning. When students refrain from asking questions due to fear of ridicule, they risk letting misunderstandings fester – essentially, those who are most confused do not get help, and their misconceptions remain uncorrected (Ryan et al., 1998). Parents in my study noticed this carry over to the home. For example, one mother (PS10) observed that her daughter, after being shamed at school, even hesitates to ask her own parents for help with studies. The girl internalized the belief that "जो जिनको नहीं आता, उन पर ध्यान नहीं देते हैं टीचर" – "teachers do not pay attention to those who do not [already] understand" (PS10, parent interview). In effect, the students who most need to ask questions (those struggling with the material) become the least likely to do so, lest they invite scolding for "not knowing."

This dynamic confirms Foucault's notion of disciplinary power and surveillance in classrooms, wherein students police their own behavior to avoid punishment. Students, knowing the teacher's authoritative gaze could turn shaming at any moment, begin to self-regulate and self-censor. The classroom starts to resemble a mini-panopticon: even without constant scolding, the memory and possibility of shame keep students in check (Foucault, 2012). One student (S13) mentioned that after a "class clown" was berated harshly in front of

everyone, "फ़िर बच्चा बुरा मान जाता है और चुप हो जाता है" – "the kid feels bad and becomes quiet" for the rest of the lesson (S13, student interview). In such an atmosphere of caution, teachers might achieve orderly, quiet classes – but it is a pyrrhic victory won at the cost of real engagement.

Consistent with findings in other South Asian classrooms (Kurian, 2020; Phyak, 2024), this fear-based silence means many students are physically present but intellectually absent. They complete tasks mechanically and avoid standing out, which keeps them out of trouble but also deprives them of deeper learning opportunities. In summary, shaming practices enforce a culture of quiet compliance that suppresses student voice. What is lost is not only day-to-day classroom dialogue and enthusiasm, but also the development of confident self-expression in students – a loss that may extend beyond school, hindering youths' ability to ask for help or speak up in later life. As Paulo Freire (2020) would describe it, this is part of a culture of silence where the oppressed (students) have been conditioned not to question authority, to the detriment of their critical consciousness and growth.

6.3 Peer Dynamics and Classroom Atmosphere

Peers as Amplifiers of Shame: The classroom is a social stage (recalling Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 2023)), and when a teacher shames a student, the audience of peers plays a critical role in how the "drama" unfolds. The interviews revealed that classmates often amplify the humiliation – sometimes intentionally, sometimes inadvertently. A Class IX student (S2) candidly admitted, "मैं भी हंस देती हूँ" – "I also end up laughing" when a classmate is being scolded publicly (S2, student interview). Many students described similar reflexive laughter or smirks when someone else is getting a dressing-down.

Even if they sympathize with their friend internally, they may join in the laughter or teasing outwardly. This peer reaction often intensifies the shame for the victim.

One student (S6) described the feeling of being laughed at by his classmates after a teacher's insult: "दूसरे बच्चे उनसे मज़े लेंगे… (वो सोचता है) अब तुम भी बोल रहे हो" – "other kids will take fun at their expense… (the hurt student thinks) now even you (my friends) are saying it" (S6 & S5, group interview, Part 1). Thus, what begins as a one-to-one incident (teacher scolding a student) can snowball into a broader episode of ridicule, as peers join in or gossip about it later. Goffman's (1963/2009) idea of the interactive nature of stigma is evident here: the teacher's actions set the stage, but the peers' reactions cement the student's feeling of being disgraced. For example, when a teacher publicly uses a demeaning label or nickname for a student, peers often adopt and repeat that insult as a joke, effectively modeling the teacher's disparagement (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

For instance, one boy who was called "गधा" ("donkey/idiot") by a teacher found that afterward some classmates would bray or whisper "gadha" when he walked by – a cruelty he remembered bitterly. Thus, peers themselves become agents of shaming – sometimes out of a grim sense of enjoyment at another's misfortune, and other times out of relief that "at least it's not me," which can lead them to join in or stay silent (Hawkins et al., 2001; Salmivalli, 2010). The immediate impact on the classroom atmosphere is an amplification of the target's humiliation and a validation (by laughter or silence) of the teacher's action.

Climate of Insecurity and Rivalry: Repeated public shaming also appeared to warp the overall classroom climate, fostering insecurity and even a degree of peer distrust. Students in focus groups explained that when a classmate is scolded harshly, others often feel relief that "it's not me" – which sometimes translates into distancing themselves from the victim. Consistent with research on bullying bystanders, students often avoid supporting or

befriending a punished classmate out of fear of retaliation or a "stigma by association" (Forsberg et al., 2018). One student (S2) observed, "Everyone leaves his side" when a particular boy was routinely shamed, meaning classmates avoided associating with him in class (S2, student interview).

They feared that if they were seen as close to him, the stigma might rub off or teachers might target them next. What follows is a classic "guilt by association" effect: once a student has been publicly disgraced, classmates often avoid being seen with them in order to protect their own standing (Goffman, 2009; Jacobsen, 2020). Furthermore, students admitted that a kind of ridicule culture had developed – they would sometimes bond through joking about incidents of teachers scolding others. In group interviews, older students swapped "famous" insults that certain teachers had delivered, chuckling as if sharing movie lines. They told anecdotes like, "Remember when Sir said X to so-and-so!" followed by laughter.

Such stories, repeated as informal lore, normalize the shaming incidents (as discussed in Section 6.7) and reinforce to new students that this is just how school is. Sociologists have observed that ridicule and "laughing along" at someone's humiliation function as a form of social control, enforcing group norms by making deviants into comic examples (Billig, 2005). But they also indicate a peer culture where empathy for the victim is often overridden by relief or amusement. As a result, emotional support among classmates erodes – students learn to hide their vulnerabilities and may even turn on each other to avoid being the lowest in the pecking order.

Some students described instances of blame-shifting: if a teacher started scolding the class collectively, children would sometimes point out one student's mistake ("Ma'am, it was him, not me!") to divert the heat. In short, a shaming-heavy environment promotes a survival mentality among peers rather than solidarity. The classroom atmosphere tends to become

tense, distrustful, and even competitive, with students looking out for themselves. Empathy gives way to self-preservation. One could argue this is a microcosm of how oppressive systems pit the oppressed against each other (Freire, 2020); here, instead of uniting in constructive challenge to unfair treatment, students often cope by reinforcing the hierarchy – laughing along with the teacher, isolating the shamed, and making sure they themselves conform.

Bullying and Cycles of Shame: There were indications that teacher-led shaming could sometimes bleed into peer bullying. A few students noted that if a classmate was publicly labeled as "stupid" or "bad," some aggressive peers would continue taunting that student later, even when the teacher was not around. In one case, a girl who was harshly scolded by a teacher for "character issues" (talking to boys) became the target of nasty rumors among other girls, essentially extending the shame. Another boy who cried after being yelled at found that later some boys mocked him as "cry-baby." These instances show how peer dynamics can perpetuate and even magnify the harm initiated by the teacher's shaming.

It creates a cycle: a child is shamed by authority, peers take that as license to also ridicule or exclude the child, and the child's victimization is compounded. Notably, some teachers were aware of this dynamic. One teacher (T4) reflected that "students can be very cruel to each other once someone has been embarrassed – they won't let him forget it," suggesting that she knew a public scolding could have ripple effects but felt she had few alternatives for discipline. This again highlights an unintended consequence: n fact, studies have found that when teachers engage in belittling or aggressive discipline, it coincides with higher levels of peer bullying in those classrooms – essentially, students copy the punitive, power-exerting behaviors modeled by the authority figure (Bandura & Walters,1977; Ivaniushina & Alexandrov, 2022).

The class "joker," for example, might adopt the teacher's sarcastic tone to tease weaker students. From a theoretical perspective, this resonates with social learning theory – students learn behavior by observing authority figures. If the authority uses humiliation to enforce norms, students may adopt similar tactics in their peer interactions, figuring that mockery is acceptable. The overall impact on the classroom atmosphere, therefore, is a more hostile or cold social environment. A few sensitive students voiced that they wished classmates would stand up for each other more, "but then teacher will scold them too," so it rarely happened. Fear had permeated not just teacher-student relations but peer relations as well.

In sum, peer dynamics in a shaming environment tend to amplify the negative effects. The classroom atmosphere shifts toward one of insecurity, with laughter that hides fear, silence that hides sympathy, and a lack of open camaraderie. Students described feeling that they were "not really friends" during class because everyone was occupied with not making a mistake or being associated with one. This chilling effect on peer support further contributes to students' social and emotional alienation in school, beyond the direct teacher-student impact.

6.4 Breakdown of Trust in Student–Teacher–Parent Relationships

Student–Teacher Rift: A consistent theme across student interviews was that public shaming undermines trust and respect between students and teachers. In an experimental study with Chinese middle-school students, researchers found that harsh public discipline by teachers significantly reduced students' trust in those teachers, supporting the interview evidence that public shaming undermines student–teacher trust and respect (Zhang & Qi,

2024). Students may continue to behave obediently after being shamed – they might still say "Yes, ma'am" or do the assigned work – but internally their perception of the teacher changes. Many students confided that after a teacher humiliates them, they no longer view that teacher as a caring mentor. Instead, they may secretly resent or distrust the teacher. One student (S1) explained, "Respect for them ends from inside; outwardly we still have to show it." (S1, student interview).

This quote encapsulates a loss of genuine respect: on the surface, the formalities of respect remain (students still greet the teacher, comply in class), but in the student's heart the respect has evaporated, replaced by bitterness or fear. Several students used phrases like "दिल से नहीं मानते" – "we don't respect them from the heart" – to describe their feelings toward teachers who regularly shamed them. This emotional distancing suggests a breakdown of the student–teacher relationship. The trust that students should have in teachers – trust that the teacher is fair, has their best interests in mind, and will treat them with dignity – is ruptured. Instead, students come to see the teacher as someone who might hurt them (psychologically) if they slip up. Research on school relationships emphasizes that trust is foundational to a healthy student–teacher bond, and once that trust is broken, the relationship deteriorates (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

In line with this, studies have shown that overly harsh discipline makes students doubt a teacher's fairness and benevolence; for example, students will perceive a teacher who metes out excessive punishment as lacking in integrity and kindness, which ruptures the relationship (Zhang & Qi, 2024). In such cases the teacher is no longer viewed as a caring mentor but rather as an unpredictable source of hurt, confirming that the student–teacher relationship has broken down. Consequently, students become guarded in front of such teachers, revealing less of themselves and sometimes even avoiding contact. Psychologists have noted that

feelings of shame often lead individuals to withdraw and hide their true thoughts; for instance, students may emotionally "go into a shell" and avoid interacting with the teacher who shamed them (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

In a classroom context, this means that once a student has been humiliated by a teacher, the student is likely to become guarded and minimize contact with that teacher, a dynamic my findings illustrate. For instance, one student (S8) mentioned she would deliberately not approach a certain teacher even if she didn't understand something in class because "उन्हें भरोसा नहीं है" – "I don't trust her" to respond kindly. This erosion of trust can also lead to passive defiance: students may follow instructions to avoid punishment, but they stop putting any extra effort or showing any enthusiasm in that teacher's subject. In their minds, that teacher is "just someone to get past" rather than a guide or ally in learning.

From the teachers' perspective, a few recognized this rift. One experienced teacher (T5) noted in an interview that "some children, once you scold them very hard, they go into a shell – they won't ever come to you for anything." She seemed aware that excessive humiliation could "close off" students. However, teachers often attributed a student's withdrawal to the student's stubbornness or pride ("he has zid [stubborn pride], so he stopped talking to me after that scolding"), rather than recognizing it as an outcome of hurt. This indicates a possible blind spot: teachers did not always realize the extent to which their shaming damaged the relational fabric. Educational research emphasizes that trust and rapport are foundational to effective teaching (Bryk & Schneider, 2002); my findings illustrate how shame-based methods corrode those foundations. A relationship that should be built on mutual respect and care turns into one marred by apprehension and resentment.

Research confirms that when students fear humiliation, they tend to stop speaking up in class. In a recent developmental psychology experiment, even children as young as seven were

found to avoid asking questions or admitting confusion if peers (or teachers) might think they are "stupid", highlighting that a climate of potential shame severely curtails honest student participation (Good & Shaw, 2022). Thus, a classroom riddled with public shaming creates the opposite of a "safe" space – students keep their opinions and doubts to themselves to avoid becoming targets. (as discussed in Section 6.2). They also become less likely to approach teachers outside class for guidance or personal issues. One student's comment was telling: "I will never forget how Sir made me feel in front of everyone. Even if I have a problem, I'd rather stay quiet than talk to him now" (S5, field interview).

This sentiment shows that shaming doesn't just silence a student in the moment – it can create a lasting barrier. In a healthy environment, a student might seek extra help or confess to a teacher if they're struggling. In my case, many students indicated they would hide their difficulties for fear of further ridicule. This means teachers actually lose insight into their students' needs, creating a self-reinforcing cycle: the less students communicate, the more a frustrated teacher might resort to scolding to elicit responses or compliance, which in turn further shuts down communication. The classroom dialogue thus becomes superficial and one-way, with students only speaking when required and giving minimal responses to avoid drawing ire. Freire's (2020) critique of the *banking model* of education – where communication is one-sided and students are passive – resonates here, except it is enforced not just by pedagogy but by fear.

Strain in Home–School Relationships: Shaming can also strain the teacher–parent relationship and the overall home–school trust. For example, a large-scale survey in China found that the stricter or more intense the teacher's punishments, the lower the parents rated their trust in that teacher (Zhang, Huang, et al., 2025). Some parents in the study described feeling uneasy or upset when they learned how teachers were handling discipline. One

mother (PS11) recounted attending a parent-teacher meeting where several parents discussed the teachers' harsh scoldings. During that meeting, her own son casually mentioned, "हाँ होता है, टीचर ने कल ही गधा बोला मुझे" – "Yes it [such scolding] happens; just yesterday the teacher called me an 'idiot'."

He said it laughing, which actually disturbed the mother more. She was stunned: Why is my child laughing about being called a gadha? It indicated to her that he had become numb to such insults. This realization undermined her confidence in the school's care. She wondered what else was happening that children weren't reporting because they saw it as "normal." Another parent (PS11's mother, of a girl in Class X) commented that her daughter "पहले रो देती थी, अब चुपचाप सुन लेती है" – "earlier she would cry [when scolded], now she just quietly listens" (PS11, parent interview). The mother wasn't sure if this change was a sign of maturity or something worrisome – had her child become too accustomed to harsh treatment?

Parents who had themselves grown up with strict schooling sometimes shrugged such things off ("that's just how school is"). But others, especially younger parents or those trying to be more involved, lost trust in the teachers' judgment when they heard about incidents of extreme shaming. One father (PS4) remarked in his interview that if a teacher "goes too far in humiliating, उस बच्चे से फिर आप उम्मीद मत रखो" – "then don't expect that child to listen to you anymore" (PS4, parent interview). In his view, excessive shaming backfires: the student mentally disengages and the parent also begins to view the teacher as part of the problem rather than a partner in the child's education.

The relationship between parents and teachers can thus become tense. Some parents quietly sympathize with their child and resent the teacher's methods, but they may not voice it openly due to cultural deference to teachers. Instead, they might undermine the teacher at home (for instance, by consoling the child that the teacher was wrong or too harsh). This

dynamic is supported by survey research indicating that corporal punishment and strict discipline are often accepted as "just how school is," making parents less likely to intervene directly (Deb et al., 2017). This covert erosion of respect means the teacher's authority is no longer reinforced by parents, which can create mixed messages for the student. Other parents, however, do support the teachers' disciplinary stance (as we will see in Section 6.8), which can put them at odds with more concerned parents.

In the PTA meeting scenario above, parents were divided – a few thanked teachers for being strict, while others shared worries about the emotional impact. This lack of a unified front can complicate home–school collaboration and further confuse students about what to feel. Overall, what should be a trusting partnership (teachers and parents working together for the child's benefit) can fracture when shaming tactics come to light. Teachers might feel parents are undermining their discipline, and parents feel teachers are overstepping or harming their child, but neither side communicates these concerns well. The child, stuck in the middle, learns that it's safest to keep their head down and not talk about school problems at all – which again loops back into reduced communication and trust.

In summary, shame-based discipline tends to hollow out the authentic respect and trust that ideally bind students, teachers, and parents. Outward compliance may continue (students still say the right things; parents still formally defer to teachers), but it is increasingly a façade. As one candid student (S1) put it, "We show them respect because we have to, but in our hearts we only fear them, not respect them." This breakdown of genuine respect has long-term implications: it can diminish teachers' positive influence on students and reduce parental engagement with the school beyond perfunctory interactions. The learning environment becomes one of enforced order rather than mutual trust – a precarious state that may maintain

control in the short term, but at the cost of the relational foundation that supports true education.

6.5 Short-Term Compliance vs. Long-Term Engagement

A striking finding is the contrast between the immediate compliance that shaming often produces and the long-term disengagement that can result. Teachers and some parents in the study frequently pointed to short-term improvements in behavior or academics as evidence that strict, shame-infused discipline "works." Indeed, in the short run, many students do become more obedient: they fall silent, follow rules, complete their homework – all to avoid the sting of public scolding. For example, the teacher T1 (cited earlier) noted proudly that in her class "no child [is] failing" and attributed this to her strict approach, saying that fear makes students study at least enough to pass (T1, teacher interview).

Parents too gave examples: one father (PS4) admitted that when he started comparing his son to a high-achieving cousin in a shaming way ("Look how well he does, why can't you?"), the boy's grades did improve on the next test. The father believed this was because he "थोड़ी लगाम कसना" – "tightened the reins a bit," implying that instilling some shame and fear motivated the child to work harder. From such perspectives, shame-based methods yield quick results: work gets done, test scores tick up, the class stays quiet. This is the utilitarian argument often presented – the ends (better discipline, higher marks) justify the means (some hurt feelings).

Many educators in India echo this ends-justify-means view – for example, in a Madhya Pradesh school survey, a majority of teachers believed that harsh punishment yields quick improvements in student behavior and marks (Lowanshi, 2019). Some parents in the PTA meetings even praised teachers for being strict. One mother of a boy often described as

unruly recounted that after a teacher publicly humiliated her son for bullying a classmate, the boy "सीधा हो गया कुछ दिन में" – "became straight-behaved (well-behaved) within a few days." She actually thanked the teacher in the next meeting for "not sparing him." Clearly, a segment of stakeholders sees immediate compliance and performance as key indicators of success, and shaming appears to deliver these in their experience. This forms a powerful narrative supporting the practice (further discussed as a counter-narrative in Section 6.8).

However, when we examine the longer-term effects on student engagement — that is, the cumulative impact of repeated shaming over the course of their schooling, as students themselves described it — a very different picture emerges. Students describe that while they may comply outwardly under fear, their intrinsic motivation and love of learning are often undermined. One student (S7) poignantly explained, "The heart isn't in it. We become robots, doing everything right but without joy or understanding." (S7, focus group). What he expresses is that students subjected to constant shaming learn to operate on autopilot – completing tasks to avoid punishment, not because they value the task or find meaning in it. Field research indicates that when students study under threat of shame, they often resort to rote memorization rather than genuine engagement – essentially "cramming" to avoid mistakes instead of exploring the material (Lowanshi, 2019).

In fact, several students mentioned that being scolded or shamed for mistakes taught them to "play it safe" academically. For instance, a student (S5) said he stopped attempting tougher problems or creative projects in a particular class because, "अगर गलती हुई तो सर के सामने बेइज्जती होगी" – "if I make a mistake, I'll be humiliated in front of Sir." So he only did the minimum he was sure he could do correctly. Education scholars warn that authoritarian, fear-based teaching can indeed stifle students' critical thinking and creativity. For instance, Harber (2004) noted

that overly punitive schools tend to "crush critical thinking" and leave learners feeling alienated rather than intellectually curious.

Over-reliance on shame also appears to affect students' attitudes toward education. Some become cynical, viewing school as a place to endure rather than to learn. One student in Class X (S5) bluntly stated, "We just have to get through it. Learning happens in spite of all this, not because of it." This suggests that any genuine learning that occurs is incidental or due to students' own resilience, not because the disciplinary climate is conducive. Child development experts note that harsh discipline can backfire in the long run – rather than instilling lasting values, it often leaves students with no positive connection to learning. They obey out of fear but do not internalize the value of studying, as shown by research indicating such students only behave when an authority is watching (Gershoff, 2002). Upon informal conversations with older siblings of current students reflected that even though they did fine in exams, they "never liked studying" after years of this treatment and were relieved to leave school. This resonates with theories of self-determination in education, which posit that external controls like threats and humiliation can undermine internal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). My data supports this: fear-based discipline produces compliance, not commitment.

Teachers themselves had some awareness of this trade-off. One younger teacher (T3) noted that while she could "keep the class pin-drop silent" with her stern approach, she worried that "maybe they are just scared and not actually interested in learning." She observed that whenever she tried a more interactive activity, students were hesitant and passive, possibly because they were accustomed to a punitive environment. This insight echoes Clive Harber's argument that authoritarian schooling can "crush critical thinking and create alienation" (Harber, 2004). In my context, students often described feeling alienated from the learning

process – they did what they were told but felt no personal connection. Some used the metaphor that they were treated "like animals to be tamed," so they responded just as animals might to a trainer – obeying commands – but with no intellectual spark.

There is also an ethical and developmental concern here: if students learn that compliance is the ultimate goal (and that not getting yelled at equals success), they may not develop a healthy sense of autonomy or moral reasoning. Instead of understanding why certain behavior or effort is good, they learn only to avoid punishment. One student (S8) reflected on this, saying, "Sometimes we don't actually see what we did wrong, we just know we got scolded. So next time we either don't get caught or we just do it grudgingly." This comment suggests that the opportunity for true moral or intellectual development is lost. The student hasn't internalized the value or lesson behind a rule; he has just learned to either evade detection or comply without conviction.

This aligns with classic educational philosophy: John Dewey (1938/1986), for example, insisted that true education must engage students' understanding and active agency rather than mere outward obedience. My findings show that shame-heavy discipline runs contrary to that ideal, often producing what one might call hollow discipline: students follow rules under surveillance, but remove the surveillance (or fear) and the behavior might not persist, because it was never internalized as a value. Similarly, external control without internal buy-in tends to create "hollow" discipline. Research on punitive parenting found that when the enforcer is absent, children often relapse into misbehavior, since the rule was never truly internalized (Gershoff, 2002).

In practical terms, a few students noted that when the pressure was off, they would "rebel" or simply lose motivation. For example, during a long stretch when a feared teacher was on leave, students admitted they stopped doing homework or paying as much attention, because

"there was no one to shout." Similarly, after graduating from the strict environment, some students found it hard to motivate themselves in college where self-study was required – they had so associated studying with external threats that in the absence of those, they floundered. These anecdotes highlight a long-term cost: reliance on shame and fear can create students who are dependent on external control and have not developed self-discipline or love of learning.

In summary, the short-term vs. long-term dichotomy is a central paradox of shame as a disciplinary tool. In the short run, it can indeed yield quiet classrooms, completed assignments, and adherence to rules – outcomes that make teachers' and parents' lives easier and feed the perception that it is "effective." However, the evidence from students' perspectives indicates that beneath this compliant surface, long-term engagement suffers. Students lose intrinsic motivation, take fewer intellectual risks, and may even become disaffected with schooling altogether. Over time, the genuine educational mission – fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and a positive attitude to learning – is compromised. This finding is critical for understanding why practices that appear successful on the surface (everyone sitting straight and scoring passing marks) may be masking deeper educational failures. It suggests that measures of success need to be re-examined: is the goal merely obedient students this term, or lifelong learners? If it's the latter, shame-based discipline seems to be a counterproductive strategy.

6.6 Student Coping and Resistance

Not all students respond to shaming in passive or intended ways. This theme explores the various coping mechanisms and forms of resistance that students employ under a regime of

shame-based discipline. Despite being in a constrained position, students are not mere blank slates – they exercise agency (however limited) to navigate or push back against what they experience.

Emotional Coping and Desensitization: A common response, especially among older students, is a kind of emotional coping through numbing or normalization (closely related to the normalization theme in Section 6.7). Students described "hardening" themselves as a deliberate coping strategy. They used phrases like "पत्थर दिल" – "stone-hearted" or "ढीठ" – "thick-skinned" to characterize this state. By deciding not to care, they protect themselves from constant hurt. One student (S3) frankly stated, "Now even if I get punished, I just laugh it off… we have become hardened." (S3, student interview). His tone suggested pride in not letting the teachers see him hurt. This stoicism is a double-edged sword: on one hand, it's a resilience tactic that helps students survive psychologically; on the other, it represents a loss of openness and sensitivity.

Students who cope this way might appear indifferent – they may indeed laugh along when scolded or show no reaction – which can lead teachers to think the child is shameless or incorrigible ("अब इसे फर्क नहीं पड़ता," as one teacher said – "now it doesn't affect him"). In reality, as students explained, it did affect them at first, but after repeated episodes they taught themselves not to visibly react. Some admitted that privately they still felt hurt or cried when alone, but publicly they maintained a facade of impassivity. This coping mechanism can mitigate immediate embarrassment (since bullies, whether teachers or peers, often seek a reaction), but it may carry internal costs like suppressed emotions or stress. Nonetheless, it was one of the most commonly cited strategies: "Just ignore it and carry on with your own thing," as one boy (S3) summarized (S3, student interview). By treating scoldings as "background noise", students try to deprive the shaming of its power over them.

Covert Resistance: Some students engage in subtle or covert forms of resistance against shaming teachers. These acts of defiance are usually low-key enough to avoid direct confrontation (which would invite more shame), but they allow students to reclaim a sense of agency or dignity. For example, a few students shared that they deliberately under-perform or pretend not to care about a subject taught by a particularly demeaning teacher, almost as a form of quiet protest. "If Sir calls me 'dull' no matter what, fine – I won't even try to do well in his subject," one student (S5) recalled thinking.

This kind of self-sabotage is risky and arguably harms the student, but in his mind it was a way to reject the teacher's approval. It's as if the student is saying, "You've labeled me a failure; I'll embrace that label and deny you the satisfaction of seeing me strive." Another subtle resistance some students practiced was mocking the teacher behind their back – for instance, assigning nicknames to strict teachers ("Hitler Didi" was one such nickname mentioned) or making satirical drawings of them. These actions, shared only among peers, gave students a sense of empowerment through humor. It built camaraderie ("we're in this together against the tyrant teacher") and provided an outlet for frustration.

Studies show that humor can serve as a "protective resource" for youth in adverse situations, fostering peer solidarity and mutual resilience (Rodriguez, 2023, ethnographic study of adolescents). Similarly, in Indian classrooms students often band together privately – sharing jokes or secret support – to cope with a punitive teacher, using dark humor and camaraderie to defuse the shame and empower each other (Waseem & Firdous, 2025, review of Indian adolescent studies). Such peer-bonding acts as an emotional safety net, letting shamed students know their friends are "in it together" with them. Of course, such covert resistance can further irritate teachers if they become aware (one teacher discovered a caricature a

student had drawn of her and was furious), but typically students were careful to keep it out of official sight.

A notable form of covert resistance highlighted by visual data was students helping each other in secret. In one observation, after a teacher shamed a boy for not doing homework, calling him lazy and making him stand aside, a classmate quietly slipped him her completed homework notebook to copy from so that he wouldn't face further scolding. The teacher didn't notice, but we did. Acts like this – students covering for each other, sharing answers, or quietly encouraging a shamed friend – show that peer solidarity can exist under the radar. It's a positive resistance in that it pushes back against the shaming by denying it full effect (the boy avoided further punishment thanks to his peer). However, it also indicates that students feel the need to subvert rules to protect each other, which is a telling indicator of a problematic system.

Overt Defiance (Rare Cases): There were rare but significant instances of open defiance, where a student directly pushed back against a teacher's shaming in the moment. These were memorable precisely because they were uncommon in a culture that discourages questioning authority. One example mentioned earlier is S1 outright refusing a task after being insulted. Another case involved a Class X student (S8) who, after being scolded as "useless" in front of the class, talked back to the teacher in a moment of anger – saying something like, "If I'm so useless, why do you even teach me?!" This was a shocking breach of decorum in the school. According to classmates, the class fell silent expecting severe retribution. The teacher (T5) indeed was stunned and extremely angry.

She sent the student to the principal and he received a formal warning. Later, in an interview, that student (S8) reflected on the incident: "At first it felt good… we said so much (to a teacher)… but later we realized we had said too much… sometimes we even apologize." (S8,

student interview). This shows the conflicted feelings that accompany overt resistance. In the heat of the moment, standing up for oneself against humiliation can feel empowering – the student asserts their dignity. But afterward, given the power imbalance, the student might feel regret or fear the consequences. In this case, the student did apologize later, and he mentioned feeling guilty for "disrespecting" the teacher despite believing the teacher was wrong to call him useless.

Openly challenging a teacher is extraordinarily rare in the Indian context, as strict norms of deference to elders discourage any confrontation (Pearce & Malhotra, 2022). Even when a student does protest against unjust shaming, they often feel guilty or conflicted afterward, having been raised to view such defiance as disrespectful (Pearce & Malhotra, 2022). In other words, the culture of obedience is so ingrained that students who "step out of line" by resisting can internalize shame for having broken the expected respect hierarchy. It is a testament to the school's socialization that students who resist openly often end up doubting themselves ("maybe I shouldn't have spoken back") rather than the system.

Resilience and Finding Voice: On a more hopeful note, a few students managed to channel their experience of being shamed into a resolve to prove teachers wrong or to develop alternative avenues for confidence. One girl (S2) who was frequently taunted for her academic performance shared that she joined a dance class outside of school and excelled there. The praise and success she found in dance "balanced" the negativity of school for her. "In school they only saw my mistakes. In dance class, my teacher saw my talent," she said. This gave her the resilience to not let the school's shaming define her identity.

Another student (S7) said that the constant scolding in English class (a subject he was weak in) motivated him to independently practice speaking English at home using online resources, so that he could "shut the teacher up next time." Indeed, by year's end he had improved

enough that when the teacher tried to mock his reading, he confidently read the passage without errors – an episode he relayed with pride. These cases show that personal resilience and resistance can take constructive forms too, albeit driven by adverse experiences. It's important to note, however, that such outcomes depended on individual temperament and external support; not every student could respond this way, nor should they have to.

All considered, students are not passive recipients of shaming – they interpret, adapt to, and sometimes resist these disciplinary practices. Their coping strategies range from emotional shielding (numbing themselves), to subtle subversions (cheating rules to help peers, joking privately), to rare confrontations. Each of these strategies carries its own implications. Emotional numbing (explored more in 6.7) can lead to loss of sensitivity. Covert defiance can create a hidden curriculum of its own (students learn how to "work around" the system rather than engage with it). Open defiance can be risky and internally confusing in a culture of hierarchy. These student responses underscore their agency but also the stress and complexity of navigating a school environment where punishment by humiliation is always a looming threat. In essence, a significant portion of students' energy is spent on coping with the school climate rather than on learning – an indictment of the system's inefficacy from a student welfare perspective.

6.7 Normalization and Desensitization

Shame as Routine: One of the most sobering themes is the normalization of shaming practices over time. Repeated exposure to humiliation tends to dull students' emotional reactions, until many come to accept such treatment as a normal part of schooling – a pattern also observed in a North Indian school ethnography where even students eventually

rationalized harsh scolding as routine and for their own good (Kurian, 2020). Many students who had been in this school for years reported that scoldings, public taunts, and sarcastic put-downs became so routine that they barely reacted outwardly. A Class IX boy shrugged when asked how he felt about teachers yelling, saying matter-of-factly, "ये तो रोज़ का है" – "this is an everyday thing." To him, being shouted at by a teacher was nothing remarkable; it had lost its shock value. Another student, S3, explicitly described this desensitization effect: "अब तो… हँस के निकाल देते हैं" – "now we just laugh it off."

If he was called to the front and berated, or subjected to a cutting remark, he claimed it hardly fazed him anymore – it was almost a performance everyone was used to. Many peers echoed this jaded attitude. They agreed that after a while, "डांट सुन-सुन के आदत हो जाती है" – "by hearing scoldings over and over, one gets used to it." They likened it to a constant background noise: initially annoying or upsetting, but eventually one tunes it out. This normalization can be understood as a coping plateau – a psychological adjustment to frequent hurt as a self-protection mechanism (to avoid constant emotional pain). It parallels how people adapt to any chronic stressor: the first instances provoke strong reactions, but over time, feeling repeatedly hurt leads to a kind of numbness. By the time students reach the higher grades, many have effectively accepted shaming as a normal part of teacher–student interaction.

From a theoretical angle, this reflects Bourdieu's idea of habitus – students and teachers internalize the social environment to the point that it feels natural. The dominated (students) come to see the dominance (teachers' harsh discipline) as "the way things are," not to be questioned. As one student succinctly put it, "डांट तो हवा हो गई है" – "Scolding has become just air." In other words, it's omnipresent yet invisible in its normality. This state of normalization is alarming because it means harmful behavior evades scrutiny – few speak up against it or even recognize it as problematic anymore. When something harmful becomes routine, its

harm can actually deepen (through accumulated effects) even as immediate reactions to it wane.

Emotional Numbing: Normalization goes hand in hand with emotional numbing. Students even joked about their own loss of sensitivity. Some described themselves or friends as "ढीठ" – which in Hindi carries the connotation of someone who is shamelessly unbothered or hardened. In the students' usage, it wasn't exactly a compliment, but a badge of survival: "We've become *dheet* – the scoldings roll off us." They might smirk or roll their eyes during a reprimand, internally saying, "फिर शुरू हो गए" – "here we go again," essentially tuning out the content of the scolding. One student (S5) said that when a certain teacher launched into her familiar tirade, he would mentally check out and start planning his evening soccer game, because "सुना-सुनाया लगता है" – "it feels like the same old story." This indicates a loss of efficacy in the disciplinary strategy: what once might have shocked or shamed students now barely commands their attention. From the teacher's perspective, this is frustrating.

In fact, some teachers lamented that "अब बच्चों को डाँट का उतना असर नहीं होता" – "now scolding doesn't affect kids as much." As a result, a few teachers admitted they escalate tactics when they sense students have grown too accustomed. For instance, one teacher (T4) said that since yelling no longer had impact, she sometimes resorted to more extreme measures – like threatening to call parents to school (publicly invoking that threat) or making ominous comparisons ("Do you want to end up like [so-and-so who dropped out]?!") – to try to pierce through the "thick skin" students have developed. This escalation creates a self-reinforcing cycle: as students get desensitized to one level of humiliation, some teachers intensify the shame (more public, more personal remarks) in an attempt to regain control. That, in turn, may lead to further desensitization, or worse, cause serious emotional harm if the escalation crosses certain lines (e.g., attacking very sensitive personal issues like family tragedies, body

shaming, etc.). It becomes an "arms race" of punitive measures versus emotional calluses – a deeply unhealthy dynamic for a learning environment.

Peer Culture of Acceptance: Within the peer group, normalization means students not only expect humiliation for themselves, but also treat it as normal when it happens to others – sometimes even as a form of entertainment. As noted in Section 6.3, students occasionally derive a grim amusement from seeing classmates scolded, as long as they themselves are not the target. In focus groups, some admitted (with a mix of guilt and laughter) that a teacher's dramatic scolding session could be "मज़ेदार" – "funny" to watch, even as some acknowledged discomfort about finding it entertaining. Over time, entire cohorts develop a kind of dark humor about it. They recount well-known incidents almost like telling anecdotes or comedy skits. When such stories lose their sting and become just anecdotes, it signifies that shame has been fully normalized among the students.

The emotional weight that these events should carry – for instance, compassion for the victim or indignation at the unfairness – gets displaced by casual retellings. In my case, many older students would narrate the "best" insults teachers had delivered, chuckling as if discussing scenes from a movie. This peer normalization further entrenches the idea that "there's nothing unusual or unacceptable" about what's happening. It also exerts peer pressure on any student who does feel strongly that it's wrong – because everyone else is treating it lightly, a student who is upset by a scolding might keep those feelings hidden to not seem over-sensitive. In effect, peer norms begin to enforce silence about pain: "Don't be a baby, we all get scolded, just laugh it off."

Parental Awareness (or Lack Thereof): Interestingly, not all parents realize that this normalization is taking place. Some parents interpret their child's lack of complaints about school as a sign everything is fine, not realizing the child has simply accepted harsh

discipline as normal and therefore says nothing at home. In interviews, a number of parents initially shrugged off questions about shaming, saying their child "never mentioned any problem." It was only when specific incidents were brought up (sometimes through the student's testimony or other parents' input) that they recognized something was amiss. For example, the mother who heard her son nonchalantly mention being called gadha (idiot) was shocked because he had never told her about it before. She had assumed no news was good news.

This points to a disconnect: children might not report everyday humiliations to parents precisely because they see them as routine and possibly worry that complaining might either upset the parent or lead the parent to ineffectual action (or even rebuke the child for "offending the teacher"). Some parents, especially those who themselves endured similar schooling, are prone to normalize it too. One father said, "Yeah, teachers scold. It happened to me too. As long as they're not beating him, it's okay." This points to an intergenerational cycle of normalization – many adults who endured shame-based discipline now view it as "just how school is," thus perpetuating the practice (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015). On the other hand, a few parents did wake up to the issue.

PS11 observed that her daughter "पहले रो देती थी, अब चुपचाप सुन लेती है" – "used to cry before, now just quietly listens" – and she wasn't sure if that was resilience or a troubling sign of emotional numbing (PS11, parent interview). "इतना दबाव नहीं… कि बच्चा टूट जाए" – "there shouldn't be so much pressure that the child breaks," she cautioned, showing concern that there is a line where toughness could become trauma. This kind of parental reflection is crucial. It shows some parents do worry that normalization is not the same as health – a child might not react anymore, but that doesn't mean the practice is okay. However, unless a critical mass of parents voice such concerns, the status quo often persists.

Some parents even mistake normalization for resilience or strength: “My child is tough; he doesn’t even cry when teachers scold him now,” one father said with a hint of pride, not realizing that what he viewed as toughness might actually be suppressed hurt. The concept of reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 1989) – where an offender is shamed and then forgiven and guided back into the community – is largely absent in this context. Here, it’s mostly stigmatizing shame that children learn to live with. Social-emotional learning advocates would argue that this situation is dangerous because children might lose their barometer for what is appropriate behavior from authority figures and what isn’t. If a child comes to believe public humiliation is normal, they may struggle to identify and assert boundaries in other areas of life (e.g., in future workplaces or relationships, they might tolerate abuse thinking it’s “just how it is”).

Consequences of Desensitization: The normalization and resulting desensitization have complex consequences. On one hand, outward disruptions decline – desensitized students might not protest or show visible distress, which a teacher or school might falsely read as positive adaptation (“See, they’re fine with it now”). On the other hand, the damage may be quietly accumulating. Just because a student doesn’t cry or complain doesn’t mean the experience leaves no mark; it may manifest later in ways less visible in the school context. For example, as discussed in Section 6.1, chronic shame can contribute to low self-esteem and anxiety that might only fully emerge in adulthood. Or students may develop a cynical or disengaged attitude toward any authority or institution, carrying a distrust seeded in school.

A common pattern noted by teachers themselves was diminished responsiveness even to positive interactions. One teacher, T3, noted that some students who had “tuned out” due to constant scolding also seemed indifferent even to praise or encouragement when it was occasionally given. She remarked, “If I suddenly compliment them, they look at me like

‘What does ma’am want now?’” (T3, field notes). This illustrates how a persistently negative environment can breed skepticism. Students might suspect any kindness as a trick or simply not value it because they never experienced a supportive baseline. In essence, the overuse of shame can blunt not only negative emotions but positive ones too – students may stop responding to rewards, motivation, or genuine care, having adopted an affectless stance.

We observed a particularly telling case of rapid normalization: a student transferred in from a more liberal school was initially shocked by how teachers yelled at students here. But within a few months, he said he “stopped being shocked… it’s normal here.” That quick acclimation demonstrates the human capacity to adjust to social norms, even harmful ones. By the same token, it shows how a fresh perspective (his initial shock) can fade quickly, which is why insiders (long-term students or teachers) may underestimate how wrong the situation is – they too have adapted.

In conclusion, normalization and desensitization represent a critical plateau in the cycle of classroom shaming – the point at which students (and even teachers and parents) come to accept shame as “just how things are.” The risk is that when harmful behavior becomes routine, it evades scrutiny. Fewer people question it or even notice it, and it continues unchecked. As one student’s metaphor of “scolding has become just air” suggests, the practice becomes an invisible part of the climate – but like polluted air, its effects on health (here, emotional and educational health) might be profound despite people’s habituation.

Normalization can lead to collective complacency: teachers continue shaming because “no one’s complaining,” students don’t complain because “it’s normal,” and parents assume “this is how discipline is.” The danger is that increasingly extreme incidents of humiliation might occur and still be tolerated until severe harm is done, because the threshold of concern has been raised. Breaking out of this normalized state would likely require a deliberate

intervention or cultural shift – perhaps through awareness programs, policy changes, or the introduction of social-emotional learning initiatives – to re-sensitize the school community to why such shaming is problematic. Otherwise, the cycle perpetuates itself, year after year, with students merely surviving rather than thriving in the classroom environment.

6.8 Perceived Benefits and Justifications (Counter-Narrative)

Up to this point, the findings have detailed predominantly negative impacts of shaming on students. However, it is also important to acknowledge a counter-narrative that emerged in teacher and parent accounts: some adults perceive shame-based discipline as effective, caring, or morally necessary. Taking this perspective seriously matters analytically because it helps explain why shaming practices persist despite the harms documented in Sections 6.1–6.7.

"Tough love" as care and moral formation: Several teachers framed strictness as a form of guidance rather than cruelty. One veteran teacher (T5) described herself as the "ख़रूस" teacher (strict/gruff) and argued that "children need firm guidance," even if that involves scolding or making a child feel embarrassed. In her view, reprimand can be a sign of invested care: "If I am disciplined, I want to make my children disciplined… My parents kept me in line, so I do the same." (T5, teacher interview). She also invoked a common moral idiom: "मारता है तो अपना ही बच्चा समझकर" — "If he (the teacher) beats you, it's because he thinks of you as his own child." In this framing, harsh correction is interpreted as concern: the adult is invested enough to "fix" the child.

This moral justification also appeared in accounts of "values" and "character." For example, another teacher (T6) emphasized that part of her role is to cultivate "आदर्श व्यवहार" (ideal behavior) and "संस्कार" (values/etiquette). She justified stern public rebukes for disrespectful or rude conduct as "for their own good — to make them better people." (T6, teacher interview). Some parents echoed this logic. One father (PS9) argued that shame is a necessary moral corrective: "If the child feels shame, they will become aware inside that they did wrong." (PS9, parent interview). In this counter-narrative, the emotional discomfort of shame is reinterpreted as ethical development — a child learning to recognize wrongdoing and self-correct.

Short-term discipline and academic compliance: Adults also pointed to immediate behavioral and academic gains as evidence that shame "works." Teachers described how fear of embarrassment can produce quick quiet, homework submission, and test preparation — outcomes that are visible and therefore rewarded within everyday school pressures. One teacher credited her strictness for having "no child failing" in her class (T1, teacher interview). Supportive parents made a similar argument about effectiveness. In one interaction, a parent noted: "I know it's not nice to scold too much, लेकिन कुछ बच्चों पे प्यार का असर नहीं होता" — "but some children don't respond to love/soft measures." (PS6, parent interview/meeting). In PTA contexts, teachers known for being strict also received reinforcement along the lines of "keep doing it — the children need to be kept in line." These accounts reveal a utilitarian calculus: visible order and measurable academic gains are treated as justification for emotional cost, especially under high-stakes exam pressure.

"Reluctant necessity" and the logic of authority: Even teachers who defended strict practices often presented them as reluctant necessity rather than something they enjoyed. A recurring view was: "I have to be strict, otherwise chaos." One teacher explained this in

culturally familiar terms — "बच्चे सर पे चढ़ जाते हैं" ("students will climb onto your head") — meaning that leniency undermines authority and invites disrespect (T7, teacher interview). The same teacher framed strictness as a response to structural constraints, arguing: "In this system, if we don't push and pressurize, कुछ नहीं होगा" — "nothing will get done." (T7, teacher interview). Some teachers offered an "inoculation" logic, suggesting harshness now prepares students for criticism and hardship later because "life's tough; better they get used to criticism now." (T7, teacher interview).

Conditional parental support: Parental endorsement was present but often bounded. A common line was that a "little shame" is acceptable when a child has clearly done wrong (e.g., bullying or deliberate misconduct): "अगर बच्चे ने सच में गलती की है, तो थोड़ी शर्मिंदगी उसे ठीक कर देगी" — "If the child genuinely did wrong, a little shame will set them right." (PS10, parent interview). Yet even parents who supported strict discipline typically insisted on limits. The same parent cautioned: "इतना दबाव नहीं… कि बच्चा टूट जाए" — "not so much pressure that the child breaks." (PS10, parent interview). This conditional support matters because it can align the home with the school: when a parent publicly sides with the teacher, it reinforces the legitimacy of shaming and discourages children from challenging it.

In summary, this counter-narrative frames shame as effective discipline, moral socialization, and sometimes care. It helps explain the durability of shaming practices: short-term compliance is visible and rewarded, while longer-term harms (withdrawal, anxiety, fractured trust) are easier to overlook or rationalize. Chapter 7 returns to this tension directly, examining how shame becomes thinkable as "discipline" in this context and whether alternative approaches can secure order and learning without humiliation.

6.9 Summary: The Multi-Layered Impacts of School Shaming

This chapter has shown that classroom shaming is not a momentary reprimand with a fleeting emotional effect. Across Sections 6.1–6.7, it emerges as a recurring social practice that reshapes students' emotional well-being, classroom participation, peer relations, and engagement with learning in mutually reinforcing ways.

At the individual level, students described humiliation as an injury to self-worth that can linger beyond the incident and shape how they see themselves as learners (Section 6.1). At the interactional level, shaming functions as a silencing mechanism: students learn that speaking up, asking questions, or making mistakes can invite public embarrassment, so they self-censor and withdraw (Section 6.2). At the peer and classroom-climate level, public shaming can spill over into ridicule, bystander laughter, and peer distancing, creating a climate where humiliation is normalized and solidarity becomes risky (Section 6.3). Relationally, repeated humiliation strains student–teacher trust and can shift classroom relationships from mentorship to avoidance and resentment (Section 6.4). Motivationally, shame can produce surface compliance — quietness, task completion, short-term performance — but it does so by increasing fear and reducing students' willingness to take learning risks, which threatens longer-term engagement (Sections 6.5–6.6). Over time, students described adaptive responses such as emotional numbing, strategic invisibility, and peer-based coping, which may reduce immediate pain but also signals the extent to which humiliation has become routinized within everyday schooling (Section 6.7).

Section 6.8 complicates this picture by showing why such practices remain durable: a subset of adults interpret shame as "tough love," necessary moral training, or the only workable

route to order under institutional pressure. Holding these perspectives together — students' experienced harms and adults' perceived benefits — is essential for understanding how shame becomes embedded in everyday schooling.

Chapter 7 therefore "zooms out" to interpret these findings conceptually: how shame functions as discipline and moral socialization in this setting, why it persists despite its costs, and what it would take — culturally and institutionally — to sustain classroom order without humiliation.

Chapter 7: Discussion – Rethinking Shame, Discipline, and Moral Socialization in Low-Fee Indian Schools

This chapter draws the study together. Where the preceding chapters analyzed the findings in turn — what teachers do and how it is staged in the classroom (Chapter 4), the cultural and relational routes through which shame travels across home and school (Chapter 5), and what this climate does to students (Chapter 6) — the task here is different. Rather than restating those findings, the chapter reads them at a higher level of abstraction, asking how shaming functions as a coherent mode of disciplinary power, why it persists despite its evident costs, and what conceptual contribution follows from holding the study's strands together. In doing so it speaks to all three research questions at once: it revisits the forms shaming takes and the beliefs that sustain it, and connects these to the impacts on learners, in order to explain not merely that shaming happens and harms, but how and why it works as it does.

To do this, the chapter returns to the conceptual framework set out in Section 2.6 and uses it as its organizing spine. That framework approaches shaming through four analytical levels — the intrapersonal (how shame is felt and interpreted), the interactional (how it is produced through public relations and witnessing), the institutional (how it operates as power and pedagogy), and the cultural (how honor, respectability, and moral socialization shape what is thinkable as discipline) — held together by two cross-cutting tools: Braithwaite's distinction between reintegrative and disintegrative shaming, and the relationship between shame, belonging, and adolescent identity. The theorists drawn on across the thesis are woven into

this structure rather than treated in turn, so that each contributes to the study's own account rather than standing as a separate review.

The chapter is organized accordingly. Section 7.1 sets out the framework in full and explains how its levels and tools fit together. Sections 7.2 to 7.5 work through the four levels in turn, reading the findings at each. Section 7.6 draws these together into the chapter's central claim — that shame-based discipline operates as a form of affective governance — and Section 7.7 considers what follows for teacher practice and educational policy, developing implications that are translated into concrete recommendations in Chapter 8.

7.1 A Framework for Interpreting Shame-Based Discipline

The framework introduced above approaches shaming through four analytical levels — the intrapersonal (how shame is felt and interpreted), the interactional (how it is produced through public relations and witnessing), the institutional (how it operates as power and pedagogy), and the cultural (how honor, respectability, and moral socialization shape what is thinkable as discipline) — held together by two cross-cutting tools. The first is Braithwaite's (1989) distinction between reintegrative and disintegrative shaming, which allows the quality of any shaming episode to be judged rather than merely described. The second is the lens of belonging and adolescent identity (Erikson, 1968; Halse, 2018), which explains why shame lands with particular force on the young people in this study. Figure 12 represents the framework. Rather than treating the four levels as separate findings, the chapter shows how they converge to produce what I term *shame-based discipline*: an inexpensive, culturally legible technology of affective governance that secures compliance while corroding the relational and ethical conditions of learning.

The four theorists who inform the study — Foucault, Goffman, Freire, and Bourdieu — are not addressed here in turn, as a separate body of theory applied after the empirical work is done. That arrangement, common in doctoral discussion chapters, tends to detach theory from data and to repeat the findings a second time in conceptual dress. Instead, each thinker is brought in at the level where their analytic purchase is greatest: Goffman at the interactional, where shame is a transaction of face and stigma; Foucault and Freire at the institutional, where shame is a technology of power and a pedagogy of silence; and Bourdieu at the cultural, where shame reproduces social hierarchy as symbolic violence. The psychology of shame, principally Tangney's, anchors the intrapersonal level. Sections 7.2 to 7.5 move through the four levels in turn, each illustrated with the study's own data used interpretively rather than re-narrated; Section 7.6 draws the levels together into the chapter's central contribution; and Section 7.7 considers the implications for practice and policy, which are developed into recommendations in Chapter 8.

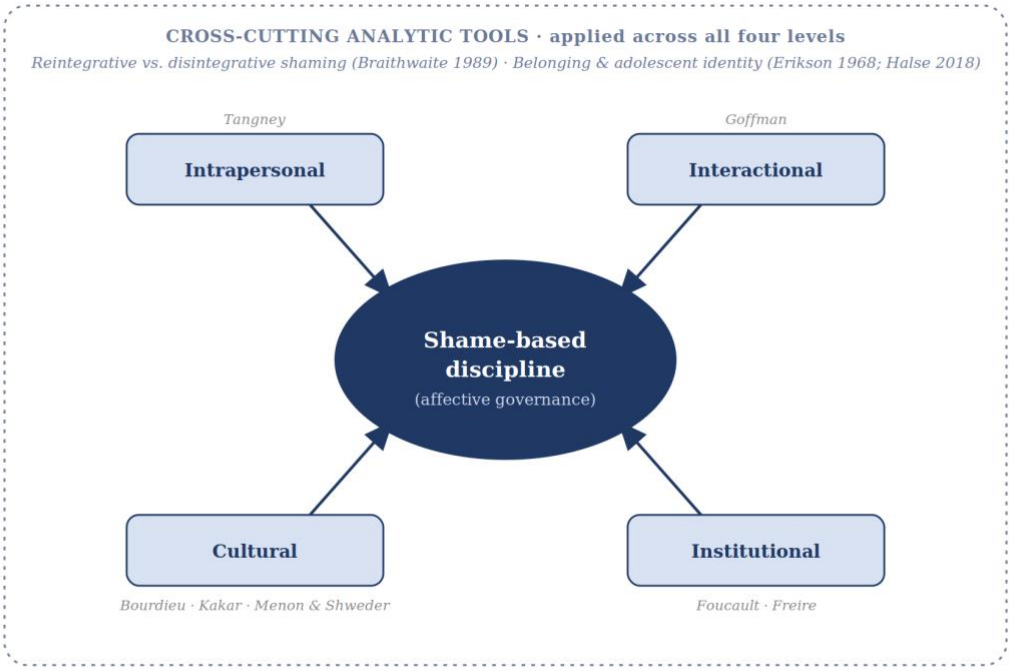


Figure 12: The conceptual framework — shaming practices analyzed across four levels

7.2 The Intrapersonal Level: How Shame Is Felt and Interpreted

At the intrapersonal level, the question is what shaming does inside the student — how it is experienced, interpreted, and metabolized into a sense of self. The findings in Chapter 6 show that shame in this school was not a momentary sting but, under repetition, a reorganization of the student's relationship to the classroom and to themselves. The analytic point is not simply that students felt bad, which would merely restate the impacts already documented, but that the feeling did a particular kind of work: it converted external judgement into self-knowledge.

The immediate phenomenology was one of exposure and shrinkage. Students reached for the language of becoming small, of being diminished in their own eyes. One girl described how, after being publicly humiliated, she "began to look small in my own eyes" (छोटी नज़र आने लगी हूँ खुद की नज़रों में); another said that her "worth had decreased," as if value were a quantity that public exposure could subtract. This is the vocabulary of shame as theorists distinguish it from guilt. Where guilt attaches to an act — "I did something bad" — shame attaches to the self — "I am bad" — and it is this global, identity-level quality that gives classroom shaming its weight (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). A student who feels guilt is oriented toward repair; a student who feels shame is oriented toward concealment and escape, wanting, as several put it, to disappear. The data therefore support reading these episodes not as ordinary disciplinary feedback but as assaults on the self that foreclose the very reflection teachers believed they were prompting.

This quality matters all the more because the participants were adolescents. Erikson's (1968) account of adolescence as the stage in which identity is consolidated against role confusion, and Halse's (2018) work on belonging as a condition of wellbeing, together explain why a

practice an adult might shrug off can lodge so deeply in a fourteen-year-old. At precisely the developmental moment when peer evaluation is most charged and the sense of self most provisional, being publicly diminished is not a trivial discomfort but a threat to belonging. This is the first cross-cutting tool doing its analytic work: the harm of shaming cannot be read off the severity of the words alone, but only in relation to the developmental susceptibility of the person they land on. The same scolding directed at an adult colleague and at an adolescent in front of peers are not the same act, because the second strikes an identity still under construction.

Over repeated episodes, this exposure hardened into internalization. Some students came to accept the labels imposed on them, absorbing an external verdict as an inner truth. The most striking instance in the data is the student who concluded, "maybe I truly am useless" (शायद मैं सच में निकम्मा हूँ) — a sentence in which a teacher's insult has become the student's own self-description. This is the process Cooley (1902/2017) named the looking-glass self: we come to see ourselves as we believe significant others see us. The intrapersonal damage of shaming is, on this reading, not principally the pain of any single incident but the slow conversion of "they say I am worthless" into "I am worthless." Tangney and Dearing (2002) document how chronic shame, unlike episodic guilt, erodes self-worth rather than guiding behavior, and the present findings show that erosion happening in situ, in the students' own words. One described the residue of these episodes as "a wound on the inside — no one sees it, but it hurts every time I think about it," a formulation that captures precisely the privacy and persistence of shame's intrapersonal life.

Yet students were not merely passive surfaces on which shame inscribed itself. Many developed intrapersonal defenses, and these too are revealing. The most common was emotional numbing — a deliberate decision not to feel. Students described training

themselves so that "now even if I get punished, I just laugh it off… we have become hardened," and others reported that "by hearing scoldings over and over, one gets used to it" (डांट सुन-सुन के आदत हो जाती है), to the point that, as one put it, "scolding has become just air" (डांट तो हवा हो गई है). On its face this looks like resilience, and teachers sometimes read it as such. But the literature treats defensive numbing as a maladaptive response to shame rather than a healthy adaptation to it (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), and the students themselves understood the cost. To become *dheet* — thick-skinned, unbothered — one must withdraw affective investment, and that withdrawal does not stay neatly confined to the teacher's words. It extends to the subject, the classroom, and ultimately the value of schooling itself, as in the student who reasoned that if the teacher would call him "dull" regardless, then "fine — I won't even try to do well in his subject." What presents to the teacher as a hardened or compliant pupil may therefore be a pupil who has quietly stopped caring. The intrapersonal level thus already discloses the paradox the rest of the chapter develops: shame can manufacture the appearance of discipline — quiet, unprotesting, seemingly unaffected students — while hollowing out its educational substance.

7.3 The Interactional Level: How Shame Is Produced Through Public Relations and Witnessing

If the intrapersonal level concerns what shame does inside the student, the interactional level concerns how it is manufactured between people. The decisive feature of shaming in this school was that it was almost never a private correction; it was a public event, staged before an audience and dependent on that audience for its force. This is the level at which Goffman's dramaturgical sociology and his account of stigma are most illuminating, and at

which Braithwaite's distinction between reintegrative and disintegrative shaming becomes the sharpest analytic instrument the framework offers.

Read through Goffman (2009), the otherwise heterogeneous mechanisms catalogued in Chapter 4 — verbal abuse, performative punishment, comparative ranking, fear appeals — share a single structure: each is a technique for engineering public loss of face. Shaming, in Goffman's terms, forcibly disrupts the identity a student is trying to project before others, and its sting depends on those others being present to witness the disruption. The data make the constitutive role of the audience unmistakable. A student who was made to stand and was mocked recalled not the teacher's words but the surrounding gaze: "everyone is looking at me and laughing." Another drew the contrast explicitly, explaining that public humiliation "is more traumatic than just getting scolded, because your friends laugh, and you feel totally ashamed." The presence of peers is not incidental to the injury; it is the mechanism of the injury. The same reprimand delivered privately would be a different act, and students knew it, which is why several reported that the worst part of a punishment was its visibility rather than its content.

Goffman's concept of stigma sharpens the analysis further. The epithets and public identifications that recurred in this school — "useless," "shameless," the boy reduced to a future "vegetable seller" — function as discrediting attributes that convert a student from an ordinary member of the class into what Goffman called a spoiled identity. Crucially, the audience does not merely observe this conversion; it carries it forward. Peers became what might be called amplifiers, extending the episode well beyond the teacher–student dyad. Students described how, once someone had been shamed, "other kids will take fun at their expense," how classmates would remind a victim of the moment long afterwards — "Remember when Sir said X to so-and-so!" — and how the shamed child found that

"everyone leaves his side." One student captured the social logic of this distancing with painful economy: peers pull away because each is grateful that "at least it's not me." This is stigma-by-association in action, and it reveals shame to be not a private emotion housed in the individual but a social relation enacted by the group, a redistribution of standing in which the many secure themselves by abandoning the one. Even the victim's own friends were enlisted: one student admitted, of a moment when the class laughed at a peer, "I also end up laughing" (मैं भी हंस देती हूँ), and described the double betrayal the shamed child then feels — "now even you, my friends, are saying it."

What makes this an interactional achievement rather than merely an unkind moment is the suspension of the ordinary repair work that social life depends on. Goffman observed that, in everyday encounters, bystanders perform tactful face-saving — they look away from a stumble, they help a person recover composure — so that the moral order of mutual regard is maintained. In the shaming classroom this cooperation is inverted. The teacher actively dismantles the student's face while the culture of compliance prevents peers from coming to the rescue, and at times enlists them in the dismantling through laughter or applause. The result is what Garfinkel (1956) termed a degradation ceremony: a ritual whose explicit function is to lower a person's standing before the collective. The classroom practice of calling the class to "give a round of applause" to a failing student, documented in Chapter 4, is a degradation ceremony in almost pure form — the apparatus of celebration turned to the purpose of public diminishment.

It is here that Braithwaite's (1989) distinction does its most important work, and it is the central reason the shaming documented in this study should be understood as harmful rather than corrective. Braithwaite separates reintegrative shaming — which condemns the act while affirming the wrongdoer's continued membership and worth, and which is followed by

gestures of reacceptance that dissolve the stigma — from disintegrative, or stigmatizing, shaming, which condemns the person, fixes a lasting negative label, and offers no route back into the community. Applied to schools (Morrison, 2006), the distinction sorts the present findings decisively: the shaming observed here fell almost entirely on the disintegrative side. Teachers attacked character rather than conduct, telling students they were useless or shameless rather than that a particular piece of work was unfinished; the labels outlasted the incident, sustained by peers long after the teacher had moved on; and there was no ritual of reintegration, no gesture that returned the student to good standing once the point had supposedly been made. The few teacher accounts that gestured toward care — the claim to scold only "for the child's own good" — did not translate into reintegrative practice, because the public, character-directed, unredeemed form of the shaming undid whatever benign intent lay behind it. This is the analytic difference between discipline that mends the social bond and discipline that severs it. The same disapproval, delivered reintegratively and in private, might have done the relational work teachers believed they were doing; delivered as public, disintegrative spectacle, it produced instead the spoiled identities, the peer abandonment, and the defensive withdrawal traced at the intrapersonal level.

7.4 The Institutional Level: How Shaming Operates as Power and Pedagogy

The interactional level explains how a single episode of shaming works; the institutional level explains why shaming is so durable, so reproducible, and so readily defended as legitimate within the school. Here the indispensable lenses are Foucauldian — discipline, surveillance, and the production of docile bodies — and Freirean — the banking model of education and

the culture of silence it sustains. Read together, they show shame functioning not as the occasional excess of individual teachers but as a settled institutional pedagogy of control, complete with its own self-justifying logic.

Foucault's (2012) account of disciplinary power illuminates how the classroom operates as an apparatus for producing self-regulating subjects. The threat of public humiliation functions as a kind of panopticon: because shaming is unpredictable and public, students internalize the disciplinary gaze and begin to police themselves in anticipation of it. The data show this internalization directly. Students reported sitting in a state of pre-emptive vigilance organized entirely around the fear of exposure — "if I make a mistake, I'll be humiliated in front of Sir" (अगर गलती हुई तो सर के सामने बेइज्जती होगी) — and one teacher confirmed the mechanism's reach beyond her own presence, noting approvingly that a troublesome student "became straight-behaved within a few days" (सीधा हो गया कुछ दिन में) once the reins were tightened. This is the hallmark of Foucault's docile body: conduct conditioned not by continuous external force but by the subject's anticipation of a gaze that may or may not be watching. Teachers' habit of pouncing on minute infractions — a whisper, a wandering glance — is, in Foucauldian terms, a micro-disciplinary practice that trains conformity at the level of the body. The public character of the shaming might seem to belong to an older regime of spectacular punishment rather than to modern, invisible surveillance, but in this classroom the two are fused: each scolding is at once a spectacle that deters the many and a normalizing judgement that sorts each student as good or bad, with public consequences attached to the verdict. Shame, on this reading, is the affective medium through which institutional power is transmitted into self-regulation; it is how the institution gets inside the student.

Freire's (2020) critique supplies the pedagogical and ethical counterpart to Foucault's analysis of power. The practices documented here exemplify what Freire called the banking

model of education — students treated as passive objects to be filled and managed rather than as agents in dialogue — and shame is the instrument that enforces the one-way flow. The predictable product is a culture of silence, in which students grow afraid to speak, to question, or to risk error, a pattern observed in Indian classrooms more broadly (Mehta & Pandya, 2015) and pervasive in the present data. Its costs are not only emotional but epistemic, as students themselves recognized with striking clarity. One described the deadening of genuine engagement: “The heart isn’t in it. We become robots, doing everything right but without joy or understanding.” Another located learning entirely outside the disciplinary relation: “We just have to get through it. Learning happens in spite of all this, not because of it.” These are not the words of students who have been disciplined into learning; they are the words of students who have learned to perform compliance while withholding understanding — the exact inversion of the educational aim. Freire’s notion of internalized oppression helps interpret a further, and at first puzzling, feature of the findings: when asked how discipline might be done differently, some students could not imagine an alternative and supposed that strictness must simply be necessary. This failure to envision another way is not evidence of contentment; it is, in Freire’s terms, the mark of a domination so complete that it has been absorbed as common sense. The teachers’ recurring justification — that the shaming is “for their own good” — fits precisely what Freire identified as the oppressor’s logic, which recasts dehumanization as benevolence and locates the fault in the oppressed, who are deemed too lazy or too unruly to be reached by gentler means.

Seen institutionally, even student resistance largely confirms the reach of the disciplinary order rather than escaping it. Chapter 6 documented a spectrum of coping and resistance, and its placement at this level is deliberate: resistance is a response to institutional power and is best understood in relation to it. The repertoire ran from the emotional numbing already discussed, through avoidance and evasion — skipping school on days when test results would

be read aloud, or the small, telling tactic of not bringing the diary on troublesome days because, as students explained, “we rarely bring the diary on days we get in trouble, just in case Ma’am decides to call home” — to covert defiance in the form of mocking cartoons, hidden nicknames, and hand signals warning of a teacher’s mood. Following Scott (1990), most of these are best understood as the hidden transcript of the subordinated: a backstage subculture that makes powerlessness bearable without altering the official order. Their significance is genuinely double-edged. On one hand they demonstrate that students retain agency and do not wholly internalize the shaming; the diary tactic in particular reveals a sophisticated practical grasp of the very surveillance system bearing down on them, and the act of hiding it is a deliberate interruption of the home–school circuit of exposure. On the other hand, with the partial exception of a rights-based critique voiced by a few older students — “teachers have no right to insult us” — these forms of resistance operate within the institution’s terms rather than transforming them, and they tend to produce students adept at evading authority rather than engaging it. In Freire’s vocabulary, this is conditioning into subservience or into mere subversion, neither of which cultivates the critical consciousness a liberatory education would seek. The deeper implication is that shame is failing even on its own terms: it secures surface compliance while breeding, beneath that surface, the disengagement, evasion, and resentment that erode the relationship on which teaching depends.

Finally, the institutional level accounts for the persistence of shaming in the face of its evident costs, because the institution furnishes a repertoire of justifications that make the practice feel not merely permissible but responsible. These justifications, examined in Chapter 4 as counter-narratives, are best understood here as institutional scripts rather than private opinions, since they recur across teachers and draw on the shared situation of the school. Teachers defended shaming as care, insisting they scolded only because they wanted

students to do well; as resilience-building, on the reasoning that "life's tough; better they get used to criticism now"; and as a practical necessity in large, under-resourced classes where, with corporal punishment banned, raised voices and embarrassment seemed the only tools that worked — "in this system, if we don't push and pressurize, nothing will get done" (कुछ नहीं होगा). Several framed strictness as the only register of authority their students would respect, warning that without it "students will climb onto your head" (बच्चे सर पे चढ़ जाते हैं). These scripts perform real work: they convert a technology of control into a professional virtue and allow teachers to reconcile harsh practice with an identity as caretakers. Yet each overlooks the substantial evidence of long-term harm and the child's right to dignity (Deb & Walsh, 2012; United Nations, 1989), and each, read through Braithwaite, describes shaming that is stigmatizing rather than reintegrative. That the justifications are sincerely held is precisely what makes them powerful, and what makes change a matter of transforming institutional norms and the conditions that produce them, rather than simply admonishing individual teachers who are, by their own lights, doing their best within an unforgiving system.

7.5 The Cultural Level: How Honor, Respectability, and Moral Socialization Shape What Is Thinkable as Discipline

The three preceding levels describe how shame is felt, produced, and institutionalized; the cultural level asks the prior question of why shaming is intelligible as discipline at all — why it reads, to teachers and to many parents, as correction rather than cruelty. Here Bourdieu's account of symbolic violence and social reproduction, set alongside South Asian scholarship on honor, shame, and moral emotion (Menon & Shweder, 1994; Kakar, 1981), reveals

shaming as the local expression of a wider moral order, one in which the practice draws its legitimacy from convictions about family, honor, and the proper formation of the child.

The intelligibility of shaming rests on a cultural premise, widely held in the Indian context, that strict and even painful discipline is integral to proper child-rearing and learning (Raj, 2011), and that enduring scolding builds character rather than damaging it. Within this premise, shame is not the antithesis of care but one of its instruments — a logic captured exactly in the parental saying that recurred in the fieldwork, "if the teacher beats you, it is because he thinks of you as his own child" (मारता है तो अपना ही बच्चा समझकर). The premise is reinforced by a moral economy of honor in which a child's conduct is inseparable from the family's standing and a child's failure is felt as a debt unpaid against parental sacrifice. Teachers drew on this economy directly, recasting indiscipline as ingratitude: "your parents are struggling so much for you… and you are doing nothing" (देखो, तुम्हारे पेरेंट्स तुम्हारे लिए कितना स्ट्रगल कर रहे हैं… और तुम कुछ नहीं कर रहे हो). The threat to telephone home worked because a call signaled not only trouble but the shaming of the family, as one student made explicit: "if a call goes home, I'll get humiliated at home as well" (अगर घर फोन गया, तो घर पे भी बेइज्जती होगी). The students had absorbed the moral arithmetic so thoroughly that some reproduced it as their own conscience — "my parents invest in me; I must repay them by achieving. If I don't, I am a bad child" — which is shame operating not as an external sanction but as an internalized ledger of worth. Menon and Shweder's (1994) account of *lajja* as a valued moral sentiment in South Asian life — a sign of one's sensitivity to the social and moral order rather than simply a wound to be avoided — explains why a practice that Western developmental psychology frames as damaging can be locally understood as the cultivation of a properly socialized self. The cross-cutting concern with belonging operates here too, but now at the scale of family and

community rather than the individual psyche: to be shamed is to be told that one is failing as a son or a daughter.

Bourdieu's (2020; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory shows that this cultural work is, at the same time, the reproduction of social inequality. Symbolic violence — the imposition of the dominant cultural arbitrary upon the dominated in a form they come to accept as legitimate — names precisely what occurs when a teacher derides a child's home language or manners. The clearest instances in the data are the class-inflected taunts that tied a child's present conduct to a degraded future: the recurring threat that a student would grow up to "sell vegetables or drive an auto-rickshaw" (आगे चलकर सब्जी बेचोगे/ऑटो चलाओगे), and the especially pointed jibe aimed at a vendor's son — "your parents sell vegetables, so do you also just want to sell tomatoes for the rest of your life?" (आपके पेरेंट्स सब्जी बेचते हैं, तो अच्छा टमाटर ही बेचना है क्या तुमको?). These are not merely personal insults; they assert middle-class trajectories and tastes as the only legitimate standard and mark the child's own background as something to escape or be ashamed of. The students felt the class judgement precisely as such, several concluding that this school "looks down on people like us." Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) claim that all pedagogic action is a form of symbolic violence insofar as it imposes a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power finds a stark illustration in shaming, which imposes that arbitrary bluntly and affectively rather than through the slower channels of curriculum and credential. Over time, students come to misrecognize the imposed norm as natural and their own dispositions as inferior — the very outcome Bourdieu's theory predicts — and because the students most often shamed are those who arrive with least of the capital the school rewards, shaming sorts and stratifies, cultivating a *habitus* of subordination that maps onto, and helps to reproduce, divisions of class, gender, and, in the Indian setting, caste (Kumar et al., 2022). The teachers' justifications examined at the institutional level reappear here as what Bourdieu

called *doxa*: the taken-for-granted beliefs that present this sorting as neutral pedagogy and thereby conceal the symbolic violence accomplished through it.

The cultural level also clarifies the gendered grammar of shaming documented in Chapter 5, which becomes legible as the policing of honor and respectability rather than as a separate phenomenon. Girls were shamed into modesty and boys into achievement and toughness, each through appeals to what a proper son or daughter should be. A teacher's strategy of seating a misbehaving boy among the girls so that "at least his manners become more civilized," the rebuke that a girl should "sit properly, you're a girl," and the threats to girls that they would end up "cleaning at their in-laws' homes" all enforce culturally specific scripts of gendered propriety through the medium of shame. Read through Bourdieu, these are further impositions of a cultural arbitrary; read through Menon and Shweder, they are the inculcation of *lajja* as gendered virtue. Either way, they confirm that shaming in this school was not a neutral disciplinary tool applied evenly, but a mechanism finely tuned to the moral categories of its cultural setting.

The cultural level thus completes the picture by showing that shaming is held in place not by individual teachers, nor even by institutional convenience alone, but by a moral order in which honor, respectability, and the proper formation of the child make shame thinkable as care. This is also why change is so difficult. To challenge shaming is to touch deeply held convictions about what a good upbringing and a good education are, convictions shared by many of the parents on whose behalf the school believes itself to act. Reform that addresses only teacher behavior or school rules, without engaging this cultural common sense, will meet the resistance of people who are convinced — sincerely, and within their own frame of meaning — that they are doing right by the child.

7.6 Synthesis: Shame-Based Discipline as Affective Governance

Read separately, the four levels each capture something real: the wounded and withdrawing self, the public ceremony of face-loss, the disciplinary institution with its self-justifying scripts, and the moral order of honor that makes the whole intelligible. Read together — as Figure 12 represents them, converging on a single object — they yield the central contribution of this thesis. What the case-study school practices is not a scatter of disciplinary incidents of varying severity but a coherent mode of rule, which I term shame-based discipline: the systematic use of shame as the affective medium through which compliance is produced, transmitted across home and school, and made to feel legitimate to those who administer it.

The value of the four-level framework is that it shows these levels to be not competing explanations but interlocking components of one mechanism, each handing on to the next. The cultural order makes shame intelligible as care and supplies its moral vocabulary of honor, debt, and respectability; the institution organizes that vocabulary into a routine pedagogy of surveillance and equips teachers with scripts that render it responsible; the interactional event delivers it through public, disintegrative face-loss before an amplifying audience; and the intrapersonal level is where it finally lands, converting an external verdict into an internal sense of worthlessness or a defensive withdrawal of investment. No single level is sufficient on its own, and this is the analytic pay-off of refusing to treat the theorists in isolation. A purely psychological account of shame would explain the wound but miss why the practice is collectively sanctioned and reproduced; a purely cultural account would explain the sanction but miss the specific institutional and interactional machinery through which sanction becomes a daily routine; a purely Foucauldian account of institutional power would explain the routine but miss the felt, identity-level experience that gives shame its grip

on the adolescent self. The contribution lies in holding the levels together and tracing their traffic — the way honor norms authorize institutional practice, which scripts interactional events, which inscribe themselves intrapersonally, and the way those internalized dispositions then feed back to reproduce the cultural order from which the sequence began, as when a parent who was shamed as a child now insists that a little shame will set their own child right.

It is this convergence that the phrase *affective governance* is meant to capture, and the term deserves to be made precise, since it is here that the thesis enters a wider conversation it has not yet engaged. A body of work in human geography and cultural studies has argued that contemporary power increasingly operates through the management of feeling — that emotions are not merely private states but objects and instruments of governing (Anderson, 2009; Pykett, Jupp & Smith, 2017). This literature has largely examined affective governance at the scale of policy, welfare, and the state. The present study extends it downward, to the micro-scale of the classroom, and specifies what affective governance looks like when its medium is shame in particular. Governance, because shame here is a means of governing conduct — securing order, compliance, and the outward signs of a well-run classroom. Affective, because it governs through feeling rather than through reason, reward, or physical force: it works by mobilizing exposure, fear, and the dread of diminished standing, recruiting the student's own emotional life as the instrument of their regulation. To name the practice in this way is to insist that the shaming documented here is not a lapse from governance into cruelty but a form of governance in its own right, with its own logic, its own efficiency, and its own characteristic failures.

That efficiency is central to explaining the practice's persistence, and the framework makes it intelligible as more than habit or ignorance. Shame is a peculiarly economical technology of order. In a low-fee private school operating under acute resource constraints — large classes,

scarce time, intense performance pressure, minimal training, and a legal prohibition on the cane — shame requires no materials, no infrastructure, and no preparation. It is, in the most literal sense, the cheapest available means of producing classroom order, and its cheapness helps explain why it survives even when teachers can themselves perceive its costs. The institutional scripts examined earlier are, in this light, the rationalizations that accompany a practice selected less for its pedagogical merit than for its fit with the material conditions of the school. Affective governance through shame is, in short, what discipline tends to look like when a school is asked to produce order and results without being given the resources to do either well.

But this governance is brittle, and the framework explains why with a precision that a single-theory account could not achieve. Because it operates through disintegrative rather than reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 1989), it purchases compliance at the direct expense of the relational trust on which durable learning and genuine moral formation depend; the order it creates is therefore parasitic on a resource it is simultaneously consuming. And because it lands on adolescents at a developmental moment of acute identity vulnerability (Erikson, 1968; Halse, 2018), its intrapersonal damage is disproportionate to the order it secures, reaching the self rather than merely the behavior. The result, traced across the analytic chapters and gathered here, is an order that is real but hollow: surface compliance laid over withdrawn investment, obedience without conviction, the pin-drop-silent classroom emptied of the very voice, curiosity, and risk-taking that learning requires. Shame-based discipline therefore names at once an achievement and a failure. It genuinely governs — this is not a practice that simply fails to work — but it governs in a way that corrodes the educational and ethical purposes for which the classroom exists, manufacturing the appearance of discipline while depleting its substance. It is in articulating this — the convergence of four levels into a single, economical, culturally sanctioned, and ultimately self-defeating mode of affective rule

— that the thesis makes its contribution to how shame, discipline, and moral socialization are understood in low-fee Indian schooling, and in the many comparable settings, within India and beyond it, where schools are asked to govern the young on far too little.

7.7 Implications for Teacher Practice and Educational Policy

A core implication of this thesis is that reducing humiliation in schooling cannot be treated as a narrow problem of individual teacher behavior. Shame-based discipline persists because it is culturally legible as correction and because it offers an inexpensive, immediately visible form of classroom control in resource-constrained settings. Effective change therefore requires a multi-level response that mirrors the levels through which shaming itself operates, pairing clear standards with credible alternatives and the structural support without which standards become mere exhortation.

At the level of teacher practice and preparation, the findings support a shift from character-attacking correction — “you are useless,” “you will sell vegetables” — to behavior-focused, private, and dignity-preserving discipline. In Braithwaite’s terms, this is a shift from disintegrative to reintegrative responses: condemning the act while affirming the child’s worth and membership, and providing a route back rather than a lasting label. This does not mean abandoning authority or lowering expectations; it means building teachers’ repertoires for de-escalation, constructive feedback, and restorative problem-solving so that order is maintained without public degradation. Training matters here for a reason the study makes plain: many teachers reproduce the discipline they themselves received and were shamed by, and stress and overload sharply increase the likelihood of punitive outbursts. Teacher development should therefore combine practical classroom-management tools with emotional

literacy and structured reflection on how shame operates as a technology of control — so that teachers can recognize in their own practice the mechanisms this thesis has described.

At the level of school culture, what is permitted matters as much as what is taught. Schools in comparable low-fee private settings in India can reduce the audience-humiliation dynamics analyzed in Section 7.3 by establishing norms that make respect non-negotiable: clear guidance on unacceptable practices such as public ridicule, derogatory labeling, and punishments designed to embarrass; consistent responses when those boundaries are crossed; and reporting routes that students can use safely. Crucially, accountability must be paired with support. In settings where classrooms are overcrowded and teachers work under intense performance pressure, reform that only prohibits will fail; mentoring, peer observation, and psychosocial support for teachers are necessary so that discipline is not driven by frustration and exhaustion.

At the level of policy, the thesis reinforces the case for treating humiliating discipline as a child-rights issue rather than a matter of pedagogical style. Policy and guidance should define humiliating practices explicitly — naming, as this study has, the public and character-directed forms that current prohibitions on corporal punishment do not reach — and should ensure enforcement mechanisms that children can access safely. At the same time, policy that is purely punitive toward teachers will reproduce the very dynamic it seeks to end. Improving working conditions, reducing class-size pressures where resources allow, and embedding positive-discipline expectations within teacher standards and school evaluation frameworks are necessary to make change sustainable rather than merely declared.

Finally, because shame in this study was transmitted across home and school, parent and community engagement is not an optional addition but a central component of reform. If parents interpret humiliation as care or as necessary discipline — as many in this study did,

and as the cultural analysis in Section 7.5 explains — then school-level change will be undermined from outside the gates. Whole-school communication and sustained parent engagement can help shift norms toward a shared understanding that discipline can be firm without being degrading, and that a child's dignity and a family's honor are served, not threatened, by an education that refuses to shame. These implications are developed further, and translated into a concise set of recommendations, in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This ethnographic study set out to explore shame-based discipline as a pedagogical, emotional, and cultural phenomenon in a low-fee private school in Delhi. Over the course of prolonged fieldwork, the research uncovered that the practices of publicly shaming and humiliating students were not isolated incidents but rather woven into the daily fabric of school life. Teachers frequently resorted to tactics such as scolding students in front of peers, labeling them with derogatory terms for poor performance or misbehavior, and using sarcasm or ridicule as tools of control. Educators commonly defend these harsh disciplinary methods as necessary for maintaining order and "high standards," operating under the belief that instilling fear or shame in students will ensure compliance. This attitude is not unique to the studied school; surveys of teachers indicate a persistent view that punitive, fear-based discipline is effective for classroom control, even though such assumptions have been challenged by child-rights organizations (Pednekar, 2017; UNICEF, 2001). Chapter 7 brought these observations together through the four-level framework introduced in Section 2.6—the intrapersonal, interactional, institutional, and cultural—showing that these were not separate findings but interlocking dimensions of a single practice. This conclusion draws on that synthesis, in which the thesis advances its central contribution: the notion of *shame-based discipline* as a form of affective governance, an economical but brittle mode of securing compliance through the management of feeling.

Notably, the faculty's own schooling had often been in environments that normalized harsh discipline, as teachers they unwittingly replicated the punitive methods they once endured. In other words, their personal experience as students conditioned them to perpetuate shame-based pedagogy, resulting in a self-reinforcing cycle (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Freire, 2020). This pattern aligns with Freire's observation that those raised in authoritarian settings

may internalize and later reproduce those very practices in their teaching. The school community exhibited a tacit acceptance of these methods – by and large, parents and administrators equated strict, punitive discipline with effective teaching. Many regarded the public shaming of a child as not particularly concerning unless it became especially extreme, reflecting a cultural mindset that prioritizes obedience over emotional well-being. This local attitude echoes broader societal norms in India and similar contexts, where authoritative (even humiliating) discipline is often considered synonymous with maintaining academic standards (Pellissery & Mathew, 2014).

Crucially, the emotional experiences of the students emerged as a focal point of this study. Student testimony and researcher observations converged: in the case study school, being publicly shamed by a teacher consistently provoked intense feelings of worthlessness, fear, and powerlessness in the children. During public reprimands, many students showed classic behavioral indicators of shame — for example, they would avert their gaze, hunch their posture, cry, or retreat into silence — reactions well-documented in psychological literature on shame responses (Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Some students even said they wanted to "disappear" or felt very "small", experiences that align with psychologists' description of shame as a profound *diminishment of the self*. Students commonly reported that once they were shamed, they could not concentrate on schoolwork – their attention turned inward, and many confessed that after a teacher's scolding or sarcastic remark, they spent the remainder of the day anxiously re-living their humiliation instead of absorbing the lessons. This kind of shame-induced rumination is known to disrupt learning and cognitive focus (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Cumulatively, repeated episodes of shaming wore down the students' self-confidence. By middle school, some had essentially internalized the "failure" label that teachers had put on

them, coming to believe they were inherently incapable. One student's reflection illustrates this internalization: "I started to think maybe I really am stupid – every teacher says it." Such self-beliefs are consistent with Monroe's (2009, p. 62) findings that children who are continuously disparaged by authority figures eventually "grow to know themselves as failures," carrying forward the stigma of those imposed weaknesses. The overall emotional toll of these punitive practices was profound: students commonly reported elevated anxiety levels and a growing avoidance of school, and many eventually exhibited what one might call *"emotional numbing"* – a state of resigned compliance in which they followed rules strictly out of fear, not out of understanding or conviction (Deb et al., 2017).

Consistent with research in moral psychology, this shame-driven mode of discipline failed to foster genuine introspection or ethical growth in pupils. Instead of reflecting on why their behavior was wrong, students learned only to think, *"I must have done wrong because you* [the authority] *think I did,"* relinquishing their own judgment to the teacher's authority. Such outcomes align with studies showing that shaming discipline stifles independent moral reasoning, causing children to defer to external authority rather than developing an internal sense of right and wrong (Goodman & Cook, 2019; Tangney et al., 2007).

These findings also highlight the cultural underpinnings of shame in the school's disciplinary practices. The tendencies observed must be situated in India's broader socio-cultural context, which inherits a long-standing hierarchical ethos and collectivist norms. This broader context also includes caste-stratified hierarchies that shape respectability and stigma in Indian social life; while caste was not explicitly discussed in interviews or disciplinary talk in this case study, it remains part of the structural backdrop to the moral evaluations enacted through shame. Deference to elders and obedience to authority are strongly emphasized values in Indian society (Hofstede, 2001), and in schools this often translates into an expectation of

unquestioning compliance from students. Within such a framework, teachers commonly perceive strict disciplinary enforcement – including public shaming – as part of their professional duty to build character and maintain social order. Some educators even invoked traditional maxims advocating "tough love," referencing sayings akin to "spare the rod and spoil the child," to justify their methods.

While corporal punishment is officially banned, these punitive folk beliefs persist informally in the educational culture, reflecting how historical attitudes about stern discipline still linger despite policy changes (Kumar, 2019). In practice, shame was used as a social corrective: by publicly naming a child's misdeed, teachers believed they were reinforcing communal norms of right and wrong. In effect, the classroom became a stage for communal judgment, where the group (peers and teachers together) publicly policed individual misbehavior. This pattern is consistent with scholarly observations of how shame operates in strongly hierarchical societies like India: shaming tends to occur at the community level as a means of enforcing social norms (Pellissery & Mathew, 2014).

The teacher's act of singling out a student and the classmates' implicit or explicit participation illustrate how discipline was enacted as a collective social process, not merely a private correction. For instance, when a student flouted dress code or spoke out of turn, the teacher might invite the class to collectively chastise the offender, effectively leveraging peer shame as discipline. These incidents illustrate that shame-based discipline is not an isolated interpersonal matter but rather a cultural performance: teachers and students enact roles that draw on broad societal "scripts" of honor, respect, and conformity (Goffman, 2023). In other words, the reprimand is performed in front of an audience (the class), tapping into shared cultural expectations about maintaining one's dignity and obedience.

This dynamic at times created a palpable climate of fear in the classroom – students became anxious not only about displeasing the teacher but also about "losing face" before their peers, a social fear that further reinforced their compliance (Goffman, 2017b). At the same time, there were moments of subtle resistance and resilience. A few students privately confided that they found ways to "laugh off" a teacher's insult or that they bonded with peers through shared experiences of being shamed, thereby subverting the intended impact. These acts of quiet resistance suggest that even within a culture of compliance, students negotiated their dignity in creative ways, highlighting the interpretivist insight that individuals are not mere victims of structure but active meaning-makers.

Read together through the four-level framework developed in Chapter 7, these findings support the thesis's central argument: that, in the case study school, shame-based discipline—while achieving superficial obedience—comes at a profound cost. As Chapter 7 showed, the cultural order makes shaming intelligible as care, the institution routinizes it as pedagogy, the interactional event delivers it as public face-loss, and the intrapersonal level is where it lands as diminished self-worth—four levels converging on a single, self-defeating mode of affective rule. Pedagogically, it creates a classroom environment of compliance rather than true engagement or understanding. Emotionally, it inflicts wounds that can scar students' self-esteem and motivation. Culturally, it reflects and reinforces hierarchical relations of power, normalizing a form of interaction that undermines the ideals of respect and dignity. Importantly, the ethnography does more than catalog these patterns; it illuminates the nuanced interplay between teacher intentions and student interpretations. Many teachers did not set out to "hurt" students – on the contrary, some believed that momentary shame would spur the child to improve and ultimately succeed, a rationale rooted in cultural notions of discipline and aspiration. However, from the students' perspective, these incidents often felt like attacks on their personhood rather than constructive critiques of their actions.

This misalignment led to unintended outcomes: some students became resentful or disengaged, withdrawing trust from teachers and viewing school as an oppressive space. Others conformed outwardly but at the expense of creativity and willingness to take academic risks, fearing the humiliation of failure. In sum, the findings highlight that using shame as a pedagogical tool is inherently counterproductive. This conclusion is in line with a broad consensus in educational research: a growing body of studies demonstrates that shaming and fear-based disciplinary tactics are not only ineffective at improving student behavior or performance, but in fact tend to harm students' learning and psychological well-being (Gershoff, 2017; Stilwell et al., 2025). Indeed, while imposing discipline through fear or indignity may achieve superficial order in the immediate term, it ultimately undermines the core goals of education over the long term – impeding genuine learning, curiosity, and healthy development (Gershoff, 2017).

8.1 Original Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes several original contributions to knowledge in the fields of education and social science, spanning empirical insights, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches. These contributions advance our understanding of school discipline in culturally specific contexts and open up new pathways for inquiry and practice.

8.1.1 Empirical Contributions

- **Documenting Shame-Based Discipline in Context:** This study offers one of few ethnographic investigations of shame-based discipline in a low-fee private Indian school—a context rarely examined in prior research (Srivastava, 2013; Yunus, 2022). Indeed, most Indian school-discipline studies emphasize physical punishment or

policy reforms rather than students' daily emotional experiences of discipline (Kacker et al., 2007; Tiwari, 2019) By providing a richly detailed narrative of how shame operates as a daily disciplinary tool, this thesis fills an empirical gap. It captures interactions and voices – from teachers' public scoldings to children's whispered conversations after being shamed – that are typically lost in survey data or official reports.

- In doing so, it offers a granular portrait of school life that reveals how deeply ingrained and normalized shaming can be as a technique for maintaining order. Notably, the data reveal that certain students—such as those with academic difficulties or from lower-status backgrounds—were shamed more frequently, echoing other findings that punitive discipline often targets disadvantaged groups disproportionately (Kumar et al., 2022; Yunus, 2022). The empirical contribution here is not merely descriptive: in surfacing these patterns it highlights issues of equity and bias in disciplinary practices.

- **Highlighting Student Voice and Emotional Impact:** A key empirical contribution is the foregrounding of students' own voices and emotional experiences in discussions of discipline. Although Indian laws and policies condemn corporal punishment and "mental harassment," the perspectives of students subjected to these practices have rarely been documented in research or policy debates (Morrow & Singh, 2014). Through interviews, participatory observations, and careful ethical engagement, this study amplifies how students interpret and internalize the shaming they experience. For instance, many students in the study did not view a teacher's public shaming as a fair punishment for misbehavior at all, but rather as a personal humiliation that attacked their dignity.

- By documenting these feelings of injustice and alienation, the thesis lends empirical weight to scholars' warnings that shaming effectively "shrinks the self" and undermines a child's sense of worth and equal dignity (Goodman & Cook, 2019, p. 62). By documenting how shame-based discipline correlates with low self-worth, school avoidance, and emotional distress among students, this research provides concrete evidence of harm – reinforcing prior findings that chronic shame is generally detrimental to children's learning and well-being (Tangney et al., 2007). Notably, the study also captures variability in student responses – while many were traumatized or demotivated, a few resisted or were oddly unfazed – underscoring the complex human dimension behind what might otherwise be seen as a monolithic phenomenon. This nuanced understanding is an empirical contribution in its own right, showing that the impacts of shaming are pervasive yet mediated by individual and cultural factors.

- **Contextualizing Discipline within School Culture and Inequality:** The thesis empirically situates shame-based discipline within the broader school culture and social hierarchies. The ethnography shows that shame-based discipline was closely entangled with hierarchies of gender and class, and it unfolded within a wider Indian context in which caste remains a structural axis of inequality. Girls were often reprimanded about dress or "proper" demeanor, whereas boys were scolded for academic failure or aggression—mirroring gendered societal expectations. Class-coded humiliations were also evident, for example when teachers mocked students' English pronunciation or invoked stigmatized occupations as insults. Although caste was not explicitly discussed by participants and caste categories were not overtly invoked in observed disciplinary interactions, caste-stratified social structures remain relevant for understanding how respectability, stigma, and moral worth are evaluated in Indian schooling.

- This account aligns with prior research in India showing that students from marginalized backgrounds can be exposed to harsher discipline and humiliation in school (Kumar et al., 2022; Yunus, 2022). By empirically documenting how shame operates as a routine disciplinary tool in a non-elite school serving a marginalized community, the study contributes evidence of how disciplinary shaming can exacerbate inequalities and reproduce broader social hierarchies. It links micro-level classroom practices to macro-level social structures, offering insight into how schools can unwittingly become sites where societal shaming of the less powerful is reproduced. In foregrounding power and inequality in a non-elite school setting, this study addresses a noted gap in educational research on India (Srivastava, 2013; Yunus, 2022). It also challenges any notion that discipline is a value-neutral technical matter; on the contrary, classroom discipline is shown to be entwined with cultural context and social identity, consistent with theories that schooling often reproduces existing power relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

8.1.2 Theoretical Contributions

- **Reframing Discipline as an Emotional and Cultural Process:** The study makes a theoretical contribution by reconceptualizing school discipline as not only a behavioral or managerial issue but as an inherently emotional and cultural process. It argues that analyses of discipline must consider the emotional transactions between teachers and students – specifically, how teachers induce shame and with what effects. In doing so, the thesis extends classical discipline theory. For example, Foucault's model of disciplinary power centers on surveillance and bodily regulation of students (Foucault, 2012), but here the emotional dimension of power is brought to the forefront as a crucial mechanism by which authority shapes students' self-

concepts. By introducing the notion of "shame-based discipline," the thesis offers a new framework for understanding school discipline as operating through the moral emotion of shame (as opposed to through physical force or external rewards/punishments).

- This emotional-cultural lens helps explain why shame can be such a potent disciplinary tool. Notably, in collectivist cultural settings like India, shame draws upon deeply ingrained norms of honor and social reputation (Kakar, 2012; Menon & Shweder, 1994), which amplifies its power to regulate behavior and shape identity. By theorizing discipline as a form of affective governance – where teachers govern student behavior by regulating emotions of pride and shame – the study offers a model that can be applied to other collectivist or honor-based cultural settings. This is an original theoretical contribution that bridges gaps between macro-level cultural theory and micro-level classroom practices, moving beyond seeing discipline as mere rule enforcement to seeing it as the cultivation (or corrosion) of certain emotions and values within a learning community.

- **Integrating Human Dignity and Rights Discourse with Classroom Practice:** Another theoretical contribution of this work is the integration of human dignity and rights discourse into the analysis of everyday pedagogy. Notably, international and Indian legal norms assert children's right to dignity and freedom from degrading treatment in education. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that school discipline must uphold the child's dignity (United Nations, 1989, Art. 28), and India's Right to Education Act prohibits "physical punishment or mental harassment" of students (Government of India, 2009). This thesis builds a theoretical bridge from those abstract principles to everyday classroom

reality. It shows that despite the normative ideal of dignified discipline, shaming practices in classrooms fundamentally violate students' dignity in practice. In theoretical terms, the thesis asserts that deliberate shaming in school is not a harmless cultural practice at all, but rather a moral violation of the child's status as an autonomous person.

- This stance closely parallels Goodman's conclusion that intentionally humiliating a student breaches the child's right to dignity and is "almost never justified" as a disciplinary measure (Goodman & Cook, 2019, p. 62). Adopting a rights-based lens, the thesis argues that any pedagogical approach relying on humiliation fundamentally conflicts with the core educational aims of human development and mutual respect. In other words, what might appear as isolated "classroom discipline" incidents are, in this analysis, elevated to questions of ethics and child rights. Shame-based discipline is thus reframed not only as a pedagogical problem but as a violation of educational values and rights. This perspective invites scholars to integrate human-rights principles into theories of classroom management – much as Freire (2020) insisted that true education must affirm learners' dignity and humanity, never debase it.

- **Extending Theories of Socialization and Hidden Curriculum:** The findings from this research also extend theories of socialization and the hidden curriculum in schools. Established sociology of education has shown that schools impart a "hidden curriculum" of values and norms alongside academic content (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1968). This thesis contributes to that literature by revealing that emotional norms – specifically, how one should feel shame or pride – form a significant part of the hidden curriculum in the case study school. In effect, students are being socialized into an "economy of shame and honor," learning which behaviors incur public shame

versus approval and developing coping mechanisms accordingly. This insight explicitly adds emotional socialization to the hidden curriculum concept, extending existing theory to include the regulation of feelings as a covert lesson of schooling.

- The cultural analysis further suggests that the prevalence of shaming as discipline may have roots in both colonial legacies of strict schooling and in indigenous social hierarchies. This invites postcolonial reflection on why authoritarian disciplinary styles endure in some Indian schools – perhaps as a "cultural reproduction" of past colonial education models or traditional patterns of authority (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In synthesizing these perspectives, the thesis offers a holistic theoretical view wherein discipline, emotion, culture, and power are tightly interlinked. In doing so, the thesis challenges purely behaviorist or individualistic models of classroom management. It proposes that discipline is best understood as a culturally scripted performance – one in which teachers and students enact roles that can either affirm or undermine a learner's emerging identity. This view resonates with interactional theories (Goffman, 2023) that portray social behavior in schools as staged performances governed by cultural scripts.

8.1.3 Methodological Contributions

- **Ethnographic Inquiry in Under-researched School Settings:** Methodologically, the study affirms the value of ethnography in "everyday" school settings that scholars often overlook. In particular, low-fee private schools serving India's urban poor (which educate a significant segment of children) have rarely been examined through in-depth qualitative research (Day Ashley et al., 2014; Srivastava, 2013). By

successfully conducting a long-term ethnography in one such school, this thesis navigated issues of access, trust, and ethics that can deter research in non-elite environments, thereby modeling how to study these under-researched contexts. By successfully conducting a long-term ethnography in such a school, the study shows how to navigate challenges of trust, rapport, and ethical consent in a context where research scrutiny may be viewed with suspicion. Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher maintained a self-reflexive stance regarding her "outsider–insider" position (being from India and familiar with local norms, yet not a member of the school community).

- This reflexivity informed concrete strategies to reduce adult–child power imbalances in data collection. For example, the ethnographer built informal rapport with students outside of formal interviews and incorporated child-friendly, participatory methods so that students could express themselves more freely (Christensen, 2004; Punch, 2002). Such practices exemplify how researchers can use reflexivity and creative engagement to ethically access children's perspectives. By employing "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), the study captured nuanced phenomena that surveys or brief visits could not – for instance, the tone of a teacher's scolding, students' body language of shame, or even the collective hush that falls over a class during a reprimand. These qualitative insights demonstrate the unique capacity of ethnography to illuminate subtle emotional dynamics in schooling. Accordingly, the thesis highlights ethnographic immersion as an indispensable approach for investigating sensitive processes like shaming that are easy to overlook in quantitative data. It contributes a model for future researchers on how to ethically and effectively immerse in school settings to gather rich qualitative data on sensitive topics.

- **Innovative Use of Interpretivist and Reflexive Techniques:** The study's interpretivist methodology was coupled with rigorous reflexivity. Rather than accepting observations at face value, data were gathered and cross-checked through multiple sources: participatory visual materials (student drawings, explanations, and student-led tours), the researcher's own field journal, and interviews with students, teachers, and parents (triangulation for validation – Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After witnessing a public shaming incident, for example, the researcher would note his own reactions and later seek the teacher's and the student's interpretations separately. This reflexive, multi-perspectival approach produced a richly layered understanding of each event and guarded against any one-sided narrative. In doing so, the researcher's subjectivity became an instrument for insight (Peshkin, 1988) rather than a source of bias – a methodological model well-suited to studying emotional phenomena in education.

- The thesis details how acknowledging one's own emotional reactions (such as the discomfort and empathy the researcher felt witnessing a child's humiliation) became a tool for inquiry – prompting deeper questions and comparisons with participants' feelings. Such reflexivity enhanced validity by continuously questioning assumptions and seeking the participants' explanations for their actions. This approach contributes to qualitative methodology by showing how researcher subjectivity can be transformed from a liability into a source of insight, consistent with interpretivist traditions. It serves as a practical guide for future scholars on conducting ethical, emotionally aware research in school settings, especially in the Global South where power distances between adults and children are pronounced and must be navigated with care.

8.1.4 Practical Contributions

The findings of this thesis suggest that humiliating discipline is not a marginal or exceptional practice but a routine feature of everyday schooling with clear educational costs: it suppresses participation, undermines trust, and can produce superficial compliance at the expense of engagement and dignity. Policy responses therefore need to address not only physical punishment but also verbal, symbolic, and relational practices that publicly degrade students.

Based on this case study, four policy directions follow. First, policy and guidance should define and explicitly prohibit humiliating disciplinary practices (including public ridicule, derogatory labeling, and punishments designed to embarrass, and ensure child-accessible reporting mechanisms with clear follow-through. Second, positive, dignity-based discipline should be embedded in teacher standards, school accountability frameworks, and guidance documents so that "what replaces shame" is institutionally supported rather than left to individual discretion. Third, accountability should be paired with support: teacher stress, high-stakes performance pressure, and limited psychosocial resources can intensify punitive outbursts, so policy must also strengthen school-level capacity (mentoring, counseling pathways, and workload-sensitive support). Fourth, policy communication should extend to parents and communities, since home–school linkages can amplify shame; parents should be included in establishing shared expectations about respectful discipline.Shame-based discipline persists partly because it is perceived as effective and culturally legitimate, change requires credible alternatives that preserve classroom authority while protecting student dignity. The goal is not to remove discipline, but to replace humiliation with approaches that maintain order and support learning.

Four practice-facing directions follow from this study. First, teacher education and professional development should include emotional literacy and classroom management

training that helps teachers recognize escalation triggers, respond without public degradation, and use de-escalation strategies in high-pressure moments. Second, training should cultivate reflective practice and empathy: teachers should be supported to examine how their own schooling histories shape discipline, and to practice private, respectful correction as the default for mistakes and misunderstandings. Third, teachers need structural support as well as skills—coaching, mentoring, and workload- and stress-sensitive supports—because chronic stress can make punitive discipline more likely. Fourth, classrooms should be organized to reduce "audience humiliation" dynamics: proactive routines, predictable expectations, inclusive participation norms, and consistent positive reinforcement can reduce the perceived need for shame as a control tool.

8.2 Concluding Reflections

This final chapter has looked back at the journey of the research and looked forward to changes in policy, practice, and scholarship. In closing, it is important to adopt a reflexive and hopeful tone about what has been learned and what can be transformed. This study began by probing a problematic yet under-discussed dimension of schooling: the routine humiliations that children endure in the name of discipline (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015). Employing an interpretivist ethnographic approach, the inquiry assumed personal moral and emotional significance for the researcher, extending beyond a purely academic exercise.

As a researcher, I became intensely aware of my dual position: at times an observer documenting phenomena with scholarly detachment, and at times a fellow human being empathizing with a child's tears or a teacher's frustration. A reflexive awareness of this duality has been crucial. Adopting this reflexive stance prevented a simplistic villain–victim

narrative. Indeed, teachers often acted under genuine belief that they were doing their best in difficult circumstances, and students developed their own ways to cope or quietly resist. This suggests that the persistence of shame-based discipline is not due to a few "bad" educators or misbehaving pupils, but is embedded in broader institutional and cultural norms – a systemic pattern that can be changed (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015; Ramavath, 2016).

A key insight from the fieldwork was the resilience exhibited by both students and teachers even within a harsh disciplinary environment. Despite the prevailing climate of strictness, there were moments of genuine care: for example, a teacher who privately consoled a student after publicly scolding them, and classmates who supported a peer following a humiliating incident. These instances indicate that more compassionate practices are already nascent in the system, and that educational policies and teacher training could strategically nurture these existing tendencies toward empathy. I also realized that children, even when shamed, often understand deeply that it is unfair – they may not have the power to contest it, but they recognize the injustice. Listening to students articulate how they wished to be treated – "with a chance to explain," "without being called names" – reinforced the conviction that student voices must inform reforms.

Notably, contemporary educational discourse—both international and Indian—echoes these student perspectives by advocating for a pedagogy of respect in place of punitive humiliation (Goodman & Cook, 2019; Ramavath, 2016). For instance, Goodman and Cook's (2019, p. 62) normative analysis concludes that shaming students is "almost never justified" as a disciplinary technique and must be replaced with methods that uphold learners' dignity. This thesis affirms that stance and argues that such a shift is attainable: with deliberate effort, schools in similar low-fee private school contexts in India can move away from regimes of fear toward cultures of trust.

Viewed in wider context, the findings underscore the need to decolonize and humanize educational practice in India. The prevalence of authoritarian discipline can be traced in part to colonial-era schooling models that aimed to produce subservient, orderly subjects, a legacy reinforced by longstanding social hierarchies (Batra, 2020). In a modern democratic society committed to equity and creativity, however, such punitive methods are increasingly recognized as educationally counterproductive and normatively outdated (Freire, 2020). Reimagining discipline thus becomes both a pedagogical and a democratic imperative, requiring that classroom practices realign with constitutional values of dignity and the demands of 21st-century education. The recommendations offered – policy reform, teacher development, further research – are ambitious, but they are grounded in the reality that change is not only necessary but possible. There are already schools and teachers in India pioneering positive discipline, and students thriving under such care. They serve as beacons. Scaling up those successes will require persistence and collaboration among all stakeholders: government officials who write and enforce laws, educators who engage in daily practice, researchers who bring evidence to the table, and children and parents who must be at the heart of this conversation.

This ethnographic case study provides depth and mechanism-level insight, but it also highlights clear directions for further research. Future work would be especially valuable in the following areas: (1) comparative studies across different school sectors and regions to examine how shame-based discipline varies by institutional setting and community context; (2) longitudinal research tracing how repeated classroom humiliation shapes participation, educational trajectories, and well-being over time; (3) intervention and action research that designs, implements, and evaluates dignity-based alternatives to humiliation, including teacher support and whole-school approaches; (4) studies examining how shame intersects with gender, caste, class, language, and disability in shaping identity and educational

inclusion; and (5) research on peer dynamics, coping practices, and the social life of humiliation beyond the immediate teacher–student interaction.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the personal impact of this research journey. Bearing witness to children's humiliation was often painful, and there were moments I questioned whether my presence and note-taking were enough – or if I should intervene. Maintaining the balance between researcher neutrality and ethical responsibility was challenging. In some instances, I found small ways to be an "ethical witness," for example by informally encouraging a child or sharing pedagogical resources with a willing teacher after formal data collection was over. These actions were not part of the data, but they were part of the human exchange that this research inevitably became. They convinced me that research in education is not just about understanding the world, but also about improving it. As I conclude this thesis, I carry forward this belief and commitment. The stories and voices from that Delhi school will stay with me, informing my ongoing commitment to dignity-based and emotionally safe educational practice.

The study's findings, highlighted its original contributions, and charted out pragmatic recommendations for change. The central message resonates clearly: discipline in schools, including low-fee private schools in India, must not be at odds with the dignity of students. When discipline and dignity go hand in hand, we create the conditions for genuine learning, emotional safety, and mutual respect. It is my hope that this thesis, in its own modest way, contributes to a future where shame has no place in education, where every child can learn without fear, and where teachers are empowered to lead with understanding rather than authority alone. Reimagining discipline is indeed possible – and it begins by seeing children not as subjects to be controlled, but as persons to be guided with care and respect.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Detailed Descriptions of All Figures



Figure 1**: Classroom scene with teacher addressing one student**

Detailed description: The drawing depicts a classroom with numerous small student figures arranged along the lower portion of the page. In the upper-right corner, a teacher figure is rendered in greater detail than the other characters. In the upper-left corner, a single student is shown standing and enlarged relative to nearby figures. Speech bubbles are distributed across the scene to represent concurrent talk. Near the teacher, one bubble reads “mujhse panga mat lo” (“Don’t mess with me”); another addressed to the standing student includes the student’s anonymized name followed by “fail ho jaoge” (“you will fail”).

A bubble near a student in the lower area reads “he, he, he,” indicating quiet, restrained laughter directed at the standing student. Additional chatter appears in other bubbles, including “class ke saste badmash” (“the class’s cheap troublemakers”), attributed to a back-row student, and a remark addressed to a female student that begins with her anonymized name and reads “tujhe milega [name]” (“you will get a ‘Kalia,’ i.e., a dark-skinned boy/man”). Overall, most students occupy the bottom of the page, the teacher is positioned at the top right, and the standing student at the top left is emphasized by larger scale and multiple directed remarks. The drawing was made by the student depicted standing in the top-left corner.

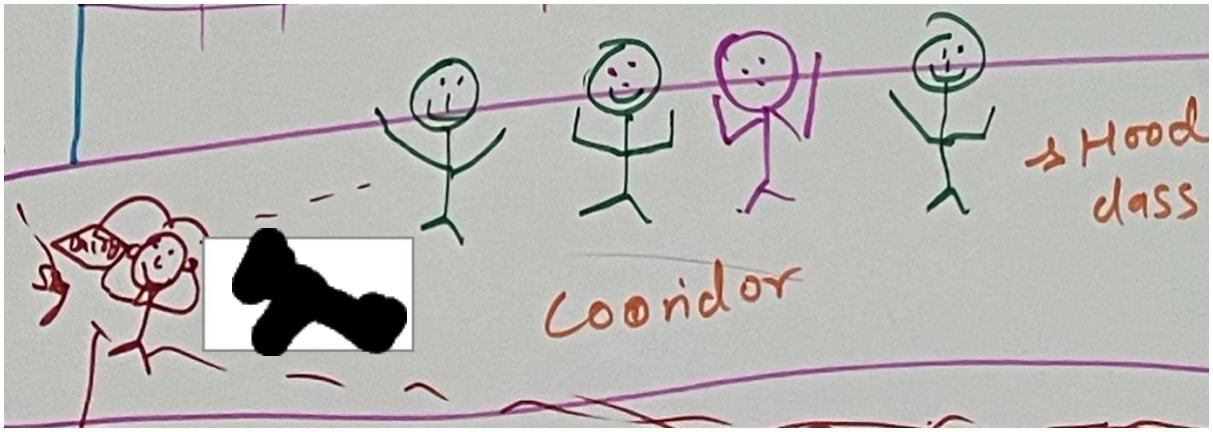


Figure 2: Corridor punishment—students standing with hands raised

Detailed description: The drawing represents a school corridor with multiple classrooms along one side. Outside one classroom, four students stand in a row beside the doorway, each with both hands raised above shoulder level as punishment. Three of the four show smiling faces; the fourth is depicted without a smile and is rendered in a different color from the others, distinguishing this student visually. A passing student (drawn as a girl) walks along the corridor with a smiling face. A dotted line is drawn from the passerby toward the group

visually linking her gaze to them; the student illustrator explained that this indicates she is smiling/laughing at them. According to the illustrator's narration (not written in the drawing), the four students were sent outside by the teacher for something they did in class, and the unsmiling boy felt uncomfortable being publicly visible in this position.

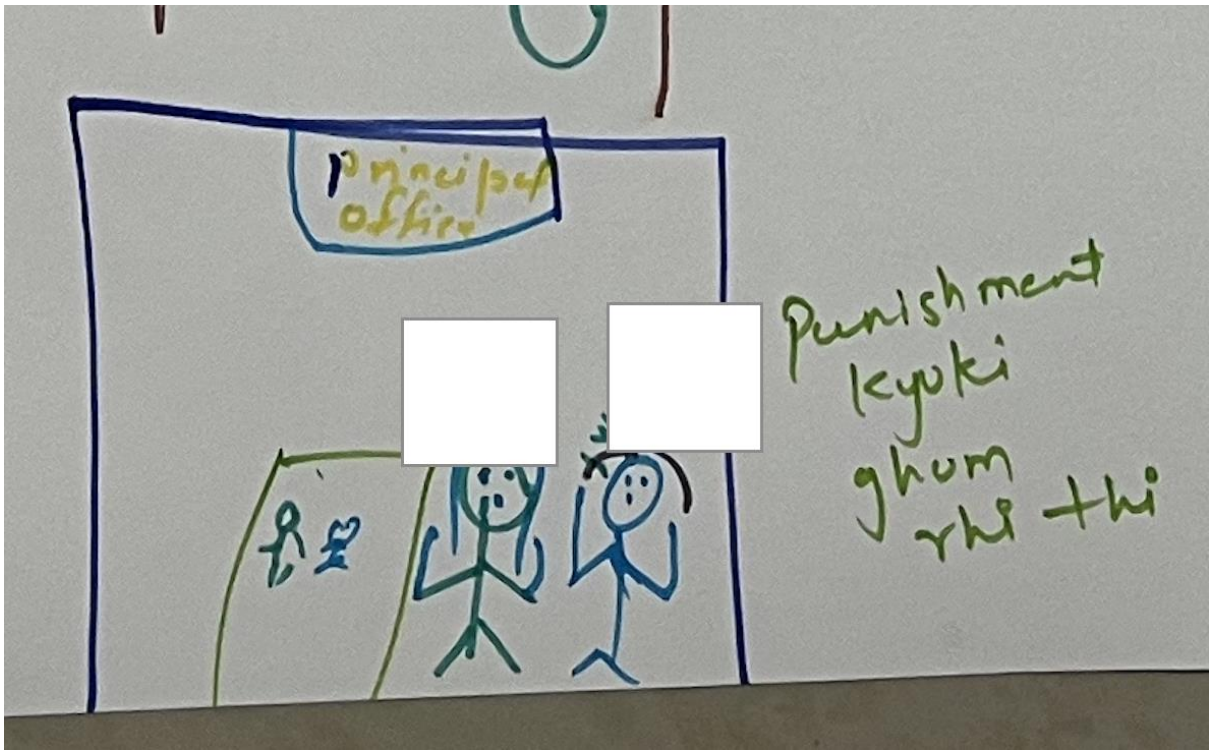


Figure 3**: Outside the principal's office—students with hands raised**

Detailed description: The drawing depicts the entrance to a principal's office. A gate/doorway dominates the central area, and two student figures—the illustrators of this scene—stand immediately to the right of the gate with their arms raised above shoulder level as punishment. Inside the gate, the office interior is minimally rendered with two small elements: a table and the principal seated on a chair behind it. Facial details on the students are sparse; affect is not clearly legible.

Text elements include a short phrase written in the illustration—"punishment kyuki ghum rahi thi" (translated earlier as "punishment because [we] were roaming while class was going on")—and additional explanation narrated by the students (not written in the drawing) that they were made to stand outside with hands raised for roaming during class time.

According to the students' narration, the location intensified the experience: the principal's office sits along a busy corridor frequently used by both teaching and non-teaching staff, and there is a nearby seating/waiting area for parents and other visitors (not depicted). The placement directly outside the office made the punishment highly visible and humiliating—people entering, exiting, or moving through the corridor could continually see the students.

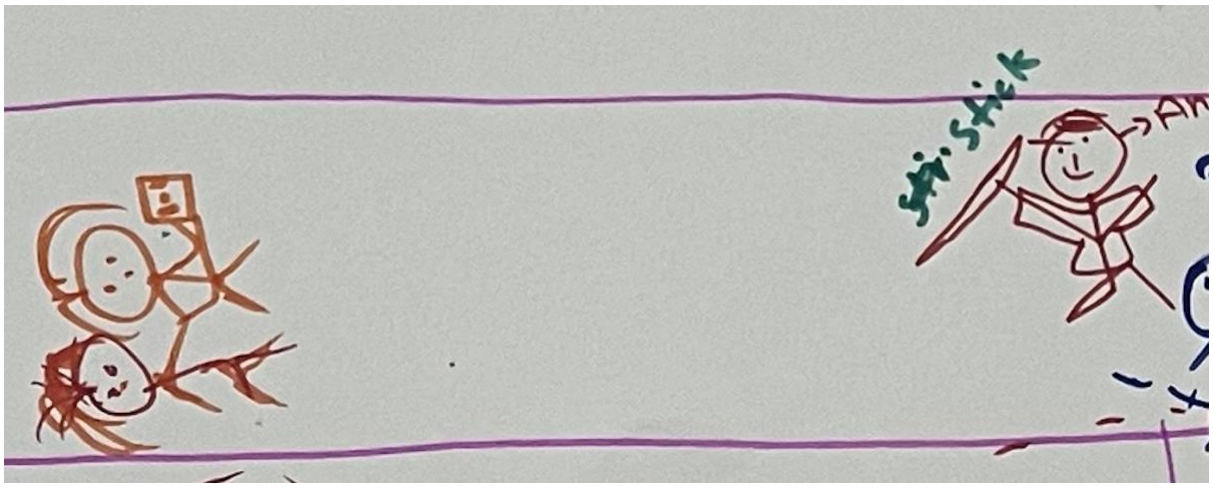


Figure 4: Teacher awaiting students with stick in corridor

Detailed description: The drawing depicts a school corridor in linear perspective with a teacher at the far end and two students—the illustrators—closer to the viewer. The two students walk together along the corridor; one holds a book in one hand. Both are drawn with visibly fearful expressions. Their bodies are shown paused mid-walk, as if they have stopped upon noticing the teacher ahead. At the opposite end, the teacher faces them with a slight

smirk and a lowered gaze, holding a stick in one hand; the stick is labeled. No additional text or background figures are indicated. According to the students' narration (not written in the drawing), they had done something in class, and the teacher is waiting for them with the stick to administer punishment.

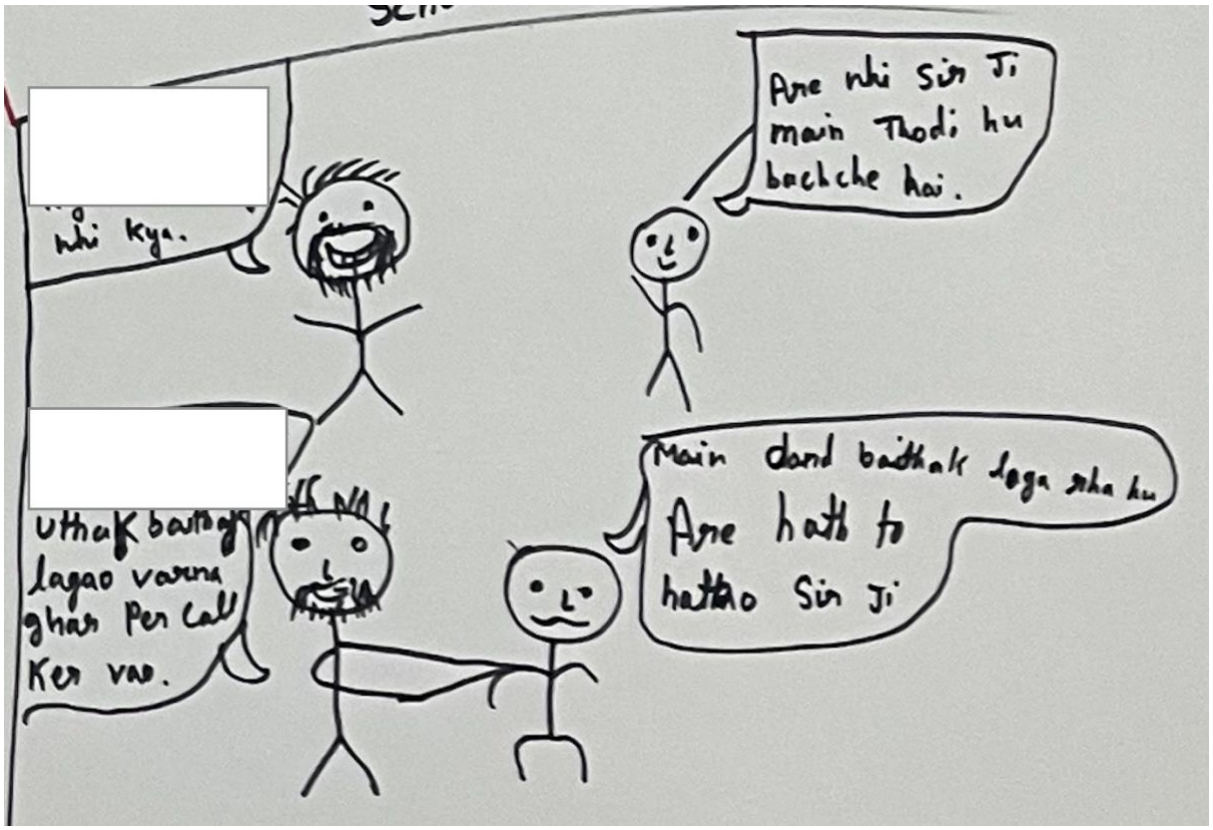


Figure 8**: Two-panel conversation—coercion via parental threat**

Detailed description: The drawing presents a two-part sequence featuring a student and a teacher. The page is divided into two adjacent images (panels). In both, the same two figures appear: the student (self-portrayed by the illustrator) and the teacher. Speech bubbles with Hindi text delineate the dialogue; the student's own name is written in the bubbles but should be treated as anonymized.

Panel 1: The teacher faces the student with a smiling expression. A speech bubble from the teacher reads: “ji matlb kya hai? manoge hi nahi.” (“So what do you mean? You just won’t listen, will you?”). A speech bubble from the student reads: “are nahi sir ji, main thodi hi bachche hai.” (“Oh no, sir, I’m not a little kid.”). The figures are shown at mid-body scale; no background details are emphasized beyond a simple interior setting.

Panel 2: The teacher is drawn with a smirk and is shown holding the student’s arm. The teacher’s speech bubble addresses the student by name and reads: “kya [[anonymised name]]? utha ke baitho, uthak baithak lagao, varna ghar per call ker dunga.” (“What, [anonymized name]? Sit up properly; do squats, or I’ll call home.”). The student’s reply reads: “main uthak baithak laga raha hu, are hath to hatao sir ji.” (“I’m doing the squats; please move your hand, sir.”). The student’s facial features indicate displeasure, while the teacher’s posture and hand on the student’s arm are clearly depicted. No additional text or symbols are present beyond the dialogue bubbles.

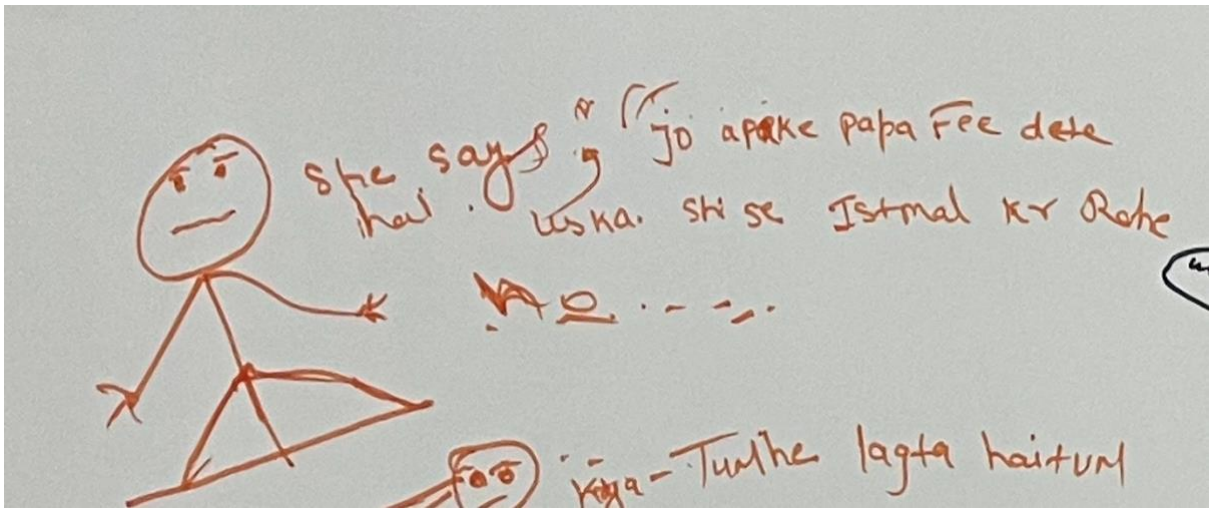


Figure 9: Teacher invoking parents’ sacrifice as discipline

Detailed description: The drawing features a single figure of a female teacher, shown frontally with a firm, unsmiling expression; background detail is minimal. A speech bubble beside her contains a quote the student reports she often says: “jo aapke papa fees dete hai, uska sahi se istemal ker rahe ho?” (“Are you making proper use of the fees your father pays?”) followed by “nahi” (“No”). The final “nahi” (“No”) is rendered more emphatically than the rest of the text—drawn in thicker, darker strokes (and slightly larger), signaling a forceful conclusion to the statement. No additional text or figures appear in the image.



Figure 10**: Teacher querying fees to shame performance**

Detailed description: The drawing depicts a conversation between a teacher and a student. Two figures face one another at mid-body scale (background is minimal). Speech bubbles carry the dialogue. Teacher’s first speech bubble: “bahar aao, tumhare mahine ki fees kitni hai?” (“Come outside—how much is your monthly fee?”). Student’s reply: “sir, 1650 rupaye.” (“Sir, 1,650 rupees.”). Teacher’s next speech bubble: “to fir padh kyun nahi rahe ho?” (“Then why aren’t you studying?”). No additional symbols or labels are shown. The

exchange foregrounds the teacher's focus on fees and the student's studying through the verbatim text in the bubbles.

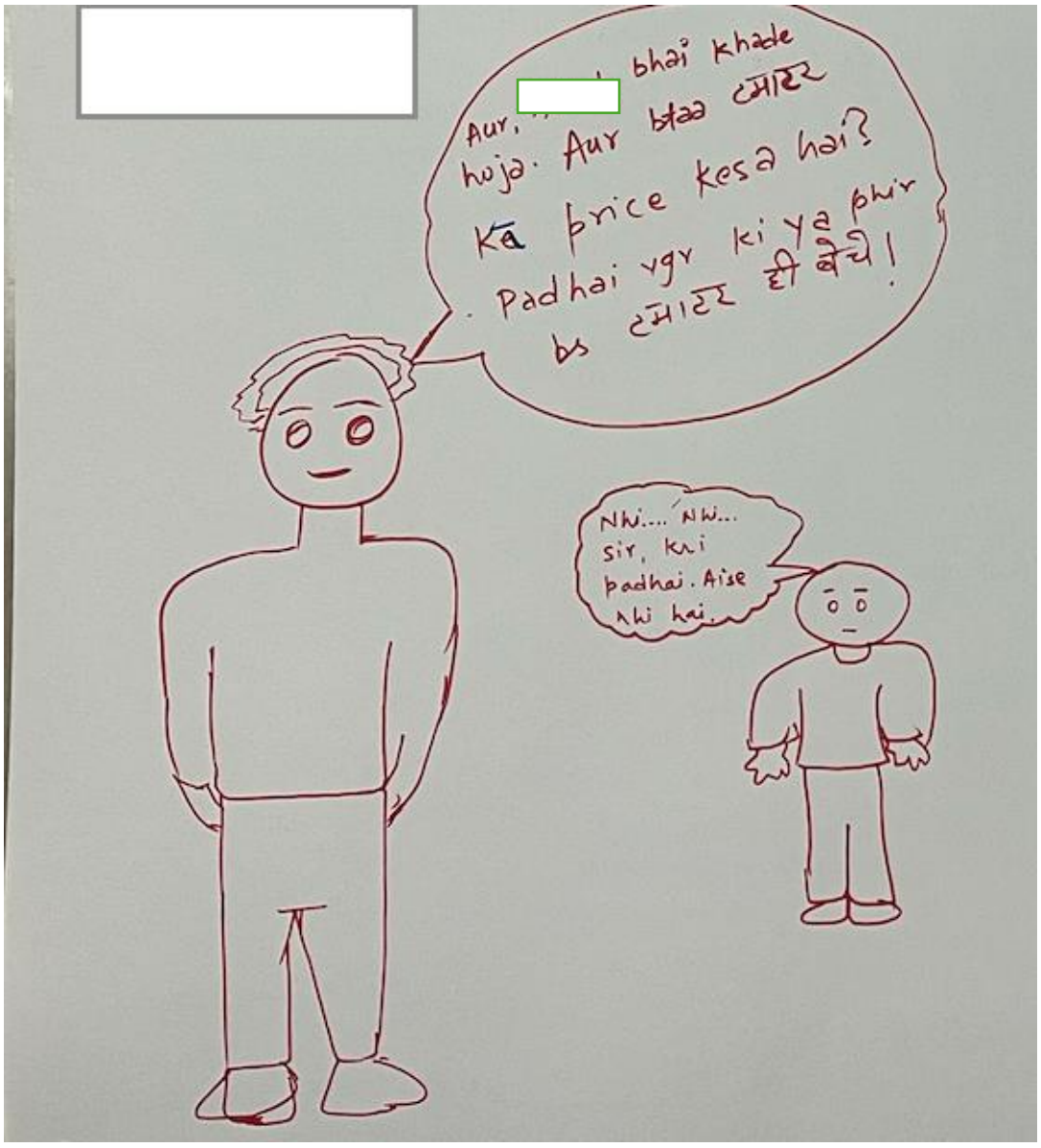


Figure 5: Class-based taunt— "study or sell tomatoes?"

Detailed description: The drawing presents a two-figure exchange between a teacher and a student. The teacher is rendered at a larger scale than the student and is shown with a smirk,

facing the student; the student is smaller and drawn with a fearful expression. Background elements are minimal. Dialogue appears in speech bubbles.

- **Teacher's speech:** "aur bhai, khade ho jao. aur batao. tamatar ka price kaisa hai. padhai vagairah ki ya fir bas tamatar hi beche."

  Translation: "So, brother, stand up. Go on, tell me—how's the price of tomatoes? Did you study and all, or did you just sell tomatoes?"

- **Student's reply:** "nahi nahi sir, kari padhai, aisa nahi hai."

  Translation: "No, no, sir, I did study—it's not like that."

According to the student's narration (not written in the drawing), the teacher's comments refer to the child's father being a vegetable seller, with the child sometimes helping at the shop. The narration further explains the implied message: the teacher is suggesting, "Are you going to study, or just sell tomatoes your whole life?"

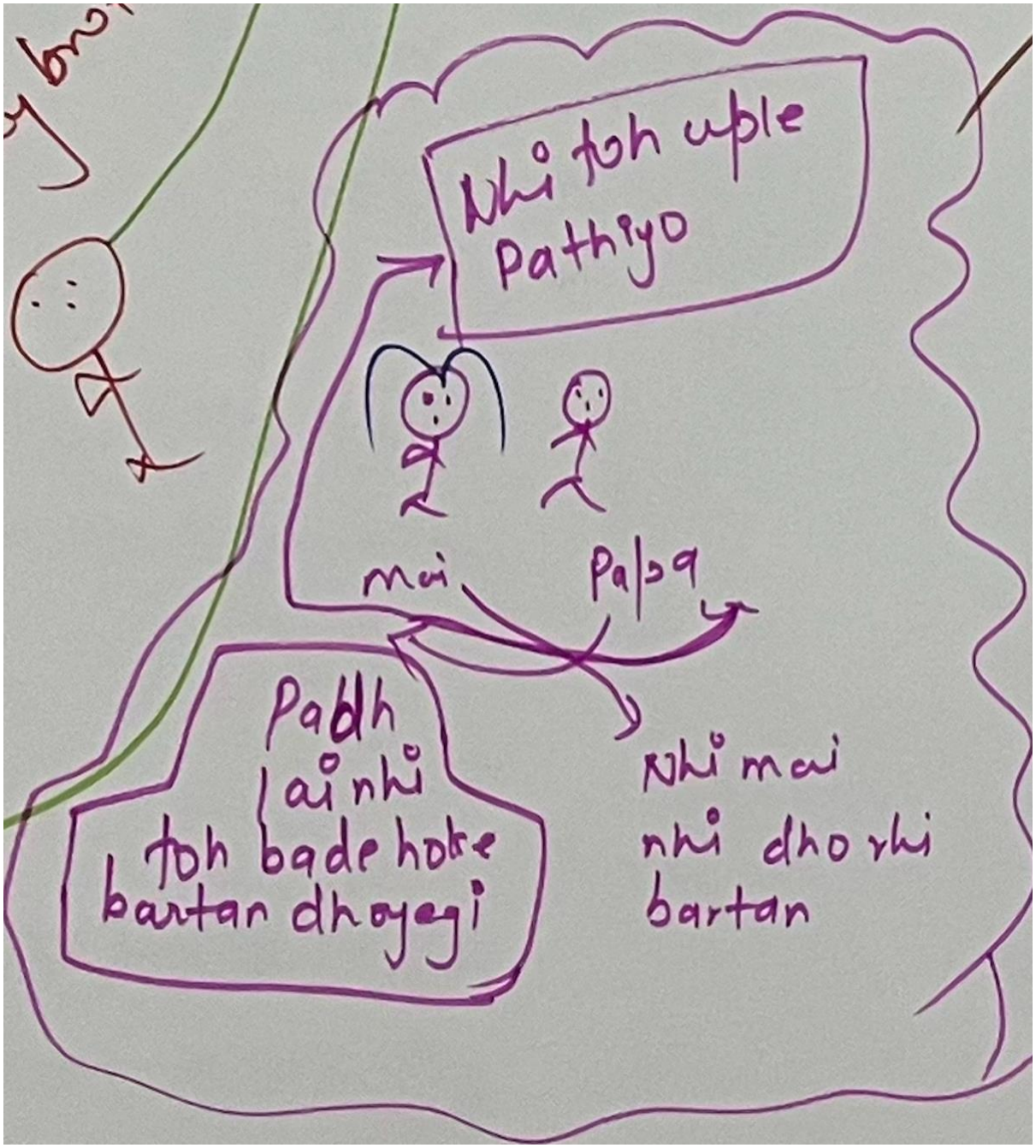


Figure 6**: Parental threat invoking gendered domestic labor**

Detailed description: The drawing depicts a conversation between a father and his daughter shown at mid-body scale with minimal background. Speech bubbles carry the dialogue.

- **Father's speech:** "padh le, nahi to bade hoke bartan dhoyegi."

  Translation: "Study, otherwise when you grow up, you'll be washing utensils."

- **Daughter's reply:** "nahi, main nahi dho rahi bartan."

  Translation: "No, I'm not going to wash utensils."

- **Father's next speech:** "nahi to uple poatiyo."

  Translation: "Otherwise you'll be plastering cow-dung cakes."

The student narrator explained (this context is narrated, not written in the image) that the father's remarks imply an expected future if the daughter does not study—early marriage and domestic labor at her in-laws' home, such as washing utensils or making cow-dung cakes. The daughter's drawn expression appears resistant, while the father's is admonitory; no additional text or figures are shown.

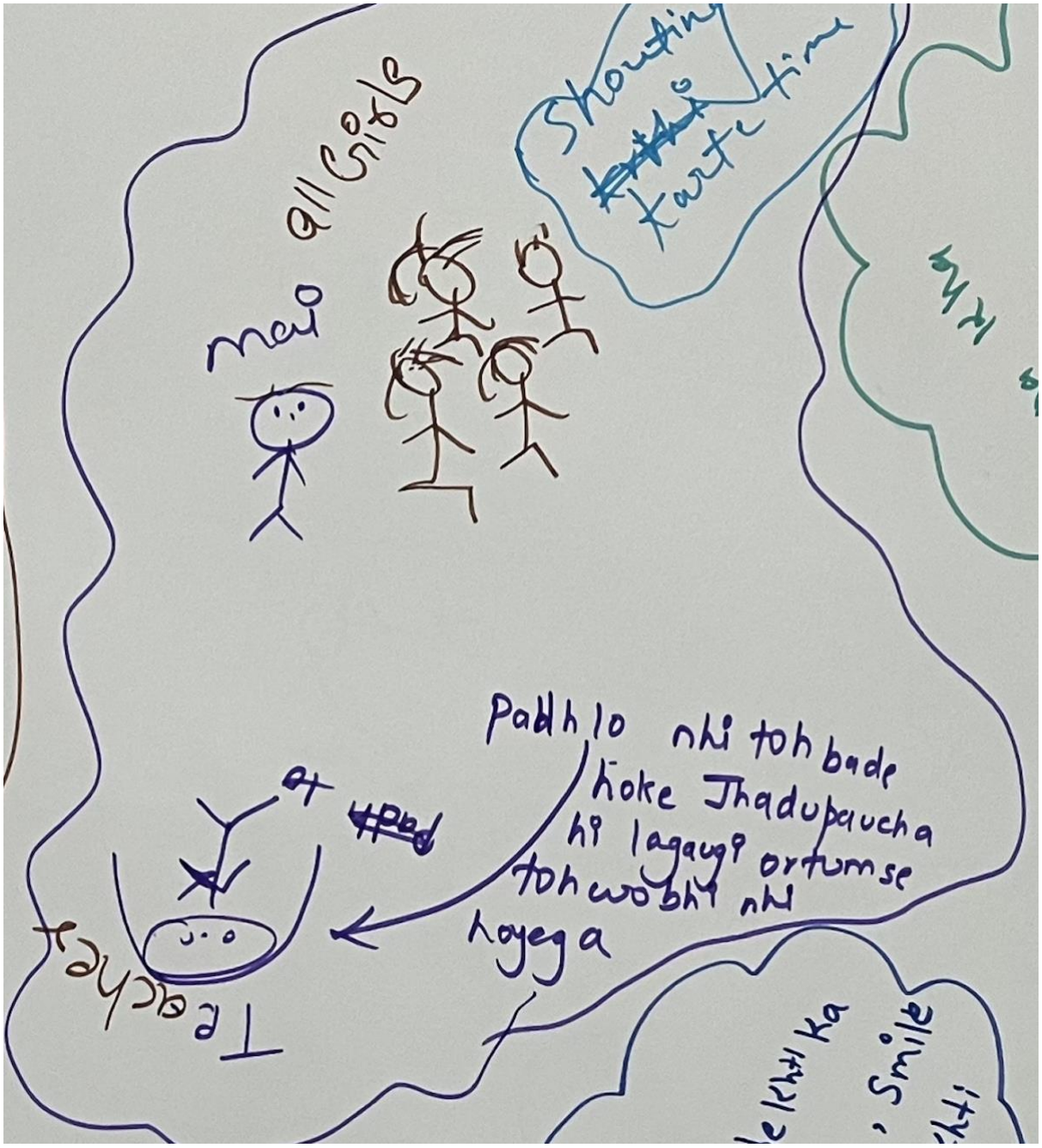


Figure 7: Gendered threat— "cleaning at your in-laws' homes"

Detailed description: The drawing depicts a classroom scene. In the bottom-left corner, a figure labeled "teacher" appears. Along the top edge, the student-illustrator has drawn herself and four additional students, with a label reading "all girls." A second label near the group reads "shouting karte time," indicating that the girls are shouting and creating a ruckus. No additional classroom furniture is specified.

A speech bubble from the teacher addresses the girls (including the illustrator). The text is written in Hindi (in the Roman script the child used), followed by an English translation:

- Teacher's speech: "padh lo, nahi to bade hoke jhadu-pocha hi lagaogi, aur tumse to wo bhi nahi hoga."

  Translation: "Study, otherwise when you grow up, you'll end up doing only sweeping and mopping—and you won't even be able to do that properly."

According to the student's narration (not written in the drawing), the teacher's remark is used to tell the girls to become serious about studies, implying that if they do not, they will clean houses and, as further explained by the student, may marry early and perform such work at their in-laws' home.

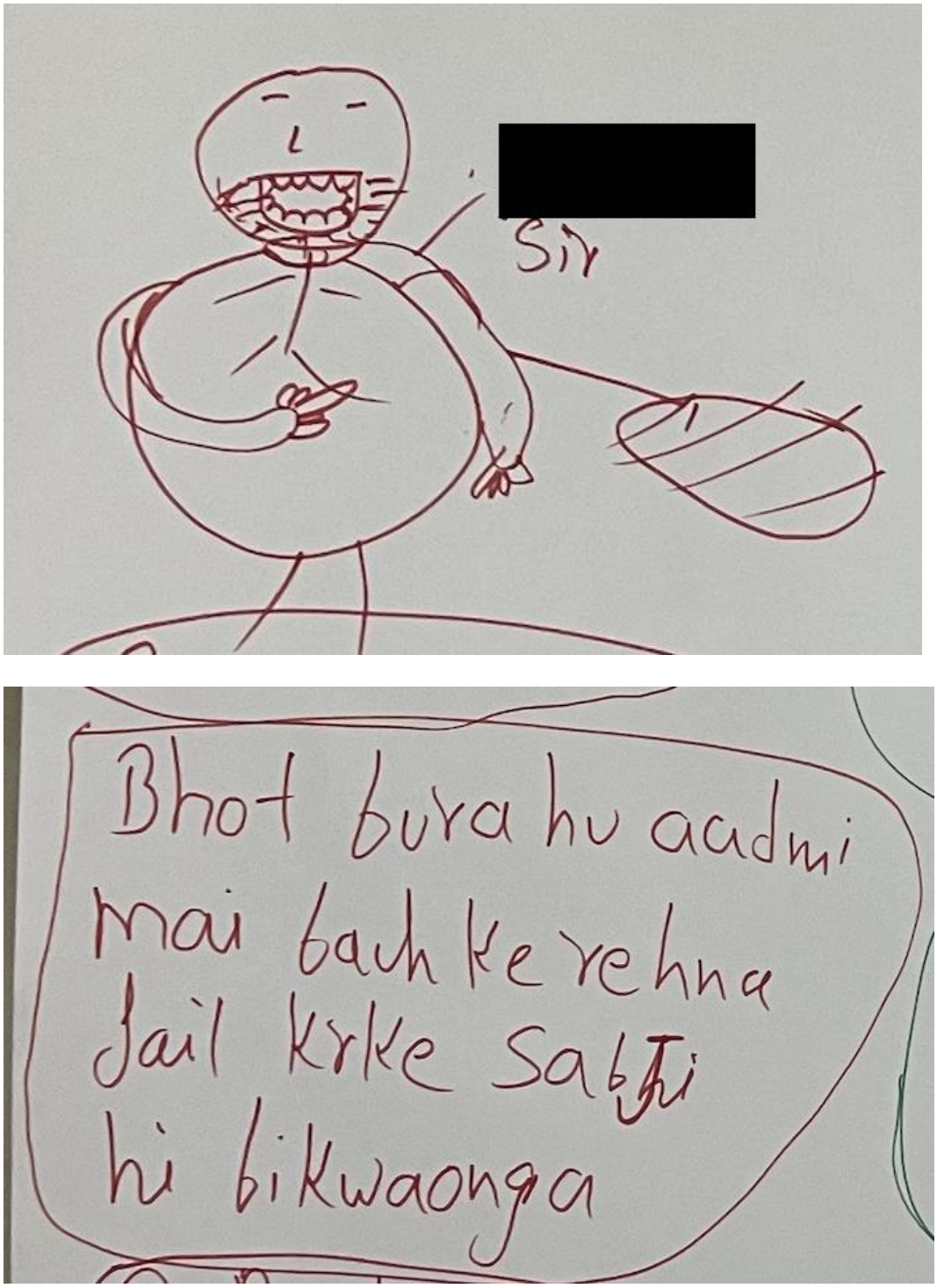


Figure 11**: Caricatured teacher with recurring threat— "I will fail you and make you sell vegetables"**

Detailed description: The page contains two separate drawings. The upper drawing is a stand-alone portrait of a teacher rendered with greater detail; the teacher is shown laughing,

front-facing, with minimal background. Beneath this portrait, a quoted line that the teacher is said to use often is written: “bahut bura hu aadmi main, bach ke rehna—fail karke sabji hi bikwaunga.” (Translation: “I’m a very bad man; beware—if you fail, I’ll make you sell vegetables.”) According to the student-illustrator’s note, this statement is commonly directed at students whose parents work as vegetable sellers, urging them to study by invoking that comparison. The second drawing appears on the same page as a separate image