



Azim Premji
University

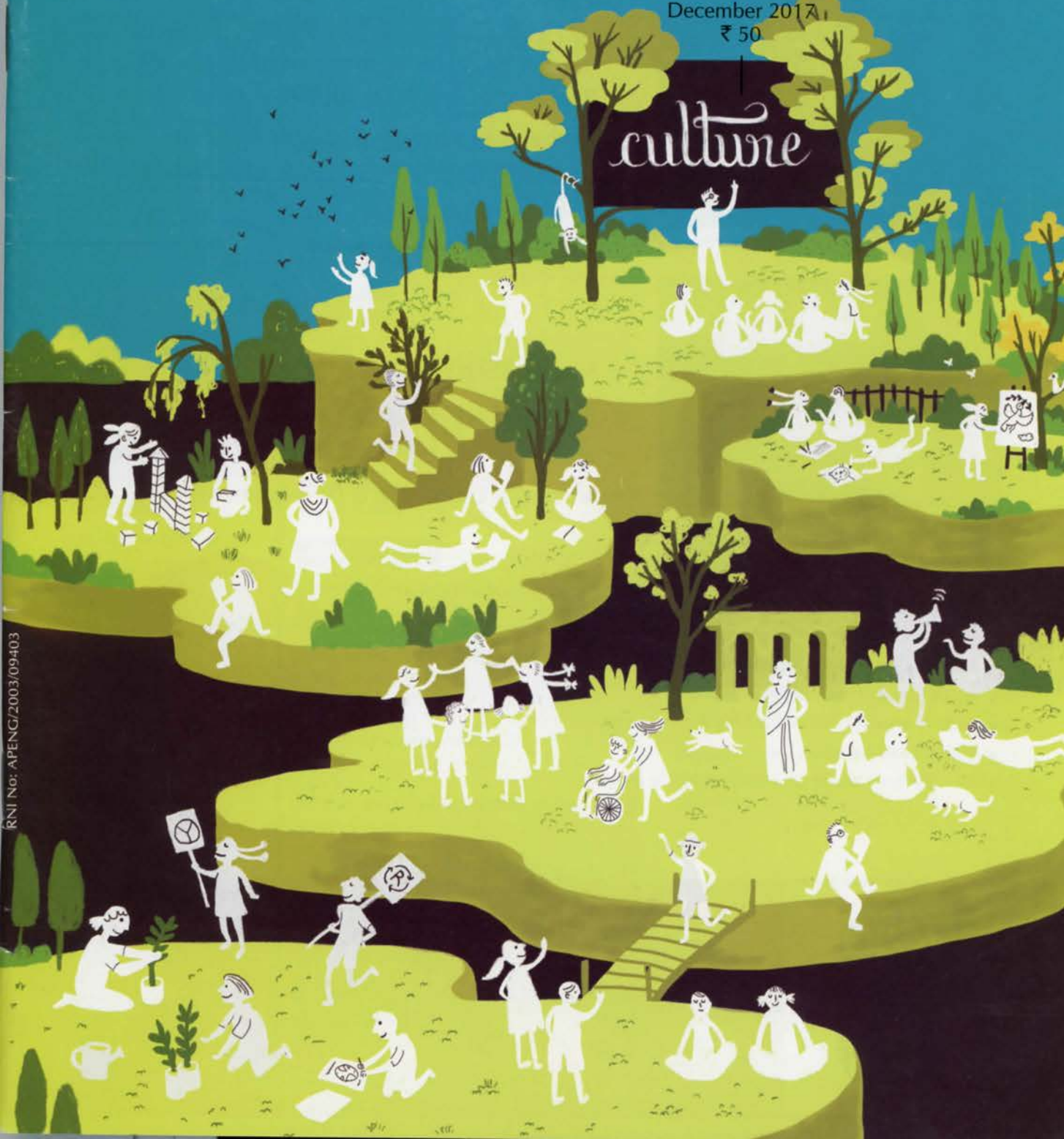
the magazine for
the contemporary teacher

TEACHER PLUS

December 2017

₹ 50

culture



Editor
Usha Raman

Editorial Team
M Nirmala
Shalini B
Sushma Rana

Layout & Graphics
Rajendra Kumar S

Social Media
Jamuna Inamdar

Circulation
N Srinivas

Cover Design
Dhwani Shah*

RNI Publications Consultant
K Raghurama Raju

Teacher Plus is supported by
Azim Premji University

The views expressed in the
magazine are those of the
authors and not necessarily
those of Teacher Plus.

Similarly, mention of
products and services by
writers in the magazine
does not constitute an
endorsement by
Teacher Plus.

Registered with the Registrar
of Newspapers of India under
RNI No: APENG/2003/09403

ISSN No 0973-778

Vol. 15, No. 11; Pages 68

Unsolicited submissions are
welcome.

Please address all
correspondence to

Teacher Plus
A 15, Vikrampuri
Secunderabad 500 009.
Telangana, India.
Tel: 040 2780 7039.
editorial@teacherplus.org
www.teacherplus.org

***Dhwani Shah** is an
illustrator and graphic
designer from Mumbai.
She studied design from
Sir J.J. School of Applied
Art, Mumbai and National
Institute of Design,
Ahmedabad. She enjoys
working on editorial
illustrations, non-fiction
comics and publication
design projects. She can be
reached at
dhwani.s12@gmail.com.

the magazine for
the contemporary teacher

TEACHER PLUS

December 2017

contents

Editorial	4	Vision & Values	
Guest Editorial		The culture of community building	42
What's the impact of your school's culture?	5	<i>Anandhi</i>	
<i>Kavita Anand</i>		Building a better tomorrow	44
Culture & Curriculum		<i>Gita Krenek</i>	
The culture classes	6	Both top down and bottom-up!	47
<i>Shailesh Shirali</i>		<i>Ritika Chawla</i>	
Feeling good about being you	10	Culture & Community	
<i>Pawan Kumar Gupta</i>		Breaking the silence	50
Stepping out of the manic machine	13	<i>Anjali Monteiro</i>	
<i>Rahee Dahake</i>		Turning the lens on society	53
Who is being taught what?	16	<i>Sunanda Ali</i>	
<i>Rohit Kumar</i>		Birthday parties, train journeys and vacations	55
Learning Spaces		<i>Geetha Durairajan</i>	
A bridge between home and school	20	Cultivating a secular spirit	58
<i>Jane Sahi</i>		<i>Sheel</i>	
The library: a place of being and becoming	23	'Something from the ocean, something from the hills'	61
<i>Usha Mukunda</i>		<i>Chintan Girish Modi</i>	
Opening hearts and minds	26	Popular culture and its role in classrooms	64
<i>Aruna Sankaranarayanan</i>		<i>Usha Pandit</i>	
Words and the worlds they make	29		
<i>Anjana Nayar</i>			
Sharing the lives of children	32		
<i>B. Ramdas and Rama Sastry</i>			
Listening to the other	35		
<i>Thejaswi Shivanand</i>			
Caring for the natural world	38		
<i>Roshen Dalal</i>			

Breaking the silence

Affirming cultures of gender justice

Anjali Monteiro

The author is a Professor in the School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. She is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and co-author of *A Fly in the Curry: Independent Documentary Film in India*, Sage 2016. She can be reached at monteiro@tiss.edu



As I sit down to write this, we are in the midst of a social media storm, which started with a #MeToo campaign, that sought testimonies from survivors across the globe, in order to establish the ubiquity of sexual harassment and rape. In response to this campaign, Prof. Christine Fair, of Georgetown University wrote a widely circulated piece for *Huffington Post*¹, entitled #HimToo, where she discusses her experience of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning and names several prominent academics as sexual predators. This has opened up the floodgates of “naming and shaming” of academics on social media. There are lists circulating with names of alleged perpetrators; there are claims and counter claims, statements and rebuttals – in short, a Pandora’s box that brings out how widespread and deeply entrenched is the culture of sexual violence, both in the society and also within educational institutions.

In this piece, I will be focusing not on this particular episode and its ramifications, but on the larger culture that it is symptomatic of and the ways in which the educational system is complicit in this culture of patriarchal violence. It is indeed necessary to start with critical self-reflection, even as many of us, teachers and educationists, work within and outside the system to resist and rewrite the dominant discourses around gender and patriarchy.

A culture of silence on matters related to sex and sexuality tends to characterize our social institutions, whether it is the family, the workplace or the school. Even where sex education exists, in schools, it is often imparted as a scientific, medicalized discourse, and not located within a framework of gender justice, of questioning the ways in which certain gender roles are naturalized. From nursery rhymes to school textbooks, there are both explicit and implicit assumptions about the construction

of gender: little boys are made of “frogs and snails and puppy dogs’ tails”, while little girls are full of “sugar and spice and all that is nice”, as a popular nursery rhyme would have us believe. Textbooks often have stereotypical images and stories of mothers who stay at home, fathers who go out to work, girls who play with dolls and boys who play with cars. When my daughter was in Class 3, her history book was titled “The Story of Man” She went up to the teacher and asked, “But Miss, what about the story of women?” She was reprimanded and told not to ask stupid questions. The teacher was only faithfully reproducing a hierarchy that she had herself internalized, a hierarchy that discourages students from active enquiry and that looks at learning as a rote driven activity. Students should listen and obey and reproduce what teachers tell them.

This disciplinary regime of the classroom, when superimposed on gender hierarchies, works towards the construction of docile feminine subjects. These relations of power impinge on the body itself in insidious and pervasive ways. When in kindergarten, my daughter was once rehearsing at home for an Independence Day event at school, where she was playing the role of a Malayali woman in a parade consisting of couples from different regions of the country. To my bemusement, she was walking with her knees bent, making herself shorter than she was. When I asked her why, she said that the teacher had instructed her to do so, because her male partner was shorter than her, and husbands can’t be shorter than wives! Injunctions, about how to sit, dress, direct one’s gaze, speak, laugh and play, shape the ways in which female (and male) bodies experience themselves and the world they inhabit. In fact, one can draw upon the work of Judith Butler (1990)² who regards gender itself not as pre-determined but as

constructed through performative acts:

We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it’s a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start (Butler, cited in Byron, 2014).³

This formation of male and female bodies and identities that conform to dominant social scripts is reinforced both within and outside the classroom. For instance, social pressure and bullying by peers (particularly males) on the playground works towards shaping notions of an aggressive masculinity and a docile femininity. One needs to ask what kind of role teachers can play here in facilitating a process of questioning dominant gender norms and preventing the imposition of rigid gender scripts, particularly the violence and discrimination meted out to non-heteronormative students; “girlish” boys and “boyish” girls.

The culture of silence, in conjunction with hierarchical gender roles, results in a situation of often blaming and shaming not the perpetrator of sexual violence but the survivor. There are countless stories about how girls and women are told that it is their fault that they were assaulted, that their dress, behaviour, conduct or

lack of judgment was responsible for the violence they experienced. Often violent behaviour by boys is condoned, by concluding that “boys will be boys”, as if it were “natural” for males to be predators.⁴ It is here that teachers can play a key role in questioning these gendered hierarchies by encouraging more sensitivity and respect on the part of boys, as well as greater assertiveness and agency on the part of girls. Education aimed at greater gender sensitivity and reworking of gender relations of power can be integrated into every aspect of academic life and need not be a separate “subject”

More than anything else, the classroom can become a space where both boys and girls are taught the importance of consent. Given the relative absence of such education within the space of the family within our culture, teachers can play an important role in helping children develop a sense of their own bodily



Illustrations: Proiti Roy



autonomy, agency and their rights in this regard:

Children should be taught that they are the only person allowed to look at and touch their bodies, unless they give permission to another person. When another person touches their body without first receiving permission or consent from that person, a crime is being committed. Learning to give and receive consent, or even just being aware about the concept of consent, can help children and young adults better understand their bodily rights while also giving them the courage to speak up if those rights are ever violated.⁵

There is some data to show that sexual harassment of school girls is alarmingly high; for instance, a Breakthrough study conducted in India reports that over 50 per cent of girls have been harassed on their way to school.⁶ There is also some data that demonstrates high levels of harassment in residential schools, particularly in poor tribal areas. All this points to the need for sex education, to adequately equip children, both boys and girls,

to handle and report sexual abuse. At times, teachers themselves are subject to sexual harassment and violence within the school system. Every school, indeed every public institution and workplace should have a sexual harassment committee as per the law.⁷ Sadly, this is not the case and parent-teacher associations as well as teachers' unions need to take up this issue on an urgent footing. We need more organizations such as RAHI in Delhi,⁸ which works with teachers, students and parents in schools and colleges to prevent and handle cases of child sexual abuse.

The dominant culture, where sexual predators function with impunity within our institutions, educational or otherwise, is not going to change overnight. Beginning with questioning our own prejudices and attitudes to gender, teachers and school managements have a crucial role to play in bringing about changes towards a more gender-just and gender-equal classroom, and in creating safe spaces within the school where children can express

themselves and share their problems without fear of being silenced, shamed or ignored. This will go a long way towards addressing the rampant issue of sexual violence, the fear of which shapes the subjectivities of girls and women, curtailing their agency and denying them access to public space and social participation.

References

- 1 Posted on 19/10/2017 and later withdrawn by Huffington Post.
2. Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
3. Byron, Experience. 2014. *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for the Interdisciplinary Performer*. New York: Routledge. Butler goes on to critique the very notion of gender as a binary of male/female, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.
4. In fact, boys are also often the survivors of sexual violence by other boys/men and this is a little talked about problem.
5. <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/article/teaching-consent-your-classroom>, accessed on October 23, 2017
6. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/50-of-girls-sexually-harassed-on-way-to-school-32-stalked-Study/articleshow/51130446.cms> accessed on October 24, 2017
- 7 The Vishakha guidelines, promulgated in 1997 sought to regulate the handling of cases of sexual harassment at the workplace and were replaced by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
8. "RAHI is a feminist group that has created a supportive environment for survivors. It goes beyond 'breaking the silence' and has developed a powerful voice that strives to mainstream the discussion about Incest/CSA in India and include it in social dialogue." Refer to <http://www.rahifoundation.org> for more details.

