

**‘The Home in the Mountains’**  
**Imagining a School and Schooling Imaginaries**  
**in Darjeeling, India**

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For  
Tenzing Wangchuck,  
whose journey finished too soon

# Contents

<b>Prologue</b>	<b>6</b>
Dreams of a Father: Why do middle class kids go to middle class schools?	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
Schooling Imaginaries: Learning how to belong in Modern India	
<b>Part One: The Story of North Point</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>I:</b> Imagining ‘The Home in the Mountains’	52
<b>II:</b> Ideal Imaginaries	78
<b>III:</b> School Spirit	108
<b>Part Two: The Year of Performance</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>IV:</b> Some Assembly Required	139
<b>V:</b> ‘Stories to Tell Your Children	164
<b>VI:</b> Students in Rehearsal	189
<b>Part Three: Brands of Schooling</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>VII:</b> The Time Traveller’s Classroom	228
<b>VIII:</b> ‘Like Colgate’	248
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>276</b>
‘As Onward Through Life We Go’: Beyond the Landscape of North Point	

<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>294</b>
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## **Appendices**

<b>A:</b> A Map of Darjeeling	304
<b>B:</b> North Point Map: Vision 2K	306
<b>C:</b> The School Chorus	307

## **Prologue**

# **Dreams of a Father:**

## **Why do middle class kids go to middle class schools?**

It all began with the story of a father's dream. It was sometime in April in 2008 and I was in the midst of my undergraduate fieldwork. I had been exploring the resurgence in the 'Gorkhaland' movement across the hills of Darjeeling in North Eastern India. I had been interviewing various people who had been engaging in hunger strikes in pursuit of the cause. In the process of these interviews and in my general experiences during this time, I was struck by the constant rhetoric that they fought not for themselves or their own futures but for the futures of their children and generations to come.

I was staying in the small town of Sukhia about 20 km outside of Darjeeling town. On that particular April day I had found myself temporarily housebound in the home of my host family, in the wake of a sudden tumultuous downpour. The weather it seemed was conspiring against my research, forcing me to postpone another interview. I sat in the kitchen waiting for the weather to pass, sharing an afternoon cup of tea with a side of sliced bread and jam, with Prabin, a member of my host family. Prabin worked in the office of the District Magistrate and thus was a man with a keen eye on local politics. As such, he had volunteered himself to be my unofficial research assistant. It had been a quiet Saturday about the house, as Prabin's wife Binita and their 3-year-old son, Pranayan, were out shopping in the market. Prabin's mother and father were visiting other family nearby, and Prabin's younger brother, Pramod, had travelled into town to collect some supplies for his school.

There was no sign of the rain letting up soon so Prabin and I continued to chat. Prabin's son had recently started school and we were discussing his son's apparent indifference towards schooling. 'Everyday he cries! He doesn't like school very much'. Prabin was convinced that his son would stop crying once he had learned the value of school. I had

been working as an English teacher in a small private school and had seen first-hand how parents like Prabin acknowledged the importance of schooling choice, even as their children began their schooling journeys at around 2 years old. Prabin was keen to reinforce the idea that his son's present school, a small building only 5 minutes' walk up the road, was just the beginning. Prabin told me that he wanted his son to get a 'good education' in contrast to his own schooling experience, which he described as 'simple'. Prabin told me that he dreamed of his son going to England and making enough money to support the whole family. Prabin knew that if his son was going to fulfil his dream then he would need to succeed at school, but not just any school. 'I want my son to go to St. Joseph's School; this is the best school in Darjeeling'.

I was aware that there were many schools in Darjeeling, both in the town itself and in the surrounding areas, all of which professed to offer a high level of English medium education, so I was keen to know what made St Joseph's such a certain choice. 'Have you been there?' he challenged me, as if to say that anyone who would lay eyes upon this place would know what he was talking about. 'We will go there someday; it is a very nice place'. He was keen to emphasize how 'nice' this school was even if he had only seen the building from the road. 'Others schools can teach English but [St. Joseph's] is more than that. They play all the sport[s], they have good Rector, they have nice student[s], good discipline, this is the right place for my son'. Prabin emphasized that he dreamed of a good life for his son and in order to get there he first had to go to the right school.

This was the first time I had even heard of St. Joseph's School, but it provided a provocative insight into perceptions of the roles of schooling in India today. Prabin's dream outlined a particular future for his son, which depended upon a foundation within a specific kind of schooling. I was immediately drawn to how he had mapped out a prospective educational trajectory, which leaned on certain intangible aspects of schooling that were perceived to subsequently guide his son towards a certain livelihood. St. Joseph's had been singled out, as it offered something that others were perceived not to have. Perhaps most importantly of all, Prabin had never been to the school which he dreamed of. His ideas of St Joseph's were ultimately imagined through an amalgam of stories that he had heard from work colleagues, interspersed with his own fleeting encounters in passing the school building. The imagined view of the school was integral in shaping Prabin's actions. He was planning for his son's future around a dream.

Prabin's perspective reflected a wider trend within literature pertaining to the Indian middle class, indicating a certain preference for a particular kind of schooling as being a necessary prerequisite for a specific, ultimately idealised, future livelihood. Donner (2006) identified a similar kind of career mapping amongst middle class Bengali families in Calcutta. The families, particularly the parents themselves, sought to admit their children to particular pre-schools, which were seen as the foundations of a scholastic career. Admission to future primary and secondary education hinged on the previous stage and as such, investment in each stage of the schooling process was vital in establishing the necessary trajectory for their child to progress on to specific occupations that would offer the necessary array of capital - financial, social and cultural – that would lead to a middle class life. What I became interested in was the concept that shapes this process. Why do middle class Indians choose certain schools and not others? What is the apparently intangible quality that leads parents like Prabin to desire St. Joseph's over all the others? What is it about schools like St. Joseph's that make them stand out from the range of available schools? It was with these questions that I headed off to St. Joseph's for some answers.

# **Introduction:**

# **Schooling Imaginaries:**

## **Learning how to belong in Modern India**

### **A Journey to North Point**

During the course of field research for this thesis, many of my days began with a walk along the pot-holed road that snaked along the mountainside, heading north out of the former British hill station of Darjeeling. The early morning traffic was populated with a parade of aging jeeps and tired yellow school buses overflowing with children resplendent in various colours of school uniforms. The air was filled with the echoes of hooters and horns as the taxis, jeeps and buses fought their way along the crowded roads to reach their destinations on time. Every day I found myself wading through the hordes of school children of all ages, who were crammed onto to the available narrow pavements (if any at all) at the road side.

This morning scene was precisely what had brought me to Darjeeling. I had set out to explore the increasing significance of private schooling in this area in the wake of national economic change that had opened up new consumer possibilities, opportunities and lifestyles. Darjeeling was a place synonymous with schooling. When I spoke with people around the town during the course of my fieldwork, I was frequently told that I had ‘come to the right place’ and that I was rather spoilt for choice with regards to potential schools. Darjeeling was developed by the British as a hill station around 1850 (Kennedy 1996; Chatterji 2007) and thus was home to many schools originally built to cater to European requirements. This hill station has retained many of its schools from this era and expanded further, and now Darjeeling and the surrounding hills are populated with hundreds of schools catering to thousands of students from across northeast India and beyond.

In the brief prologue we met Prabin, a civil servant and young father, who had his heart set on sending his son to St Joseph’s School. Prabin’s dream was for his son to go to England

and he imagined St Joseph's as the only school that could help him to achieve this dream. The question here was what was so special about St. Joseph's School that made it stand out above all the others? That is the question with which I began my journey. That morning, like the hordes of school children, I too was off to school.

My destination was St. Joseph's School, North Point. Some months earlier I had negotiated my entry to the school through a series of connections and friends that I had accrued during my previous visits to this region<sup>1</sup>. The school was a Jesuit run private school which sat on the northern most ridge of Darjeeling town in suburb known during Darjeeling's colonial past as North Point. In order to avoid confusion with other St. Joseph's, the school became known as North Point, and henceforth this is the name which I will use to refer to the school during the course of this thesis.

My walk to school stretched from the outer most limit of Darjeeling town for 6 kilometres to the suburb of Singmari. Every weekday morning was always a hive of activity as this road proved an important arterial route for the school children of Darjeeling travelling each way to reach their school. There were a number of schools dotted along the route, serving various levels of schooling, from primary to secondary as well as the government college for further education. The road was rather hazardous for someone on foot, as it often swelled with traffic and was only further intensified by the array of school buses and taxis. Despite this, walking was one of the more common means of getting around, particularly for those villages and homes which were inaccessible by road and constant travel by taxi or shared jeep was an expensive endeavour to conduct routinely. As such, I would often find students walking the journey from the town to Singmari, and on this day I met two students who I had met previously and would meet on future morning walks, Prakash and Rajah.

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<sup>1</sup> I have visited the Darjeeling region on two previous occasions, from July to November in 2006 and from February to May 2008. Both of these visits were work placements, acquired through a UK based charity at a private school in a small town around an hour's drive from Darjeeling town. These work placements were an integral part of my Undergraduate degree in Social Anthropology at Brunel University. During these visits I lived with a local family through whom I was able to develop some social networks and contacts with which I was able to gain access to North Point. During the second work placement I conducted research into the 'Gorkhaland' political movement, which I compiled into my Undergraduate dissertation entitled 'The Quest for Gorkhaland: Reconstituting National Identity through Ethnic Movements', focusing on the appropriation of 'Gorkha' as a fabricated 'ethnic' identity drawing the disparate ethnic groups of the Darjeeling hills into one political movement calling out for a new state within India for the Darjeeling region.

Rajah was 17, and a Class 11 student, the penultimate school year group. His friend Prakash was a year older and a Class 12 student, the final year of secondary schooling. They had more or less grown up together as neighbours and considered each other honorary brothers as neither had a biological male sibling. They were both born in raised in Darjeeling, Rajah's father was a pharmacist, running a pharmacy in town, in which his mother also helped. Prakash's family owned a clothing shop in the market which had been established by his grandfather who had since retired from working leaving the running of the business to his son, Prakash's father. Both families could be classified as members of India's 'new middle class', defined partly through one's occupation and subsequent income but more significant through one's capabilities to consume and engage with a specific social world. I shall explore the practicalities of this social group a little later on in this introduction. For now it suffices to say that Prakash and Rajah were emblematic of their fellow North Point students, as the vast majority hailed from families in the hills who had each invested a great deal financially in their sons' schooling.

That morning our conversation was directed towards the rather chunky textbook that Rajah had tucked under his arm. Rajah had a class test that day, a weekly occurrence at school where students would be routinely examined in their subjects to form the basis of their report cards which monitored each student's progress throughout the year. He had kept the book out of his bag, for Prakash to test him as they walked, however Rajah was simply growing nervous as Prakash kept asking him questions he did not know the answers to so he had decided to simply hold it instead. Today's test was 'Accountancy', a subject which Rajah considered his 'worst subject'. His eyes were a glazed and blurry hangover of a long hard night studying. Rajah admitted that he often stayed up late before exams even for subjects he considered himself proficient at. In this case there was a reward on the line. His father had promised him a new phone if he achieved an 'A' grade on his terminal report card. A low mark in one test would bring down his average across all the subjects and thus effect his overall grading in his report card.

There was evidence here of how the student's familial lifestyles held influence over their school lives. Of course this would not mean that such promises would materialise in the achievement of grades, or even that parental promises would even be fulfilled. Prakash had reminded his friend that once upon a time Rajah had been promised some money a previous year's successful report; a promise that went unfulfilled. Prakash joked that his

friend must really be bad at ‘Accountancy’ as he had a bad management of his money. Rajah reacted to his friend’s jibe ‘It’s not all about the money’. Rajah reminded his friend that their parents paid for them to go to North Point and this in itself was a reward, ‘Without our parents, we wouldn’t have North Point’. This revelation opened up a different discussion altogether. Why was North Point a ‘reward’ for these students?

Both Prakash and Rajah spoke fondly of their school, even on a day of a dreaded class exam. ‘We don’t go to school for exams’ Rajah told me ‘We go because it is important for our lives. It’s preparing us to work hard, be successful to get to university so we can get a good job’. I asked him if he thought he might become an accountant someday. He laughed, ‘I don’t know, ask me after the exam!’. He stressed that studying accounting was not just for accountants. ‘It’s a state of mind, actually’. It soon became apparent that learning, or rather schooling more broadly, was less about specific futures than it was about shaping a way of thinking about that future.

This was clearer when I probed into what ‘good job’ either Rajah or Prakash might consider doing. They offered me a range of options, such as studying business degrees, perhaps entering the burgeoning IT market but there was no certainty to their forecasts. ‘We must pass our exams first, then we can see what will happen’. Both students were open in their admittance that they had not thought a great deal about their futures other than vague details, rough job titles or occupational fields. This is not to suggest that they were negative about their potential futures but rather that the future to them appeared open.

The students, who I encountered at North Point, perceived their schooling as far more complex than simply a stepping stone onto bigger things. Rajah and Prakash were both aware that their weekly tests all added up to greater than the sum of a terminal report card. They were each aware that they were preparing for the next stage of their lives; their school life was a journey not a destination. The ‘journey’ in many ways seemed more important to the students by which I mean the school itself. The rhetoric about ‘preparing for the future’ was a regurgitation of narrative read and re-read to them by their teachers over the years. Rajah and Prakash, and others whom I would meet over the year, did not see schooling as a stop gap to an inevitable career. The social world of the school was in itself meaningful for the students and marked a departure from the social world of Darjeeling as a whole.

I will expand more on the unique social world of Darjeeling and the implications on this research later on. But at present I wish to highlight what had a profound impact on Rajah and Prakash which was North Point itself. Even though he was perturbed by his impending Accountancy exam, Rajah still seemed quite excited to go to school. For both the students, North Point was not simply a school, but rather an important place for those who go there.

Rajah told me: ‘North Point is such a great place. Yes, we have classes and exams and all that but we also get to see our friends, we talk about music and play football; we enjoy these things’. More often than not, conversations with students about North Point would focus on the opportunities afforded to them by attending the school. Students focused on the chance to play their favourite sports or to talk to their friends about last night’s football match, for students North Point was the centre of their social lives. The importance of North Point, for the students who attended it, lay in the *opportunities* the school provided. Both Prakash and Rajah spoke frequently about *opportunities* at North Point. The word was loosely applied to almost any aspect of the school environment such as the opportunity to play sports, to talk to friends, to learn from great<sup>2</sup> teachers, or to attend ‘smart classes’, (the new interactive white boards installed at North Point during my field work).

North Point was seemingly seen through *opportunities*, or in other words, the kinds of lifestyle practices the school facilitated for its students, in particular those practices which wouldn’t have been possible without the school. Rajah, in particular, told me about his new found love of the violin. ‘Ten years ago I hadn’t even heard of [the violin] but now I love to play it.’ Rajah was often invited, with the handful of other violin players, and other musicians and members of the school choir to perform in school events, such as Rector’s Day<sup>3</sup>. ‘So many parents come to those events, because you don’t get the chance to hear music like this in Darjeeling. This is why North Point is special’.

This returns us back to proposition with which I began my own journey to North Point. What was so special about North Point that made it such a desirable school? So far I have

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the word ‘great is quite deliberate here. There was an annual theme for the year, ‘Good to Great’ which I will explore in more detail specifically in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 but also more broadly across the thesis. This annual theme shaped many of the experiences that I had with staff and students during my fieldwork and certainly had a strong bearing on the shaping of this thesis as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 2 for a fuller description of the significance of this event and other such staged events at North Point.

outlined the perspectives of two of its students with the aim of highlighting some of the complexities at hand in exploring a school such as North Point. On one hand North Point was a school preparing students for a potential future, however on the other hand North Point was an important, meaningful component of the social lives of its students, facilitating opportunities unavailable elsewhere. North Point was a social centre for its students. The school campus provided the facilities for students to engage in sports, to play musical instruments that they had not even previously heard of or to play sports with their friends. Or at least this was how it was imagined by its students. North Point was imagined as a place of opportunity where students could engage in sports, meet friends and learn music.

So here we have a journey. On one hand a very physical journey on the road to their school, but also a journey towards the rest of their lives. Rajah and Prakash both noted how school life was a preparation for a future, a journey towards prospective careers. However School life was clearly not simply a means to an end. There was something more at stake. Rajah, Prakash and their fellow students created immensely meaningful lives within North Point; imagined by the students as a social place not simply a school. It was this imagined perspective which opened up the debates which I will attend to in the duration of this thesis. School was not simply the ontological reality of being in school. It was not simply classes, grades and report cards. It was not simply the preparation for future lives. North Point was a social world. This school extended into the lives of the students shaping their interactions not only towards their friends and family in Darjeeling, but to the wider world. This process I will frame in the terms of Charles Taylor's (2002; 2004) 'modern social imaginary' which seeks to conceive of the relationships between people and their social world.

I will expand precisely why I shall adopt this particular approach in due course but in order to do so I must offer much greater contexts within which this thesis resides. I must explain why strikes, and the power cuts, were so prevalent in Darjeeling. The story of Darjeeling in recent years, reflects wider shifts on a national level which have paved the way for a 'new middle class' to rise to prominence. I will seek to set the scene for the thesis by offering first a story of contemporary India with a specific focus on the emergence of this 'middle class' and their relations to private schooling.

In the second section, I will expand on the intricacies of Darjeeling as an ideal location for the observation of middle class life in India. In particular I will offer a case study of the Gorkhaland movement as an example of how increased self-reflexivity in the wake of neo-liberal opportunities, such as the increased availability of consumer goods such as televisions, mobile phones and the internet, have offered new spaces for the negotiation of group identities. I will also offer greater detail into the ‘social imaginaries’ approach which I will apply in the course of the thesis.

The third and final section of this introduction I will move towards the field site itself, offering an outline of the social world of North Point and also introducing my own methodological approaches which I applied during my fieldwork. Finally, I will outline the chapters and the structure of the thesis.

## **Section 1: Contested Contexts: The Middle Class, Private Schooling and Imagination of Belonging**

### **The Indian Middle Class: A contested category**

My own research journey began with a review of a report by the McKinsey Global Institute (Beinhocker et al 2007) which had explored the increasing prominence of the middle classes within India. The report was specifically tailored to demonstrate how the role of this particular social group would play in the shaping of India’s future. The report draws upon definitions drawn up by the National Centre for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) who define being middle class as a household earning an income between Rs. 200,000 and Rs. 1,000,000 per annum wielding a purchasing power-parity of between \$20,000 and \$100,000<sup>4</sup>. The forecast in economic terms is proposing a radical increase in size in a financially powerful group of consumers that is bound to attract attention from companies across the world.

The authors emphasized how neo-liberal economic policies had simultaneously generated a range of new opportunities for livelihoods, while also making those opportunities open to a larger proportion of the population. The impact of an increased spread of financial capital

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<sup>4</sup> Rs. = Indian Rupees. The exchange rate roughly equates to roughly Rs. 45 to US\$1, which would put the earnings within a bracket of between \$5,000 and \$25,000 however the concept of purchasing power is an economic term used to compare the equivalency of currency within its own environment, accounting for lower cost of living and general cost of consumer goods. Thus the purchasing power of Indian middle classes within India equates to someone in America with an income of between \$20,000 and \$100,000.

across the Indian social milieu has transformed India as a whole, with the middle classes at the forefront of these social transformations, as a class at the centre of the consumerist practices that will serve to shape not only the nation but the world beyond it.

The emphasis of the report rests on the forecast that the Indian middle classes will spread to number over half a billion within twenty years, presenting a considerable marketplace to attract a wealth of international investors and companies who are seeking to expand. This report provoked questions about this new vast social group who were forecast to shape the future of the entire country. Just who exactly are these middle classes? By casting such a vast number of people together purely on the basis of their sharing similar levels of income can we really say that all those within this bracket are comparable in their aspirations and their approaches to the world?

The report cited above outlines a poignant issue that India as a whole has been transformed in recent years and the consequence of this transformation is the emergence of new social forms which are responding to the new opportunities. In particular, anthropological and sociological theorizing of the impact of the neo-liberalist policies of the 1990s, popularized a new frame of reference in 'new middle classes' (Fernandes 2006). This indicates that the category of 'middle class' was by no means a new one but rather to indicate how distinctly new social practices had been enabled by the national economic policy changes. The use of the prefix 'new' alluded to a specific phase of Indian sociality and the transformation of the social map of India, opening up opportunities across the social spectrum, which had previously been unavailable. It is evident that the 'middle class' per se is by no means new within India and has existed in some form for a great deal longer. I would not attempt here to divulge an extensive history of the category of the 'middle class' in India, for two reasons. Firstly this has been extensively covered in other publications (most notably Joshi 2001; Ahmad and Reifield 2002; Beteille 2002). Secondly, I would not wish to draw undue attention to the middle class as a definitive category as I contend, in accordance with the trends in ethnographic engagements with the Indian middle class, to focus on the practices apparent within. Furthermore it was apparent during the review of the literature, and during fieldwork itself, that the notion of being middle class was a highly contested category within both academics and within the Indian middle class itself.

This emerging world of opportunity has impacted upon perceptions of gender (Osella and Osella 2000; Donner 2008; Lukose 2008), understandings of caste and hierarchy (Dickey 2000; Froystad 2005), attitudes towards education (Kumar 2004; Jeffery and Chopra 2005; Jeffrey et al 2006; Donner 2008; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2008; Jeffrey 2008;) and more broadly a certain sense of morality (Beteille 2002; Varma 2007; Savaala 2010). In any case, negotiating being middle class is by no means a given. The ethnographic approaches demonstrate that social class is only in part constituted through financial capital and also something which is performed in public and in private (Donner 2008). The form of performance most synonymous with being middle class is through consumption and participation in a global capitalist consumer market place (Corbridge & Harriss 2000; Dickey 2000; Liechty 2003; Mazzarella 2003; Froystad 2005; Jaffelot & Van der Veer 2006; Fernandes & Heller 2006; Brosius 2010; Savaala 2010).

Anthropological leanings towards the middle classes have employed some strategies, developed from the seminal theoretical positions on social class in order to get to the heart of this diverse social group. The prevailing position on class in India is located somewhere in the midst of a Marxist conceptualisation of labour and consumption and a Weberian engagement with social networks and institutions (Liechty 2003; Jeffrey 2010; Savaala 2010; Donner and de Neve 2011). As such this vision of class owes a great debt to Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework, which envisioned class within the parameters of various forms of capital, which emerge and are utilised through social relations. The most significant forms of capital for Bourdieu were social and cultural capital, which were accrued in the course of one's life but also deeply embedded within one's social background. Bourdieu argued that class was not something inherently natural but arose through social interactions and was embedded in everyday practices. Through social practices culture emerges as a set of socialised 'tastes', which then act as a means of interpreting one's social world. These 'tastes' or aesthetic dispositions serve as a means of orientating oneself within the world, realised through social practice which in turn is reinforced (or impaired) by the utilisation (or lack of) various forms of capital. 'Tastes' are markers of class and ways through which certain groups achieve 'distinction' over others. This sense of distinction is the means, Bourdieu argues, through which class groups come to define themselves from one another.

Bourdieu's model of class was developed by observing European implementations of class lifestyles, whereas the examples from the subcontinent show a slightly different dynamic at play. Savaala (2010), for example, notes how class boundaries were not constituted in relation to a distinction from others but rather through a sense of belonging within. She explores how those who identify as middle class do so through the prism of a set of values, which Savaala terms 'middle class morality' which are imagined to be shared across all those who identify as middle class. This morality encompasses approaches to one's sense of family, maintaining social networks, valuing education and literacy in English, leading to qualification for certain occupations and thus opening up opportunities to participate in the neo-liberal market place. In this example, it is not distinction from others which is the definitive aspect of the middle class but rather a sense of 'belonging' which defines them. Savaala's focus on 'belonging' represents a core theme which flows through other recent ethnographic approaches to the middle class in India, (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2008; Brosius 2010) who have represented how a sense of being middle class is constituted through an engagement in social practices, such as private schooling, engagements in a consumer marketplace, investment in religious rituals and through one's practices within the family each combine to conjure an imagined cultural space where the middle class is unified (Donner and De Neve 2011). In other words, participation within the Indian middle classes was predicated on one's capabilities to imagine their relations to others whom they one can imagine being like one's self. This returns to the conversation with Rajah and Prakash and how they thought of their fellow students. North Point was a school composed of a diverse array of students from a range of backgrounds which made for a potentially disparate social group. In the course of this thesis I will seek to argue how a school such as North Point enabled this diverse group of students to come to see their fellow students as like themselves primarily through the medium of the school itself. The students would become a unified whole through imaginings of 'North Point' and the 'North Pointer', thus laying the foundation for prospective lives as middle class citizens imagining themselves as belonging to a larger whole of 'middle class' across all of India and the global world beyond.

Questions of the middle class in India have taken the stance that 'being middle class' is not an arbitrary economic category but is understood as a continual social practice through

which those who perceive themselves as ‘middle class’ come to understand themselves and their relation to others.

One of the recurring themes throughout the anthropological literature on contemporary India is the importance of schooling and education in underpinning class ideologies (Beteille 2002; Donner 2006, 2008, 2011; Fernandes 2006; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; Lukose 2005, 2008; Brosius 2010; Jeffrey et al 2006; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2008; Jeffrey 2010; Savaala 2010). Such accounts have stressed that engagements with specific schooling practices were an integral part of constituting one’s middle class status. In the following section I will examine precisely how schooling has become embedded within understandings of middle class life in India, primarily through the colonial encounter through which schooling in the subcontinent was significantly transformed.

### **Learning to belong: Schooling the middle class in India**

Although often referenced as the ‘new middle class’, this class is by no means a new phenomenon within India. I would stress that this ‘middle class’ was far from alien to India, as some form of ‘middle man’ had been historically present in the subcontinent by means of mediating the trading relationships between various societal elites, royalty, aristocratic landowners, and the beginnings of international trade with various European nations (Ahmad and Reifield 2002). However there were some specific shifts which brought about contemporary imaginations of what it means to be middle class in India today, namely the perceived intimate connection with schooling.

To understand the emergence of this, we must explore the British development of the subcontinent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, British administrators accepted the difficulties of officiating over such a vast geographical area, and also expected certain hostilities to their approaches. In view of this, they thus sought to cultivate a class of ‘middle-men’ within the local population. The aim was to produce a ‘class of persons Indian in blood... but English in taste’ (Macaulay 1835 cited in Dewan 1991: 78). The objective was to find a middle ground with a political sphere dominated by Orientalists who favoured intimate studies of vernacular systems of education and Anglicists who argued for the widespread teaching of English as the single language (Advani 2009). In order to achieve this, the British began to introduce schools, orienting generations of Indians in English and European models of science and philosophy. The products of this

system were destined for employment within the British civil service to fulfil Macauley's vision. This historical period thus marked an important watershed in schooling in India underpinning a connection between a form of schooling, instructed in English language and European Logic and Science, creating the beginnings of a way of life that would trickle through to the present (Kumar 2004; Advani 2009). The Wood's Despatch of 1954 called for a radical approach to education in India, not only as a means of managing trade relations but as a means of further disseminating the European notions of democracy and modernity (Dewan 1991). The creation of the university system in 1857 provided a professional dimension to education within the subcontinent as the British moved to bolster their civil service by allowing elite Indians to attend school and thus acquire jobs as clerks and administrators (Cohn 1971). These engagements situated a social class of India that oscillated between the more deep-rooted forms of social hierarchy, such as caste, kinship, family and gender, and also the British ideals of education and modernity (Joshi 2001).

The lasting legacy of the British schooling system was the English language, the utilisation of which formed the key political debates in the years following independence. English was perceived by some quarters as providing a means of unifying a disparate linguistic array of languages spoken in India. However the English language still imbued the elitist angle inherited from the colonial era. English was not equally accessible to all, yet contradictorily English was held as vital in enabling Indians to access the global world of opportunity.

Recent anthropological investigations of education in India in particular have explored the position that the concept of education has occupied within political discourse (see Chopra and Jeffery 2005). It has been observed that education has been assumed to be a 'social good' and perceived as a transformative process that enables social mobility. However, education cannot be separated from the broader socio-economic frameworks that organise the social world and therefore cannot be viewed through the same subjective standpoint as the politicians. Instead, anthropology must move away from the concept of 'education' as it is utilised by politicians and policy makers and instead situate the various forms of educational practice within broader value systems encompassing local, national and global political fields (Jeffery 2005). With this point in mind, education in India today must be reviewed within the context of the current political and economic climate.

In recent decades, education and schooling in the subcontinent has undergone a significant array of transformations in light of the wider shifts in the national centre. The opening up of the national economy introduced an influx of private enterprises increasing the role of the private sector. The government jobs once the preserve of the graduates of English medium schools were now being reserved and made available for those of scheduled caste status and other linguistic backgrounds (Hansen 2000; Joshi 2001). Subsequently, the past two decades have witnessed a fractured political sphere which has oscillated between a series of political alliances which relied upon large national parties combining with smaller regional groups to gain a democratic majority (Wyatt et al. 2003). No longer able to depend on a strong public sector to secure their livelihoods, the Indian middle class were forced to seek new avenues in the private sector. As such from 1990s onwards, there has been a rise in the number of private institutions across India and increased enrolment within those schools (Jeffery et al 2005). Within this context, private schools such as North Point could be viewed as coveted components of a middle class livelihood, going some way to explain why the parents of North Point students, and indeed potential parents, covet this school for their sons.

However this historical narrative only tells part of the story. This offers a context for schooling in India, primarily the ways in which private schooling in particular has risen to prominence amongst the middle class and indeed how the category of middle class developed considerably within a British India framework, in relation to specific forms of schooling and occupation. The next part of the story is what precisely happens in these private schools that sets the student in motion for their life ahead? This is the question which would lead me to North Point. I should now briefly divert my attention to the anthropological enquiries regarding education and schooling to which this thesis speaks. This brief interlude will explore the specific anthropological engagements with educational practices which have occurred elsewhere with a view to situating this present study within this academic milieu.

### **Education, learning and schooling: Anthropological reflections**

The work of anthropologists within this field in recent decades has been concerned with problematizing the nature of schooling and particularly the ubiquity of concepts such as education. Education in a general sense refers broadly to the processes that incorporate

children, or peripheral figures, into a social whole (Levinson et al. 1996; Jeffery 2005). Such questions return to Emile Durkheim's (2002) explorations of the role of schooling in 'civilising' a group of students into a nation state. Schooling in this sense is a process of rather specific nurturing and enculturation which, through discipline and adherence to a particular curriculum, would result in the successful 'moral education' of the child. Anthropological readings of education and learning have sought to expand from Durkheim's early propositions in order to flesh out the various nuanced ways in which education is understood as a concept. Ultimately, education, or specifically school based education, had been seen to engage with the cultural formation and production of self, or set of selves that can be shaped, moulded and oriented in relation to a specific authority, be that the nation state, a religious doctrine or some other (Levinson 2000; Advani 2009).

I am not afforded space here to conduct an exhaustive history of the ways in which anthropology has explored the dimensions of 'education' as a vastly diverse concept employed in various socio-cultural settings and historical-political frameworks, to be interpreted in vastly different ways. Such a vast topic has consumed many a volume in exploring the vast array of social experiences of education, schooling and learning (see (Levinson et al 1996; Levinson and Pollock 2011; Anderson-Levitt 2012)). In the wake of this, I accept the basic premise of such collections that education, and indeed its interrelated concepts schooling and learning, are not universally applicable terms; instead, they are terms that possess a multitude of possible meanings and inflections. But yet what is a key consideration is a firm grounding of such concepts within a socio-cultural process. It is this process of cultural formation (Levinson et al. 1996) to which I will turn briefly, with the aim of narrowing the focus here to the theoretical space in which this thesis resides.

Education within the contexts of the Indian middle classes, whose lives I have endeavoured to flesh out here, is grounded within the colonial turn and has been transformed through recent decades in the wake of wider societal change. This is evidenced in Donner's (2006; 2008) accounts of middle families in Kolkata, who understood education to be the process which made middle class Indians possible. Education, in this sense, is imagined as a specific cultural production of the middle class Indian, formulating an imagined life trajectory in which children are able to learn English, computer literacy and an awareness of the global world within which they would later

participate. Education in this interpretation was synonymous with formal schooling, and even beyond that, a specific form of private schooling. The father in the prologue didn't just covet an 'education' for his son. Instead he articulated a very specific desire for his son to attend North Point as only this school aligned with his aspirations for the future. The academic analyses on the Indian middle class seem to agree with this view, arguing the significance of kinds of schooling as a determining factor of one's middle class status (Beteille 2002; Savaala 2010; Donner and De Neve 2011). Yet there is a telling gap in exploring precisely the role of such schools, and in particular the particular mechanisms and social processes enacted within school campuses, that seem to engender future middle class livelihoods. There are notable exceptions to this latter claim (Srivastava 1998; MacDougall 2005) and indeed others who've argued that schooling certificates alone were insufficient in securing the requisite employment to secure one's middle class status (Jeffrey et al 2008; Jeffrey 2008). However I would argue here that the sheer number of available schooling options, each viably comparable with the apparent middle class engagement with education, demonstrates that navigating schooling is a far more complex picture than the existing literature alludes.

So finally we arrive at the unit of this study: the school. Anthropological analyses of schools have departed from Durkheim's earlier assumptions, and should not be taken for granted as an arbitrary component of a nation-state paradigm (Reed-Danahay 2003); instead, they are understood to exist in relation to a wide range of social relations. A school is not just a random collaboration of classrooms, teachers and students, but is a specific social space located within an array of other social institutions, local and national politics, popular culture and parental expectations (Nespor 1997). The school is more than just a space for formal instruction. Numerous authors (Opie 1993; Roberts 1980; Lanclos 2003), for example, have explored how school playgrounds and other areas have been utilised as key sites for the establishment of child sociality. It is precisely this - that school is more than a place of instruction or even formal learning – and the ways in which this is manifested, that I attempt to understand in this thesis.

With this, I turn now to the core debates which form the focus of this thesis. I will first explore the dynamics of Darjeeling where North Point was situated, with the aim of contextualising the discussion of the Indian middle class that I have presented above. Here I examine a short case study of the 'Gorkhaland' Movement in Darjeeling which provides

a contexts for the lives of the students whom I came to experience but also explore the ways in which the apparent ‘new opportunities of modern India were not accessible by all. Following this example I will expand upon my approach of ‘social imaginaries’ and demonstrate why I am advocating this approach, with a brief theoretical foray to examine the significance of the ‘imagined’ in anthropological endeavours. Finally I will round off this discussion with a outline of North Point and the students who called it their ‘home in the mountains’.

## **Section 2: Imagining North Point**

### **At the Borderlands of Belonging: A case Study of the ‘Gorkhaland’ Movement.**

Social life in Darjeeling was quite limiting for the students who lived there. The students of North Point, and others who I was briefly acquainted with during my fieldwork, often bemoaned the lack of things to do for young people. There were few cafes or places to hang out with friends and there were hardly any places where they could play sports. Aside from social spaces, there were many other aspects of social life in Darjeeling which the students often complained about. Both Rajah and Prakash would often complain about the limitations of local resources, in particular the inadequate electricity supply which lead to frequent power cuts or the frequent strikes which could be called at a moment’s notice shutting down everything in the region often for days at a stretch. The students would note how it was often difficult to get access to a computer in one of Darjeeling’s ‘cyber cafes’, frequently overcrowded with eager young people *facebooking* their friends, playing games or simply browsing the expanses of the internet. Even if they were able to get a computer there was the intermittent connection and the failing electricity to contend with.

The difficulties of the social environment didn’t just prevent the students from enjoying themselves. Rajah was quick to point out how studying at home was often problematic. ‘Last night I was trying to study but there was a power cut, so it was hard. Things like that can happen’. Prakash also offered his perspective on how life in Darjeeling affected their schooling: ‘Our parents are hardworking, they provide for us and they pay us to go to a good school like North Point, so there is some pressure on us’. Prakash noted, ‘But some days there is a strike, we can’t go to school, and there is no money and no food, so how can we focus on our studies then?’.

The strikes which Prakash alluded to, and to a certain extent the increased frequency of the power cuts, were due to resurgence in a political movement which had swept across the Darjeeling hills over the past few years. This movement echoed through a fragmented cluster of political parties calls for a new state known as ‘Gorkhaland’ for the hills of Darjeeling. Strikes were frequently called by the ruling party, the Gorkha Janmukhti Morcha (henceforth GJM) and who had also encouraged a ‘non-co-operation movement’ between 2008 and 2011<sup>5</sup>, declaring that no resident in the hills should pay any utility bills. The latter were often blamed for a gradually declining quality in electricity supply to Darjeeling during that time.

The early months of 2011 had seen a spate of violent protests across Darjeeling, most notably a series of arson attacks damaged government vehicles and buildings in the town. In February 2011, a protest in Shibshu, in the nearby Dooars<sup>6</sup> district had provoked an aggressive police response resulting in the deaths of three protestors. In the aftermath, there was an indefinite *bandh*<sup>7</sup>, which paralysed life across the Darjeeling hills. This protest, driven by the popular GJM party<sup>8</sup>, called for an inquiry into the police reaction to the deaths of the protestors, with all offices, shops and school to remain closed until this happened. The *bandh* persisted for almost two weeks with no demands being met, causing a delay to the start of the school year which for the majority of the schools in the hills commences in mid-February. The strike came to an end partly due to the pressure of the upcoming board exams which would play a vital role of the futures of Darjeeling’s students<sup>9</sup>. It was notable that the issue of education had brought a premature end to the strike action, as the issue of schooling clearly held high importance over the other issues at play within the Gorkhaland movement.

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<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140125/jsp/siliguri/story\\_17863095.jsp#.U2Y0yPldWSo](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140125/jsp/siliguri/story_17863095.jsp#.U2Y0yPldWSo)

<sup>6</sup> The Dooars is a region located with the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal which borders the Darjeeling to the east. This region is heavily populated with Nepali people and thus has formed part of the proposed Gorkhaland territory (Subba 1992).

<sup>7</sup> A *bandh* is a general strike which incorporates the total closure of all civic institutions, shops, schools, restaurants and offices (barring medical supply shops and hospitals). No taxis or public vehicles may operate and social life grounds to a halt, save for daily marches, protests and occasionally hunger strikes which are each summoned in the name of a particular cause. Most commonly a *bandh* would only last for a predetermined amount of time, usually 24 hours, however in extreme circumstances they were known to be called indefinitely. Such *bandhs* remained in place until a particular demand was met.

<sup>8</sup> I will expand on the GJM later on, with a greater attention to who they were and their role in influencing the social fabric of Darjeeling.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.kalimpong.info/2011/02/page/2/>

This brief examination of the social world of Darjeeling offers an adequate backdrop for the contexts of this thesis. What is most notable here is that education and schooling clearly takes precedence with regards to the ongoing political struggle. I will argue that Darjeeling is an ideal location to explore the nuances that underpin approaches to ‘being middle class’ or ‘being modern’ in India today. Firstly I will offer an example, extracted from my previous research visits, which explores the recent resurgence of the ‘Gorkhaland’ movement. This example examines how certain events, when amplified through new media sources such as satellite television, mobile phones and the internet, provide new spaces for reflection and self-analysis.

Darjeeling (see Appendix A) is not as simple as I have made it out to be. The name Darjeeling actually refers to three different spaces. Firstly there is the town of Darjeeling, the site of my fieldwork and the administrative heart of the district that stretches across the hills of the sub-Himalayan, bordered by the Indian state of Sikkim to the north, Nepal to the west, Bhutan to the east, and the district of Jalpaiguri, to the south. The district encompasses four sub-districts, of which Darjeeling is one, the others being Kurseong, Kalimpong, and Siliguri (Subba 1989). The name Darjeeling also serves as an encompassing term for all of these sub-districts, as the Darjeeling district of west Bengal, the Indian state in which Darjeeling lies. So in this sense, ‘Darjeeling’ is potentially confusing as a point of reference. However the vast majority of my fieldwork was based within the town itself, so when I refer to ‘Darjeeling’, I am referring to the town itself, unless otherwise specified.

The historical past of the Darjeeling District is deeply intertwined with that of India as a whole, and also with the histories of the neighbouring kingdoms of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. I am not afforded the space to truly open out the colourful history of this part of the world. In any case, such efforts have been better applied elsewhere (Dozey 1922; Subba 1992; Chatterji 2007). It suffices to say here that the origins of Darjeeling were deeply embedded with the British Raj after formal colonisation of India in 1857.

Darjeeling was developed as a hill station during the 1850s<sup>10</sup>, constructing houses, schools, hospitals and churches to accommodate the expanding European population in India. Hill

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<sup>10</sup> Darjeeling and the surrounding area were acquired through the treaty of Singauli in 1819. The lands were leased to the East India Company in return for their support of the Rajah of Sikkim in his conflict with the Gorkha Kingdom of Nepal. The hills of Darjeeling were identified as a prime location for the establishment

stations such as Darjeeling served to establish a vital foothold in the subcontinent, offering an environment similar to that of Europe and thus more favourable to the European settlers, particularly for the families of the administrators, the wives and children, who had struggled in the heat of cities such as Delhi and Kolkata (Kennedy 1996). As such, Darjeeling was cultivated as a distinctly British social space, with the buildings, facilities and even the landscape itself shaped to fit the European clientele. The British style buildings were named with a nostalgic nod to the homeland: Mount Pleasant, Beechwood, Woodland, Oak Lodge and The Dell (Kennedy 1996). Each building was accompanied with a small garden of imported flowers and vegetables such as turnips and carrots, which prospered in the cooler weather<sup>11</sup>. The most famous botanical import was tea, which the British first introduced to the region in the 1840s (Chatterji 2007) and remains to a vital component of the region's economy to the present day.

All of this serves as the backdrop for the town as it stands today. The Darjeeling District has built itself upon the industries laid down by the British, the tea and the tourism. The District is home to 1, 846, 823 persons spread across four sub-divisions, with the town of Darjeeling populated by 118, 805. This population is diversely spread across a number of ethnic backgrounds, with the majority of Nepali heritage (68%). Others resident in include the Bhutias and Tibetans (9%), Bengali's (8%), Lepchas (2%), with the rest hailing from various different backgrounds from across India (12.4%) and a small number of Europeans and North Americans (0.6%). Approximately 81% of the total district is Hindu, 12 % Buddhist, 4% Christian and 3% Muslim (Chatterji 2007). These statistics not do adequate justice to the cacophony of groups to which the population affiliate themselves or more precisely the ways in which people identified themselves. The ranks of the Nepalis, for example, were composed of various sub-castes Tamangs, Chettris, Gurungs and Sherpas, each of which encompass differing languages and also differing cultural practices (Subba 1989). Darjeeling's present population has always fluctuated through waves of migration, primarily during the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century as the British attracted agricultural labourers from Nepal as well as soldiers to bolster the Imperial ranks (See Sinha 2003). More recently

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of a 'sanatorium' which would provide a place to offer respite to administrators and officials to escape the heat of the cities such as Kolkata. For a more comprehensive historical analysis of the development of hill stations in general see Kennedy 1996; for the development of Darjeeling see Dozey 1922, Subba 1989; Sinha 2003; Chatterji 2007).

<sup>11</sup> One of the earliest residents of Darjeeling, Captain Lloyd developed a Botanical Garden to perfect the growth of British flowers and fruits and vegetables within the region (see Kennedy 1996).

Darjeeling has provided a home for those exiled from their homelands, such the waves of Tibetans who've fled to India since 1959, as well as a number of Bhutanese Nepalis who fled persecution in Bhutan (Chatterji 2007). This diverse cultural array has created a complex social world composed of a vast array of cultural practices. However this heterogeneity was largely condensed into the category of 'Gorkha'<sup>12</sup> which has since become a byword for a person hailing from Darjeeling, regardless of one's other ethnic or cultural affiliation. The term 'Gorkha' was popularised in the 1980s as the region was dominated by a political party known as the Gorkha National Liberation Front (henceforth GNLF) lead by a lawyer by the name of Subash Ghisingh. The GNLF were instrumental in spreading the message of a unified hill identity as they were distinct from the Bengali majority of the West Bengal State within which Darjeeling is located. The GNLF drove the demand for 'Gorkhaland', the name of the state they wanted to see formed across the Darjeeling hills; separate from West Bengal but within the Indian nation. A key component of this movement was that the Nepalis of Darjeeling argued that the rest of India considered them to be 'foreigners'. The movement erupted into bloody violence during which thousands died. In order to halt the bloodshed, a tripartite agreement was reached between representatives of the GNLF, the Indian Government and representatives of West Bengal government leading to the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, an autonomous political body representing the various groups across the hills of Darjeeling on a national stage<sup>13</sup>.

The Gorkhaland Movement quietened for almost two decades. So much so that during my 5 months of field work in 2006, I hardly heard a mention of the word 'Gorkhaland', and strikes were a rare occurrence. The quiet would not last much longer as one event was set to transform the future of Darjeeling indefinitely. That event was Indian Idol 2007. This nationally televised singing competition would bring to the fore a number of debates which had remained dormant for years and serve to demonstrate how a range of new media technologies have risen to play significant roles in the shaping of Indian social life.

### **Pop Stars and Protests: New Media and social transformation in Darjeeling**

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'Gorkha' was drawn from a region of Nepal. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century King Prithvi Narayan Shah lead the Gorkha kingdom to conquer the other kingdoms and unify Nepal as a whole. The British would come to encounter the expansion of the Gorkha Kingdom during the Anglo-Nepalese war 1815-17, the same war which brought about the origins of Darjeeling as a British hill station (Sinha 2003).

<sup>13</sup> This is not a complete history of 'the Gorkhaland movement'; such a story could potentially occupy the headings of many theses (see Subba 1992; Sarkar 2000; Samanta 2000; Chatterji 2007).

Indian Idol is a national singing competition crafted in the mould of the 'Pop Idol' format as masterminded by music mogul Simon Fuller originally in the UK. It follows the stories of members of the public who audition in front of panels of established musicians and actors, in order to win a lucrative recording contract and potentially begin an even more lucrative career in music. Once they have won the approval of the panel, the contestants are then submitted to a public vote via weekly live shows where they each sing for the right to be called 'Indian Idol'. The show was immensely popular and the third season produced in 2007 served to have quite dramatic consequences for Darjeeling.

One of the music hopefuls was Prashant Tamang and he had a story to tell. Prashant was born and raised in Darjeeling. He was forced to move to Kolkata after the death of his policeman father, following a trend in India for son's to take up their father's civil post in the case of a sudden unexpected death. Prashant's stories struck a chord with those across the Darjeeling hills who began to vote in their droves. I had heard stories of those who had acquired satellites and television sets purely to follow the competition. They were aided with an increased availability of television providers which had in turn driven the costs of the service down to competitive levels to enable far more than ever before to tune in and catch up with the action. In addition, the programme demanded a level of interactivity, offering viewers an opportunity to influence the outcome by texting their votes. The following for Prashant grew steadily leading to the formation of a fan club which spanned the towns across the hills. This was the beginning of a new imagining of unity across the hills as they united to promote their 'Pahadko Gaurav' ('Pride of the Hills'<sup>14</sup>). The fan club would collect money towards phone credit and summon three volunteers to spend all night texting in to vote for Prashant while other volunteers ensured the voters were plied with enough food and water to keep them going through the night. Here was a Nepali, competing in a national Indian singing competition, thus emblemizing the 'Gorkhaland' movement's attempt to realign the Nepalis of Darjeeling within the Indian national conscious.

An undercurrent to this grand narrative was bubbling along. Bimal Gurung, one of the chief confidantes to Ghisingh, and a known enforcer of the GNLF, defected, establishing his own party Gorkha JanMukthi Morcha (Gorkha People's Front - henceforth GJM). The

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<sup>14</sup> <http://news.oneindia.in/2007/09/05/chamling-appeals-to-people-to-vote-for-prashant-tamang-1189001110.html>

GJM utilised the outpouring of emotions created by Prashant's win and the re-established sentiments of unity to depose his former master, Ghisingh, and reinvigorate the call for Gorkhaland under the guidance of his GJM. Ghisingh had fallen from grace as he had inexplicably failed to publically support Prashant, at least in the eyes of those across the Darjeeling hills. Ghisingh had lost his chief enforcer in Gurung and thus was no longer as feared.

The story of Prashant was a catalyst for change. The increased audience of the event, augmented by the spread of mobile telephones and satellite television, had offered a space whereby the people of Darjeeling came once again to imagine themselves as on whole, each bound together to vote for their hero. The Prashant fan club enabled a political opportunist, Bimal Gurung, a ready-made support group for his new political party, as his former mentor, Ghisingh had fallen so drastically in popularity by not only failing to support Prashant but championing the other finalist. Within this example, the complex relations within a heterogeneous social world comes to the fore, in particular the ways in which people come to imagine their relations to one another. The new opportunities of modern India, here represented by the Indian Idol competition, offer a stage for the renegotiation of the ways in which members of particular places, in this example Darjeeling, imagine their relations to a national whole. The investment in voting for Prashant, both financially and socially, performed a sense of belonging amongst those of Darjeeling. When Ghisingh challenged that sense of belonging by refusing to join in with the support he was exorcised from the hills.

Here, I wish to offer a picture of the social world within which my own research was set for two reasons. The first is simply to present an ethnographic contextualisation of the influx of new opportunities outlined above. Second of all, and most importantly I wish to elaborate upon how Darjeeling was imagined as marginalised by those who lived within it. I have stressed here how an 'imagined' category of 'Gorkha' came emblemize a sense of belonging across a vastly diverse social space, offering a platform through which such diverse groups can imagine themselves as the same. In addition, the most recent case study of the Prashant phenomenon provides an example through which those who imagine themselves to be 'Gorkha' were offered opportunities to perform on a national stage.

The story of Darjeeling is thus one of diversity and belonging. And that is what this thesis is all about: belonging. The 'Gorkhland' movement in Darjeeling encapsulated various themes of reference which stood to define how the people of Darjeeling saw their relations to each other and the world beyond. Once the disparate groups found unity under the umbrella term of 'Gorkha' they then projected this attention towards the national consciousness. This endeavour was given further potency through the Indian Idol competition, which offered a national platform for the Gorkhas to articulate their own position on a national stage. This project was in part a means of transforming the perceptions of Darjeeling from a marginalised town inhabited by an apparently 'foreign' people to a town very much part of modern India. The people of Darjeeling had found belonging within themselves as 'Gorkhas'; what they craved was belonging with a nation.

The examples presented here raise a number of questions. This theme of belonging has been demonstrated earlier in Savaala's (2010) explorations of middle class life. In here example it was shared morality which middle class Indians imagined to be shared within the middle classes. Other authors have similarly explored a sense of belonging amongst the middle class along other lines. Beteille (2002) suggested that it is contradictorily through diversity that the middle classes found common ground. He argued that an observance of difference co-existing together reformed customs rooted in hierarchy, such as the caste system, establishing new values which were aligned with life as experienced in the 'Western' world. Writing about Nepal, Liechty (2003) argued that the 'middle class' was equally defined through its heterogeneity; however it was a certain negotiation of this diversity that informed social practice. One was required to be 'suitably modern', thus to understand the requisite balance between being a participant in the global market but also remaining innately Nepali.

What is key to this latter approach, is the acknowledgement of greater self-reflexivity within the Indian middle classes as they are continually engaged in a debate within themselves as to precisely what being a member of the Indian middle class means (See Donner and De Neve 2011). A telling social space where one can observe this debate playing out is on the shelves of a book shop. Within the pages of various glossy paperbacks, various commentators ranging from Indian academics, travel writers, journalists, politicians, amongst a host of others reflecting on life in the subcontinent today. There were also a high volume of contemporary authors crafting fictitious narratives

around the Indian middle classes and their practices, which often took pride of place towards the front of the shop. Within these volumes lies part of the picture which defines the contemporary experiences of India today, with particular reference to the ways in which those who directly experience this world, the Indian middle class, are posing open questions as to precisely what it means to be part of contemporary India.

### **In Search of the Middle Class: A Literary Journey**

Throughout my fieldwork, I was always drawn to bookshops. These were opportunities to seek out some new material for my thesis and keep up to date with the latest concepts and trends in academic circulation. The entrance way of many a bookshop was often a space utilised to position the most popular books of the day, the bestsellers that everyone is talking about. The bookshops of India were no exception to this rule, albeit with varying degrees of sophistication with regards to their sense of ordering. A glance through the titles, and a strong theme emerged: *Becoming Indian; India Becoming; Revolution 2020; We are Like That Only, The Beautiful and the Damned; Making Sense of Everyday India*. These books all revolved around the changing social landscape of India, with a certain fondness for the idea of the ‘modern’, not as an academically debated theory but as a popularised frame of reference. The glossy covers and embossed titles belied a debate lying at the very heart of what it means to be a ‘modern’ Indian.

The key question, posed by many of the bestselling paperbacks on India’s emergent middle classes mentioned above, was ‘is all this change good?’ Pavan Varma (2007; 2010) suggested categorically no, purporting that the new opportunities had caused a breakdown of traditional values and shifted towards westernised notions of individualism. In his critique, *The Great Middle Class* (2007), Varma demonstrates how the fragmentation of the family was driven primarily by people migrating to find the best jobs. His views were also reflected in Siddhartha Deb’s (2011) part memoir, part social commentary, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, which explores how those seeking to make a living in ‘new’ India suffer from a form of cultural schizophrenia, drawing inspirations and influences from such a wide range of sources that they are caught between a multitude of worlds. However this more negative review of contemporary India was countered with works that celebrated the diverse array of social life within the subcontinent. Akash Kapur’s (2013) *India Becoming* and Santosh Desai’s (2010) *Mother Pious Lady* create more candid

accounts of what it means to be an Indian in the world today. Kapur explores the economic transformations that have created a vibrant and dynamic social life in contemporary India, although much of his emphasis focuses on the impact upon the rural social world, and the author questions what impact these changes will have in what he perceives to be an idyllic way of life. Desai's collection of essays tackle everything from the speed bump to Bollywood films, exploring the differences between the ways of life in India compared with elsewhere. What emerges in his account is a nation unafraid to be distinct in the face of perceived Westernised hegemony. These accounts are not the work of academics theorizing about the social world, but rather reflexive accounts written by the middle classes for the middle class.

The sheer volume of material – and I have named but a handful here – which continues to populate such bookshelves demonstrates a certain level of reflexivity of a particular cross-section of Indian society, contemplating their own place within their nation. These books cut across the spectrum of literary production, featuring autobiographical reflections, historical explorations, economic analyses, satirical observations, business projections and fictional stories, with each in their own way, through a variety of formats, presenting certain dimensions of the Indian social world. These various accounts and perspectives paint a picture of a particular cross-section of India that contemplates the world in particular ways and a cross-section which is constantly searching for its place within that world.

This cross-section consists of what has been referred to as the 'new middle classes' (Fernandes 2006; Varma 2007; Fuller and Narasimham 2007), a generation of Indians offered new opportunities in a global marketplace following the liberalisation of the economy in the 1990s (Assayag and Fuller 2006). This changing of political and economic policy not only opened up avenues for consumer practice but also impacted upon a general sense of self, and the relationship of that self to the world (Beteille 2002). It is this particular cross-section, the 'new middle classes', and these apparently new opportunities, upon which I wish to focus in this thesis. Emphasis on this group is by no means a novel approach, as the array of material on the bookshelves demonstrates, but I will seek to identify the significance of continued study of this group - if we can call them a group at all - and identify the gap on the proverbial shelf that my research seeks to fill. In particular I am struck by the reflexivity expressed within the Indian middle class, as evidenced by the books on offer and the ways in which this internal debate plays a key role in wider

understandings of class in India. If I extend this concept further I would add that the case study of the transformations of Darjeeling in recent years, demonstrated the significance of new media platforms such as the spread of satellite television, cheaper mobile phones and call charges, as well as increased accessibility to the internet. I would contend that the ‘new choices’ (Beteille 2002) emerging in India in recent years have enabled new social spaces where social groups can collectively (re)imagine themselves and come to explore how they relate to one another and the wider world. This maze of relations is not simply an abstract ethnic identity but a sense of belonging which subsequently engenders one’s possible livelihood. Herein lies the connection between the ethnographic examination of a private school and the story of the Indian middle class. In this thesis I aim to explore how students came to ‘imagine’ the world around them, their relations to one another and their relations to the world. I will contend the shaping of these imaginaries was enacted socially, thus operating as a starting point for a global middle class life.

Here I throw my theoretical hat into the proverbial academic ring. I wish to suggest that the concept ‘modern social imaginaries’ (Taylor 2002; 2004) provides a framework for interpreting how the process of generating aspirations and desires for the kind of life one wants to live begins to take root in the context of school education. It is here that certain perceptions are not only oriented but certain reflective and analytical capabilities of the individual are brought into force. This approach has much in common with what Bourdieu (1977) termed ‘habitus’, offering a similar interpretation of the dynamic between individuals and the social world. This theoretical stance accounts for the creativity and flexibility somewhat lacking in Bourdieu’s approach and at the same time draws attention to the primacy of the relations between individuals, placing importance on belonging.

### **Section 3: Towards Social Imaginaries**

A social imaginary is a concept that has a number of potential meanings and interpretations, but the key component of the theoretical matrix which I am building in this thesis draws from philosopher Charles Taylor (2002; 2004; 2007). In its simplest guise, Taylor’s social imaginary is a reflexive framework of interpretation, which incorporates an understanding of a given social milieu with how one relates to others within that. In essence, this is an individually appropriated mechanism that demonstrates ‘how we all fit together’ (Taylor 2004: 24). A social imaginary acts as a guideline that determines what

one should do and how one should live (Vogler 2002). Crucial to this understanding is that these ideas are not held by an individual alone but are a prevailing consensus held by a given group, learned, appropriated and envisioned through social relations. I will argue here that incorporating Taylor's concept of the social imaginary into the existing debates surrounding the social world of the Indian middle class provides an important point of connection that draws lines between certain forms of schooling and potential middle class lives.

The concept of social imaginaries is embedded within the approach of multiple modernities (Gaonkar 2002). This approach rejects the notion of one singular form of the 'modern', acknowledging instead a diverse array of perceptions of what it means to be modern, which depart significantly from the domineering European model of modernity (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995; Appadurai 1996; Gaonkar 2002). The approach of multiple modernities acknowledges the variation of historical-political models not occurring in isolation but encompassed within an intricate network of colonial and imperial relations reflected and experienced through global flows and media, people and capital (Gaonkar *ibid.*). The essence of this concept explores the ways in which forms of social life across the world do not ascribe to one universal form of development or progression, but rather such ideas are shaped in relation to the particular dynamics of particular geographical spaces. This is not to suggest that various societies arose in isolation but rather they each arose within distinctly different parameters which have subsequently shaped their social world.

Taylor's basic premise is that these global differences are the result of different 'social imaginaries', brought into being through different discursive public spheres and differing forms of political organisation. Taylor's idea explores the ways in which the average person imagines, understands and interprets the world around them, in particular the ways in which this has been facilitated within the 'modern age' (Taylor 1989). A social imaginary is embedded within everyday practice, experienced through symbols, stories and actions, which each serve to build a sense of collectivity within a given group and thus lend a sense of legitimacy to social life. These understandings bring meaning to everyday actions, seeing how they make sense (or don't) within a wider perspective of who we are and where we fit within a certain space and time. A central tenet is a sense of normative

understandings that exist between individuals as the basis of their ability to conceive of themselves as a collective.

The concept of 'social imaginaries' is neither exclusive to Taylor, nor is it a new theoretical approach. The ideas explored here were inspired in particular by Cornelius Castoriadis' own philosophical explorations of human imagination. Castoriadis' (1987) 'The Imagined Institutions of Society' laid out his vision of the imagination as a 'cultural ethos' (cf. Strauss 2006), a mechanism through which society transformed itself not through the reproduction of predetermined structures but through the 'emergence of radical otherness' (Castoriadis 1987: 184). For Castoriadis, the imagination was the 'constitutive magma' (1987:7) that allowed people to perceive of the world in the first place, organising the 'natural world' into a socially ordered world within which we can sustain both biological and material needs. Much like Taylor's particular idea, Castoriadis was also key to note that this 'imagining' was enacted not consciously by elite powers but through 'anonymous masses' acting in bursts of 'imaginative praxis' (ibid.: 6).

Social imaginaries owe an equal debt to Benedict Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities*. Anderson argued that the process of 'print capitalism', among other things, had brought about a heightened communication between the members within a given society, leading them to imagine themselves as a nation. For Anderson this summarized a condensing of time and space, into acts of what Timothy Mitchell (2000: 22) described as 'contemporaneity', the process through individuals come to identify through others by understanding a certain sharing of a space within a given time. For Anderson, the circulation of print materials, such as newspapers and novels, served to facilitate certain ways of imagining the social world, in particular the ability to imagine an individual connected to others through the prism of the national. The imagination here is considered as a means of interpreting, reflecting on and exploring the dynamic and dialectical relationship between individuals and the wider society.

Taylor developed his idea alongside other members of the Centre for Transnational Studies (CTS) in 2000; Arjun Appadurai, Dilip Gaonkar, Craig Calhoun and Michael Warner were the most active amongst the other members (see Goankar 2002). The CTS explored the 'productive tension' that lay between the process of globalisation and the various multiple modernities across the world. They sought to explore the various forms of modernity, not

as isolated political economies but rather as encompassed within a complex network of imperial relations reflected through circulations of global media, people and capital. Social imaginaries was one such way in which these authors envisaged conceptualising the everyday processes that lay at the heart of this 'world of flows' (Appadurai 1996). They outlined five key ideas (Gaonkar 2002: 4-5), which comprised the modern social imaginary, and as such offered a speculative framework within which a social researcher can operate.

First and foremost, a social imaginary operates as a 'habitus of a population'. This focuses attention on the first person narratives underlying social action and the dynamic relations between individual and society in a mutual act of imagination, whereby the individual imagines themselves in relation to the society around them, but also accepts that the society is itself constituted of an array of representations, which themselves had to be imagined. This is understood in the same dialectic manner that Bourdieu (1977) implied within his theory of habitus, however whereas habitus is inculcated within the body, the imaginary is embedded within social practice conveyed. Secondly, we must consider the spaces of circulation within which social imaginaries operate. Here, the relations between strangers are facilitated, first through print capitalism and latterly transformed through global media, with increased engagement of ideas, people and capital. Thirdly, the concept of a national people creates a paradigmatic means of framing 'we the people'. This concept offers transparency between individuals and the collective, within which they can envisage themselves, bound within a progressive history alongside other national peoples. Fourthly the national paradigm is one among many other imaginaries, such as ethnicity or the public, some of which are not experienced as 'we' but through the third person, such as the market, the mainstream and so on. Some are experienced not through collective agents but through mass sentiments, such as grief at a funeral of a public figure. Finally, and perhaps most crucially of all, imaginaries do not exist 'eternally in cosmos' (Gaonkar 2002: 5), but only come into being temporally. The agency of modern social imaginaries is realised through a number of carefully orchestrated 'dramas of social temporality' (ibid.), such as sports events and public ceremonies, but also through less organised and perhaps more violent bursts of agency such as revolutions or protests.

There are evident parallels between the particular mechanics of social imaginaries and the social world of the Indian middle class. I have identified that one of the key aspects of

being middle class, or at least being seen to be middle class, was based upon a common understanding of a group, which shared a certain imagined cultural space that paved the way for particular expectations and aspirations of life (Donner and de Neve 2011). What I have also demonstrated is that the Indian middle class has been portrayed as a highly reflexive group, constantly examining and contesting their position and the rights for others to those positions. I have identified that one of the most common denominators across the middle classes consists of certain forms of schooling. This was inherited in some manner from the British era, but transformed through new economic policies and rapidly developing private sector opportunities, providing a range of possibilities for instilling one's life with meaning and opportunity. Furthermore, I have identified that class is not naturally imbued in social life but emerges through social practice. The concept of social imaginaries presents a thread that runs through all of these aspects of being middle class in India today as it represents the imagined forms of belonging and affiliation which seem so definitive of being middle class. Furthermore this approach engages with the social articulation of 'belonging', that is to say that it is realised not simply as an act of lucid imagination, but rather imagined through social practice.

This brings us full circle to the example with which this story began. A simple journey of two friends on their way to school. Two friends just like any other. But to them they were different. They were *distinct* from the others. They were students of North Point, a place where they met their friends; a place where they *developed* as people. North Point provided opportunities that were not otherwise available. I will now turn to the school to which we were headed that day and explore the particular history which brought about North Point.

### **St Joseph's School, North Point, Darjeeling**

I knew the school as 'North Point' before I had even set eyes upon it. This was the name by which the school was known and had built its considerable reputation around. The name was a reference to the old colonial name for the site where the school now stands. The name itself is a marker of distinction employed to avoid confusion with other schools that shared the school's official name, 'St Joseph's School'. The very name by which the school is known is the first insight into the ways in which this school is imagined by its students. For example, 2013 was set to be the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school's founding,

and during my fieldwork in 2011, the school site was undergoing maintenance and building work to be completed in time for the celebrations. I observed how students noted that it was set to be 125 years of North Point, despite the fact that this school had originally started life at a smaller site nearer Darjeeling town before relocating to this new space, around 5 km outside of the town some years later.

The school was established in 1888 as ‘St Joseph’s School’ by a prominent Belgian Jesuit priest, Father Henri Depelchin. The aging priest had been recruited especially, following his work in establishing prominent schools in other parts of India, most notably St Xavier’s in Calcutta in 1860 (Dewan 1991). The school expanded beyond its capacities and soon a new site was acquired and ‘North Point’ was officially opened in 1892 (Whelan 1988). The Jesuit<sup>15</sup> affiliation was coveted by the European families who populated Darjeeling during this period and thus the school began to carve out a reputation as the finest in Darjeeling. The school’s origins place this site neatly within the discussion placed above. Firstly, it was a school to cater to the colonial elite, emblemising the British ethos of learning and education. Furthermore, the school was undergoing a project of development, bringing the methods, practices and even the buildings themselves into line with the grander narratives at play on the national level. We shall see how this has unfolded in Chapter 7, when I discuss how a consortium of past students had implemented a programme entitled ‘Vision 2K’, which endeavoured to keep the historically rooted reputation of North Point relevant within a modern day India.

St Joseph’s School, North Point, where I spent approximately 12 months<sup>16</sup> carrying out anthropological fieldwork, is a private school exclusively for boys with roughly 1200 students. The student body is predominantly composed of ‘day scholars’, with around 500 boarders, who hail from Kolkata (Calcutta), Bihar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, among other places. The day scholars have mostly been born and raised in the Darjeeling district, with the vast majority living in Darjeeling town and the surrounding areas. A small number opt to travel a little further from the neighbouring towns of Sonada and Kurseong<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 4 where I will highlight how the importance of Jesuit history at North Point today.

<sup>16</sup> I spent over 15 months in Darjeeling but with a combination of holidays and various other closures this amounted to around 12 months within the school itself.

<sup>17</sup> A daily commute of about 1 ½ hours each way

The majority of the students hailed from what we could term middle class backgrounds. Many of the students' parents were lawyers, doctors, businessmen, government officials, or were employed in and other white collar occupations. The boarder students hailed from more upper middle class homes, from cities such as Kolkata and Kathmandu, with the parents of these students occupying senior business roles, management positions and high ranking government posts such as judges or state ministers. The earlier example of the walk to school noted how one of the students was promised various high value gifts in return for achieving certain grades, which offered some insight into the family backgrounds of many of the students. The kinds of gifts spoken about in this example would have cost month's wage of a North Pointer's family, and I was aware throughout my observations of students that they each demonstrated an acute first hand awareness of various consumer product from iPhones, to tablet computers and games consoles to fridge freezers. Many of the students had experienced travel and some had ventured overseas to Europe, America and Australia where they would often be visiting relatives.

This is not to say that all of the students at North Point came from financially wealthy homes. The Jesuit enterprise of the school also offered some scholarships, more recently to those from Bhutan who were often noted as coming from 'broken homes'<sup>18</sup>. Teachers would remain acutely aware of the various backgrounds and social histories of each student and would take this into consideration, particularly when administering discipline. However I was intrigued to note that without prior knowledge of a student and their background, it was almost impossible to tell the difference between them. There were those students whose parents were doctors who never did their homework, for example, and there were those who had suffered the loss of a parent who were near model students. I do not wish to infer that students would always ascribe to stereotypes, but purely indicate that a student's social background seemed to hold minimal influence over what transpired at school.

It suffices to say that the students of North Point generally hailed from a familial background surrounded by high income levels of consumerist lifestyles and were immersed in worlds of television, music, sports, mobile phones, computers and demonstrated keen awareness of other places experienced through these various media. I

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<sup>18</sup> This was a vague term utilised by teachers to describe students whose parents had divorced, separated or perhaps were just absent, away at work rather than tending to the child. The term was also used to apply to students whose parent or even parents had passed away.

do not wish to infer that students were all the same but rather they had a good deal of common ground between them which enabled their imaginings of similarities across the student body and also each shared a similar starting point from which to imagine the world.

During my fieldwork, I oscillated between being a boarder at school and living outside to explore both dimensions of student experience. Through this experience, I uncovered a little discrepancy between the day students and the boarders in terms of their attitudes and ideas regarding the arguments put forward in this thesis. There were obvious differences. One group could 'go home'; one could not. One could make use of internet at home for homework; one could not. One group could bring their own food; the other was at the mercy of the school dining hall. With regards to how they imagined and talked about their school, however, there was precious little difference. Even for day scholars, North Point was as much a home as it was for boarders. The day scholars were often equally restricted by the occasional strike or forced to do their homework by candlelight in the wake of a power cut. The only real significance, which I will highlight in the pages that follow, was the ways in which students interacted with one another. The boarders were more adept at socialising, making friends and being part of school activities. For the day scholars, it was sometimes more difficult to make friends, get involved in sports teams and so on. Where there were differences between these groups, I have identified as much in the text, but otherwise I have categorised the students along the same lines: as North Point students.

The core issue that I wish to examine in this thesis is that which linked all students together: being and becoming a North Pointer. In the course of this thesis I will argue that North Point sought to perpetuate a specific social imaginary which I will term the 'NP Imaginary', a specific orientation to the world which aligns with the cosmopolitan, global lives of the coveted future livelihoods. Much like the middle classes from which they came, the students of North Point demonstrated strong correlations and similarities within their respective ideas of the world. They imagined themselves as unified under the banner of 'North Point', projected through the school's past, which served as evidence of the school's success at creating successful people. The students endeavoured to become 'all-rounders', or those capable in each and every field, from the classroom, to the sports field, to the stage. This was what was encapsulated in being a 'North Pointer', an ambiguous term, much like 'middle class', which on one hand referred simply to students from North

Point, but on the other also referred to the highest achieving of those students. In the course of this thesis, I will examine the ways in which becoming a 'North Pointer' was an act of imagination, one that was facilitated by the school itself. This act of imagination brought the imagined world of North Point into being in the first place, serving to create the very images to which the students themselves aspired. Before I proceed to outline the details of the chapters, I might add a brief note on the methodological approaches I adopted, how I was positioned within the school and how much of the research presented here was collated.

### **The Importance of Being an All-Rounder: A Note on Methodology**

At the outset I was unsure about how I would position myself at North Point. My uncertainty came from my previous experiences of Darjeeling in 2006 and 2008 during which time I taught English at a small private school, of around 80 pupils, in a town outside Darjeeling. Through this experience I came to experience how being a teacher was embedded within an array of social relations and expectations, most notable of these was the particular relationship between teacher and student which I found rather difficult to negotiate. There was an issue of a linguistic and cultural barrier for both parties but the key distinction for myself was the ways in which teachers were always seen to be teachers. There was seemingly no 'down time' when if you were seen walking around town you were still 'sir'. In other words, I became frustrated at my efforts to become friendly enough with the children that they might communicate more freely with me, rather than be consistently afraid that they might find themselves on the wrong end of some discipline the next time they attend school.

It was with this apprehension that I headed into North Point seeking to position myself between staff and students in order to gain as much insight across the school campus as possible and then find a focus. However my initial efforts were hindered through student apprehensions. The students seemed apprehensive of me and my intentions and the few conversations I did have with students would see students asking who I was and what I was doing at the school. The students that spoke to me would reel off a host of vocational positions and each time my answer was the same. 'Are you a teacher?' *No*. 'Are you a priest?' *No*. 'Are you a student?' *No*. 'So what are you doing here?' Despite the fact this was a perfectly salient question to ask an intruding anthropologist, this signalled the students'

difficulty in understanding why I was turning up and hanging around the school every day. I thought initially this was due to my obvious physical foreign-ness, but in time I realised that I was being treated with the same passing glances that students offered to the cavalcade of foreign visitors who frequented a school like North Point over the year: the international NGO representatives, political ambassadors and most frequent of all, the former students (as I will discuss in Chapter 1). I remained with this tactic at first, working through the initial months of my field work, from October to December 2010, during which I lived on the school campus. Living in the school didn't seem to breed familiarity and despite seeing some of the students frequently every day I was continually frustrated in my efforts to strike up conversations. However the little success I did manage came with the Lower Division students, student aged between 12 and 14, from Classes 6, 7, and 8. These students were above the level of the younger Primary students, but still finding their feet in North Point as members of the senior school so in some ways we had much in common. My connection with the Lower Division students was also helped by the fact that my room was right next to the Lower Division dormitory and I had become quite friendly with the teacher who was their boarding supervisor. The supervisor at that time was a 23 year old fresh out of teacher training having just qualified that year. We were around the same age and found each other easy to get along with.

At the commencement of the new school year in March 2011, the opportunity arose to enter the classroom. I say opportunity, perhaps emergency might be a more suitable word. There were a number of illnesses in the Primary Division faculty and thus I was drafted in as a 'Class Teacher' of Class 4C for a month. During this time I was required to complete a vast array of bureaucratic roles, and was thus able to begin to access the full environment of North Point. Through this, I came to know the headmasters and thus gained access to a number of opportunities to substitute classes and some to gain greater familiarity with the students (the importance of familiarity is also further developed in Chapter 7). I also came to know the administrative office staff, and thus gained access to some information about students and goings on in the school<sup>19</sup>. Aside from simply being in the classroom my attire also changed. I donned a shirt and tie and occasionally even a blazer. Students would wish me 'good morning sir' as they walked past and stand up if I walked into a room, but the

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<sup>19</sup> Although I should add that I was not given permission to fully access the records regarding the students, for privacy reasons although during my time as a Class Teacher I was given some access to student records for administration purposes.

greatest transformation was in the way students interacted with me. They would ask me questions pertaining to their lives, seeking advice or guidance over problems at school or asking whether or not certain teachers were absent that day. On one level this as down to a certain familiarity but on the other being positioned as a teacher simply affirmed to the students who I was and what my intentions were. As such students who I didn't really know would approach me with questions, usually pertaining to school matters. The ultimate realisation I had finally 'made it' in the field actually came from outside the school, when I received a call from one of my friends in Darjeeling who was enquiring about admission exams for the coming year and wondering if I could pull any strings to help his friend's son get in to North Point.

Much of the data presented here occurred during informal participant observation, akin to what Renato Rosaldo termed 'deep hanging out'<sup>20</sup>. This largely entailed being as available as possible for each and every school activity in which I was allowed to take part. I use the term 'allowed' here as my initial activity within the school was highly formalised and regulated. I had been given some rather cryptic advice from the Rector after he had agreed for me to conduct research in the school that I should not tell anyone that I was researching at North Point and I should instead tell them I was teaching. Having said this however, my very first day at school I was introduced as a 'researcher from England'. Subsequently I attempted to gain access to classrooms to shadow lessons and gain a feel of the school in action however many of the teachers seemed slightly dubious about my intentions, perhaps in part to my rather unceremonious and cryptic entry into the school. I was never formally introduced to the students and as such found myself swimming upstream somewhat in trying to find my own position at school.

During the first few months, I conducted a handful of 'substitute' classes with the lower division classes (Class 6 to 8) whereby I was required to stand in for absent teacher and cover a lesson. In these situations I was never expected to fulfil a formal role and was given a free reign to chat to students, and some of these discussions would form the starting points for my opening forays into the NP Imaginary. However the formalised environment of the classroom brought with it a level of expectation from the students, many of whom were anxious who would be marking their homework, or when the exam

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<sup>20</sup> Rosaldo's comment was made during a conference in 1994 titled 'Anthropology and 'The Field' cited in James Clifford's (1997: 56) *Routes*.

would be and what questions they might be asked. It became apparent that the classroom was not the best space for me to learn about the students' lives. Fortunately, there were a high number of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities which provided a far more relaxed environment where students and staff alike were happier to chat and discuss the various questions and queries that I had.

Although I lived in the school for the first few months, for the majority of my fieldwork I lived outside the campus. Living outside the school allowed me greater personal flexibility to access both the school and the town as a whole. However it was also restrictive as I would find that events were sporadic and sometimes I would spend days on end at school with precious little to note and then be away for one day and something would happen. After a few months, I attempted to bring greater structure to my own research with a run of 'focus groups' where I was given groups of four or five students, who I would take for one period of the day and hold a question and answer session. It took me a few months to negotiate the terms of this exercise as some of the senior staff were evidently nervous about the possible repercussions of my research. One of the head masters told me that the school had students from some families with prominent public figures, such high ranking members of the police, the army, as well as state officials and other bureaucrats. They wanted me to remain sensitive to that fact and avoid any potentially misunderstandings which could arise from a 'foreigner' investigating the school. As such, I managed to agree a premise that suggested my research was intent on 'improving life at school' and my research was a means of obtaining student feedback on a number of school services, such as the food and how these could be improved. The groups were decided by the head of the lower division, who taken as my test sample as they were deemed old enough to be knowledgeable about the school but not about to sit important board exams so I couldn't disrupt their studies. These groups weren't hugely successful as I was only permitted to utilise a time of timetable given over to 'library' meaning the class would be reading books and newspapers in the school library. This period was also utilised by other extra-curricular activities most notably music teachers to run instrumental lessons which a high number of students conducted. Furthermore, the library lesson was something of a treasured off period and many of the students seemed to resent some foreign researcher coming in and asking them questions. That said I continued with my 'deep hanging out' and this was productive enough, allowing me to witness and take part in sports events,

spelling competitions, quizzes, school fetes, the plays and even the occasional lesson so I had no shortage of activity to occupy myself.

It was often difficult to find space or time within the hectic schedule enforced at North Point, which was in part caused by the political unrest in the region over the winter 2010/11, delaying the school year by a few weeks. The delays would be sporadic across the year ranging from more political protests, to landslides and even an earthquake. As such the school year was rather truncated and I was forced to work around this. I often had to abandon formally arranged meetings or interviews as Saturdays were frequently given over to additional school days, students were required to attend additional after school tutoring in order to improve their grades, or they just generally weren't feeling like it.

I spent my year oscillating between various parts of school life adopting as many roles as possible across the school. During my fieldwork I was a Class Teacher, a Games Teacher, Substitute teacher for History and Geography classes, I assisted in the rehearsals and performances of the Primary and the senior Play, I ran a stall at the Children's Day fete, I assisted in choral elocution and singing practice, created a magazine with the primary students, a coach for the Lower Division cricket team, scorer for the spelling bee, quiz master, and general technical advisor on computing and other digital media usually sourced from the internet to assist one of the teachers. In casting myself across school life I came to witness that other members of the school were often found to be doing the same. Teachers doubled up as sports coaches, quiz masters, and running clubs such as the photography club. In conducting my research across this field over the year of my research I became friendly with staff and students across the school and enabled myself to fully immerse within the imagined world of North Point.

## **The Chapters**

The research presented here is subdivided into three parts. Part One will present an overview of the social world of the school, outlining the ways in which North Point was imagined primarily through a pre-existing 'History' that contained all of the elements that students required to become 'North Pointers'. Chapter 1 details my own journey in finding 'North Point' and thus mirrors, in some ways, the ways in which the students themselves came to first experience their 'Home in the Mountains'. Here I will introduce the concept of the 'NP Imaginary', which structures the thesis as a whole. I will argue that the students

were first introduced to ‘North Point’ through an imagined past known to students as ‘History’. In Chapter 2, I will develop this concept of the ‘NP Imaginary’ further to explore how the students of North Point envisaged themselves as ‘North Pointers’, coming to embody the school itself, performing and constructing the image of North Point through lavish ceremonies such as Rector’s Day. Chapter 3 will examine some of the more everyday mechanics of school life, suggesting how students come to crystalize their imaginary through social interactions amongst North Pointers, primarily through particular engagements with ‘competition’. I contend that by ‘competing’ with one another the students came to understand their own positions within the school and thus developing a sense of ‘belonging’ as North Pointers.

Part Two explores the activities that students considered important aspects of being North Pointers. Chapter 4 will consider the school assembly, a space offered for student presentations about their own ideas and their place within the world. I will argue here that it was during assemblies that students came to experience what it meant to be studying in a Jesuit school and the implications of this on their perspectives of the world. Chapter 5 will look into the students’ favoured past time, sports. This chapter will examine further dimensions of how the students came to envisage their relations to other schools through interschool competition. Chapter 6 illustrates how the students contested the prevailing images of the school by means of theatrical performances in the school’s annual play. The play also presented a platform for student imaginaries to flow beyond the limits of the school and posed questions about their futures and asked whether or not they were prepared to face that future.

Part Three will project the analysis beyond the level of the students to encompass the school itself, as an imaginary competing against others, seeking to explore how the landscape of North Point was a small speck on a much larger landscape of middle class life in India. This final part explores how North Point sought to ‘belong’ within the elite schools across India by transforming itself to bring the school into line with other comparable schools. Chapter 7 observes the introduction of digital learning technologies into the classrooms, exploring how the latest advances in teaching can be incorporated into North Point. The final chapter, Chapter 8, is the story of North Point, packaged, promoted and sold in a vastly competitive market place of other schools. I will argue that the school possesses an aim of maintaining itself and in doing so seeks to reproduce a certain kind of

student, which feeds back into the kinds of people students' desired for themselves to one day become.

I will conclude by exploring the events of the school Leavers' Dinner, one of the final events I would experience myself at school. In this final event of the school year, I will examine how each of the elements which serve to constitute the NP Imaginary were performed as the senior most students said their own personal farewells to their 'home in the mountains'.

The arguments presented in this thesis lie at the heart of a storm of change within Indian social life, exploring the ways in which the contestations, tensions and contradictions realise themselves in everyday life. It is vital to note, as would be the case in any social environment, that such changes do not materialise in the same ways at all levels of the social spectrum. The focus here is on those who position themselves within the parameters of the emerging middle classes, with an aim of examining the ways in which 'being middle class' shapes lives and everyday practices with a particular focus on a social institution where all these ideas seem to crystalize: the school.

Ultimately the theoretical directions of this thesis explore the ways in which private schools such as North Point establish certain ways of thinking about the world through which the students come to learn, examine, reflect on, contest and construct the imagined cultural space occupied by being 'middle class' in India. The theoretical stance here adopts the view of the middle class of India as grounded within everyday practices, discussed, contested and examined through intersubjective relations. The goal here is to demonstrate how such intersubjective understandings of how one relates to others takes root during engagements with particular schooling practices and offers student a framework for how they should live their lives.

# Part One:

# The Story of North Point

To All North Pointers, Past, Present and Future

*These are voices of the past,  
Links from a broken chain,  
Wings that bear us back to time,  
Which will never come again.*

- North Point Annual, 1897

There was something about North Point. I had noticed in my conversations and everyday interactions with the students that there was something intangible that I couldn't quite put my finger on. It was certainly a very grand school in terms of its appearance and its neo-gothic architecture found no equal across the Darjeeling hills. The students often spoke of North Point beyond their everyday experience recalling a 'History' to which they all belong. This 'History' was not simply a reference to times passed but was imagined as a grand story of North Point through which the school had come to be what it was to students. This 'History' was ultimately intangible however it became visible to students through various 'symbols' across the school. The hallmarks of that bygone era remain embedded across the school campus, resonating through the classrooms, the wooden benches, the school uniform and the school chorus. As each student came to experience these symbols in relation to one another they construct an image of the school, an image of what North Point was, is and will be. This was the 'idea' of North Point; a school as it was *imagined*. This imagining of the school was itself facilitated by an overall pursuit of particular type of student which was an 'all-rounder' able to demonstrate prowess academically, through extra-curricular activity and also in character.

Here I will explore how the school was 'imagined' by its students, thus revealing an unseen world of the school which shapes actions and orients its students. Specifically I am seeking to engage with the ways in which North Point was imagined to be 'a special place', unique as a school and as a place, reflected through its unique architecture but also through the social practices engaged within. These opening three chapters will sketch out

the 'landscape' of North Point as it was imagined by the students. I will envisage the school as a 'taskscape' (Ingold 1993), a social world composed of related practices which orient students and staff towards one another but also towards the school as a whole.

Chapter 1 will explore the school as 'The Home in the Mountains' which was the moniker by which the students fondly referred to their school, drawn from the opening lines of the school chorus. I argue that North Point was envisioned through an array of symbols embedded within the school landscape. These symbols were constituent elements of the school environment which facilitated student imaginaries. The students interpreted these symbols through the prism of 'History', which referred to the existence of North Point beyond the immediacy of students' experiences. This 'History' referred in part to the past of the school but also its future.

The second chapter expands upon the world of North Point by exploring the category of the 'North Pointer'. This form of student was encapsulated as the 'ideal type' (Taylor 2004) and an imagined notion from which all students assessed their own positions within the school. The ritualised performances of the North Pointer through events such as 'Rector's Day' positioned the 'ideal' student as a part of North Point 'History'. Here the North Pointer becomes the key character in the story of North Point and offers students an example of how to write their own chapters. The concept of the 'North Pointer' provided a rallying flag around which students created a shared sense of value (Savaala 2010), which underpinned their collective unity and (re)created a sense of belonging within their 'home in the mountains'.

Chapter 3 explores the practical everyday experiences of students as they come to learn about their relations to one another through life at school. I envisage this through a 'competition' (Liechty 2003) whereby the students are engaged in attempts to become like one another. In this chapter I argue that students were generally seeking to become North Pointers by measuring their own practices against their fellow students in order to test their own perceptions of how they fitted into the school as a whole. This everyday process complimented the grand ritualised performances of the second chapter, in offering further observable symbols of North Point by imagining these inter student relations through the 'NP Spirit'.

Each of these chapters will outline what I have termed the ‘NP Imaginary’ which stands as the particular social imaginary perpetuated through North Point. I draw predominantly on Charles Taylor (2002) in order to explore how the students came to understand their relations to one another but more crucially within the wider world. I would argue here that the engagement with social imaginaries explores the ways in which particular schooling practices align with perceived middle class livelihoods across the subcontinent. Schools such as North Point perpetuated a particular image of a school and its students which aligned with that of a successful middle class Indian. I would argue that through the nurturing of an ‘NP Imaginary’, enabling students to imagine themselves and their world around them in specific ways, the students are preparing for a middle class world of opportunity that lay ahead. It is through a particular imagining of the world, that students are laying the foundations of the concept of belonging which is important to negotiating middle class life (Liechty 2003; Savaala 2010; Brosius 2010).

The third chapter explores the more practical experience of the students as they comprehend their relations to one another. I argue that the model of unity as imagined by the majority of students did not equate as a whole to all students. However the students came to learn their own individual sense of belonging as they begin to realise that they are competing with one another. This inter-student competition, far from being divisive, operated as a productive space where students came to understand their positions within North Point, their relationships to other students and potentially their relationship with the world at large. This intra-student competition would set the students in good stead for the competitive market place they would enter once leaving the school.

# I

## **Imagining the ‘Home in the Mountains’: ‘Blazing a Trail’ through the Symbols of North Point**

### **Introduction**

North Point was a unique place. From the moment they first walked through the doors of North Point, the students were confronted with an array of images and sights which they would most likely have not encountered in their lives. The school campus possessed a unique building that had no equal in the Darjeeling hills. However I soon became aware that North Point was far more than simply the sum of its physically observable components. The students in the introduction of this thesis had spoken about how special North Point was, and by this they weren't referring to the physical space itself but rather the place as a whole. The students spoke about the opportunities North Point facilitated and the sentiment of 'belonging' which swept across the student body. There was more to North Point than met the eye. In this opening chapter I aim to illustrate the imagined landscape of North Point.

In this chapter I endeavour to outline precisely how I came to encounter the imagined dimension of North Point and this offered students a productive space where they could draw meaning from their school lives. I will demonstrate here how that the students were guided through this imagined realm by an array of physical artefacts within the physical landscape of North Point. In this chapter I have conceptualised these artefacts as 'symbols', by which I mean to imply that these were physically observable aspects of the school environment which were interpreted by the students to hold an alternate set of meanings beyond their mere physical presence. I will explore how the students saw these the 'symbols' as North Point 'History', a term I will employ here not as an academic subject or concept of time, but a particular ethnographic category which the students themselves openly employed in order to contextualise their experiences. This 'History'

unfolds like a story, much like Ingold (1993) envisioned his ‘taskscape’, a perpetually unravelling narrative whereby the students engage with this ‘History’ in order to situate themselves within the school. This chapter marks the introduction to ‘North Point’ as it was experienced, as it was imagined, by its students.

I will contend here that this ‘imagined’ North Point connects with the wider national projects of middle class becoming to which I alluded in the introduction of this thesis. The students imagined their school as an ‘authentic illusion’ (Skounti 2007: 7) which is to say that they imagined North Point to exist now as it always had done, thus they were each engaged in a careful negotiation between the onset of change, all the while maintaining a relationship with the past life of the school. The experience of schooling conforms to the modernist project of ‘contemporaneity’ (Mitchell 2000) as students experience the overlapping of past present and future, as they temporarily act within the landscape they seek to etch themselves permanently within it. In essence, learning to comprehend themselves in this manner prepares them for the global middle class lives they are bound for.

I shall begin by exploring arguably the most significant symbol of North Point which was the building itself. The building, or rather the bounded campus space provided the stage for the story of North Point to be told. The building was an embodiment of what the students called ‘History’ as a physical testament of North Point over time both as something static yet ever changing. This initial ethnographic detail will provide sufficient context for the outline of the theoretical discussion which will shape this chapter and to an extent the thesis as a whole. Drawing on Victor’s Turner’s use of symbols I will demonstrate how students came to interpret the landscape of North Point, and how they imagined their school as an ‘authentic illusion’ (Skounti 2009). The concept of the ‘authentic illusion’ is key to understanding why North Point was imagined to be so special and unique as it conceptualised the school as one which had a rich heritage of producing high quality students and would continue to do so. This process of imagining, I argue, is part of an educational process which orients students to their social worlds in such a way to guide them towards the aspects of the social world which are adjudged to befit middle class lives.

I will continue the investigation by sketching out the social imaginary of North Point as a series of observable symbols embedded within the landscape of the school. These symbols represented what the students termed ‘History’, by which they were largely referring to the time before the immediate present, as they referenced the school and Darjeeling’s colonial past. However, during the course of my observations, I came to learn that ‘History’ for the students was not simply the past, but their future. Students were constantly seeking opportunities to become part of ‘History’ and thus cement their place as part of North Point. In this chapter I will introduce how the students saw ‘History’ at North Point and how various constituent elements, including the school honours board, the school motto, the school assembly and the school chorus, served as a matrix of ‘symbols’, which students were required to interpret. These symbols provided markers for students to explore the ‘History’ of North Point and locate themselves within it. By connecting the points together, I suggest that the North Point student wove an intricate web of images, stories, and ideas creating an imagined vision of North Point. This first chapter will outline North Point as a school but more significantly a place imagined by students as ‘the home in the mountains’.

### **North Point: A ‘Special Place’**

The most significant component of North Point was the building. The structure itself was highly distinctive and it was evident to those residing in Darjeeling that there was something special about this building. I had heard Prabin, the dreaming father in the prologue, speak at length at how ‘beautiful’ North Point was. Before my initial arrival at the school, I had telephoned one of the teachers<sup>21</sup> to ask for directions whereby I was told ‘you can’t miss it’. North Point was indeed a very unique building (see Appendix B), Two rather grand sets of gates set on the road, known to all at North Point as the ‘twin towers’<sup>22</sup>, mark out the entrance to the school campus, with a wiry fence tracing the outline of the campus. The school building was set back about 50 metres from the road with was a vast dusty playing field lying in between. The frontage of the school featured three pointed gothic archways, the central one being the largest, adorning the main entrance way. This

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<sup>21</sup> This teacher was contact I had acquired through my previous visits to Darjeeling during 2006 and 2008.

<sup>22</sup> The comparison with the nickname of the late World Trade Centre of New York is rather ominous however, the colloquial name attributed to the school gates predates the latter by over half a century (see Whelan 1988)

building was distinct from the more common square concrete buildings that dominated the Darjeeling skyline, or indeed from most other structures seen across the subcontinent.

The uniqueness of the building was evidenced by its role as an unofficial tourist attraction. North Point attracted daily clusters of ‘domestic’ tourists<sup>23</sup> who would pause momentarily at the school gates, peer through with their cameras to take photos before continuing their tours. The visits were so frequent that the Rector had considered this as a source of income for the school<sup>24</sup>. He proposed to have former students as guides to give guided tours during lessons stressing that the tourists were only interested in the building. The tours would last around an hour, offering some background on the building and various key areas of the campus such as the quadrangle and showcasing North Point. There would be an additional opportunity for revenue through a tea and coffee stand, but all of this was incidental as the plan was never implemented. The tourists had to remain at the gates with their cameras. The proposed tour highlighted that there was something of interest in the North Point campus, something marketable and sellable<sup>25</sup>. These plans were never realised not known to the students but they were aware of the cameras poking through the fence, especially the primary school students who used the flat area in front of the school during their break periods and during their games lessons. During one such lesson, I joined a group of Class 3 students playing basketball. The nets were often too far for the small students to reach so after about 10 minutes of trying, they would often stop entirely and sit on the steps for a break, until they were spotted by their teacher and ordered to commence playing again. As they were sat during one such break, a jeep stopped at the gates only a few metres away, and a handful of tourists jumped out and began taking photos. I joked with the students that they were film stars and some fans had come to take their photo. The students disagreed with me immediately, ‘No sir, they want to click North Point’s photo’. I asked them why would they want a photo of North Point. All the students clamoured to talk over one another, each reiterating that the school was ‘so beautiful’ joking that North Point was

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<sup>23</sup> The vast majority of Darjeeling’s tourist industry relied upon what was referred to as ‘domestic tourism’, which implied tourists from India. The tourists from Kolkata were more likely to pay for jeep tours that would ferry them around various points of interest. Although North Point was not explicitly a ‘point of interest’, it was located on route to other sites and as such the tourists would ask to stop in front of the school gates just to take a photo before heading off on their way.

<sup>24</sup> This conversation occurred during breakfast in the staff dining hall during the early months of my field work as I lived within the school. Breakfast was served for all resident teachers at the school before the commencement of school thus I often shared breakfast conversations with other resident staff such as the Rector which were privy to a number of others present and not private to myself.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 8 for a discussion of North Point as a consumable brand.

the ‘film star’ the tourists had come to see. There were many more games lessons that I would spend on that flat, and many more times when I would see tourists taking photos. The visits of the tourists facilitated the students imagining of their school as ‘beautiful’. The students were thus able to imagine their school as special as it was visited so frequently by tourists it must be so.

In my early conversations with the older students, I continued to explore what was distinctive about the school<sup>26</sup>. They also noted the tourist visits to the school and used these visits to explain why North Point was special.

‘You can see [the tourists] come to take photos. They come out here to Darjeeling just to click this picture. They come to see the *History* of this place’.

‘We get so many visitors here. Many foreigners want to see this place. North Point is world famous’.

However the building was not only part of the school’s ‘History’, but was also part of the school’s present. The flocking visitors underpinned a sense of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1984) which facilitated student imaginings of their school as somewhere unique.

The tourists were not the only reason the students saw their school as distinctive. The students also spoke about the building of North Point in relation to other buildings across the hills imagining North Point as a ‘place’ rather than just a school. They would tell me things like ‘there is nowhere like it in Darjeeling’ or ‘no other place looks like North Point’ and often I would hear them refer to the school as the ‘Home in the Mountains’. In one of my lunch time conversations I talked with a group of Class 10 students about the school and I picked up on their references to North Point as a ‘special place’ asking them what was so special about it. In this conversation I was intrigued in the way they spoke of the school as a ‘place’ and specifically how this place related to Darjeeling’s colonial past. One of the class 10 students outlined the sentiments of many of his classmates:

‘You don’t get other places like this in Darjeeling. There’s no *style* like this out here, except maybe in the British time. At that time you would get more places

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<sup>26</sup> Many of these conversations occurring during the lunch break when students gathered about in the quadrangle to eat their lunch. The conversations were with day scholars as the boarder students had their lunch in the student dining hall.

like [North Point]. Now there is only Raj Bhavan. You can see in the photos we have here. [In these photos] you can see our History'

North Point remained as a lasting product of the colonial era and the students bore witness to this. There were other buildings of a similar vintage in Darjeeling, but the majority of these were hidden from public view within the private *Raj Bhavan*<sup>27</sup> compound. That compound was a bounded area, not accessible by public, which encompassed the buildings used during the colonial era as the summer seats of governance, when the Europeans retreated from the heat of Calcutta. The student quoted above was referencing a style of structure which denoted a period of time, a period long since passed. In this student's brief summation, North Point was unique as it had lasted where other buildings have disappeared. The only evidence of these other structures remained in the array of photographs hung up around the edge of the quadrangle. The black and white images depicted scenes during the British colonial rule, both within the school and across Darjeeling. One such image depicted well-dressed ladies enjoying high tea in the quadrangle, and others showed the North Point building as a whole at various stages of its development. Here the story of the building provides the context where North Point is no longer a school but imagined as a place.

The students imagining North Point as a place is an important component of the argument I will make in the course of this thesis. North Point stood out not only amongst other schools but against other places in general, such as the Raj Bhavan. The link to the Raj Bhavan marked another colonial linkage of private schooling, to which I alluded in the introduction, that such schools were the privilege of the elite. In the student's own words the physical building of North Point compared with the style of building which was once home to the elites of the Imperialist rulers. It would be tentative to suggest that he was implying that North Point was the home of the elite. Rather it seemed he was simply inferring that such buildings were rare, and North Point was visible from a publically accessible road whereas the Raj Bhavan was limited to glances at postcards and photographs dotted around the town. These moments of reflection and comparison seemed on one hand to employ the sense of 'distinction' which Bourdieu (1984) had posited was a defining aspect of middle class life. On the other hand however, these students were

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<sup>27</sup> This was a closed complex of buildings in Darjeeling, which was once occupied by the visiting governors from the plains throughout the colonial era and now played host to a handful of visiting state ministers and governors.

focusing on similarities rather than differences, as they drew comparisons between North Point and other kinds of buildings which they deemed similar, such as the Raj Bhavan and other buildings from the 'British Time'. This emphasis on similarities aligns with the pursuit of belonging in what Savaala (2010) argued was a defining attribute of middle class life in India. I would hesitate to conclude one way or another at this early stage, but rather I wish to draw attention to how the physical environment of the school played a significant role in the shaping of student lives and how we can begin to observe how students envisaged their lives in relation to specific others, whether to distinguish themselves from those others or to assert similarities with them.

This is just an introduction to the landscape of North Point. This landscape, as Tim Ingold (1993) envisaged, unfolded like a story. This is to say that the physical and social aspects of the environment of the school were intertwined. The school building served as a bridge between that which the students can experience in their everyday and a time which they 'imagine' through their encounters with the photographs and other related buildings. The frequent visits of tourists had offered students the opportunity to see their school being a desirable photograph to 'click'. Furthermore, the school was unique as a place the like of which was imagined to have been unseen in Darjeeling, since the British era. The significance of this becomes clearer a little later when I explore other symbolic elements of the school landscape (the honour's board, the school motto, the magazine and the assembly). But for now I have presented a context for student imaginaries, particularly the ways in which the students began to imagine their school as a 'special place'. The school building was more than an impressive arrangement of bricks and mortar. North Point transcended the physical space which the building occupied. The visits of the tourists, the photographs around the quadrangle, the comparisons with other similar buildings (and indeed the scarcity of such structures) facilitated the student's imaginings of their school as 'special'. In the course of their North Point lives, the students would seek out opportunities to inscribe themselves on this landscape to become part of the North Point story and thus underpin their sense of belonging.

One example I can offer came during the production of the primary play, when I came across a Class 5 student who was busy scratching at one of the wooden panelled walls in

the Fraser Hall<sup>28</sup>. ‘Sir I am putting my name here’. I asked him why, ‘Sir,’ he replied, ‘All of the boys put their names, now I am also putting my name’. He pointed at the ceiling above at a host of names etched in various colours of pen and various depths of carving, strewn across the side of the curved ceiling. ‘Who are those boys?’ I asked him. ‘Old students’, was his reply. The cast list above had been built up over many years of the school history, composed of those who had trodden the hallowed boards of the Fraser Hall in the past. This young student still had some considerable years of school ahead of him; however it seemed that he was expressing his wish to be considered part of the school history and to leave evidence of his presence to others who will come after him.

In the course of the four performances of this play, more students would add their names to the assembled cast. The boys would follow in the footsteps of their friends and their forebears in marking out their own name in history. I asked some of the other students whose names I saw inscribed why they chose to do so. ‘Sir, these boys did the play before us, now we see all their names, so next time, the next boys will see my name’. Another boy offered a different angle, one of continuity. ‘These boys are all the boys who made the play, we also did the play’. In this instance this student’s imaginary was stirred by the host of names before him, imagining a student quite like himself standing in that same spot carving his name into the wood.

In these cases, the students had quite literally left their mark at school. These students imagined their actions in conjunction with the actions of other students present, past and future, who they imagined to be like themselves. These students perceived these inscriptions associating themselves with North Point; or to put it in Ingold’s terms, they were telling their ‘story’ (Ingold 2000: 189). The walls of the Fraser Hall offered a canvas for the students to inscribe themselves within the landscape of North Point and forever consign themselves within the school’s story. This example offers a further example of the students’ pursuit of belonging as I described in relation to student comparisons between North Point and other buildings. But precisely what were the students belonging too? At this point it is not clear why the students saw the need to inscribe themselves on the walls of the hall to ‘belong’, but I will expand this in the course of the chapter. I will further this examination of North Point by exploring a number of other ‘symbols’ of North Point, such

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<sup>28</sup> The Fraser Hall was a separate structure located to the side of the main quadrangle building. This hall had stood for over a hundred and amongst its many functions it had been the home of all North Point staged productions for the past few decades.

as the school honours board, the school motto, the school magazine and the school chorus. Before I proceed I should first expand on what I mean here by 'symbol' and what the repercussions are for the argument in this chapter. In addition I seek to contextualise how the landscape of North Point sits within the middle class landscape of India more broadly, with specific attention to the practices orienting the students towards others, both through a sense of distinction and through a desire for belonging. This theoretical stance will open up the social imaginary as the primary theoretical thread of this thesis, as a stance which allows an anthropological reading of how schools such as North Point operate within a complex social world such as contemporary India.

### **School of 'Symbols': Blazing a trail through NP 'History'**

So far I have argued that the building of North Point was a 'symbol' through which the students were able to imagine the school. I use the term 'symbol' with slight trepidation as this word is open a cavalcade of interpretations. I use the term 'symbol' to refer to an empirically observable object, activity or relationship which could be interpreted as pertaining to something else (Turner 1967). I use 'symbol' here to indicate that the building was an observable object which offered meanings beyond purely what one could see. The students were able to observe a host a tourists coming to take pictures of North Point and infer that this meant their building was special. Furthermore, the students demonstrated an awareness that the physical structure of North Point was comparable to other structures such as the former colonial residences of the Raj Bhavan or the former British buildings that once populated the hills, which students were able to see through a number of photographs which adorned the school's quadrangle. I focused on how these observable aspects of the student environment paved the way for students to imagine the wider world of their experiences. I wish to focus this chapter upon the ways in which students were guided in their interpretations of these potentially disparate objects and relations in order to construct an idea of their life at school. I would also argue that 'symbols' offer a tangible access for a social scientist to explore the social apparition of the imagined.

For Victor Turner, symbols created points in social space where an intangible world of belief met the physical world of experience. In Turner's explanation, the role of symbols in social life was comparable to the Ndembe hunter's act of 'blazing a trail', through which

they would mark trees as they traversed unfamiliar wilds of the ‘bush’ to enable them to find their way back to their village. In this vein, symbols act as landmarks which enable individuals or groups to navigate their way through the unknown; creating structure in the unstructured and to make intelligible what is mysterious and possibly dangerous. Turner (1969) also noted how symbols were not simply abstract icons but rather they reverberated across performed rituals of the Ndembe. The repeated performances of these symbols offered both a means of interpreting these symbols as significant markers of what Ndembe life was. The role of a symbol in this interpretation is to mark out the contours of one’s social world; a social world which can only become apparent when one is enabled to read such symbols in the first instance. In my example of North Point, I envisage that the social world of North Point was composed of symbols, such as the building, the school chorus, the school motto and so on which the students interpreted to be markers of what North Point was. In addition to the ontological realisation of these observable symbols, they also represented intangible values and ideas to students who came to experience them. These symbols thus combine as students interpret the imagined world of North Point which I refer to here as ‘History’.

I will now strive to expand upon the ramifications of these symbols on how the students perceived an imagined ‘History’ of the school. ‘History’, a word in itself with so a great deal of meaning and potential connotations attached. So why use it here? I deliberately refer to ‘History’ as opposed to history, in order to invoke the ethnographic category employed by the students in their perceptions and interpretations of their school landscape. ‘History’ was a category employed by students to make reference to the general life at the school which had existed prior to their own arrival. That said, ‘History’ was also understood to be in the making in the course of a student’s career. As such, ‘History’ applied not only to the past, but also the present and the future. This concept enabled students to reflect upon their lives and actions within school and to situate themselves within a larger framework. This concept of ‘History’ created links between the students, the school of North Point and the world beyond, links which were ultimately ‘imagined’. By ‘imagined’ here I do not mean to imply that these links were fictive. Instead I wish to situate this imagined History within other theoretical stances of the imagined, most notably Charles Taylor’s (2004) ‘social imaginary’, which explores how people come to understand the world through their social interactions. In this section I will examine how

the students of North Point came to ‘imagine’ their school, primarily through a complex series of ‘symbols’ which demarcated the contours of the school’s social imaginary. In order to distinguish this from Taylor’s more general term, I will label this as the ‘NP imaginary’.

I envisage the relations between the imagined and physical realms of North point along the line of Tim Ingold’s (1993; 2000) ‘dwelling perspective’. Ingold’s theoretical approach offers a useful means through which we can interpret the ways in which North Point was imagined by those students who entered it. The dwelling perspective envisions landscapes as ‘constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to- the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so, have left something of themselves’ (ibid: 152). Ingold’s landscape is not envisioned as land of the natural world, neither is it simply ‘space’, but rather as a ‘world known to those who dwell within’ (ibid: 156). Here the ‘landscape is both something physical to be observed and interacted with but also something which can be shaped and interpreted through social interactions. Ingold developed a terminology in ‘tasksapes’ which envisages a social world as comprised of ‘constitutive acts of dwelling’ (ibid: 158).

Ingold’s approach interprets social life like a social habitus, that is to say a social world structured and interpreted through social relations but also structuring and guiding the interpretations of those relations. This approach shares many similarities with the philosophical angle provided by Taylor’s (2002) *Social Imaginaries*. Both of these approaches explore the ways in which lives are mediated through collective experience and elaborate on the relations between individuals and their social worlds. Ingold offers a greater attention to the ways in which specific environments are constituted and are constitutive of social lives whereas Taylor’s angle emphasizes the creative power of collective imagining in carving out a social world imbued with meaning.

The final distinctive element of the theoretical approach adopted here draws attention to how a particular intangible element of the social world of North Point, becomes a crucial axis around which students come to understand their own lives. I refer here to what Ahmed Skounti (2009) termed the ‘authentic illusion’ which denotes the idea that the practices and cultural norms prevalent within a given cultural space are imagined to have remained unchanged over time. I have explored briefly how various different historical times were

encapsulated within the school building and how students experienced these through their interpretations of the building. Skounti argued that such imaginings serve to offer a sense of legitimacy to social practice, detailing an observable practice or set of practices which were thought to be shared amongst like-minded others. The practices were imagined as unchanged as they defined the very essence of the group itself, shaping a sense of place and bringing meaning to social action (Smith and Akagawa 2009).

Within North Point, I would argue that the 'authentic illusion' was in full force as the students imagined their school operating in much the same way as it always had. So far I explored how the seemingly unchanged appearance has facilitated imagined connections with the British Raj and connotations of North Point's place within the modern world. Imagining North Point to have remained 'authentic' is crucial in students imagining a sense of entitlement to belonging in the middle classes of contemporary India

Christianne Brosius (2010) observed how sense of belonging was held in high regard by the new middle classes of India, who leaned on their distinctive cultural heritage to distinguish themselves in a world of consumers. The author noted how an emerging consumer marketplace served up certain cultural categories of Indian social life, such as caste, regionality, language and ethnicity, repackaged within a world of consumerist imagery projected and circulated through new media marketing. Brosius argues that 'being modern' in India was an aspirational goal of many of her informants who identified themselves as middle class. However, 'being modern' was not opposed to the apparent traditions of India. In fact, articulating traditions and observing one's heritage formed one part of what Brosius termed the 'good life' (ibid: 324) which was apparently the ultimate aim of the Indian middle classes. Being modern did not require one to disengage from acts that were not modern, but rather to express an engagement across the breadth of social life with the role of honouring heritage and thereby creating a both a sense of belonging (Savaala 2010; Donner and de Neve 2011) within the Indian middle class and a sense of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) on a global scale.

Drawing on these discussions, in the course of this thesis I will argue that schools such as North Point were coveted because they were perceived to best prepare students for a middle class life with an all-round engagement across social experience, with a great importance placed upon a grounded heritage from which they could carve meaningful lives

and navigate the potential minefield of global consumerism. Most importantly, access to this future world was predicated on one's abilities to imagine one's self as belonging to that world and comprehending one's relations to others. Herein lies the importance of the particular social imaginary, the NP Imaginary developed through a scholastic career at North Point.

I now turn to an examination of four 'symbols' through which North Point is most explicitly imagined. These include the school honours board, the school magazine, the school motto and the school chorus. I will then illustrate how a collective performance, namely a school assembly, serves as a space where these symbols were performed and interpreted. The example here, which introduces some former students from a bygone era, serves to further bolster the concepts of History as an unfolding story and the unique heritage which shaped social life at school.

#### **'Our History, our heritage': Imagining through the honours board**

In the early days of my fieldwork I was positioned rather tentatively on the fringes of school life. I had been told that the imminent exams were playing heavily on the minds of staff and students alike so I had time to familiarise myself with the surroundings. As such, I often spent days whiling away time writing in the parlour, a seating area in the main entrance way, taking down notes of whatever conversations I had, and what information I had become aware of. One day, the bell sounded and I began to head over to the staff room for the morning cup of tea when a voice called to me. 'Sir, excuse me, what are you doing?' It was an inquisitive student from Class 7. The usual confused conversation ensued as to what my intentions for being there were, until I managed to deflect proceedings to his reasons for being in the parlour that morning. He told me that he enjoyed reading the newspapers in the morning<sup>29</sup>. As we spoke a number of other students, also there to consume the day's news, were clamouring for the few available newspapers. The Class 7 student decided to forgo his newspaper for the day and sit and chat to me instead. I fielded the usual questions about where I was from and what I did there. 'I bet you have many schools like this in England?' Without waiting for an answer he went on to ask me about other aspects of life in England, which football team I liked, what kinds of

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<sup>29</sup> Newspapers were delivered daily to the school with English language newspapers being available to the students at two stands, one in the parlour and one in the quadrangle. There was also a supply in the library, as well as deliveries to the staff room and the Jesuit quarters. Where the student newspapers were exclusively in English, the staff also had newspapers in Nepali, Bengali and Hindi.

sports I played and so on. Eventually I was able to get my own question in and I asked him about the wooden honours boards that sat high upon the wall above us. The Honours boards were a series of wooden shield shaped boards which listed the names of the decorated students of the past, listed in two columns on each board, with each name sat alongside the year in which they were awarded. When the board was filled up a new one was added and the list continued. ‘This is our history’, the boy replied. His response was concise and immediate without a hesitation. ‘Who’s history?’ I asked him. He explained that it was the history of North Point; that these boards contained the names of the Depelchin Gold Medal winners from ‘before’. ‘We have always had good student[s] here’, he added. The boards, the boy told me, showed how old the school was. In this instance,, the ‘history’ of the school was not the written record that I had read months prior, but was encased in the honours board. This was on one hand a literal display of dates within which North Point had existed; but on the other it also demonstrated continuity, from one year to the next, with the Gold Medal consistently representing the high standard of students across the length of the school’s existence.

He went on to describe the specifics of the Depelchin prize:

‘This is for the best North Pointer. Only one boy can get. He has to be good at sports, in studies also and not have any detentions or anything like that...This is Depelchin Gold Medal, he [Depelchin] is the first North Pointer. We all try to be like him’.

The honours boards represented far more to this student than simply the names of memorable past students; they represented the very embodiment of what it meant to be a student at this school. For this student, this board was a continual record of the students from ‘before’, referring to an imagined time before now, but no specific time period. In explaining this to me, the student was offering me an insight into how he perceived what North Point was and what it meant to him. The students were intertwined with the school itself as the school was defined as one which has ‘always had good students’. The honours boards represented a window into the past of North Point. The faceless names were each representative of an imagined ancestry of North Point students.

Here the student echoed a term that I was hearing more and more of: ‘North Pointer’, a word that stood seemingly for all those at school. Yet here was an example of how some

were heralded above others. The ‘North Pointer’ was what Charles Taylor (2002) would have termed an ‘ideal type’, that is to say the ideal model of being, from which others were compared. Fr. Depelchin, the founding father of the school, was honoured in the student’s assertion that he was the first North Pointer and thus the students trace their ancestry back to him, almost like a family tree. The student noted how even though only one student can be immortalised alongside the other names, all students aspire to the same model of being, which is prescribed as key to deciding who is the best student. I will pick up more on the concept of the ‘North Pointer’ and the ‘ideal’ in the following chapter. Here I wish to focus upon the symbols, such as the honours boards, which seem to offer certain founding stones in prescribing how a student should be at school. In this instance, the honours boards stood to represent a shared ‘History’ within which all students were situated. This became more evident when the student drew my attention to one name in particular:

‘Sir, look here....Father Kinley is also there. He is a gold medal winner, so we must respect him. I don’t know others but if they are like Father Kinley then they are all good. I hope one day my name will be there also’.

I watched the student staring up at the board, hearing the desire in his words to be amongst the school’s most heralded sons. He was able to use the concrete example of his rector, Fr. Kinley, to emblemize what it meant to be a Gold Medal winner, and as such a little bit of the rector echoed through all the other faceless names. It was not important that the student didn’t know whose these people were. It was enough that they were Gold Medal winners, they were North Pointers<sup>30</sup>.

In this example, the student indicated that there were parts of the school environment which offered students a window into an imagined world of North Point. Symbols such as the honours board, the school rector, the gold medal and the North Pointer each marked out a part of the ‘history’ which extended the school beyond the everyday schooling of the classroom. The school was imagined to be now as it always was. Central to this assertion was the school environment, which was perceived by students as the very embodiment of the ‘History’ of North Point. The physical landscape of the school, incorporating symbols such as the honours board, served a key means of orientation for students plotting a course through the imaginary of the school.

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<sup>30</sup> See next chapter for more detail with regards to the Gold Medal and the ceremony of Rector’s Day on which it is awarded.

As we shall now see, imagining the school was not simply a process of observing the school landscape and objects such as the honours board. I now turn to one of the symbols of the school which the students were active in constituting, the school magazine. This bi-annual publication was an important platform for students presenting a space where students could articulate their views about the school and also the world beyond. This ‘symbol’, I will argue, offered opportunities for reflexivity which were vital in the inculcation and construction of the ‘NP Imaginary’.

### **‘Among Ourselves’: the school magazine**

Students were also keen to point out that it was the students who made the school and not the other way around. In the editorial for the student magazine, *Among Ourselves*, the editors sought to draw attention to this in stating that ‘the school is a building made of bricks and stone just like any other without all of us [the staff and students]’. This editorial was focused upon that which made every student ‘great’ in their own way, echoing the wider annual theme for the year, which for 2011 was ‘Good to Great: The Year of Performance’. The magazine was edited by a group of Class 12 students, with a staff convenor who had very little involvement in the collection of articles and the editing process. The student editors were selected from the most literary and academic students with a flair for writing, adjudged by the staff convenor to be capable to select the best entries of others.

The editors were keen to stress the role played by students in the building of North Point. Many of the articles sought to position the school as being ‘special’ and ‘unique’. There were articles with new teachers which focus on how unique an opportunity it was to teach at North Point; there were articles on the sports victories which aligned the achievements of the present crop of students within the contexts of the achievements of previous years. The articles on sports offered an insight into the ways which the student sought to quite literally write themselves in to the story of North Point. Typical reports on sports would make reference to the achievements of teams of past years and how these weigh up against those of today’s teams, creating a narrative flow from one year to the next. The magazine was a space where one could reflect upon the ways in which social lives of the present students were aligned with the lives of those who had come before and those who would come after. The magazine was widely distributed and read amongst all the students who

could then read this story unfolding before them. The pages of this student publication contextualised school events, most notably sports events, within the contexts of events that had transpired before and hinting towards those that might one day come.

Perhaps most interesting of all was a collection of poetry, featuring student reflections of the world around them. The poems reflected largely on the past, memories and how one deals with adverse moments in one's life. I had been told by one student that he had been inspired to write his poem in response to reading the work of others in 'Among Ourselves'. Here was a space outside of the academic realm yet firmly grounded within the school where a student could experiment with their relations to the world and explore their emotional connections to their social lives. The poetry section was always the most popular page, for submissions and for readers, demonstrating perhaps the most reflexive of all the articles and prose which the magazine contained.

These articles each demonstrate the comments of the editors in locating the current crop of students not purely as students cast in the mould of 'History', but as a group of young minds acutely aware of the world around them. Through the submission of articles students were seeking to write the story of North Point and those reading it were witnessing North Point in a state of being written. The students had explicitly stated that the school was only in part composed of a building with bricks and mortar and it was the 'faculty', the students, the staff and all others who combined together to form 'North Point'.

The landscape of North Point offered some shape and structure to the 'NP imaginary', however it was not alone in achieving this. This symbol, as indeed were all the symbols, was engaged in relation to one another where they held no meaning in of themselves. A magazine produced by a group of 18 year olds was not significant, but a group of senior North Point students collating a series of articles about North Point by North Pointers for a readership of North Pointers was. The school magazine drew attention to the landscape as an example of what Ingold (2000:189) would have termed 'performed tellings' which made a landscape visible to those who were responsible for its being.

The pages of Among Ourselves revealed other elements of the school story, the most prominent was that of the school motto, *Sursum Corda* (Latin for 'lift up your hearts – see below), which made a guest appearance in a host of articles. None of these articles

addressed the motto specifically but rather cited it at the end as a means of signing off. Here was another window in to the ‘NP Imaginary’, a phrase which seemed embedded with meanings, the most vital of which indicated that the speaker or author of the phrase was a North Pointer, which I will now explore.

### **Sursum Corda: ‘A Whole Philosophy of Life’**

When looking for words to sum up North Point, one can do little better than ‘Sursum Corda’. This simple Latin phrase has adorned the school crest since it was introduced by the first Rector of North Point, Fr. Newt<sup>31</sup>, and has remained a part of school life ever since. The phrase translates literally as ‘lift up your hearts’. It is drawn from a particular segment of the Christian mass known as the Eucharist, during which the priest invites the congregation to ‘lift up their hearts’ in celebration and recognition of the sacrament which they are about to receive. Although all students could tell you what their motto said in English, only a select few could draw the connection with the component of the Christian mass. The majority of those who were able to understand the subtle reference were Christian themselves and regular churchgoers, but even for them this religious distinction was not the meaning of Sursum Corda.

I was intrigued as to how this phrase was used across school life, and it became a central part of a series of ‘focus groups’<sup>32</sup> I had with various students during the latter part of the year. I was keen to unearth what the students felt, thought and meant when they heard or said ‘sursum corda’. One class 10 student told me plainly, ‘[Sursum Corda] means North Point’. And he was not alone in this summation.

The 1988 centenary annual offered this description of the school motto:

‘For North Pointers, these words are not just a college slogan but a watchword, a whole philosophy and theology of life’.

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<sup>31</sup> Fr. Depelchin was the founder and first rector of St. Joseph’s School when it began at its first location in Darjeeling. However, Depelchin envisioned a grander school and established a new campus at North Point, completed in 1892. He was reassigned to a new role once the new school session began in 1892, replaced by Fr. Newt, who introduced the crest and motto (Whelan 1988).

<sup>32</sup> As I explained in the introduction, these focus groups were loosely premised along the lines of ‘improving school experience’. This was so in order to explain my research to students but mainly to answer potential questions from parents. Although the sessions with the Class 6, 7 and 8 students were timetabled, the sessions with the older students were more ad hoc based on teacher absentees.

Within this short phrase, one could find the essence of North Point. Everything that it was, is and will ever be was *Sursum Corda*. But what did this mean for students? It was evident that there was some kind of meaning attached to it from the way in which it pervaded social life at school and one would hear it all the time, yet it remained a mystery. It was all very well that it translated as ‘lift up your hearts’ and that was North Point, but what did that mean? No answer was seemingly forthcoming. I was constantly frustrated as students were only able to vocalise the literal translation and to reiterate that *Sursum Corda* stood as representative of North Point.

However I gained greater insights to its meaning through observing its usage across school life. I began to see it appear in articles in the student magazine, in the school annual; perhaps the most dramatic incarnation was when it was chanted during sports matches. During assemblies student speakers ended their speeches with *Sursum Corda*; I would see it written on Facebook messages by students and ex-students when they talked about North Point. Wherever I would see North Point, I would also see *Sursum Corda*.

As such ‘*Sursum Corda*’ became so ubiquitous with students that it had slipped into their everyday vocabulary as a means of expressing not only who they were personally but who they were affiliated with. *Sursum Corda* became a linguistic representation of the shared qualities between students at North Point, a marker of distinction from other schools. Much like the landscape of the school as imagined in the first part of this chapter, ‘*Sursum Corda*’ flowed through all of school life from the days of Depelchin to the present and was imagined as something quintessentially North Point. It had been passed down from student to student and would be passed on to the next as the symbol of the North Pointer. As such, the notion of the North Pointer embedded within the concept of *Sursum Corda*, could be framed as an ‘authentic illusion’ (Skounti 2009), providing a level of legitimacy to social practices.

Here, we can observe similar reflections within the frame of ‘*Sursum Corda*’ and the school which it represents. As the school annual noted, ‘*Sursum Corda*’ was seen to be a ‘whole philosophy of life’, and thus this simple phrase encompasses within a message that says ‘this is North Point’. The enduring nature of this motto over time reinforced the ‘authentic illusion’ that the school was now what it always was.

The physical landscape of North Point was a testament to the changes and transformations the school has undergone over time, yet throughout change the newer buildings are cast in the shape of the old, representing a desire for North Point today to be in the present what it always has been. Students located themselves in this milieu through invoking the story of North Point in their writing for the school magazine and through observing the honours boards and scores of trophies. These physical symbols paved the way for an imagined world of the school where ‘North Point’ remained untouched by the changing world around it and the North Pointers were eternally cast as ‘good students’, capable all-rounders who could thrive in any field. This message is encapsulated in ‘Sursum Corda’, a ‘philosophy of life’, which has existed in school life for the entire history of North Point. This phrase became the emblem around which the unchanging North Pointer was based, reflected through the gold medals won over the years, that being North Pointers was something passed on from one batch of students to the next.

This ‘inheritance’ was more evident in instances when the past came to visit the present at North Point in the form of former students. The visits from these North Pointers from overseas affirmed the perceptions that North Point existed now much in the same way that it had in the past. As the recent transformations had endeavoured to reproduce the new spaces in the model of the old, the visiting students noted how North Point was ‘just like the old days’. The parallels between the students, old and new, would be drawn closer with instances such as the one described below, whereby the visiting former students performed the school chorus along with the present students. In this example, the story of North Point is once again performed to all those students who witness it and in this temporal moment of praxis, all of North Point history becomes visible to the students and they are able to imagine themselves within it.

### **‘A World of North Pointers’: Singing the School into existence**

Assemblies formed a core part of the North Point schooling week. These were timetabled events which often occupied an entire period of the timetable, twice a week, bringing the whole senior school together for a series of announcements, messages, presentation of awards and so on<sup>33</sup>. On certain occasions there were guests, which often served to reinforce the students’ view that North Point was somehow special. On a few occasions

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<sup>33</sup> I will explore the role of assemblies at North Point in greater detail in chapter 4.

these guests were former students who had come back to visit the school. On one particular day, outlined in the ethnography that follows, there were two former students from North Point's past. As we shall see in the anecdote that follows, these former students served as symbols, alongside the buildings, the honours boards, the school motto, and others, offering a physical example of the imagined world of North Point.

Everyone was in place<sup>34</sup>. The bell had sounded; the students had obediently taken to their lines. The late comers had raced into position to avoid any punishment; the teachers were standing around the edges of the columns of students, all waiting for the Rector to begin. Slowly but surely, cloaked in the black cassock befitting of his priestly occupation, Father Kinley Tshering took to the stage. Trudging after the Rector were two elderly men from England who I had run into the day before. They were former students of the school and were returning to the school for the first time in 20-odd years. They had spent a few days in Darjeeling and had made the voyage from England specifically to visit the school.

The assembly rattled along and Kinley introduced the elderly gentlemen to the students as members of North Point's Alumni, who had been students during the 1950s. 'So you see boys', Kinley's voice echoed across the quadrangle, 'once you are a North Pointer you are forever a .... North Pointer. These gentlemen have come all the way from England, lots of North Pointers in England, lots of North Pointers all over the world. Every year I meet with all these former students who come to meet their former teachers, to see their old school and they come from all over the world. And these days in my Jesuit duties I have to travel all over and everywhere I go I meet North Pointers, in Delhi, in Kolkata, Bangalore, all over India, in America, everywhere. So you see boys, North Point has a long history and you are all a part of it'.

The assembly came to an end and the rector invited the guests to lead the school in a school chorus. The school captain called the students to attention, and every student responded, bolt upright, arms tightly wedged at their sides. They stood as they would for the Indian National Anthem in order to sing the words of the school chorus. This song was composed in the formative years of North Point and has been performed more or less unchanged since its inception. As the elderly gentlemen stuttered their way through the song, it was clear that their singing prowess had been ravaged by their years, but their

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<sup>34</sup> The assembly I am referring to here was for the senior school, encompassing Classes 6 to 12.

memory had not faded with it. They recalled all three verses, in time with those who sang it every week. They sang the song just as they would have done, standing in the same quadrangle as they did when they were young boys half a century before. In this instant, the history of North Point was brought into being to all those in the quadrangle. While I was aware of the origins of the school chorus, it was apparent that the students themselves were not. However what mattered to the students was that the chorus prescribed an affiliation amongst students. Much like ‘Sursum Corda’ the words and rhythm of the chorus reflected an association of the students with each other, bonding them together as North Pointers.

In this instance, the elderly former students stood to represent a ‘world of North Pointers’, enabling students to envisage a world populated by former students dispersed across the globe. Furthermore, the performance of the school chorus with these former students cemented an affiliation between students across eras. Whereas the honours board demanded a greater sense of imagination to envisage the generations of students flowing from one to the other, in this example, the former students stood alongside the present faculty and sang the song with them. In doing so, the students were able to witness first-hand the ways in which they related to one another. North Pointers from different points in time yet imagined as the same, facilitated by the school chorus.

I will now conclude with a brief exploration of the school chorus itself. While the meanings behind much of its composition are unknown, the lyrics can be viewed as significant symbols which outline student imaginaries. Primarily this occurs through the first line of the chorus, ‘Hurrah for Our Home in the Mountains!’ In recent years this has become the moniker for North Point but also a lens through which it is imagined. I will argue here that the school chorus reflects an element of ‘History’ whereby the messages of the past stand as symbols for the path towards the future.

### **Hurrah for the Home in the Mountains!: The NP Chorus**

The school chorus<sup>35</sup> (see Appendix C) was first performed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1897 on the feast day of St. Joseph. It was composed by the parish priest of Darjeeling, Fr. Nash, and one of the school’s resident teachers, Fr. Hipp. The international reach of the chorus, implied

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<sup>35</sup> The song is commonly referred to at school as ‘The school chorus’, or the ‘NP chorus’, so this is why I have chosen to refer to it here in the same vein.

within Kinley's assembly speech, was evident in its inception. Fr. Nash hailed from Limerick in Ireland and his lyrics echoed the poetic namesake of his ancestral home. His co-composer, Fr. Hipp, was a German national with a flair for music (Whelan 1988). The chorus has remained a central part of school life and is performed at the end of most assemblies, regardless of any special guests like those described in the above scenario, and on school functions, such as sports days and Rector's Day. The words of the chorus were often referred to by students when I asked them about the school, especially with reference to what makes the school unique. It was not the chorus in itself that was unique but the message contained within and how this binds the students together and enables them to imagine a community of North Pointers. The very first line in the chorus, 'Hurrah for the home in the mountains', is perhaps the most referenced part of the chorus, and it is the moniker of 'our home in the mountains' that stands as a byword for North Point itself. I heard many students refer to the school in this way, particularly those who boarded there, but not exclusively.

The chorus itself reflects upon the physical landscape of Darjeeling and India as a whole, referring to the 'hot winds' of the plains, and the 'sweltering south', and referring to Darjeeling as the 'gates of snow' and the Himalaya more broadly as the 'monarchs of snow'. In addition, the chorus includes a reflection on social life at school as students are instructed to lend a 'hand to faltering brother' and each reminded that North Point will remain within its students long after they 'pass out'<sup>36</sup>, as the chorus recalls a 'cheer' for the school as 'onwards through life' the students pass.

Perhaps the words of the chorus are a relic of history and reflect a bygone era of Darjeeling's idyllic past, but from the conversations with students, it became apparent that this imagery had become part of the NP Imaginary. The recurring performance of the school chorus and the respect that the students display, in the same way that schools across India expect their students to stand when they sing the national anthem, embody a certain brand of 'passion' (Benei 2008), which shapes the social actions of students. In this case singing the school chorus was intended to nurture 'passion' for North Point, which was referred to by those within the school as the 'NP spirit'. This 'passion' served as one

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<sup>36</sup> The term used for students graduating from North Point was 'pass out', similar to the military terminology. A further example of military language in popular use was the use of 'batch' in reference to each year group, the '2010 batch' for example, although such references are common in Indian schools.

element of the school chorus. The lines were often cited in school articles by students as words of wisdom to demonstrate what it means to be a student at North Point.

The second most cited line was ‘here’s a hand to a faltering brother’, a line which referenced the school’s Jesuit roots. The repeated use of this line throughout school life echoed the model of student who should be social responsible. This line indicates that the students who have passed out from the school’s gates over the years have not only possessed the necessary academic skills to succeed but have remained rounded individuals, prepared to help those less fortunate than themselves. All of this is embedded within the words of a song, sung over and over again. I wouldn’t argue at this juncture that the chorus was blindly followed by all students; rather its ubiquitous repetition in the lives of students was much like all the other symbols of heritage noted here, each seeped through the ‘History’ of North Point. All of these symbols were aspects of the ‘authentic illusion’ which defined what it meant to be a student of North Point. Without any one of these things, North Point wouldn’t be North Point. It was these points of heritage that traced the outlines of History and that enabled the students to imagine North Point.

The school chorus then was a relic of bygone era. School songs were once prevalent across many schools, but I am not referring to school songs per se; rather the specific interlocking nature of all the elements described in this chapter which intersect, overlap and interweave to constitute North Point both as a physical space and as an imagined one. As I have demonstrated here, the imagined bled into the physical, as the idea of the school shaped the way in which it was seen and experienced by students. The chorus was first and foremost a symbol of unity. It was performed by the whole school together. Occasions like the one described above only served to bolster student imaginaries in connecting the lives of students at North Point today with former students from the school’s story as a whole. The appropriation of the school chorus through time, along with the preservation of the original school building, the honours board offering a catalogue of gold medallists, the ‘philosophy’ contained within ‘Sursum Corda’ and the student reflexivities encompassed within the student magazine each combine to ‘blaze a trail’ through the imagined North Point History and establish ‘heritage’ upon which the sense of belonging within the school is built.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have endeavoured to open up a discussion on precisely what lies at the heart of parental favouring of one school over another. I set out to discover why schools like North Point were desired by parents and why such schools were considered so important for certain future livelihoods. Here I have indicated that schools like North Point reproduce a particular form of ‘social imaginary’, which serves to create a mark of distinction between itself and others. This imaginary is outlined by a particular ‘History’, which students experienced through a number of ‘symbols’ that indicated key aspects of the school landscape. I have argued that ‘symbols’ such as the honours board, the school building itself, the school motto and the school chorus were combined within performances such as school assemblies forming collective reference points through which students came to imagine their school and themselves within it. In addition to this array, the students also had spaces for reflection within these symbols, as with the example of the school magazine *Among Ourselves*, wherein the students both explored their interpretations of North Point through articles invoking ‘Sursum Corda’ and came to witness the collective contributions of students coming together.

This chapter provides the first steps on this journey in establishing how students come to understand their position within a vast North Point history. In the course of the thesis I will extend the introduction to the NP Imaginary which I have presented here. This imaginary operates to structure a particular relationship with the world, through an interpretative dialectic framework within which the students come to understand at first their position within the world, then their relation to one another and then the ultimate livelihood to which they are headed.

The students drew upon the material world around them, observing that the architecture of the school was distinct from the rest of the town and thus served as a marker of how special it was. The building was also a symbol of the school’s ‘History’ which was an idea, imagined by the students to encompass all of North Point in a static unchanging realm. In this vein, the students of the school have always been good students, reinforced by objects such as the honours board, which indicates a certain universal standard of North Pointer through the ages. The North Pointer is also replicated in the school motto, *sursum corda*, which was imagined to have been passed down from student to student, representing a school created not by a building or a faceless history but by the words, actions and thoughts of the students themselves. This formed a certain ‘authentic illusion’, which was

further replicated in the performance of the school chorus, especially in the presence of former students, emblemizing a collective feeling amongst students encapsulated in the 'NP Spirit'.

The social imaginary emerged as a story, embedded within the school buildings and relayed through various symbolic aspects of school. The most significant symbols were the school motto and the school chorus, both of which were cited as emblematic of the school as a whole, not only within the present day, but also in the days past and will be for the future yet to come. The history of the school appeared to students as a flowing narrative into which they learned to position themselves through being immersed in a world of symbols which they had 'inherited' from their forebears. The students would come to meet some of their North Point 'ancestors' through countless visits, particularly of those from 1950s, who stood to represent the timelessness of being North Pointers. Within these visits students came to see North Point, in the same fashion as Kinley himself imagined, as a static image unchanged by time, despite the constant world of change around them. The school of North Point enshrined within the symbol of this grand neo-gothic structure was on one hand imagined to be a static point in time, which had remained constant since its founding over a century ago, yet simultaneously constantly in motion.

The following chapters will pick up on the threads presented here. I shall now proceed to explore how the 'North Pointer' emerged not merely as an amalgam of symbols but also through 'ritualised performances'. These performances centred around an imagined 'ideal' character, the 'gentleman', which all students aspired to be. I will ground this in Charles Taylor's concept of 'ideal types', which forms a central tenet of his idea of the 'social imaginary'. The third chapter in part I will explore the social world of the 'NP Spirit' through inter student relations. I will seek to demonstrate how students perceived equality amongst themselves through a concept of 'competition'. In social practice students demonstrated an awareness that they lacked a practical equality, despite the impressions of the wider picture that they were all equal.

# II

## Ideal Imaginaries: 'Ritualised Performances' of the North Pointer

### Introduction

Every student at St. Joseph's School, North Point was issued with a diary in February at the start of the school year. The shape and design had altered over time<sup>37</sup> but the order and form of the content has stayed consistent in recent years. The diary's primary use was for the students to record their timetable and homework, but the front pages were dedicated to outlining other details of school life, from the schedule for boarding students, to brief historical accounts of the school and also outlines of expectations of all students and indeed staff. One such page explains:

*'All students are to behave like a gentleman. Students are responsible to the school authorities for the conduct whether in campus or outside the school'*

In the words of the school diary, the students were required to behave like a gentleman at all times. But what did this mean exactly? There were certain expectations of the students at North Point. They were reminded daily, in their interactions with the teachers and with the school captains, to straighten their ties, not to run in the quadrangle, not to shout or make too much noise when moving between classes and so on. However beneath the veneer of these practices I would begin to discover how student ideas about being 'gentlemen' served to shape students' experiences at North Point as they strived to find their place within the social fabric of the school. In the course of this chapter I will attempt to address how student concepts of what defined a 'good' student were shaped by ritualised performances. In order to demonstrate this I will rely on Charles Taylor's (2004)

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<sup>37</sup> The school annual forms part of the discussion in Chapter 8 on North Point as a 'brand'.

concept of ‘ideal types’, which served to shape personal orientations within a social imaginary. I will argue that ‘gentleman’ is an aspect of an ideal category which was known at school as a ‘North Pointer’, outlining an ideal for life in school but also beyond. I will also note how the concept of the North Pointer incorporated the abject, through applications of discipline. I will stress that it was only through the collective experience of the ideal and the opposite where the imagined notions of being ‘North Pointers’ took root. I will explore the centrality of certain ‘ritualised performances’, namely the Investiture Ceremony and Rector’s Day, and how such events provided an outline of what being North Pointers was about.

But first I will examine how the students themselves demonstrated the layers of meaning embedded within the category of the ‘North Pointer’. These examples offer insights into forms of being which were crucial in students coming to see themselves as belonging to North Point. This belonging, as I have discussed in the previous chapter and in the introduction, was a vital part of potential middle class futures which lay ahead.

### **What is a North Pointer?**

In the previous chapter, I attempted to show how ‘North Point’ stood for more than just the name of a school. North Point was an imagined place which imagined as an unfolding story referred to as ‘History’. North Point was imagined through the moniker ‘the home in the mountains’ which all North Pointers past, present and future called home. But who was a North Pointer? First students had to come to see themselves as North Pointers in order to imagine themselves within North Point. What role did the North Pointer play in the story of North Point? It was questions such as this which lay at the heart of my early interactions with the students, which took place in some small focus group discussions with students during their library period<sup>38</sup>. One of these discussions, early on in my fieldwork, took place with a group of five class 6 students, newly risen to the level of senior school, who were contending with the transition between the primary and secondary level. I was interested in how being in this age group would influence their views of the school as a whole. This particular group was composed of four boarders and a day scholar, and I had been informed that they were a group of students considered to be the highest achieving in the class, participating across the spectrum of school life, from the classroom, to the sports

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<sup>38</sup> For a greater discussion of how these focus groups were selected see the methodology section in the introduction.

field to music, but also not needing to be disciplined for bad behaviour. The group was comprised of 11 year old Harsha<sup>39</sup> from Siliguri<sup>40</sup>; three 12 year olds, Chewang and Dorji from Sikkim, and Gaurav, the only Day Scholar, from Darjeeling; and 13 year old Rinchen from Nepal. All of these students, with the exception of Harsha who had only started that year, had studied at North Point since Primary, thus this was their fourth year at the school.

I directly asked the students ‘What is a North Pointer?’. ‘It is all of us, we are North Pointers’, Chewang said, indicating his fellow students with his hands, ‘we are students at North Point’. ‘North Pointer means all-rounder; we can do all things,’ Dorji added. ‘Yes sir, like we can play all these sports, music also, plays (theatre) also, we have many opportunities’, Harsha continued his train of thought from above. The group agreed that they were all North Pointers. The primary defining element of their definition lay in being students of North Point. First and foremost, the notion of the North Pointer was unifying. The students, even in this small group, hailed from four different places, yet they saw themselves unified under the labels of ‘North Point’ and ‘North Pointer’. Within this small caveat there is an indication towards an establishment of a sense of belonging which I have argued previously forms a considerable part of Indian middle class experience.

The students’ senses of belonging were shaped in relation to the collective category of the North Pointer. This belonging was also fashioned in relation to what the students called the ‘NP family’. ‘We help each other like family, we lift our hearts for others’, Rinchen said, the others nodding along. ‘Yes sir we are all brothers’. The NP family, like ‘North Pointer’, was a term I would hear countless times across my time at North Point. The students in this focus group expressed that their imaginings of unity were part of social life at North Point. So at first glance, the category of the North Pointer seemed to simply refer to a student of North Point. However as the students hinted here, the category of the North Pointer was imagined to possess characteristics beyond simply being a part of the school.

As was mentioned earlier, a North Pointer was conceptualised as a student who is an ‘all-rounder’. This means that a student is a high achiever in the classroom, proficient in sports and possibly in music or performing arts of some kind, and - to top it all – a student who remained at all times a well-behaved individual: a ‘gentleman’. The students in this focus

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<sup>39</sup> Names are pseudonyms

<sup>40</sup> Siliguri is located in the only plains district of Darjeeling and is the second largest city in West Bengal after Kolkata.

group focused on the latter point. Harsha introduced the discussion. ‘Sir, a North Pointer is a gentleman’. I asked him what he thought a gentleman was. ‘Sir, gentleman means [being] good in studies, good in games, [doing] all things well’, Harsha responded, seemingly invoking the notion of the all-rounder, which was prevalent at school. But then Dorji added his own view. ‘Gentleman means no smoking, no taking drugs...’, but he was interrupted by Harsha, who added ‘...and no girlfriend ‘til Class 12!’.

These students had offered me with some insights into how they imagined the ideal student to be. I was presented with what the students imagined as a gentleman, who stood to represent the ideal character for the students. In this chapter I am seeking to explore how students came to imagine the ‘ideal’ student. As encapsulated in the ethnography above, I will argue that students possessed a shared idea of how a student should behave which they largely referred to as a ‘gentleman’. Here I will explore how the ideal students were performed in school events. In the previous chapter, I focused on how the NP imaginary was embedded within an array of ‘symbols’, aspects of the school environment that were subsequently interpreted through moments of collective praxis, most notably the school assembly. In this chapter I will continue this line of analysis with a greater focus upon the ways in which North Point was practised or rather how it was *performed*, focusing on the ways in which the symbols of North Point reverberated through performances and in particular how grand events were key in offering an interpretative framework for students to enable them to piece together their own interpretations in understanding their place within the North Point family.

I will argue that the North Pointer was imagined and constructed through elaborate performances enacted in the presence of the whole school. I will narrow my focus upon the school’s grandest occasions, Rector’s Day and the Investiture ceremony. I will observe how such occasions were enacted with a certain ritual repetition and in doing so illuminated to all students what being a North Pointer was, what it meant and how it affected their lives. As I hope to demonstrate, these performances of North Point constructed a key aspect of the NP imaginary. I suggest that such performances laid down explicit templates of ‘norms’ that were crucial to being ‘North Pointers’. These ‘norms’ and ‘ideals’ were identified by Taylor (2004: 24-5) as constituent parts of social imaginaries, shaping the ways in which people come to understand various social experiences. These understandings rely on the ability to identify ‘ideal types’; that is to

say, when a certain social situation meets preconceived expectations and indeed when it does not. In this chapter I will outline this process in action. I will examine how student expectations were shaped at North Point through practices of discipline. I will argue that the combined forces of the ritualised performances of North Point's ceremonies coupled with the underlying expectations enforced through discipline. I do so by exploring more explicitly the role of performance at North Point, with a particular reference to how large scale performances, such as Rector's Day and the Investiture Ceremony, underpinned the students' imagined views of the school and offered them a means through which they could position themselves within it.

I begin by offering an insight into the theoretical propositions which guide the analysis of this chapter. I will examine two vital concepts which are important for understanding the NP imaginary. Firstly, I will highlight a prevalence of ritualised performance through which the NP imaginary largely through theoretical approaches drawn from Victor Turner (1967; 69). I will stress how it is the 'quality of action' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994) rather than the nature of the event itself which transforms such performances above more everyday occurrences such as assemblies. Two key performances, the Investiture of the 'Beadles' (see below) and presentation of the Depelchin Gold Medal are presented in this chapter which demonstrate how such ritualised performances make the NP Imaginary visible to students, and perform the 'norms' of being a North Pointer for students. Secondly, and on this latter point, I will explore the social production of 'norms' and 'ideals' through Charles Taylor's (2004: 24-25) approach to social imaginaries. In this vein, I will examine how the students' expectations were composed of 'ideal types' and 'foul plays', which enabled students to navigate their way through school life. The 'ideals' were defined by the best possible results of given situations, good behaviour, success in the classroom, and prowess in sports, each of which were encapsulated in the imagined idea of a gentleman which pointed students towards becoming North Pointers. Inversely, students were aware of 'foul plays': the misbehaving students, absent from class, not taking part, breaking school rules, all of which were highlighted through discipline. Whether through ceremony or discipline, through ideals or fouls, all these acts were encapsulated by students within the NP Imaginary, and each played their part in constituting the school as a whole and positioning the students within it.

### **The 'Ritualised Performances' of the North Pointer**

In the opening chapter I explored how North Point was imagined by its students. I outlined how this imagined world of North point was comprised of a number of symbols which guided student imaginaries. I hinted in that chapter that performances were key in enabling students to interpret the symbols which surrounded them. So far, I have suggested a role played by the weekly assemblies in orienting student imaginaries. Here I seek to expand upon the role of staged performances at North Point with particular reference to the two grandest events of the school calendar, Rector's Day and the Investiture ceremony. These performances incorporated the symbols of North Point and also offering an outline of the 'ideal' student emblemized as the 'North Pointer'.

Soon after my arrival, I was repeatedly told by those within the school and outside that North Point was renowned for its events. One of the teachers once told me that the Jesuits were the best at 'putting on a show', referring to a great investment, financially and socially, in important school events. This teacher's sentiment was also reflected through histories of Jesuit engagements with education across the centuries, whereby performance of ceremonies appeared central to Jesuit schools (see De Souza and Borges 1992; Chapple 1993<sup>41</sup>). Comments like these from both staff and students within North Point, illustrated how imaginings of events such as Rector's Day not only fitted within the NP imaginary, but served as an important catalyst of imagining North Point in the first instance.

This alludes to both my wider engagement with social imaginaries and the connectivity between private schooling and a preparation for middle class life in India. The theoretical approach of social imaginaries identifies the significance of temporal events as integral to facilitating social imaginaries in the first instance. One of Charles Taylor's contemporaries, Dilip Gaonkar (2002: 5), noted that social imaginaries do not exist 'eternally in the cosmos' and are only experienced and constituted through what he termed 'organised dramas of social temporality' (ibid.). This also hearkens back to Ingold's (1993; 2000) 'dwelling perspective' in the previous chapter which equally purported how temporal 'tasks' existed as observable elements of a social environment. Like Taylor and social imaginaries, Ingold's approach argues the importance of temporal moments of practice in establishing out an intimate sense of connectivity between individuals and the social worlds in which they reside. Gaonkar suggested that events such as the Olympic Games or other large scale sporting events represent the epitome of social imaginaries in

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<sup>41</sup>See Chapter 4 where I extend this discussion into the influence of Jesuit models of learning.

practice. In these large scale events, the citizens of a given nation come to envisage themselves as collectively engaged in a nation in the first instance, and then how that national whole is constituted in relation to a world of other nations. Such events are broadcast through an increasing array of new media outlets which enable those witnessing to imagine themselves as participating in a global audience of millions. The singing of national anthems, the waving of flags, competing in the colours of a nation all symbolise the various nationalisms. Those following such events, the spectators, come to align themselves with a social world of other spectators, imagining their connections to others in their following of their national heroes.

Rector's Day was not the Olympics. However, within the world of North Point, Rector's Day held as much significance. The same symbols were present after all: there was a school flag, students draped in school colours and the school chorus was performed. Rector's Day and the Investiture Ceremony, among others, can be theorized as the moments when the intangible NP imaginary became tangible to students. As such, the NP imaginary was indeed carried through the kind of 'symbols' that I explored in the previous chapter, but the 'organised dramas' such as Rector's Day encompassed these 'symbols' and performed them to the students. I will depart slightly from Gaonkar's (2002:7) 'organised dramas' and the assertion that the events in themselves represent imaginaries. The contention here is that it is only through specifically oriented performances that social imaginaries come alive. This analysis is grounded within existing anthropological entanglements with ritualised performance, leaning most pronouncedly on Victor Turner's (1967; 1969; 1988) use of theatrical rhetoric to explore the ways in which such performances constitute social life. This continues from his interpretations of the role of 'symbols', which I employed in the previous chapter, and offers an anthropological lens for interpreting social imaginaries.

More specifically, I will argue that the ceremonies presented here could be theorized as 'ritualised performances', a term I contend describes the role of such ceremonies in orienting students in the 'NP imaginary'. On one hand, I mean to imply that certain events at school were ritualised in the ways in which the events took place. I employ 'ritual' here as descriptive term to indicate how these events encompassed embodied and prescribed enactments embedded within a certain social milieu (Grimes 2012:38). In other words the enactments which took place during school events were practiced as if they had been practiced many times before, or at least they were imaged to have been. Skounti's (2009)

‘authentic illusion’ is important for interpreting how imagining these ritualised activities in this way established notions of belonging within a given group. However the approach I am adopting here centres on the ways in which the actions in the ceremonies were not simply enacted but performed. In particular, the performed actions of school ceremonies were distinguishable through their ‘quality’ (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:3). This term is utilised by Humphrey and Laidlaw to outline what they term the ‘ritual commitment’ (ibid: 88-110), which identifies the way in which actors participating in ritualised action acknowledge the differences in their actions from non-ritualised behaviours. Actions which are ‘ritualised’ are understood to be non-intentional (although not unintentional), operating within stipulated time and space, and understood as external to the participant, not of their own making but contained within a specific frame of existence. In other words, there were clearly defined ‘rules’ regarding what one should and shouldn’t do during ritualised performances. These rules were embodied in the performers, learned and nurtured over time predominantly through observation at North Point. The meaning of the ritualised actions was located in the ‘quality’ of those actions; it was in the ways in which certain enactments were conducted, performed and realised within a realm of preconceived understandings that brought about a sense of meaning and legitimacy in action (ibid). The crucial definition here of what is and what is not ritualised within North Point ceremonies is defined through the relation of events to ‘History’ at school. ‘History’ provided the specific frame of existence without which the acts performed in such events would be meaningless.

The importance of this approach is to identify the ways in which ceremonies such as Rector’s Day are distinctive within North Point but not separated from it. Assemblies share a lot in common with events such as these, but there is a difference in the ‘quality’ of action. An award given in assembly was heralded, but an award given on Rector’s Day was part of North Point History. Furthermore, I wish to stress here the importance of these events in the ways in which they gave ‘dramatic emphasis to unity and indivisibility’ (Bloch 1986: 51). I follow in the footsteps of Turner, (1967; 1969) ritualised events were ‘performed’, which is to say they were enacted within and for the benefit of a specific group. In his analysis, such performances reflected the importance of particular symbols, as described in the previous chapter, and offered a space where these symbols could be interpreted. The importance of ‘performance’ to Turner was the ways in which certain

actions were enacted within the presence of an audience of like-minded others. In this vein, ritualised actions were performative moments of creation; a space in which all aspects of a socio-cultural were brought to life (Schechner 1993). As such, these ritual engagements were moments where members of a given social group could witness the essential components of that social group, embedded within symbols, performed and enacted. This comes full circle to Gaonkar's assertions of social imaginaries, stated above, in which the ways in which people come to imagine their social world only comes to the fore through 'organised dramas'.

To reiterate then, performance was an action witnessed, but in this sense not just any action but one which was ritualised, distinguished from everyday actions and considered within a broader frame. I will develop the theme of performance more explicitly in Part 2 of the thesis, but for the outset here I wish to highlight the ways in which specific performances, namely Rector's Day and the Investiture Ceremony made the imagined world of North Point tangible to students. The ways which student imagined the 'North Pointer' and the 'gentleman' constituted what Charles Taylor referred to as an 'ideal type' (2004:24). The social imaginary is an act of interpretation and as such Taylor argues that there are 'ideal types' and opposing 'foul play' (ibid.), which encapsulate our abilities to understand (or not) a given scenario. Taylor offers an example of democratic voting. Those located within a social world of democratic voting will be familiar with the processes it entails through an engagement with its specific mechanics. The process is an act of imagination. The ways in which a voter can comprehend that they are participating with a grand frame of reference whereby what transpires in the ballot box occurs across a larger geographical region, shared amongst a group of others<sup>42</sup>. We can assess this process in terms of that which is 'ideal' or 'foul'. The act of at the ballot box would be meaningless without an underlying understanding that the vote is counted equally among a box full of others, essentially representing the 'ideal', where every citizen casts their vote in a fair election and each and every voice is heard. Counter to this, ideas of what is a 'normal' election are understood in relation to 'foul play', such as corruption, spoiled ballots, or

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<sup>42</sup> There are strong parallel with Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities*, a theoretical stance which Taylor drew heavily from as I noted in the introduction. The key difference here is where Anderson was more interested in how such democratic systems facilitated ways of imagining nation-states, Taylor argued that democracy or other forms of social organisation was only brought about through a particular imaginary which had developed in response to a particular model of modernity.

failures on some level to ensure that the conceived ‘norms’ have not been met (Taylor *ibid.*, 2007).

In essence we can transfer this notion into the social realm of North Point. As we shall see in the ethnography that follows, students understood their own lives as students in relation to the category of the North Pointer. Essential to their understanding was a frame of the ideal student as an all-rounder: the ‘gentleman’. This ‘gentleman’ was seemingly rooted within the ritualised performances of the school’s large events, firmly grounded in North Point History. Also central to student understandings was a perception of the ‘foul’, which was realised through discipline. I will explore how student imaginings of being North Pointers developed in relation to performance of the ideal and the foul by which the students of the school could imagine themselves collectively. This collectivity, I will argue was the foundations of what has been identified as the key aspect of middle class life in India (see Savaala 2010; Brosius 2011) nurturing an importance of belonging.

I will now turn towards an ethnographic exploration of two key events in the North Point calendar. They are by no means the only events of repute but they stand as the most significant landmarks in establishing the character of the ‘North Pointer’. I will now explore the ways in which the North Pointer was performed with particular reference to how these events were ritualised, thus offering collective interpretations of the ‘symbols’ which I have outlined in the previous chapter but also a collective establishment of the ‘norms’ which define being ‘North Pointers’. Through a sharing of these events, both in participation and by witnessing as an audience, the students of North Point came to see themselves as North Point. However I will also present a counterpoint to these celebrations of the North Pointer with a brief foray into discipline. I will argue that the enforcement of discipline served to offer the opposing ‘foul play’ to the North Point ideal. I will argue here that North Pointer did not stand to embody simply the ‘ideal’ but represented the combined force of both the ideal and the foul. The ideal was heralded as undeniably positive but it was through discipline and punishment where the students came to see themselves as unified and truly understand their sense of belonging; coming to see themselves as North Pointers belonging to North Point.

### **The Investiture Ceremony: Beginnings of a North Pointer**

The Investiture Ceremony occurs towards the start of the school year and is recognised as being the official opening of the school year. In 2011, this was held on a clear sunny day in March, a time so chosen so that all sections of the school had arrived and were under way<sup>43</sup>. A delay had been enforced upon the school due to political unrest in the district<sup>44</sup> prolonging the winter holidays and causing the school to open later than usual. The late opening had caused the loss of two weeks of senior school lessons and thus the early part of the school year had been restructured cancelling some events and conducting some weekend classes. It was telling that the Investiture Ceremony was not among the cancelled, although the event had been condensed in lieu of the rather truncated start to the academic year. That said, condensing the event meant a greater focus on what were deemed the most important aspects of the event namely the ‘Investiture’ of the new ‘Beadles’<sup>45</sup>.

The ‘investiture’ of the day was reserved for the creation of the school ‘Beadles’ and captains, which were titles bestowed upon students whose task was to assist in the running of the school. Such appointments were often reserved for students who were considered most like the archetypical ‘gentleman’, as outlined by the students in the above discussion. The Beadles and captains were ultimately selected by the Rector, albeit there were often consultations with some senior staff and the school prefect in identifying suitable candidates. There were two Beadles for each house<sup>46</sup>; one from the ranks of the day scholars and one from the boarders and effectively the Beadles were student leaders of the four school houses into which students were sorted. These students were selected by the Rector as students capable of the duties that would befall them, such as ensuring students arrive for class in time, helping out during school events, managing their houses during sports day and the general task of everyday discipline amongst the students. The chosen eight were deemed to be of ‘suitable’ character, to be ‘the example for all students to follow’, as Fr. Kinley said during the ceremony. The ‘Beadles’ were thus emblematic of ‘gentlemen’ selected on one hand for their all-round abilities but primarily it was their adjudged ‘character’ which set these candidates apart from the rest.

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<sup>43</sup> I should note here that the primary classes began a week or two later than the senior classes.

<sup>44</sup> See introduction with regards to the ‘Gorkhaland’ movement.

<sup>45</sup> The origin of this term was not known to students, who simply understood Beadles in relation to their roles at North Point. The term Beadle has a long relationship with church hierarchy, and such figures were laymen employed to assist in the running of the church. Jesuit schools adopted this term and these roles with regards to appointing student Beadles to assist in the running of the school (see Chapple 1993).

<sup>46</sup> The students of the school, on initial registration, were placed within one of the four ‘houses’: Fallon, O’Neill, Laenen and Depelchin. The house system as it exists currently was instigated in the 1950s and was used primarily during sports competitions and formed a central part of the annual sports day.

The Investiture Ceremony took place in the quadrangle, the architectural heart of the school. The building was truly dressed for the occasion. Multi-coloured flags representing the many nations of the world fluttered in the mountain breeze, stretched out above the heads of the assembled guests. Each archway was decorated with a trio of blue and white balloons, adorned with various quantities of blue and white paper tissue paper and ribbon. The scene was set and signalled to all students that this was a special occasion. The dressing of the quadrangle presented a separation from the 'normal' day. I watched as the students arrived, slightly earlier than usual, in the taxis or buses which brought them every day, observing as they looked around the setting for the events to follow. For the younger students this was still something new; for the elder classes, they had seen it all before. Like the suitably dressed up quadrangle, the student body was similarly dressed differently for the occasion. The day-scholars wore their usual uniform but the usual grey uniforms of the boarder students were absent and in their place a sea of blue blazers. The reason being this was a public occasion in as much that guests from outside the school, predominantly parents, would be on campus and as such the boarders were required to wear the same uniform as the day scholars. These examples presented the first marker of distinction for such occasions. The simple divide between boarders and day scholars was diminished by the donning of one uniform for the day. Likewise the decoration of the quadrangle also signalled a departure from the regular routine. The decorations marked out the space which was so frequently utilised during the school day. It was the space of the assembly; it was where the students wandered in between classes; it was where a few students would gather to eat their lunch. This was by no means a space unique to these occasions, but through layers of decoration the stage had been set for what was to follow. These markers signified that what was about to happen here was special.

The students sat in a vast semi-circle around the marble stage. Guests, parents and teachers would sit immediately in front of the stage, save for the front row, which was reserved for the 'Beadles elect', who sat dressed with sashes bearing the colours of their respective houses, and the school captain elect, who wore a sash in the school colours. I asked them briefly before the festivities began about the event that was to follow. They admitted they were a little nervous but accustomed to being on stage. The primary reason for their calmness was that they had seen it all before. Most of them, with one exception, had been at the school for a few years and thus seen a number of such ceremonies. 'He will just

copy us' One of the captains-to-be said 'We know what to do'. The student here was implying that they had seen a number of Investiture Ceremonies over the years and in witnessing these events had come to learn the processes involved. The students were all understandably excited but there were a few nerves. 'I hope I don't mess it up' One of them said, which he further clarified in saying, 'I might trip over on the stage or stand in the wrong place, that would be embarrassing'. There was a sentiment that even though they knew what to do it was still possible to 'mess it up'. In confessing to this, the student was alluding to the imaginings of this event through its 'ritualised performances'. They noted how they had seen this event before and they were confident what to do but they were also nervous about making a mistake.

The role of the Beadle was imagined to have always been part of life at North Point even though they had only been re-introduced by Father Kinley after a period of absence. Their role was to lead their houses, predominantly during intra-school activities such as Sports Day, and also to act as general ambassadors, representing the kind of student expected of others. The Beadles were entrusted to extend the reach of the staff in both standing as embodiments of the North Point 'ideal', but also as figures of authority.

The ceremony began with a small procession leading down from the staircase on the left of the stage, moving around half the assembled crowd, before parading down a central aisle to take to the stage. The procession was headed by a flag bearer, carrying the North Point flag, followed closely by the Beadles elect, with the group of Jesuit priests dressed in red and white cassocks, with the two school headmasters and Father Kinley bringing up the rear. The ceremony began with a hymn performed by members of the school 'choir'<sup>47</sup> before the Rector lit the ceremonial lamp to inaugurate the year. There were welcomes for new teachers and new students, and an acknowledgement of teacher departures, and there were a couple of intermittent songs from members of the choir. Here were the first points of what I have termed here, 'ritualised performance'. The students above had identified on some level that the events about to transpire were not unknown to them. It was telling that the same procession, ordered in precisely the same way, would take place on Rector's Day, which I discuss below. The lighting of the lamp and the opening procession mirrored certain aspects of the opening of a Christian Mass, whereby the same enactments signal to

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<sup>47</sup> They were really a small group of students, perhaps around ten or so, who enjoyed singing. Many of them were amongst the school's Christian students and thus regularly attended the school's religious services, where the majority of their choral performances were located.

the congregation that the event has started. All of the actions above were non-intentional in as much that they were perceived to be the way in which an event begins. Not just any event, of course, and the parallels between the opening of the Investiture Ceremony and Rector's Day indicate to students how these two events are significant and how they relate to one another.

There was also an assortment of prizes to be handed out to recognise the highest achievers in the previous year's exams. The students had been informed in advance and had been placed at suitably easy access points to avoid having to shuffle along rows of students to get to the stage. These awards had been cut down for the year to enable the ceremony to be condensed. These prizes were awarded in a very different manner to those awarded during 'Rector's Day', which was recognised as the annual prize-giving. Therefore awards given through the Investiture Ceremony were less coveted and the presentation process itself was more of a production line of awarding, with a student coming up onto the stage, a quick shake of the Rector's hand, before leaving the stage before the next student arrives. Part of this was down to the truncation of the event, evidently prioritising the 'investiture' component of the day. But more importantly this represents the difference between those enactments which were 'ritualised performances' and those which were not. The virtue of being conducted on the stage of the main event did not in itself define an act as 'ritualised', but rather it was the 'quality' of the action that was important. The action of collecting a prize at the Investiture Ceremony was a reward for achievements in the previous years' terminal examinations. These achievements were acknowledged in so much as being presented on stage, but were not conceptualised within NP History. There was no observable record of these awards, like the gold medal honours boards and unlike on Rector's Day, these awards were a side show, a supporting act to the main act; the investiture of the Beadles.

As I already stated, the bulk of the occasion was reserved for the 'investiture' of the new Beadles, who were invited onto the stage in two waves. First came the day scholars. They ascended the stairs, and stood facing their Rector, with their backs to the majority of the crowd. The flag bearer lowered the flag so that the students could place a hand upon it as they recited the Beadle's oath, repeating each line after their Rector, swearing to uphold the values of the school. In this action the students stood before the whole school, swearing to the school itself through the flag to act as was required of them. In doing so, this action

invoked the kind of ‘symbols’ discussed in the previous chapter – namely the school motto- and the school’s most senior students were distinguished through their ‘character’. This action celebrated a number of character traits, which the students in the earlier example made reference to, such being kind and generous and lifting your heart for others (invoking the school motto). On completion of this the students were awarded their badges. They returned to their seats only to be replaced by the boarder Beadles elect who repeated the whole process again.

Here I have outlined what I have termed ‘ritualised performance’ at North Point. The event was distinguished from the everyday performances of assemblies, for example, through the specific decoration of the space of the quadrangle and actions such as the procession and the lighting of the lamp. However I have sought to draw more attention to the specific enactments during the course of the event, rather than the event per se. The students in the opening example clearly demonstrated how they imagined a ‘North Pointer’ in relation to notions of the ‘gentleman’. This abstract concept was encapsulated and performed during the investiture of the Beadles, who stood as embodiments of ‘gentlemen’. The action of ‘investing’ the Beadles was notable for its celebration of a particular character, what the students imagined through the category of the ‘gentleman’. This ‘gentleman’ then subsequently acted as an ‘expectation’ to the students, such as the Lower Division students I encountered in my focus groups, who were able to vocalise to me the ‘ideal type’, which they expected of themselves as students of North Point. ‘Ideal types’ such as the ‘gentleman’, I contend, were important in shaping student imaginaries. I would also argue that the significance of the ritualised performances mentioned here gain greater significance when considered in collaboration with those enacted on Rector’s Day. Students combined the two ‘ideals’, intertwining the ideal of the ‘gentleman’ with the ‘ideal’ of Rector’s Day, which was the ‘all-rounder’.

The Investiture Ceremony was the opening of the school year. It served to summarize the year just passed while laying the foundations for the year to follow. There were great similarities between this event and Rector’s Day, which was held towards the end of the school year, usually around October before the students depart for the ‘Puja holidays’<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> The ‘Puja Holidays’, or often simply known as the ‘Pujas’, referred to the two Hindu festivals of Dusshera and Diwali, which occurred towards the end of September/beginning of October. The Hindu calendar is lunar based and as such these holidays fluctuated in terms of dates, however events such as Rector’s Day, the school sport’s day and other events such as the Major Play, were often arranged in the days before the

This year (2011), it was staged in November and was shortened in response to events outside of the school<sup>49</sup>. Like the Investiture ceremony, however, it was too important to cancel.

### **Rector's Day**

'No other event of the school year could compare with the great day set aside for the celebration of the Rector's feast'. This rather bold claim appeared in a section of the centenary edition of the North Point Annual, outlining how important this particular occasion was considered at the school, not only within the present but during the school's past. However it was notable that the annual had also stated that Rector's Day was no longer celebrated. There seemed a stark contrast between the declarations pertaining to the grandeur and significance of the event, on the one hand, and the statement that it was no longer a part of the North Point calendar, on the other. The centenary annual was published in 1988, a period of the school's history which was run predominantly by Canadian Jesuits<sup>50</sup>. Fr. Kinley himself made reference to this difference and offered explanations as to why this might be the case. During an informal chat with the Class 11 students a few days prior to Rector's Day, he revealed his own memories of the presentation of his gold medal. 'They [the Canadians] had no concept of occasion', he remarked. 'When I received my gold medal, they just handed it to me one day, shook my hand, and said well done. That was it. This is not how you give a Depelchin gold medal'.

At the outset, it was evident that Rector's Day had changed over the years and in particular the role of the central figure, the Rector, had implemented these changes. Kinley's critique of his own school days had alluded to what he perceived to be a failure in the presentation of his medal. One of the first changes Kinley made was to restore Rector's Day as a prominent event in the school calendar. Thus in the eight years since Kinley's stewardship began, Rector's Day had come to be imagined as the definitive event of North Point. I will argue here that it was the ways in which the event was composed of ritualised

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holidays in order to allow as many parents as possible to attend. This was largely with boarder parents in mind, as many would travel to collect their children for the long break, thus they could travel a few days earlier and join in the celebrations.

<sup>49</sup> An earthquake had hit the region in September and subsequent heavy rainfall had caused a large landslide that devastated the arterial road which connected North Point with the town. Thus, the Puja holidays had begun early and Rector's Day, the sports day and the Major Play had been postponed.

<sup>50</sup> The school was run for a number of years by Canadian Jesuits, one of whom remains at the school as an emeritus advisor.

performances which served to reinforce student imaginings of what it meant to be a North Pointer. In particular I will focus upon the key prize of the Depelchin gold medal which cements the imagined views of being North Pointers.

Rector's Day was an annually held day of celebration, which awarded the best all-round students across the school. In addition to the prizes given to the best students, prizes were also awarded to teachers, usually in commemoration of length service to the school. The most coveted and heralded of all the prizes was the Depelchin gold medal. I first brought attention to this prize with the identification of the honours board in chapter 1. It was named after Fr. Henri Depelchin, the founder of North Point, and the names of past winners were immortalised on the honours board in the entrance foyer. The example of the student in Chapter 1 identified Fr. Kinley, and even Depelchin himself, as 'all-rounders', who were sources of inspiration for the present students. The evidence from Kinley's testament, and the details in the centenary annual, were a stark contrast to the views of the students. The low key presentation of the Gold Medal and the absence of Rector's Day entirely in the recent past, presented a notable contradiction to the students' assertions that Rector's Day and the presentation of the Gold Medal had always been presented in the manner they were accustomed to. From the outset, it seemed that students imagined the gold medal prize across all eras of North Point in the ways in which it was understood in 2011. This demonstrates the NP imaginary in action. It was clear at this stage that students imagined their school through their own experience. What I will show here is that students considered Rector's Day significant because the ritualised performances indicated that this event had occurred repeatedly over time, thus forming a crucial part of North Point History.

As with the Investiture Ceremony, the Rector's Day saw the quadrangle once again decorated with the same international menagerie of flags hanging overhead with the accompanying blue and white balloons draped over the arches. But there was a notable difference, and that was the red carpet lining one side of the quadrangle. Stationed along side this carpet were a number of students drawn from the school's Scout group and National Cadet Corps. These students stood as if awaiting the arrival of an international head of state, bolt upright, hands at their sides, staring straight ahead. This carpet paved the way for the opening procession of Rector's Day, which once again offered strong parallels with the Investiture Ceremony. As with the Investiture Ceremony, all the action

took place on the stage with the audience gathered in neat rows, the front rows reserved for parents and teaching staff. The similarities between the two occasions identify the links between them, but also how these events were somehow distinct from the everyday.

Despite the similarities, there were some differences between the two events, which seemed to signal the greater importance of Rector's Day. The day began with the sounds of the marching band. The musicians, who hailed from the local army band, strode dramatically along a red carpet in the colonnade surrounding the quadrangle. Striding steadily behind were the 'Beadles', the students elected from Class 12 as the student leaders of the four houses, wearing sashes of three shades of blue demonstrating their unity as members of the same school. Hot on their heels were the headmasters, both senior and primary, attired in black gowns and mortarboard. Following closely behind were the Jesuit contingent and Fr. Kinley himself.

The band was not the only musical interlude; there was a time set aside to show the best of student musical talent. The crowd was serenaded first by violinists performing pieces from Mozart and Bach, and promptly followed by classical guitarists flaunting a full range of delicate techniques, fusing some regional resonances with more international sounds. These particular music performances were distinctive from the music performed on other occasions, such as Teacher's Day or during the Major Play (which I discuss in chapter 6). The music during these other events was drawn from what might be termed 'popular music', featuring an assortment of melodies from Bollywood and songs from the international market. The choice of music at the Rector's Day, with its classical and international orientation, thus added to the growing distinction of this event from others at North Point.

Now I shall turn my attention to the award presentations, which constituted the central tenet of this event, and which were enacted as 'ritualised performances'. The awards were presented on the stage, and were presented in order of Class progression, beginning with the primary Classes and then moving up. First the general Class prizes were awarded, celebrating the best 'all-round' student form each Class before the more specific awards for achievements in various fields. The final awards were the two gold medals: the Depelchin and Stanford gold medals, respectively.

Each award was presented in the same fashion. Fr Kinley had invited two of the parents to present the awards. One of whom was the parent of a recipient of one of Class awards although this was incidental and they were chosen as they were both employed as university lecturers in Kolkata. This was, as I was lead to understand, done each Rector's Day. The presentation began with the reading aloud of the student's name and the achievement of that student. That student came forward, accepted his award (in the form of a certificate) amidst applause from the gathered audience shook hands with the guest speaker and the Rector, before posing with the Rector and the presenter for a photograph. At this moment, the student's parents were also invited to 'share in the moment' as Fr. Kinley put it, and joined their son for the photograph.

As noted earlier, these presentations were notably different from those awarded during the Investiture Ceremony. There were general prizes that were awarded to a student in each Class<sup>51</sup>; prizes gifted to the students who performed well in their studies, as well as participating in sports and other co-curricular activities. In addition to these achievements, the awarded students were also required to possess a certain 'character', meaning that they would be well-mannered, polite to teachers and their students, across all aspects of school life. In previous years, prizes had been awarded to the best student in each section<sup>52</sup>. However in an effort to trim down proceedings<sup>53</sup>, the prizes had been cut down. There were prizes for best scouts, and 'colours'<sup>54</sup> awarded for outstanding achievements in fields such as athletics, performing arts, academics, basketball and even for competing in interschool quizzes. Awards extended beyond the student body and there were awards for 'Best Teacher' and a new award for 'Best Parent'

With the exception of the awarding of the gold medallists, whom I will describe below, the majority of the prizes followed this 'ritualised' enactment. The difference here from those

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<sup>51</sup> Read 'Class' in the Indian sense, as in a whole year group of students. This was one prize for the best student from the four sections, selecting one out of around 140 students.

<sup>52</sup> There were 4 sections in each class, A, B, C and D, except for primary which had three, A, B and C. The senior division, Classes 11 and 12 also had three, organised into Science, Commerce and Arts.

<sup>53</sup> Again this was attributed to the lateness of the event, owing to events noted earlier, including the September Earthquake and a series of landslides across the region. Other celebrations, including the annual Diwali celebrations at school, were muted or cancelled, as they were in other parts of Darjeeling, due to the nearby Bijanbari bridge collapse, which claimed many lives.

<sup>54</sup> The awarding of colours is a common aspect of private schooling whereby individuals who have excelled in certain fields are awarded, in this instance a 'blue coat'. I found this a bit strange as every student had a blue jacket anyway, but this 'blue coat' was a pale sky blue in colour and with a specific badge sewn on to the pocket to note the event for which the colours were awarded. On the rare occasion of three blue coats being achieved, a student would be awarded a 'white coat'.

prizes given at the Investiture Ceremony was that the Rector's Day prizes were considered to be representative of 'North Pointers'. These prizes, like the celebration of the gentleman through the Beadles, were considered to be part of NP History. Despite the changes to the routine and the reduction of awards, there was still an ardent observation of a specific form of presentation. The ex-North Pointers among the parents were also identified by Kinley as they took to the stage with their sons. The presence of the achievements of the former North Pointer aligning with those of the present drew further comparisons between the North Point of the Past and North Pointer today.

The school's most prestigious award was the Depelchin Gold Medal, which was given annually, on this day, to the student from Class 10<sup>55</sup> who had excelled in studies, in games and other co-curricular activities – in essence, the perfect North Pointer. Since the 1990s a new prize, the Stanford Gold Medal<sup>56</sup>, had been added to proceedings. This medal was given to the best Class 12 student along the same lines of the Depelchin Medal, however it was introduced later as the school only expanded its Classes to include 11 and 12 in the 1990s. The medallists were dressed in blue academic gowns, complete with mortarboards distinguishing them from the rest of the students who received awards, symbolising the superior status of their achievement. The medallists were joined on stage by their parents to accept the awards. The rector himself had chosen the candidates for the award albeit in consultation with some senior members of staff. The presentation of the award was not a celebration of individual achievement, but of imagined ideal model of student found at North Point. The performance of the award ceremony presented an image of the 'North Pointer' to the students. The performance demonstrates that the presentation and role of 'gold medals' at North Point in 2011 contrasted sharply with the more private presentation during Kinley's time as a student.

As noted above, there are a great number of parallels between the Investiture Ceremony and the Rector's Day that are worthy of note. Firstly, they are structured in a near identical way. Both begin with a procession containing students who are being recognised in some way, either as 'Beadles' or as outstanding examples of 'North Pointers', who are paraded around in front of all the others. Both ceremonies began with the lighting of a lamp as a

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<sup>55</sup> Formerly the senior most Class in the school until the introduction of Class XI and XII in the 1990s.

<sup>56</sup> This new award was named after former Rector, Fr. Stanford, who was a Canadian Jesuit who served the school, its neighbouring college and the community of Darjeeling at large. The award was introduced during the 'Canadian' era of North Point, and the then Canadian Rector at the time of the new award's introduction, Fr. Stanford, was said to be the ideal representative of the award.

symbolic inauguration.<sup>57</sup> Both events were staged in the quadrangle, decorated in near identical fashion and both events were witnessed by the whole school. Boarders would forgo their usual all-grey uniform for the blue blazers<sup>58</sup>, laying foundations for perceptions of unity to emerge through the performances. Like with the students coming together in assemblies to sing the school chorus together, singing their unity, these events stood to celebrate the ‘North Pointer’ through the perceived ‘ideal’ of the ‘gentlemen’, represented by the Beadles and the ‘ideal’ all-rounders of the gold medallists.

Finally, both events provided the backdrop where the importance of student character was acknowledged, in the form of the ‘Beadles’ during the Investiture Ceremony, but more so in relation to the medallists from Rector’s Day. Rector’s Day was perhaps more representative of ‘all-rounderness’ in an explicit sense, as it continually offered models of such students from across the spectrum of school life, even encompassing the teachers and the parents.

In short, both the Investiture Ceremony and the Rector’s Day could be viewed as performances of North Point. These events established all elements of what the school was, what it represented, and provided the students with a framework within which to place themselves. Within these ceremonies, the symbols which students came to encounter in their everyday lives - the honours boards, their uniform, the Beadles, the social hierarchy, the ‘History’, the school chorus - are all anchored within a performance which specifically draws attention to . The ‘ideal’ model, as posited by Taylor (2004), is ritually performed. The ‘ideal’ students, the all-rounders of Rector’s Day, the gentlemen of the Investiture Ceremony, are distinguished through certain actions which are imagined to be ritualised as such actions are non-intentional.

This is to say, the students in the opening segment of this chapter each outlined a shared understanding of what it meant to be a ‘North Pointer’. The traits and characteristics these students outlined were present within the prism of the ceremonies such as the Investiture Ceremony and Rector’s Day. Some of the actions were ‘ritually performed’ that is to say

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<sup>57</sup> This lamp was often employed during smaller school events and on larger religious events. The lamp has four separate wicks, which guests were invited to light in the opening of the event. The Alumni quiz and the Workshop referenced in chapter 7 began with the lighting of these multiple wicks.

<sup>58</sup> As noted earlier, all events of this kind required boarders to wear day scholar dress, i.e. a blue blazer. All inter-class events, such as the singing and choral elocution, also permitted such dress to be adopted. The only other occasion was during ‘outings’, the monthly events when boys were permitted to leave school for the day.

distinguished from the normal everyday flow of events and positioned within North Point 'History'. The distinctive way in which these were performed singled out these components of the ceremonies as 'ideals' as Charles Taylor (2004) argued in his concept of social imaginaries. Within these performances, the imagined and the physical worlds of North Point are aligned and the students can observe the NP family gathered together, witnessed and celebrated.

I do not wish to argue that events such as those presented here were the sole source of a student's sense of being 'North Pointers'. Here, I wish to contend that such events were some of the most visible and important markers for students to establish the 'norms' and expectations of North Point. The norms I refer to here are the importance of 'being gentlemen', the significance of being all-rounders, emphasizing unity and cultivating ideas of belonging. However what I also seek to stress is that these events operated in tandem with more banal practices such as the everyday enforcement of 'discipline'.

So far it seems that all is well at North Point, which is far from the case. This is a school full of over a thousand pupils, and evidently there is going to be more than a little discord within. It is this discord that I shall turn my attention now. In the following section, I wish to explore how student imaginations are shaped not merely by taking part in ceremonies and events but managed and performed within everyday acts of discipline.

### **The North Pointer, Contested: Discipline at School**

The students at school seemed to agree precisely what they saw as 'North Point', and within that what it meant to be a 'North Pointer'. However I was readily aware throughout the discussions that I had with students, such as those described above, that this was not the whole picture. There were regular cases of students whose behaviour or performances in the classroom had dipped below the required standards. In such cases, certain measures of 'discipline' were enforced. In this section, I wish to flesh out the discussion instigated above with some examples of those students who did not assume the particular images of North Point. I shall explore how students became aware of the boundaries within which they could operate, and how certain figures in the school were central to students' perceptions of what they should and shouldn't do. This will contribute to my overall discussion of how the students imagine themselves as 'North Pointers' by illustrating not only how they challenged the restrictions of the school environment and how they were

punished for doing so, but also how they ultimately understood this as an essential part of ‘togetherness’ at North Point. Those students honoured in the ritualised performances of the ‘ideal’ described above were not representative of all students within the school. It was expected by teachers and the Rector that all students should strive to attain such ideals, and they were aware that if such expectations were not met - if students did not behave like the gentlemen they were expected to be - then there would be repercussions. I went to great lengths earlier in this chapter to illustrate the role of the investiture of the Beadles in offering students an ‘ideal type’ to aspire towards. Later in the year, these apparent ‘gentlemen’ came under fire in an incident which threatened to damage student perceptions of the heralded ideal, the ‘North Pointer’.

I will begin this endeavour with a brief story of mobile phones and a boy who ran away. The story unfolded rather dramatically one afternoon, as the teachers of the primary division sat in their staff room. Their students had long since departed for their homes, and another teacher rushed in with some troubling news. ‘I can’t believe it, Sagar has run away’. There were gasps of surprise around the few gathered in the room. ‘But he was good student’, said one of the teachers who had been newly moved to the primary section. ‘He was in my class last year, but he was top of the class’. There was an inflection in his voice that suggested he couldn’t believe his own words. Sagar was a boarder student in Class 9. He had recently turned 15 and, according to his former Class teacher (cited above), he was well on the way to good grades in his board examinations. The staff room was rife with speculations as to what might have happened. Most suspected bullying; others suggested there was a girl involved. It transpired to be a touch of both.

Sagar’s family was from Kolkata<sup>59</sup> but they also had a home in the town of Siliguri<sup>60</sup>, which was only 3 hours from Darjeeling by road. The boy was discovered when he arrived home in Siliguri the following day, and the story began to unravel. I managed to acquire bits of information from a few teachers and students, as the story began to spread across the school. Apparently, one of the senior boarders had concealed a mobile phone somewhere at the school and was illicitly loaning it out to students. Sagar wanted to make

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<sup>59</sup> The state capital of West Bengal, located around 500km from Darjeeling.

<sup>60</sup> The second largest town in West Bengal about 80km by road from North Point, most commonly reached by road, which took around 3 hours. A number of wealthy families would keep a second home in Siliguri, either secondary to a home in Kolkata or in Darjeeling.

use of this mobile phone<sup>61</sup> in order to speak with his girlfriend. The boy with the phone teased Sagar about his girlfriend, occasionally letting him use the phone for a short time, then taking it away. The prolonged teasing eventually seemed to take its toll on Sagar, leading him to take more drastic action and run away<sup>62</sup>.

Runaways were extremely rare and most were caught in the immediate surroundings of the school. There were guards on each exit of the school, both to prevent unwanted trespassers, but also to prevent those who should be on the school premises from leaving. It was partly due to this reason that the boarders wear a different colour blazer to the day scholars. Running away alone was a serious issue, but perhaps more significant here was the perceived failures of the school 'Beadles'. As this act occurred within the boarding division, the four boarding Beadles were brought into question for either not being aware of the issue or for not bringing it to the attention of school authorities. These students had been invested, as we saw above, with the responsibility of assisting in the everyday running of the school. But they were also seen as key arbitrators of student disputes. The revelation of Sagar's story was in itself a black mark against the Beadles, but as the story unravelled the role of the Beadles appeared to be more explicit. The full truth of their involvement was never revealed to me<sup>63</sup>, but what happened next illustrated the severity of the case and the importance of the position of the Beadles, not as individuals but as symbols of North Point.

The significance of what had happened was demonstrated in the events of the following day, when the Rector recalled the basketball team, who were at that moment attending a Basketball Carnival in the town of Kalimpong, about 40 km and 1 ½ hours by road away. It took a calming phone call from Fr. Kinley's own brother, who it just so happened had been recruited to lead that year's basketball teams, to convince him to reconsider his decision. But the Rector's anger was not diminished, and one of the boys at the Carnival,

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<sup>61</sup> Mobile phones were strictly prohibited on campus, largely for reasons outlined here.

<sup>62</sup> I should highlight that the sequence of events presented here was as I heard it from a couple of students. This is not to suggest that they fabricated it in any way, but perhaps some finer points or motivations remain unclear. The story as presented here seemed to be more or less how it was understood by teachers and other students, but it suffices to say that runaways do happen, and students persisted to subvert the rules to keep prohibited items such as phones.

<sup>63</sup> I did try fishing for information with some teachers and students but either they didn't want to talk about it or they simply didn't know what had happened. In the case of the students they seemed anxious to offer any insights which might suggest their own personal involvement and the severity of the incident was such that they could be potentially risking their own futures as North Point students if they were found out to be involved.

who had been party to what had happened, was promptly returned to school that day. The threat to recall one of his teams was a serious proposition. The very model of the North Pointer was premised upon all-rounder capabilities, and the school had founded this reputation on regular appearances (and victories) at sports events. In this instance, the perceived breach of school rules was severe enough to overpower all other engagements. The incident was amplified in severity as the Beadles were involved. Kinley would not permit individuals who had breached the school rules to remain in office. Their specific offence was unclear to me as I had relied upon a number of sources during the case and none of which were identical to one another. I had heard rumours from the students that it was the Beadles themselves who were directly involved in articulating and facilitating the use of mobile phones amongst the boarders, but others countered these claims and suggested that the Beadles had simply failed to report the situation and, as the case got out of hand with Sagar running away, they were being held responsible. It was certain that the Beadles had known about the possession of the phones and failed to act upon this. Their actions were deemed a breach of their investiture as ‘gentlemen’ of North Point. In the days that followed, all four boarder Beadles were requested to hand in their badges. All of them complied.

Most of this incident revolved around mobile phones, the most highly prohibited item at school with any student caught in possession could face of Rs 10,000<sup>64</sup> and possible expulsion from the school. The reasoning for this harsh punishment was largely attributed to the cases such as Sagar’s. This was primarily an issue with regards to the boarding section of the school and it was cases such as Sagar’s purely served to reinforce the potential disruptive impact mobile phones can have.

Father Kinley had made statements of his feelings on the subject in an assembly earlier in the year. ‘We have a rule, boys. It is written in your diary’. He was referring to the same diary issued to each and every student at the start of the year. ‘No mobile phones. Any mobile phone I find I will smash right here in front of you all’. When the Rector made his initial threats he thought that he had dealt with the issue. However one day when I was arriving in school I met a very excited student who told me that there had been a discovery the previous night. He was one of the senior boys and had been a source of information for

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<sup>64</sup> This amount equates to about a third of the annual fees required of day scholar students. It is an amount difficult to equate although at the time of field work this would be about £150. This would equate to over a month’s wage of one of the students’ families thus would constitute a significant punishment.

me throughout the Sagar case and was excited to tell me the latest development. ‘They found a whole bag of mobile phones!’ He smiled at the thought of what was going to happen. ‘And now Father [Kinley] is going to smash them all’. Later that morning the Rector took the stage at the assembly and carried out his threat.

There was an important distinction between these acts of discipline, in terms of which were performed and which were not. The destruction of the mobile phones was an act that was performed; it took place on a stage, in front of an audience of students. The Rector had established a rule and an expectation in his earlier declaration that he would destroy any phones that he found. In performing the destruction of the phones, the Rector established that expectations would have to be met, otherwise there would be consequences. Inversely, the stripping of the Beadles took place in private. They were invited to come and privately surrender their badges. Although this action was known within the school, it was not performed, in that it was not witnessed by an audience. The destruction of the phones was an act of enforcing a strict school rule, amongst all individuals. The act of deposing the Beadles was an act against individuals, not against the symbol of the Beadle. The Investiture Ceremony had celebrated the symbols, that is to say, the Beadles, rather than the individuals themselves. I argued that the Investiture Ceremony established expectations of how all students should act. These expectations remained in spite of the failures of the students who had been selected to fulfil the role of Beadles. The stripping of the Beadles of their roles was known to all students in as much that they would understand that there were punishments for breaking the rules regardless of who you were. But the lack of ceremony in stripping away these titles, I suggest, sought to preserve the model of the ‘ideal’, which remained important to the NP Imaginary.

The above case also highlights the levels of resistance to the rules of school life. Despite the threats of punishment, students still sought to keep mobile phones and other electronic devices hidden. Despite the claims of being a school that thrived on ‘togetherness’, students fell out to the degree that one might take drastic action such as running away. As I delved deeper, I became aware that students themselves accepted that there would always be those who didn’t fit the ideal ‘gentleman’, as outlined and celebrated during the Investiture Ceremony.

The issue of mobile phones was a contentious one amongst some of the students. Before the Sagar incident I had spoken with students about the school rules and some of the boarders, particularly those who were in the older Classes, such as 10, 11 and 12, were often critical of North Point's strict ban on mobile phones. One Class 11 student remonstrated with me that he knew other schools were allowed phones. He argued that the older students were responsible enough and knew not to use the phones during lessons. However not all students agreed, particularly the younger Lower Division students who held my focus groups with. The Lower Division students generally agreed it was a positive rule reasoning that some brands of mobile phone were desirable and could cause jealousy amongst students. There was evidently some discord with regards to school rules which was to be expected in a school but the students of North Point imagined this within the prism of their sense of collective belonging. Discipline brought the group together. This became clearer as I extended my discussion to more general applications of discipline.

In one of my later 'focus group' discussions with a group of Class 7 students, who were between the ages of 12 and 14, one of the students mentioned how North Pointers were 'good guys'. In response, one of his friends retorted, 'not all of us sir'. The student then argued his case that some students still misbehaved. The student claimed there 'was always one in every class'. The other students agreed that there was always a 'troublemaker' or a student who never handed in their homework. However this did not mean that this student was the only one who suffered the consequences of his actions. There was further agreement amongst the Lower Division students whom I spoke too that the enforcement of discipline was rather unfair. The students told me about their experiences of discipline and how a section of thirty would often be punished in the wake of the action of only two or three of that group 'Sir we always get punished. Everyone gets punished, and then those boys who did it, they don't care'. Other students agreed that the discipline was 'strict' and identified that they didn't enjoy being punished when they had themselves done nothing wrong.

To give an example, if a number of boarders had misbehaved during the end of the day study period, making noise or not doing their work, then quite often this would mean that this entire group of students would receive a punishment. By entire group here, I am referring to all the boarders from that section, so if we were talking about the Lower Division Classes then the punishment would apply to all students from Classes 6, 7 and 8. One of the most common punishments was that a given Class would not be permitted to

buy 'tuck' when they were supposed to. Each section of boarding students was allowed to buy items from the 'tuck' shop, a snack stand which operated during breaks and lunches for day students to buy food from, but was also open to differing sections of boarders twice a week. For the boarder students this was all the more harsh as the kinds of food available in the 'tuck' shop, such as sweets, chocolates, and other street food snacks such as momos<sup>65</sup> were not available to them for the most part as they ate their meals in the school canteen. An even harsher punishment was the removal of an end-of-month outing<sup>66</sup>, which had been known to be taken away from the whole school on serious instances. It was not the case that any misdemeanour by one student would result in the punishment of all, but rather with cases of groups of students within a class or section, as it was not necessarily known who the perpetrators were. I asked the students why they didn't do something about their friends' behaviour. 'No one likes a complainer', was the resigned response. It was evident here that discipline served as a practical enforcer of unity at school. The adage that no one liked a complainer suggested that students were reliant on their relations with others to be successful as North Pointers. They needed to have friends, to socialise, to be part of the school. Which is more; they suffered discipline together emphasizing their belonging as a group.

It was clear from the above examples that students had a certain knowledge that not all students at school fitted within their imagined views of North Point. However, such students actually reinforced the imaginary rather than challenged it. The perception that there was 'one in every class' suggested that the 'foul' behaviour had a place within student expectations of school life. Even more so the acts of discipline seemed to create unity, as students were forced to bear punishments together. Instead of directing their frustrations at other students, they adjudged the discipline itself to be 'strict'. In Taylor's (2004) terms the students were imagining the 'one in every class' to constitute the 'foul play' in their expectations at school. So on one hand the students witness the North Pointer performed in ceremonies described earlier and they also witness the models of studentship contrary to those values, which they experience through discipline. This then provided

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<sup>65</sup> Momos were steamed dumplings, usually filled with mixed green vegetables or pork. This dish was a Nepali variation of a Tibetan dish which was widely available as a popular snack at eateries across Darjeeling and wildly popular with the region's school children.

<sup>66</sup> At the end of every month the boarder students were permitted a day outing, usually with a number of students on a Saturday and another group on a Sunday. The primary boarders, Class 3, 4 and 5 were permitted to spend the weekend in the custody of family or guardians, from Friday evening to Sunday evening.

students with an imagined spectrum to which they could compare themselves. There is also an indication here of the sharing of values, as purported by Savaala's (2010) explorations of the middle class. In the examples here, the school rules are a value system of sorts to which the students shared with one another. This sharing of value was in part a means through which they could imagine themselves to be like one another.

Herein lies the significance of this chapter in the outlining of student experiences at North Point. The North Pointer is performed and contested in the course of student experiences, as it comes to embody the decorated all-rounder and the strictly disciplined school boy. Above all the North Pointer is a point of reference, a symbol embedded within the social landscape of the school, which students employ to imagine their relations, good or bad, to one another. In the course of this chapter, the nuances of a North Pointer have come to light; most importantly of all, how the students were enabled to imagine a school of a thousand like-minded others.

## **Conclusions**

In the first chapter, I offered an insight into how the world of North Point is constituted through a landscape of symbols that were refracted through a prism of the school's 'History'. This chapter continued this story by fleshing out its chief protagonist, the 'North Pointer'. I demonstrated here how the concept of the 'North Pointer' was one which influenced each and every student at North Point. Primarily, this category emerged in response to ritualised performances on a grand scale. The Investiture Ceremony celebrated the 'all-rounder'. Such events created desires in others who wanted to emulate their cohort, but also laid down the foundations of a sense of unity. I observed as such events were perceived as a celebration of ideal students. This imagining of the North Pointer created a point of reference around which all those at school could refer to. The concepts of North Point and the North Pointer created rallying points to which all students could relate to and thus generate a sentiment of belonging within the school.

The performances were the model of the ideal type and these were reinforced by everyday acts of discipline. In cases where a severe breach of the school's norms had occurred, such discipline was actually performed, such as the destruction of the mobile phones, or the removal of the captains. In these instances, the opposite of the ideal was brought into play as a counterpoint to the heralded 'North Pointer'.

This chapter has ultimately been about connections, principally how students imagined their connections to one another, and between themselves and previous students. The key unit of imagining this connectivity was through the North Pointer. This category was embedded within the History of North Point, as evidenced from the ritual performances, imagined to have been conducted today as they always were. This imagining of an 'authentic illusion' offered a wider sense of belonging than simply the here and now of North Point, but a belonging to a grander story. By imagining the ritualised performances as repeated over time, the students imagine their own lives in the contexts of all those lives who have also passed through the North Point gates. Through participating in the performed events develop their sense of belonging.

In the following chapter I will explore this dimension, which takes the form of the 'NP Spirit'. This imagined concept provides the missing links between North Point and the North Pointer. The NP Spirit was the difference between North Point and other schools. It was the reason why every student imagined themselves as a unified family. It was, in essence, what made North Point unique.

# III

## School Spirit: Finding ‘Belonging’ through ‘Competition’

### Introduction

In the preceding chapters I have explored the composition of a concept I have outlined as the ‘NP imaginary’. I have examined how the particular space of North Point mapped out an environment that nurtured and encouraged a certain ‘NP imaginary’, which enabled students to imagine themselves within the world they live. I have shown how this imaginary arose initially through an engagement with the school landscape through which students experienced North Point as a story. The story of the school was embedded within various observable symbols such as the school chorus and the school motto which constituted the school landscape. I have also investigated the importance of ritualised performance, where events such as Rector’s Day served to perform the ‘expectations’ of North Point and outline the ‘ideal’ North Pointer. The performances of North Point were imagined as an ‘authentic illusion’ which students came to imagine their school existing now as it always had done, thus laying the foundations for students to imagine themselves as North Pointers. All of the above is encompassed within what I have termed the ‘NP Imaginary’. I will now examine how this imaginary shaped, and was shaped by, student interactions within North Point.

In this chapter I wish to illustrate how students saw their relations to one another as mediated by a concept that they referred to as the ‘NP Spirit’. The ‘NP Spirit’ seemed to encapsulate the very essence of the ‘belonging’ which the students imagined in relation to the school. I will explore the concept of the ‘NP Spirit’, a concept that was elusive yet prevalent across my experiences at North Point. Most importantly I will examine how students imagined their relations to one another through a system of ‘competition’ which

structured their reflections of themselves against how they saw others. This relational process, I will argue here, is a crucial step in development towards middle class lives.

This chapter provides further insight into the ways in which social imaginaries shaped students' social action and inversely how that social action shaped students' social imaginaries. I will focus on how the students imagined 'NP Spirit' as a unifying concept that encapsulated student sentiments of 'togetherness', which, as I have hinted in previous chapters, was imagined by students as something that defined North Point. I should stress at this juncture that 'NP Spirit' is an ethnographic category that students routinely appropriated in conversations with me and with each other. As such I will begin with some student perspectives on the 'NP Spirit', examining how it was imagined and understood. I will frame the explorations here primarily within the perspectives I garnered from the focus groups with the Lower Division (Class 6, 7 and 8) students, as these provided my initial insights into the 'NP Spirit'. However as important as this concept was to students, it soon became apparent that the 'NP Spirit' was rather difficult to grasp. Furthermore the sense of unity imagined through the NP Spirit seemed rather utopic and potentially masked the everyday interactions between students. In this chapter I will explore both the veneer of the NP Spirit and the everyday acts of interacting through which I contend students developed a sense of 'competition' with one another. This chapter will thus explore how the imagined unity of the NP Spirit and everyday competitions between students combined to create an orientation to the world to both envisage themselves as belonging to a given group but also being able to articulate one's self within that group.

I will begin with an outline of what is meant here by this term, examining how it appeared and how it was used by students. I will then frame the analysis here within a concept of 'competition', which captures how students envisioned not only their relations to their fellow students but also to the world beyond. In order to do this I will situate the actions of the students within a broader examination of the 'new middle class' to demonstrate the parallels between the lives of students at school and their potential lives beyond. I draw inspiration here from Mark Liechty's (2003) use of the term 'competition' to describe the ways in which families in Kathmandu sought to align their own consumer habits and lifestyles in the ways of others with whom they likened themselves. I will extend this discussion to situate this analysis within the broader literature pertaining to the new Indian middle classes. I will make particular reference to the ways in which the new middle

classes are seemingly constituted through similar processes of competition. I will further flesh the explorations out with particular reference to how students sought to align themselves with other students most like themselves. Finally, I will examine the key role of sports as a marker of ‘competition’ by which the students were able to compare themselves with others. In doing so, I will delve into the roots of how ‘playing together’ became a template for student imaginaries of the ‘belonging’ which, as I have argued in the previous two chapters, was a key marker of North Point and being North Pointers.

### **‘We just feel it’: The ‘NP Spirit’**

There was an evident importance placed on unity and belonging across the student body of North Point. This pursuit of belonging has noticeable parallels with the explorations of the new middle class of India from the Introduction of the thesis. Anthropological accounts make reference to ways in which the new Indian middle class consider themselves within a global world, thus relying upon particular concepts of tradition and heritage imagined and practiced through social categories of kinship, religion and others to cultivate a distinct social position not only within India, but within the wider world (Savaala 2010; Brosius 2010). As Savaala (2010) notes, an integral factor shaping middle class sociality in India was a notion of belonging, through which the particular social life which constitutes being middle class is established. Here, a sense of one’s place in India, and indeed the world, was shaped in part by occupying an array of cultural ‘tastes’ (Bourdieu 1984) that were at once ‘distinct’ from others and aligned with the tastes of like-minded others. As I indicated in the previous chapter, the students also saw a sense of unity and belonging as integral to their lives as students.

‘Togetherness’ was a recurring theme amongst my early investigations into what constituted North Point as a school. This sentiment was seemingly grounded within student experiences of school events and inspired in part by the imagined story of North Point which I alluded to as ‘History’ in Chapter 1. These experiences had influenced student imaginaries to consider the perceived camaraderie amongst students as definitive North Point. I observed how students compared themselves with one another and, in particular, I was drawn to the concept of the ‘NP Spirit’, which seemed to encapsulate this. This concept emerged as something perceived by students as unique to North Point and,

like the ritualised performances of North Pointers in the previous chapter, the ‘NP Spirit’ was also imagined as something that shaped student imaginaries.

I first came into contact with the ‘NP Spirit’ during my initial confrontations with the Lower Division students at school. Most of the ‘focus groups’ I conducted during my research involved only five or six students but others, like the one described here, were whole class affairs. On this occasion I had been tasked with looking after a Class in the absence of their regular teacher. I had been invited to use such instances to chat with the students and ask them some questions. I had mixed results with this approach, particularly towards the beginning of the year when the younger students were anxious about their upcoming exams. But there were always one or two keen students who would get the conversation going. Prashant was one of those students. He was a Class 7 boarder who had been at North Point since Class 3. He was the kind of student who sat keenly at the front of the classroom, offering advice and assistance whenever I seemed to be confused about what lesson this was supposed to be or informing me which students were absent that day. There would be more interaction with this particular section of Class 7 over the year, but the incident outlined here was my first foray into this classroom.

After I had safely negotiated the mundaneness of introductions, I moved on quickly to the subject of North Point. I had asked for a show of hands: who liked their school? Every hand in the room shot up, some students rather enthusiastically offered me two hands. The following question asked what they liked about North Point. There was an assortment of answers, many of which touched upon the friendly atmosphere, the sense of ‘togetherness’. Then the student above, Prashant, rather boldly blurted out the ‘NP Spirit’. I asked him what this meant and his immediate reply was, ‘It’s kind of difficult to explain’. There was some nervous laughter in the room as Prashant searched for an answer, perhaps there was still some confusion whether this was actually a lesson or not. Would this be on the test? Prashant himself rather shyly opted out of explaining it himself but the rest of the class was more than happy to join in. ‘We all have NP Spirit’, one voice shouted, ‘because we are North Pointers’. ‘It makes us win all the matches’, another voice said. ‘NP Spirit makes us North Pointers’. ‘NP Spirit is NP only, no other school has this’.

The free-for-all environment of the focus group discussion made tracing the source of some of the words difficult; however the messages rang clear. ‘NP Spirit’ was intrinsically

part of North Point and seemed to underline much of the positive sentiments that students held for their school. Prashant's struggles to describe the NP Spirit to me belied the intangibility of the concept. However I contend that this intangibility was what made the NP Spirit so vital to students. It was potentially whatever any student wanted it to be, yet contradictorily it was imagined to be something shared by all students. In essence, the NP Spirit stood to represent the connections between each student and the school as well as between students themselves.

One student explained 'we just feel it', indicating that it was something that the students themselves didn't fully understand; but that wasn't important. The 'feeling' which leads students, such as Prashant, to acknowledge the influence of the NP Spirit demonstrated that this concept represented a certain association between themselves and North Point. Whilst rather obscure and indefinable, it seemed to be central to what North Point was and what the school meant to students. Where other topics instigated discussions and debates amongst students, NP spirit was something they seemed to agree on. That is to say, this concept represented, for the students, all that was 'distinct' about North Point. It was figuratively the difference between North Point and other schools.

The 'NP Spirit' was described by one of the Class 12 students writing in the School Magazine 'Among Ourselves' described the NP Spirit as the 'difference of one basket'. This somewhat cryptic description is incidentally the best description of the NP Spirit that I had encountered at North Point. This description invoked the sporting prowess that North Point boasted over other schools in the district. This description was referring to a basketball contest, suggesting that whatever 'score' the opponent got, North Point would score one 'basket' more. To frame this in terms of other sports; this is the difference of one goal or winning by a single point. However good the opponent was, North Point would be just that much better. The 'difference of one basket' outlined the same quandary with which I began this investigation: what was so special about North Point? The NP Spirit filled the gap for students to describe to each one of them just how special North Point was and which is more bound them to North Point. In the first chapter I envisaged how North Point was a 'special place' and in the second chapter how the North Pointer embodied the 'ideal' student. Here I aim to explore how students nurtured a sense of belonging at North Point and how the abstract notion of the 'NP Spirit' provided a space for them to achieve this.

I soon began to realise that asking students to define the NP Spirit wasn't overly fruitful and like the concept of the 'North Pointer', I had to witness 'NP Spirit' being performed to truly understand it. This concept was most visible, as the Class 7 students had indicated, during sports matches. Here I will note how the students performed sporting chants and in doing so performed a sense of unity and togetherness, unified in support of their school as its team competed against others on the sports field.

### **Singing at the Sidelines: 'NP Spirit' in action**

It is an often heard line around sporting grounds that the supporters of a given team are routinely credited with giving a team an extra lift to enable them to defeat the opposition. This sentiment seemed as strong as I have ever witnessed at North Point. I will argue here that the performance of 'supporting' the school team served as a key contributor in constructing student ideas of 'NP spirit', and thus underscored why 'NP spirit' signified student unity. In a later chapter I will explore in greater detail how the world of sports was one of the most significant components of school life (see chapter 5), but for now I will focus squarely on how sporting events brought the 'NP Spirit' to light.

In the previous chapter I regarded the role of specific staged performances at North Point, namely the two most significant events of the year in the Investiture Ceremony and Rector's Day. These events performed the North Pointer to the students, making tangible the world of symbols of North Point enabling the students to imagine their school and the students within it. I will expand the discussion here to include how the 'NP Spirit' was performed predominantly during sports events. This example incorporates some symbols of the school, thus constituting a further performance of the school as a whole. In addition, the students perform the unity which they subsequently imagine as definitive of North Point as a 'special place'.

Whether playing on their home ground or visiting another school, there was always a group of fellow students on hand to shout out words of encouragement. Much of this encouragement was encapsulated in the form of chants and slogans which were repeated endlessly during the course of the event. Chanting was most common amongst the more senior boys of the school as they were more frequently involved in the inter-school activities. One of the most popular chants invoked the school motto: Sursum Corda ('Lift up your hearts') discussed in Chapter 1. This chant would begin much like any other,

instigated spontaneously by one or a small group of students. The chant instigator would begin by crying out the letters: 'S-U-R-S-U-M!', with the expectation that the remaining letters 'C-O-R-D-A' would be called out in chorus by the rest of the gathered crowd. This could be repeated a fair number of times, especially if the team was winning. Even on the occasion when the North Point team didn't fare so well, the crowd provided chants, such as 'never mind' followed with the student's name, a popular chant in cricket when a player had been dismissed. When North Point were on top, one of the crowd would shout out 'we want another one...', and the rest of the crowd would join in 'just like the other one', calling out for more runs, more goals, or just more good play. There were also occasional outbreaks of the school chorus, or more frequently choruses of 'when the blues go marching in'.

These chants could be conceptualised within the confines of this thesis as 'symbols' of North Point. The chants enable a relation between the imagined world of North Point and the practical world of everyday experience. This is particularly true of the school motto which is invoked as a chant here. The performance of 'Sursum Corda' invoked the 'NP Spirit' as a group of students had come together to literally sing the school in to existence. The chanting in general invoked a relation between the singular student and the group, as one would begin and the others would finish.

The role of chanting was recognised by the students themselves in invoking the NP Spirit and also enhancing North Point itself. At a cricket match I accompanied a small group of Class 9 and 10 students to a neighbouring school and witnessed the reserve members of the team sitting at the side of ground singing louder than the home support. I asked them about the songs they sang and why they sang them. They sang because they had been asked to, that was why they had travelled with the team. They knew they weren't going to play but to them their role was almost like playing. 'We can't all play the match, but we can all show support. That way we can help win'. These students were keen to demonstrate how the handful of North Point students sang louder than the scores of students from the host school. I was often told by the students that the support NP student offered their teams was the reason why North Point always won. This was what the NP spirit was. The chanting was as much a performance of North Point as the Rector's Day celebration; however the key difference here was that this performance was in the presence of those from outside the school. Here the chanting was imagined as playing a practical role in the team's

success. The chanting wasn't just about exploring one's relations to others but about enhancing the team itself.

All of the chanting and singing offered a context for unity amongst students. It was moments such as the one described above which students relied upon to describe unity at North Point. This unity then manifested itself in student imaginaries as the 'NP Spirit'. The Lower division students in the earlier example framed the NP Spirit as the difference between North Point and other schools. The 'difference of one basket' as the Class 12 student said. The performance of the NP Spirit demonstrated relations amongst the students and to the school itself. Chants began with one and were responded by the many, performing to those on the outside of the school, but more significantly inviting those within the school to join in. Furthermore this sense of unity was reified through sports performances in the sense that winning was attributed to the students' unity. The students imagined the singing and chanting as the reason why NP was so successful and thus it was the unity of the students which was proving a winning formula.

Despite this clear display of affection and support for the team, the NP Spirit seemed rather elusive and ambiguous. Prashant, the ever keen student, struggled to define the concept himself even though he was certain that this was the distinctive factor between North Point and other schools. The singing in the stands was indeed a performance of unity and the students imagined this as the reason why North Point always won. I would argue here that the 'NP Spirit' was perceived by students to represent that intangible quality, which I was searching for myself when I began my journey at North Point. The 'NP Spirit' was seemingly the 'ideal' form of North Point, relating back to Taylor's (2004) concept explored in the previous chapter. Only those who had attended North Point, either as a student or a teacher, past or present, were considered to possess the 'NP Spirit', and as such this concept offering a unique axis around which all those connected to the school could rally.

This chapter delves beneath student imaginaries of the 'NP Spirit' to explore the way in which students related to one another. The 'NP Spirit' was significant with regards to way the students idealised unity and belonging, but yet this concept didn't materialise on a day-to-day level. In the examples below, I will delve beneath the veneer of the NP Spirit to explore how student interactions were facilitated through processes of 'competition', made

most manifest through sports competition. Competition between students and within the student body as a whole at North Point created a social map of inter-competing selves each seeking to assess their own potential success against a social world of others. In the process students are engaged in social interactions with others with whom they have little in common save for the imagined connections facilitated through the school. Ultimately what I aim to illustrate here is how social life at school was competitive and potential fractious, however all the while students relied on their imagined sense of unity, the NP Spirit, as a bond which they shared. The reason for this lay in the previous chapters where student perceptions of life at North Point were oriented towards the specific landscape of North Point. Without that orientation students find themselves socially adrift and searching for meaning in their lives.

What I will explore in a subsequent section is how students came to learn how to ‘play together’, using ethnographic examples of primary level students (between 7 and 11 years old). In these later examples I will tease out how ‘togetherness’ was developed through student negotiations in playing sports. At this juncture I will depart from the ethnography briefly to explore this emerging concept of ‘competition’ that has emerged in the course of this chapter. The concept of competition I will invoke here draws from academic interpretations of the new middle classes, examining how a sense of being middle class is mediated through social practice (Savaala 2010; Donner and de Neve 2011). In this section I would look towards an exploration of the ways in which internal struggles for belonging, framed through the concept of competition, provide a fruitful source of analysis that can also be used to understand how the students of North Point came to imagine their relations to one another, and how we can view these within the contexts of their future lives.

### **Competition and Togetherness**

Competition is a term that implies a certain sense of conflict. One could use it to adequately frame the various sporting engagements described above, when one team is pitted against another within a game specified by particular rules, the completion of which determines the respective positions of each team as either victor or defeated. However competition also invokes a particular set of relations between people. A competition reveals the ways in which competing individuals or groups are measured against one another. What I wish to draw attention to here is the ways in which ‘competition’ has

materialised in ethnographies of the subcontinent and in particular how this idea shapes notions of membership to the new middle classes.

Mark Liechty (2003) utilises 'competition' to refer to the ways in which middle class families in suburban Kathmandu, Nepal, compared themselves with other middle class families. Liechty observed how families compared themselves with one another along the lines of their consumer habits, evidenced with various material goods such as what kind of clothes they wore and what kind of TV they watched. Liechty invokes a line of inquiry he had borrowed from Douglas and Isherwood's (1979) *World of Goods*, arguing that these families were embroiled in 'competition', not in the way that they were seeking to distinguish themselves from one another but rather to maintain a parity between them. In this example, the competition is driven by aspirations towards a particular lifestyle, shaped through encounters with others with whom one possessed perceived similarities. These similarities were imagined through other social categories such as caste, kinship and religion. This 'competition' was also driven by a fear of being left behind, and thus feeling excluded from the lifestyle that they coveted. The families that Liechty observed demonstrated awareness of the consumption habits of close neighbours and other families with whom they considered to be similar to themselves. The members of these various families noted that their desires to possess certain material goods - items like televisions, computers and other household items - were shaped by observing the buying of others. In order to 'compete', the Nepali middle class had to maintain a 'suitable' balance between the various new consumer opportunities and incorporate understandings of being Nepali. Liechty describes this most effectively through clothing, where his young informants would note how they sought 'suitable' fashion, which incorporated some Westernised clothing with the forms of dress more familiar to Nepal. The young men and women of Kathmandu were wary of appearing too 'Western' or too 'traditional'. In this sense successful negotiation of being middle class in Kathmandu required a distinct 'taste' in fashion but it also relied on comparative competition in order to develop understandings of what the requisite 'taste' of the middle class was in the first place.

Liechty's line of analysis, albeit based in Nepal, has strong parallels with critical examinations of middle class social life in India. Much of the academic endeavour in this field has centred on consumption patterns defining middle class life in relation to the acquisition of particular resources such as household electrical goods, cars and property

(Sheth 1999; Corbridge and Harris 2000; Varma 2007). In this sense, social positions were perceived in relation to the kinds of consumer products one might possess; an engagement within the consumer marketplace offered a space for negotiating one's social identity and paved the way for new imaginings of the social world within which one is located (Lukose 2008). These 'new imaginings' incorporated the shifts through which the new middle classes moved away from their relationship with the state, which I had demonstrated as a core relationship during the British era, and aligned themselves with the influx of opportunities in the emerging private sector (Fernandes 2006; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007). The Indian middle class was no longer defined purely as the class of bureaucrats, but rather through their abilities to negotiate a new world of global opportunities. Opportunities such as the growing market of private schools each competing for parental attention as to which one would be most appropriate for their child. Selection of the right school was often a practice which involved knowing which family's children attended which school, as parents who were doctors or lawyers or civil servants, for example, wanted their children to go to school with the children of other doctors, lawyers or civil servants (see Donner 2006). This latter example highlights how new consumer opportunities formed just a part of social life and operated in relation to other social categories such as religion, gender and the family (Brosius 2010; Savaala 2010; Donner 2011).

Such opportunities are not equally accessible to all and thus possible tensions arise with regards to who might have access and who might not. Savaala (2010) noted how middle class professionals were concerned that they might have to share any success with relatives who were lesser off. They were anxious over expectations that they, as the high earner in the family, would be required to support others. Likewise those members of wealthy families who were not as successful, in terms of employment or education, were concerned that they would be 'left behind', unable to participate in the consumer market in the same ways. However, there were ways in which these potential tensions could be negotiated. Paolo Favero (2005) observed how groups of young lower middle class men struggling to find work in suburban New Delhi shared their resources amongst themselves. They didn't possess the capital or the social networks alone to successfully ensure their middle class status and so relied on co-operation and collaboration in order to compete in the consumer market.

There is a danger here of over emphasizing consumption and the authors cited here have stressed that consumer behaviours are simply one aspect of a complex social world interwoven, as intimated above, with concepts of family, gender, religion and so on (Lukose 2008; Donner 2011). However what I do wish to highlight within these examples is how new middle class Indians were shaped in relation to competing within a market place. Middle class identity was not defined through occupation per se, but rather cast within a world of potential opportunities. The consumer marketplace was the most observable, where families would be able to observe the practices of others, or even differences within the family itself, in order to carve out a sense of middle class belonging.

The concept of competition in relation to middle class enacts itself on two fronts. Firstly one must have the means to ‘compete’, which is to say that one must possess a certain amount of financial capital; and secondly, one must know how to ‘compete’. This second point is similar to what Bourdieu termed ‘taste’ or what Liechty termed ‘suitability’, identifying that there was a particular way of acting, of consuming, of competing, which affirmed understandings of what it meant to be middle class. My aim here is to engage with this concept of ‘competition’, albeit in relation to a school rather than a consumer market place. The ‘competition’ to which I refer is that which existed between students, each vying to be heralded ‘all-rounders’, each seeking to be top of the class. I suggest that it was only through ‘competing’ that students were able to develop a sense of belonging. Student’s also keenly demonstrate a way of ‘competing’ which was ultimately fair and offered equal opportunity to all to succeed.

I turn now to an exploration of the concepts of competition and the interactions between students as they were encouraged to ‘play together’ from a young age. As we shall see, even such encouragement didn’t always realise itself or translate onto the playing field. The first ethnographic anecdote served as my introduction into the ways in which students negotiated ‘togetherness’ on an everyday level in the early days of their school lives.

### **‘Learning to ‘play together’: The ‘competition’ begins**

I shall begin with an example drawn from my encounters with the youngest age group at the school in Class 3<sup>67</sup>. The example here is taken from the first few weeks of this Class's experiences at North Point and serves to examine how new students adjusted to the expectations of the school. This case study focuses on a 'Games' lesson, which was without doubt the most popular lesson amongst the Primary students. It was popular with those who liked sports as it offered them a chance to play and it was popular with those who didn't like sports because it meant they could spend two hours out of the classroom. Sports was important at North Point as I shall stress later, but here I wish to draw attention to how the sports field was a space where the students were offered more freedom of a sort to dictate their own play.

On this sunny afternoon on the 'PD flat', the games teacher decided to permit one of the students to issue the equipment from the store cupboard. He chose one very happy looking boarder student, Jigme, and gave him the explicit instruction to set up one cricket match and one only. As the students all raced after an excited Jigme with the store key in hand, the games teacher Warwick had explained to me that his first task was to encourage the students to 'play together'. As he spoke he noted how his instructions were already being ignored as Jigme was distributing more than the prescribed equipment from the games cupboard. The teacher stood motionless watching as the young boys scattered themselves across the flat. 'See how many bats they have' Warwick continued 'They all want their own game, all want to be captain, all want their own bat. They cannot play a game like this. They have to learn to play together'. Warwick expressed that this was in part an issue of resources. There was only a small amount of equipment, whether for cricket, football or whichever sport was being played, and this equipment had to be shared across among a class of 35 students. This was, according to Warwick, also an important lesson for the students to learn. He explained to me: 'We have over a thousand students at this school. Some of these guys spend almost ten years together. If they can't learn to play together then it will be a difficult ten years'.

Warwick told the students to return most of the equipment, leaving only enough for a single game to be played amongst the students. However there was still no prospect of a

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<sup>67</sup> Class 3 students were generally 7 or 8 years old. The promotion based nature of the Indian schooling system meant that not everyone in a given class was of the same age, but deviations were never really more than a year or two among students.

game. A group of the students returned to the teacher to ask, ‘Sir, who is captain?’<sup>68</sup> ‘No captains’, he responded assertively. ‘You make the teams’. The teacher grinned, knowing that despite his intention it was unlikely this would happen. The huddle of students continued to move about the flat like a rugby scrum battling for territory. A couple of students were constantly at the centre, both of whom were day scholars with their own bats<sup>69</sup>, and Jigme was doing his level best to use what authority may have remained in his earlier role of distributing equipment to muscle in. ‘This is the youngest class at school, it is often like this’, Warwick repeated to me. ‘They learn about each other, make friends, this is the first part of their school lives together’. Warwick had spent many years at North Point over two separate stays. He had overseen the development of a number of students over the course of his experience and as a former boarder student himself (albeit at a different school) he often talked about how he empathised with the difficulties the students faced in learning to live together.

The game remained in limbo, and with no sign of a start or even a teacher’s intervention anytime soon, they were set to spend the whole period arguing. A few of the huddle ran after the boy with the bat, and the rest soon followed. The huddle reformed again. And then the dreaded whistle sounded. The students had failed to put a game together, and now they had been found guilty of abusing the equipment. A couple of the students bounced up and remonstrated at this decision. Their teacher was unmoved and calmly he instructed them, ‘I gave you a warning, I told you to play together, otherwise you won’t play’. The student’s shouted at each other, blaming one another for the end of their play for the day, as they shuffled the wooden stumps into the store cupboard for the last time.

This was not an uncommon sight during Class 3 Games classes. In this example, the students were offered a chance to play, something they relished, however in order to do that they had to learn to ‘play together’. This example demonstrated a very simple case study of a competition for resources. However this was not a case where one would triumph over others but rather a scenario where in order for each participant to get a chance to play they had to co-operate with others. This was reinforced by the teacher who,

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<sup>68</sup> The captain was often a point of contention and every student wanted to be chosen to captain the team. The captain was a manager of the team affairs, choosing who got to bowl, who batted and in what order. Some boys reacted badly to not being chosen and often refused to play in the game.

<sup>69</sup> Only Day Scholars could have their own sports equipment, though they were restricted in what they could bring. They were only permitted to bring cricket equipment during cricket season, footballs during the football season, and so on.

much like the enforcement of discipline in Chapter 2, declared the rules and enforced them. In this example the students ‘over competed’, in so much that they argued over who would be a team captain, who would be on which team and so on. However the afternoon was not done and the students would be offered another chance to play.

Warwick often openly admitted that he found it hard to stop students from playing. He had told me about his own experiences as a boarder and how much he enjoyed Games so he wanted the young students to enjoy some games that afternoon. The cupboard was re-opened and basketballs were distributed. The students began to organise themselves into games, playing on the two courts to the side of the Primary playing area. I observed a small group which was composed of 7 students, with 4 boarders and 3 day scholars. Two of the boarders wished to organise the teams along the lines of the ‘houses’ to which each student was assigned at the beginning of their schooling careers. These boarders were mirroring the technique utilised by Warwick during the boarder Games afterschool activities, where he would divide teams along house lines. One of the day scholars disagreed. This day scholar, Palden, was a prominent figure within this class. Despite being early in the school year, this student was already a member of the Primary Division cricket team which was rare for a Class 3 student. As such he was regarded to have superior knowledge about sports and how to play. In this instance his actions cemented the status that his position on the cricket team had granted him. Palden offered an affirmative ‘No’, shook his head, and took possession of the basketball, signally his intention to stamp his authority on the game. Another day scholar suggested ‘day scholars against boarders’, which was another option that Palden flatly rejected. He grabbed one of the boarders by the arm, a boarder who I had thought Palden to be friendly with<sup>70</sup>. ‘Rupen and I, against you all’. Rupen quickly pulled his arm away, his eyes widened in surprise. ‘Nooooo’, he glared at Palden, arguing that two against five was not a good arrangement of teams. Palden tried to compromise in picking a third player but Rupen decided he no longer wanted to play with the others and slumped off to sit by himself. The ball remained in Palden’s hand and he selected two players to be with him, leaving the others to make a team. The other three protested that he had picked the best players, so Palden assigned me, until this point just a casual bystander, to be on the other team. By assigning me to the

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<sup>70</sup> In a number of times hanging out around the flat during the lunch breaks I would often observe the same students playing with each other.

other team Palden ensured that he could pick who he wanted for his own team, as I negated any potential inequalities in the strengths of the respective teams.

As the game continued, I went over to Rupen to ask him about his reasons for leaving the game. 'Sir, they don't know how to play'. He told me that Palden was a 'selfish' player who didn't share with others. Rupen told me about how Palden would dominate cricket matches and then these games would not be 'fun'. 'He only will pick the players, who will bat, who will bowl'. While other students were more receptive to Palden's suggestions for teams and games, given his aforementioned sporting prowess, Rupen refused to be subordinate to Palden and preferred to leave the game rather than risk his own perceived status as one of the better players.

Here we have witnessed some of the complex transactions at play, albeit on a small scale, which were at hand as students endeavoured to 'play together'. First and foremost there was some evident disagreement amongst students. It is important to note that these students were only months into their experiences at North Point, but it suffices to say that life amongst the students was not entirely as harmonious and utopic as the rhetoric about the 'NP Spirit' made it out to be. The Class 3 example is poignant as it offers an insight into how students learn about working together. There is a certain parallel with the consumerist narrative apparent within the competitive middle class lives outlined by Liechty (2003) and Savaala (2010). Within the games class, the students were offered limited resources in terms of equipment and thus were competing for a chance to play. However the teacher laid out rules which altered the parameters of this competition for students to negotiate their positions in relations to others in order to play. In the case of Palden and Rupen, this latter point becomes a little clearer as it becomes apparent that each student imagined a certain way of playing which didn't necessarily fit well with everyone.

The likes of Palden and Rupen even built their respective social groups on the basis of their observable performances in sports. They identified one another as being like themselves and were friends for some time. However when Palden was elevated to the cricket team and Rupen was not, their status changed and Palden was able to command others to play along his rules, whereas Rupen could not.

There is a notable disjuncture here with the 'NP Spirit' with which I began. The imagined unity and togetherness, which the students observed through events such as the

performance of sporting chants, had seemingly dissipated when it came to more everyday interactions. This harkens back to the discussion regarding middle class and the broader concerns with the 'NP Imaginary' within this thesis. The 'NP Spirit' was an imagined relationship between a student and the collective whole of North Point. The Class 7 students I mentioned earlier in the chapter suggested that the NP Spirit was a concept through which they imagined 'togetherness' at North Point, placing themselves within the North Point milieu. This NP Spirit or sense of togetherness furthered the students' imagined distinction from other schools, a distinction observed and performed most succinctly at sports events as seen above. But in the Class 3 example we have a group of North Point students exploring and learning their relations to other North Pointers. It could be argued here also that these students, as the youngest and newest to arrive at the school may not have come to witness 'NP Spirit' as the Class 7 students might have done. However I would argue that this bore little relevance on the students choosing to compete with one another, as I will demonstrate in a later example pertaining to the Class 7 students. Here I would highlight that 'competition' was a vital part of the processes through which students came to see themselves as 'North Pointers' (or not). And subsequently being 'North Pointers', students would invoke the NP Spirit and come to see themselves as unified. To put it more succinctly 'competition was necessary to bring students together.

Sport wasn't the only arena where one could observe the interactions between students. Food was a common object of exchange and, indeed, competition, and students frequently underscored their friendships with gifts of food, particularly sweets and chocolate. Examples such as the case below illustrate how relations between students were not simply imagined through the categories of North Point and North Pointer, but were also underscored with interactions in relation to specific resources. In the example below I will explore a case of two students from Class 4 and an insight into how two young friends came to fall out with one another. This example extends the discussion regarding how students, particularly those at the start of their schooling journeys, were seeking to align themselves with those who they imagined to be like themselves. This imagining is shaped in relation to the interactions between these students demonstrates how students 'competed' off the sports field.

### **A Tale of Two Friends**

This is the story of two Class 4 boarders, Pratik and Ayush. Both students came from Nepal. Each had joined North Point in Class 3 and both were placed in the same class. They were both about 9 years old and much like Palden and Rupen, these two seemed inseparable friends. I came to know both of these students when I substituted<sup>71</sup> their class for a month while their teacher recovered from illness. I noticed how they sat next to each other in every lesson, played on the same team during games classes, and played together during the breaks. As both boys were boarders, they spent entire days in each other's company. One day I noticed that the usually inseparable pair no longer sat together in class. They were also playing in different groups at break times and were not speaking with each other during the evening boarding routines. As it seemed so unusual I approached Pratik one day to ask him what had happened. 'He is not my friend', was the abrupt reply. Pratik claimed that Ayush was always after his 'tuck'. Pratik was always gifted more sweets by his parents, which were only allowed on special occasions such as birthdays or on days when students were allowed to buy items from the tuck shops at school. On these occasions, Pratik claimed, he always shared his sweets with his friends, and always gave Ayush more. The problem arose on Ayush's birthday. When Ayush was giving away sweets to his friends, he only gave Pratik one. According to Pratik, Ayush gave other boys more than one, which was seemingly the primary cause of the breaking of the friendship. Pratik claimed Ayush of trying to make friends with the day scholars purely so that they would allow Ayush to play with them at break times. Pratik noted that as the day scholars were allowed to bring their own sports equipment, Ayush was only interested in being able to play games during breaks. Pratik didn't want to play with the day scholars because, in his words, 'they don't know how to play'. This had parallels with the fallout between Palden and Rupen. In that previous scenario, Palden had also refused to play with a certain group claiming they didn't know 'how to play'. Both Rupen and Pratik had identified those who they perceived were not able to play games the right way and thus they refused to play games with those individuals.

Both this example and the earlier example on the PD Flat both demonstrated how competition played out on and off the sports field. Both examples invoked how specific resources, the first case was sports equipment, the second was 'tuck', in each case were key spaces for students to explore their relations to others. This follows in the stead of

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<sup>71</sup> During this period I conducted the role of Class teacher and was responsible for a number of lessons such as English, Maths and Science.

considerable ethnographic engagements in the middle classes in India, referenced in the discussion above and also in the introduction, as to how their sense of membership to the middle classes was facilitated in part through interactions with particular consumer goods. In the examples demonstrated here, the competition for desired resources served to suggest to students those others who they can 'play with' and those who possess different values to themselves.

Now this angle at this stage is perhaps a little simplistic however it stands contrary to the 'NP Spirit' with which the chapter began. On one hand I was being told that there was a shared sense of belonging and togetherness across the breadth of North Point life, yet I had observed for myself students who were imagining themselves as different from their fellow North Pointers. These processes become more pronounced as the students get older as I shall aim to demonstrate how the intra-student competition played out amongst the Lower Division students. These examples illustrate a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of competition where the students seek to compete with only those students with whom they were the most similar. Within these contexts students developed their sense of belonging by imagining others who do the things that they do, to think like them to. In other words, what the students observe other students and come to comprehend who they are alike or not alike

### **'This is our game'**

I had spent a few afternoon sessions watching the after school boarder games activities unfold, trying to learn the ebbs and flows of the games, who chose to do what and why. After spending some time getting to know the primary students, I moved up the school to the next section: the Lower Division, Classes 6 to 8, whose playing area was on the smaller area around the back of the school (see fig. 2). I would observe as a few students were entrusted to be the 'monitors' of the games equipment, bringing out the balls and bats and other playing apparatus from the store cupboard in the study hall. I would watch as the students lined up in their houses and then, spurred on by the words of their supervising teacher, would begin their warm up jog around the perimeter. Then after completing their rounds they would break into groups, some continuing games from previous days, some strolling off without any obvious direction or purpose. The Lower Division games were not ordered in the same way as the primary, and scores were only kept if the players

themselves wanted to. Even on the odd occasion when they did note the scores, there was always a debate about what the score actually was. I was interested in how the lessons of ‘playing together’, which seemed so strong within the primary division, had evolved with the older students, who seemed to have been left to their own devices. What unfolded was that students had an understanding that ‘playing together’ was essential, but they had made further distinctions about who they should and should not play with. This boiled down a sense of competition. As students grew older they became more aware of being ‘left behind’ or, in terms of games, of being ‘left out’. As such, the groups in which students socialised became more specific, and the transactions between students served to underpin how they weighed themselves up against others. I will illustrate this through a particular occasion of a cricket game on the lower division field.

The nature of games at Lower division level could be construed as an act of ‘competition’. It was a kind of survival of the fittest on the playground. There were limited resources available to play with, and no formal organisation. Similar to the primary students, the Lower Division students leaned heavily on their friends in order to play a game. There were a variety of games on offer, season depending. The latter half of the year was dominated by football, which involved one ball and seemingly about 30 or 40 students in one large game. The first half of the year was basketball and cricket, interspersed with volleyball or badminton. There were separate courts for volleyball and basketball, and although as these lay parallel to the large flat where the football and cricket took place, it was highly usual for games to spill over into each other. So in this scene, students were competing for both resources (sports equipment) and for space, perhaps the ideal setting for some life lessons, one might say. It was in these spaces where I was able to observe how students negotiated being part of the crowd to pave their own way.

One day, I was playing cricket with a small group of boys, who had secured the use of a bat and tennis ball, using one of the concrete pillars on the edge of the flat as a set of stumps. One student would bowl a few balls until the student with the bat was out, then the batter would relinquish the bat to another player, which was generally accepted as the first to the bat gets the bat. With a small number there were rarely altercations; any player who deemed that he was robbed of his turn would promptly take the tennis ball and try and get the batsman out. The game, along with the dynamics between the players, was interesting, and I witnessed many of the elements described in the above ethnography of the class 3

attempts to play cricket, where one or two players seemed to be key to the ordering of the game, deciding whose turn was next and who could and couldn't join the game. Here, one student in particular, Ashok, seemed to be in charge of proceedings. Although he was not as vocal or as authoritarian as Palden from the earlier example, he was nevertheless the student to whom others looked when wanting to join the game. When Ashok raced off to collect the ball from the other side of the flat, I quietly asked one of the other boys why Ashok was in charge. 'He is the best at sports out of us. He knows the rules, we don't always know', I was told. I saw a student walking alone in the colonnade behind the flat and I suggested to the students that they invite him to play. 'No sir', was the immediate reply. 'Dhires is on the cricket team, he is too good. He will bowl us all out. He will bat and bat, and we won't get [a] chance'. I asked Dhires why he wasn't playing, and he sheepishly shrugged his shoulders. Ashok offered his insight, 'Sir he prefers to be alone'<sup>72</sup>. I watched as any new students who wanted to join the game were continually directed to Ashok. He decided not only who could play, but also their role within the game. 'You can play, but only field', he would say to one boy. When I offered to give the new player the ball, Ashok protested, 'No sir, he can't bowl'. The fielder nodded his head in agreement. 'He don't [doesn't] know how to bowl', Ashok told me.

So here we gain a greater insight into the perceived importance of figures such as Ashok and Palden, who bring authority, order and structure to games. It was not always the case, and some games would involve only a couple of students at times, but predominantly games were conducted with large groups and with a number of students as key arbitrators like Ashok or Palden. The role of the arbitrator was to ensure that the game was played with the interests of the group. He firstly was able to acquire the equipment and space to play the game in the first instance. He denied access to players who were adjudged to be 'too good' and also shielded the ball from those who bring the level of playing below their level. This offered an insight into how students arranged themselves, accepting the importance of hierarchical positions in order to keep playing. In some cases there were two or three 'Ashoks' in a given group, which strengthened their claims over equipment or space. This was particularly the case with the larger group games such as with football, and disagreements and fights were also commonplace in such games.

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<sup>72</sup> I will return to this point later on in the section 'going my own way'.

I wondered how it was the case that students accepted the authority of others. How did figures such as Palden and Ashok gain the prominence to be able to decide how a game is played? The answer to an extent came in exploring how these prominent students competed against one another. We saw earlier how Rupen refused to compete with Palden, as he felt threatened by Palden's status as a member of the school cricket team. A similar situation was unfolding on the Lower Division flat but in reverse. Ashok had refused Dhiresh's request on the grounds that the latter's perceived superior ability would affect the experience of the game for lesser players. In both examples the students expressed a desire to only compete with those with whom they perceived the most similarity.

In the case of the Lower Division students above, the students assessed themselves in comparison with the sporting prowess of other students. By utilising observable performances within sports, students came to associate themselves as being like or not like other students. The aim of the students mentioned above was to play a game, and in order to play that game they knew they required a number of players, a lesson they had learned at primary level. There was limited equipment so access to play involved negotiations with other students. The most effective way of accessing sports equipment was to engage with those who were perceivably at the same level of prowess. As Savaala (2010) noted within middle class families, there were certain tensions apparent with regards to this kind of competition. Those students perceived to be 'too good' or 'too weak' faced exclusion from certain games. Ashok refused to let a player bowl who was seen to be 'too weak', as he threatened to reduce the competition below his perceived level. To do so would, in Ashok's eyes, risk decreasing perceptions of his own sporting abilities and thus prevent him from potentially accessing other games in the future. In Ashok's assumption was that in playing with lesser students he may eventually be seen as a weaker player himself and thus be excluded from certain games.

So what of those who didn't 'compete'? It seems apparent that the social environment cultivated through competition left some students marginalised. In the above case, Ashok indicated that Dhiresh 'preferred to be alone'. This was an interesting proposition in a school that defined itself through the strength of its collective unity. Everything I had heard thus far had suggested that it was only by 'competing' and engaging in school activities where one could come to define one's self as a North Pointer of North Point. In defining oneself as a North Pointer, a student would therefore imagine himself within the

‘NP Spirit’, which appeared at the outset of this chapter, to be the imagined ‘distinction’ which students relied upon in distinguishing themselves from other students from other schools. If this was true, what was the benefit of being alone? There were those at school referred to as ‘losers’: those peripheral figures who didn’t feature in sports teams, who didn’t seek to join games and who found themselves outside of the competition, so to speak. This did not necessarily mean that they were unable to play games, or couldn’t play instruments, but rather that they did not seek to ‘compete’ with others. What I will illustrate is that being a ‘loner’ was not necessarily a deliberate act but arose rather contradictorily through social action.

### **‘Going my own way’**

The case of Rahul provides an example of how failure to compete, or to attempt to compete would leave a student outside the group and thus unable to access the unity experienced through the NP Spirit. Rahul was what other students and some teachers referred to as a loner. He first came to my attention when one of the teachers pointed him out to me during a conversation in the quadrangle. The teacher noted how he was a talented student, attentive in class and achieving good grades. But he was always seen wandering alone. I soon found myself wandering around the quadrangle at lunch times with Rahul. Firstly I went over to him, but after a while I would find him at the foot of the stairs from the staff canteen waiting for me. Early on we just chatted about our lives, learning a bit about each other. He was from Kolkata. He had joined in Class 11, which was the class he was in when I first met him, fulfilling a lifetime ambition to study in Darjeeling.

He dreamed also of moving to America and working for NASA, and it soon became apparent that he likened himself more to ‘the West’<sup>73</sup>, and told me about his overseas friends, including his ‘relationship’ with a girl in Lincolnshire. He asked me if I knew where that was, and claimed to have met her through an internet messaging service where he had also befriended a number of others from across the globe. He claimed to have exchanged letters with the girl in Lincoln, but she had told him via the online platform that she had not received his last mail. He bemoaned the Indian postal system and generally the state of the country of his birth. ‘Everything is better in England, I think. Here you can’t do

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<sup>73</sup> His phrase

so many things. Like we have power cuts and all but also you can't hold hands in public'. Rahul liked to complain. Many of our conversations were dominated with his various gripes and issues, which seemingly stood in his way of achieving his goals. He craved a relationship but all girls were liars and cheats. At least Indian girls were. He wanted to study to be top of his class, but his personal problems prevented him from focussing. He wanted to fit in but couldn't agree with any of the students at the school. He claimed that everyone was 'fake', and found it difficult to make friends. He claimed to have felt as if he made some friends when he first arrived, but became aggrieved when he discovered that others had been talking about him behind his back. At least this was his view. He enjoyed sports but didn't want to play with the other students.

There was a swagger and arrogance about Rahul. He often boasted about his abilities and prided himself on his international network of friends, although he avoided Facebook, claiming that this was for those who want to be liked. Rahul stressed to me that he felt it important to do things the way he wanted. 'I have dreams. I know what I want and that is what I work for. I don't need friends who aren't really my friends. I'm going my own way'.

Rahul was from Kolkata and he blamed his different 'mentality' obtained through his growing up in the capital of West Bengal for his inabilities to bond with other students. However there were many students from Kolkata at North Point and they often travelled together on the trains to school after vacations. Furthermore, such students were also often well integrated into the school. The student I mentioned earlier, Ashok, although not from Kolkata, was an ethnic Bengali from the plains town of Siliguri. In Chapter 2 I demonstrated how a group of students hailing from differing backgrounds such as Kolkata, Sikkim and Bhutan were all able to imagine themselves as like-minded North Pointers.

So Rahul's difficulties with positioning himself within North Point came from the way he imagined his relationships with others. Most fundamentally this emerged through his choice of language, meaning the kinds of words he used, the kinds of topics he preferred to talk about and the activities he participated in (or didn't). He was often confrontational, challenging, frequently pedantic. Most crucially of all he frequently positioned himself as superior, perhaps not knowingly, but in doing so excluded himself from the 'competition'. One example I can invoke here was when he and I were having a conversation nearby

another younger student from Class 7 who was reading a newspaper. Rahul peered over the other student's shoulder to ask him about the news story he was reading. Rahul corrected the other student's pronunciation and then went on to speak more at length about the particularities of the news story. The other student reacted angrily asking him why he was 'talking like a foreigner', arguing that Rahul was just trying to impress me. This was typical of reactions to Rahul and thus why he preferred the company of his own thoughts over the company of others. His assumed position of superiority had been acclaimed through North Point, as Ashok had been through his performances as a member of the cricket team, and thus Rahul's approach was not liked by his fellow students. Furthermore, the Class 7's assertion that Rahul was 'talking like a foreigner' also suggested that Rahul outward appearance, his speech and mannerisms, did not belong within North Point.

In the case of Rahul the importance of inter student interactions and transactions becomes an example of a source of student imaginaries. It was not simply enough to 'feel' together, as demonstrated above with the 'NP Spirit' or in the previous chapters with concepts of North Point and 'North Pointer'. Student perceptions of where they belonged were mediated and grounded by everyday interactions between themselves and others. In the case of Rahul, he opted for social exile because he interpreted the reactions to his conversations as rejections, but continued to maintain faith in his own dreams and aspirations. Rahul found his sense of belonging in a very different place; in the internet chat rooms that he frequented, believing himself to be like those from the 'West', as he put it. However his self-imposed exile made him problematic to those who imagined themselves as part of North Point. Rahul's example demonstrates that he perceived himself to be more like his international contacts list and didn't relate himself to any student at North Point. As a result he refused to engage in activities and avoided 'competing' with his cohort. Rahul's refusals to compete left him isolated and outside of the 'solidarity' perceived by the students of North Point. Rahul's failures to compete outline how important competing in such a way was to establish connections between students whether good or bad. Failure to compete was a challenge to the student's sense of unity.

## **Conclusions**

There was something utopic regarding the ways in which students spoke of North Point. Nowhere was this more evident than the elusive concept of the 'NP Spirit'. This concept

offered a space where students could reflect upon their experiences at school and come to see themselves as North Pointers. The NP Spirit serves to unify a potentially disparate group of students to form their collective ideal of who they should be; realised within the categories of North Point and the North Pointer. This practice plays out much like within the subcontinental themes of 'competition' whereby those who perceived themselves to be middle class demonstrated an awareness that they had to remain practically engaged in a series of public practices, such as specific acts of consumerism in order to maintain their appearance as middle class citizens. Despite this jostling for position, the middle classes still maintained an imagined sense of belonging within the category of the middle class which brought legitimacy to their competitive lifestyles.

At the outset I sought to explore what students meant by the NP Spirit and to what significance it held at North Point. Most simply, the 'NP Spirit' was an ethnographic category which the students employed to personify their imagined togetherness, which I have argued was nurtured through an immersion in the story of North Point (Chapter 1) and an imagined shared sense of values through the ideals of the North Pointer (Chapter 2). The 'NP Spirit', was intangible, like North Point and North Pointer, and was only temporally visible through momentary performances, such as the chanting of songs at the side-lines of a sports fixture. However these fleeting moments served to echo across student experiences to offer a context within which their everyday experiences played out. The student life, as I have endeavoured to show here, was highly 'competitive', as they each sought to find their own places within the story of North Point. The students were seeking to learn to 'play together'

The 'NP Spirit' was elusive and was nearly impossible to define even for the students who held the concept with such high importance. But this elusiveness was the great strength of the 'NP Spirit'. This left enough manoeuvring room for each student to find their own relationship with North Point. However that said it also required students to engage with one another. One could not 'possess the NP Spirit' if one did not learn to 'play together'. Thus students such as Rahul found themselves in ambiguous exile where they searched outside of the school for meaning and belonging.

The examples above illustrate how certain amounts of negotiation and transaction were often required on the part of students in order to participate in school activities. These

negotiations took the form of a social ‘competition’ in which students demonstrated how they positioned themselves at school in relation to others. This harkens back to the earlier theoretical discussion regarding ‘competition’ as the means through which those who consider themselves to be part of given social group, in this case North Point, came to understand how they relate to others. These comparisons were driven by students’ desires not to be ‘left behind’, leading to potential tensions between students. The ‘tensions’ apparent within defining one’s place in world through ‘competition’ came from anxieties over being considered more successful or less successful, and how this affected one’s relationships to the group. These anxieties were alleviated somewhat by the vagueness of the ‘NP Spirit’ which permitted students who participated to imagine themselves engaged in a grander social project which brought legitimacy to their actions.

I argued that being middle class in India was not founded on an arbitrary relation to an institution, such as the state, and that one could only nurture a sense of belonging through engagements in a social world. I had earlier framed this within the confines of the consumer market place, as those who came to see themselves as middle class did so in observing their consumption practices in relation to others. In the examples presented here there was a similar process at hand albeit on a smaller scale. ‘Competition’ here is both an expression of a desire to ‘keep up’ with those who one has most similarities but also a struggle as to who is able to access the resources, in this case sporting equipment. But it could also refer to the Rector’s Day prizes, for example, which were coveted within these groups.

As I tried to demonstrate in previous chapters, North Point students came to learn about the connections between the students and the school through the imagined History and the ritualised performances that sketched out the ‘ideal’ models of being which shaped student expectations. In this chapter, I have shown that the students also framed their student experiences within an ‘ideal’ form of ‘togetherness’, in the form of the ‘NP Spirit’. In the first part of this thesis I have endeavoured to sketch out how the students of North Point understood the social world in which they found themselves. The students developed an ‘NP Imaginary’, an imagined sense of belonging that flows through the story of North Point, embodied within North Pointers and idealised in the ‘NP Spirit’. I have fleshed out the nuances of this imaginary, which offers strong parallels between the social life at school and the middle class life which lies beyond. I now turn to Part 2, which will offer

some greater insight into the everyday practices within North Point particularly the three spaces which I will claim to be definitive examples of the ‘NP Imaginary’ – assemblies, sports and the Major Play. Themes of performance and story shape student experiences, as the students come to reflect upon their positions within North Point History and begin to consider how they might write their own chapter in the story of North Point.

# Part Two:

## The Year of Performance

*'By coming to NP one does not simply become a North Pointer unless one seriously imbibes the NP spirit and makes use of the opportunities provided.'*

*Education is not only about the teaching, learning and finding a job in the future. Important as all these are in a market driven economy, it is very important the children enjoy the present and enjoy growing up'*

- **Fr. Kinley Tshering, S.J., North Point Annual, 2011**

2011, the year of my field work, was themed 'Good to Great- the Year of Performance'. This theme was intent on enhancing reputation of the school further to continue to improve across all aspects of school life. The use of the word 'performance' encompassed a number of meanings invoking the practical performances in the classroom, on the sports field and across general school life. Student performances were a response to the range of opportunities imagined to be on offer within North Point.

The students of North Point were often keen to talk about the 'opportunities' the school afforded them. The students referred me to the array of activities on offer as an example of what defined North Point as a great school. Students had the opportunity to develop their prowess in additional languages, such as Bengali, Tibetan and Dzongkha. There were additional music classes teaching an array of musical instruments from guitars to violins. There were sports teams for each age level in almost every sporting competition imaginable, including football, basketball, table tennis, cricket, and swimming. The school put up three annual theatrical productions for various ages groups, with the Major Play performed by the senior students constituting a highlight of the school calendar. On top of these there were more academic pursuits with competitions for elocution, singing and poetry recitals. It was through these activities, through these 'opportunities', where North Point came alive to the students. In this section of the thesis I will seek to explore these opportunities in greater detail with the aim of delving into the practices which lay at the heart of what defines the school as a whole. In this section I will explore the 'taskscape'

(Ingold 1993) of North Point and examine how these practical engagements within the environment of the school both constituted the image of North Point as experienced by its students but also how students came to imagine their relations to a wider social world beyond.

A key theme that emerges is that of 'competition', appropriated both within the school and with other schools. The 'competition' within forms a kind of relatedness by which the students come to know who they are similar to and who they aren't. This materialised as a means of simply wishing to keep up with the majority and not be left behind. Such processes within schools such as North Point are shaped in relation to the social world of the Indian middle class that lies beyond. In this section of the thesis I explore how certain practices at the school serve to offer a platform for students to imagine themselves both within a school but also beyond it. This 'competition' is practical incarnation of the social imaginary. It is through sports, through assemblies and through performed plays, where students are given the stage from which they can reflect upon their surroundings

Chapter 4 will discuss the practice of Class assemblies, a weekly performance by a particular class group on a given theme, which would be enacted in front of the whole school. These assemblies offered students an audience of others, whom they imagined as like themselves through 'competing' with one another. This 'competition', extending from my discussion of discipline in Chapter 3, offers a social space where students can assess themselves up against a world of others. In these pragmatic performances, students stage and also bear witness to a staging, of what being a North Pointer means.

The themes of competition were also intensely strong on the sport's field. In chapter 5, I will explore the ways in which sports facilitated student imaginaries by offering a physical space whereby students could compete against one another but also against others schools and observe differing models of studenthood. However, sport was more than pitting one against another. Students were aware of the school's record of wins in various events and simply taking part was not enough. Winning was everything. Students demonstrated a desire to 'make history' by winning at sports, particularly in large interschool tournaments, indicating that to do so would ensure their 'North Pointerness'. Here I begin to tease out why being a 'North Pointer' was an identity so coveted. Victories in sports events became

synonymous with ideas of ‘success’, which shaped both student experiences at school and the beginnings of their expectations beyond.

The final chapter of this section, Chapter 6 follows on from the themes of success and the future as I cast my attention towards a student stage production known on the school calendar as the ‘Major Play’. This year the play had been written by the students themselves and thus offered poignant insights into student reflections of their lives and more pertinently their future lives. This play looked towards the future and asked what bearing being a ‘success’ at school could have on one’s future. The play explored the students’ reflexivities as they explored their relationship to the world at large. Here the North Pointer is contested and questioned but ultimately performed not on the stage of the production but in the process of the play’s becoming. The practice sessions and rehearsals brought the essence of the North Pointer to the fore, as a group of students who feel capable of achieving anything, even with only ten days to practice in. The concept of ‘talent’ was key to how students imagined their own positions in the world and their own capabilities of negotiating their way through the murky world of their respective futures.

# IV

## Some Assembly Required: Spaces of Performance and Reflection

### Introduction

There is an often quoted Jesuit saying: ‘give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man’<sup>74</sup>. This saying can be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be a statement of intent, declaring that Jesuit schooling will transform a boy into a man. Inversely, it could also be said to be a claim of the Jesuits to locate the attributes of a man contained within the frame of a child. In either case, this proverb indicates that the characteristics that define one are developed and nurtured during one’s formative years. This proverb identifies how the Jesuits placed central importance upon the development of the child and as such were instrumental in the development of formal education in Europe (Chapple 1993; Mangan 2000). The premise here was that in schooling the habits of children with regards to philosophy, morality and spirituality would enable that child to develop into a person who could serve society. Over the centuries the Jesuit mission has filtered down through its long engagement with schooling, remaining enacted at schools such as North Point. The aim of this chapter is to bring attention to how the Jesuit pedagogical approach of the school nurtured student reflexivity, enabling students to imagine their social world in particular ways. I will consider this aspect of North Point within the on-going concerns of this thesis regarding the ‘NP Imaginary’.

In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate how a particular Jesuit pedagogical approach known as the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm reverberated through the everyday experiences of schooling at North Point, with a specific focus on the weekly school assemblies. This chapter argues that assemblies, explicitly those conducted by the students themselves, offer an insight into the ways in which student reflexivity was nurtured at school. This

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<sup>74</sup> This proverb most famously sparked the social experiment, *7 UP*, a documentary series which began in 1963 which followed the fortunes of children from the age of 7 tracing the influence of their childhood years on their later life (Singer 1998).

reflexivity, I contend, lay at the root of student imaginaries and thus underscored the broader ‘NP Imaginary’ across the student body. This chapter will ethnographically divulge the practice of assemblies constructed by students in order to demonstrate the ways in which students come to consider their respective positions, firstly as North Pointers and secondly within India, and the wider world beyond. I will demonstrate how assessments of assemblies through the guise of ‘grades’ awarded by the Rector acted as a means through which students could ‘compete’ with one another. More importantly, assemblies that received the highest grades were those that were able to best articulate how the themes of the assembly culminate in a message that translates into the ‘NP Imaginary’. This is to say that assemblies often invoked lines from the school chorus, or the school motto, for example as a means of bringing about a potentially vague series of anecdotes or ideas and comparing them with the values attributed to North Point. Ultimately this chapter argues that assemblies played an important role in shaping the NP Imaginary.

I will begin by describing what assemblies involved at North Point. I shall then ground this within the Jesuit roots of North Point, focusing upon the Ignatian Pedagogical paradigm to which the school subscribes. I will flesh out some ethnographic detail in order to describe how assemblies offered a platform for students to imagine themselves within North Point and the world beyond. This chapter continues the themes of *performance* and *competition* which was begun in Part 1, and which will develop in the course of the following two chapters. Specifically, this chapter explores how the pedagogical aims of North Point to cultivate student reflexivity served as a background in the development of the ‘NP Imaginary’. North Point nurtured and encouraged students to not only reflect but enact those reflections. These performed reflections thus facilitated student ways of imagining how they compared themselves with others and how they related to others both inside the school and beyond.

### **Monday Morning**

Assemblies were part of the timetable at North Point. First period on a Monday morning was, weather permitting, reserved for a school assembly. This assembly gathered together classes 6 to 12 in the quadrangle for an entire 40 minute period. The students were expected to respond to the call of the morning bell and form themselves into neat columns in order of their respective roll numbers. Some of the Class teachers (whose role I will

focus on later in this chapter) would wander amid the boys, encouraging them to line up and remain quiet. Helping the teachers were class monitors and Beadles, who similarly called their fellow students into line with varying degrees of success. The students and staff were all awaiting the arrival of the rector, who would conduct the assembly from the marble stage at the front of the quadrangle. The Monday assembly was usually dominated by announcements regarding forthcoming events, or something the Rector wished to bring to the attention of the students, either on behalf of himself or another member of staff. This was usually an issue of discipline, reminding students how they were expected to wear their uniforms, how they should behave towards one another, what they were anticipated to achieve in exams. The raising of these issues was usually in relation to a recent event that had brought this issue to light. There was more than a hint of ‘expectation’ of the students.

The Monday assembly was entirely dominated by the Rector and was rarely staged in his absence. During this assembly, the Rector would announce any recent sports results with a particular emphasis on those which North Point had won. In this manner, the Monday assemblies seemed like a scaled down version of the larger events such as Rector’s Day, which I explored in Chapter 2. I would suggest that assemblies offered a more mundane, everyday means of framing the ‘ideal’ aspects of school life, all the while offering these in contrast to the undesirable, the abject, and the bad. In this way we can observe reverberations of Charles Taylor’s (2004: 23) ‘ideal types’ and ‘foul plays’ being performed with the express aim of establishing expectations of how a student should and should not be. Just like The trophies from victorious sports or other extracurricular triumphs were always presented at an assembly. The presentation was invariably identical each time inviting the members of the team onto the stage to present them with their trophy and parade them in front of the whole school. The captain and the coach of the team would be singled out for praise before the captain would lead the congregation of the assembly in *three cheers* for NP.

This small enactment, which occurred on numerous occasions throughout my fieldwork, contained within all the elements of the ‘NP Imaginary’. The victory was an act placed within ‘History’, as there was often a brief description of how this particular attainment measured up against other sporting achievements of a similar kind. By ‘History’ here I return to the ethnographic category that I identified in Chapter 1 as the imagined world of

North Point, which exists beyond the everyday experience of students, and which serves as the background for all which occurs within North Point. Perhaps this would include mentioning the past achievements of the players themselves or past victories in the tournament. There were three cheers for North Point, invoking a performance of the ‘NP Spirit’ as the gathered students sang the praises of the school, akin to the raucous atmosphere created by the students when they chanted along during sports matches (see Chapter 3). Finally, the victory is shaped as a victory of the North Pointer and North Point, a victory over other schools, thus affirming the importance of North Point in the eyes of the students. Performances such as this, as I indicated, occurred throughout the year and although without the significance of Rector’s Day, still served to mark out points of the ‘NP Imaginary’. This was the case for Mondays, at least. Now I wish to move on to the assemblies which would take place the following day. These assemblies return back to the premise with which I began the chapter: the Jesuit approaches to schooling. This is not to imply here that Jesuits were unique in their assemblies. The school assembly is a fairly common concept, common to a number of schooling environments. However I wish to focus on the ways in which the students of North Point were required to conduct their own assemblies and how this platform offered a space for students to ‘reflect’. I will flesh out the concept of ‘reflection’ later on when I ascribe further detail to the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, which orients teaching practices at North Point. For now I will centre my attention on the Tuesday assemblies themselves, how they were enacted and how this specific practice is located a key space for student imaginaries to develop.

### **The Student Assemblies**

The Monday assembly alone was not deemed a sufficient means of laying out expectations for students on how they should relate to others in the world. On Tuesdays, first period after break, the Rector would make way, leaving a Class of students to take to the stage to host their very own assembly. This was enacted on a rotation policy with each Class conducting two assemblies throughout the year. The rotation began with the youngest of the senior Classes<sup>75</sup>, Class 6, running through each of its four subdivisions which were known as ‘sections’ and labelled A, B, C and D. Each section was comprised of roughly 35 students and the rotation would progress up the year groups moving onto Class 7, then 8 and so on until eventually all the classes had been exhausted. These assemblies would run

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<sup>75</sup> The Primary Division, consisting of Class 3, 4 and 5 had their own assemblies.

for approximately 20 minutes, allowing time for a final word from the Rector at the end. The Rector would then offer his ‘assessment’ of the proceedings in the form of an oral feedback, commending certain aspects of the assembly and often critiquing others. Ultimately an assembly would be ‘graded’, with the usual array of grades on offer from A+ down to F, although C – was the lowest grade I personally witnessed<sup>76</sup>. This grade would provide the marker by which student adjudged the success or failure of their assembly. Although these grades did not count towards any ‘official’ grading of the students, they were a means of bringing some ‘legitimacy’ to proceedings. Fr. Kinley explained to me that the students wanted grades. He claimed not to want to give them, but he did so because the students were always asking him what he thought. In this sense there was recognition from the students that there were certain requirements placed upon them within their assemblies and the conclusive grades was a means of understanding whether or not they fitted these requirements.

In this sense one could consider assemblies ‘ritualised performance’, as I outlined in Chapter 2. There I argued that school events were only given legitimacy and meaning through the specific performance of certain enactments. For example, the Investiture Ceremony could not exist with the act of ‘investiture’, which consisted of a very specific sequence of enactments performed before the whole school. Likewise student-lead assemblies were repetitive and consisted of prescribed actions. I would observe how the format and timing of each class was equivalent to all others. Actions were repeated; sequences of events were routinely performed; there was a general expectation of what was to be witnessed. However, I would argue here that, much like the Monday assemblies, such events were not considered within the broader spectrum of North Point ‘History’, in as much as they were not directly repeated. Although the list of actions was comparable from assembly to assembly, no two were identical or even imagined to be so.

At this juncture I should briefly return to the key theoretical axis that runs through this thesis: social imaginaries. The assemblies, which I am extrapolating from here, act as vital components of student imaginaries coming to bring students together as a collective within a specified space and imagine together. Charles Taylor (2002; 2003) perceived of social imaginaries as realised collectively through the Public Sphere, a concept he drew from

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<sup>76</sup> I had been assured by the rector and the teachers that some assemblies had been graded ‘F’ before, and had been asked to be repeated; but they concurred that this was rare.

Jurgen Habermas. This approach is envisaged much in the same vein as Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities* as those people of a given social collective are enabled to imagine themselves as affiliated and connected with others through mutual participation in certain social practices. Anderson notes how reading the morning newspaper and witnessing others also reading the same newspaper facilitated certain connections. That newspaper referred to events within a specific geographic space and distributed amongst only those within that space. Taylor's Public Sphere analogy takes this analysis to the next level in exploring how imagining socially was a collective discursive practice. This means that it was not enough to purely witness others reading newspapers; one had to take up a debate with those other readers, and also the authors of those newspapers. This essentially demonstrated a critical awareness of the reality with which one is confronted. This demonstrated a reflexivity which Taylor attested constituted social imaginaries. It was not enough for individuals to see themselves in a world of others, but to engage with those others and through those relations coming to understand the ways in which a social whole is constructed. In pursuit of this reflexive social engagement, I will turn my attention to the student assemblies of North Point, which I contend offer the opportunity for students to engage in the social world of North Point. The students were required to reflect upon an issue, a personality or a theme drawn from the world at large, and to perform this to the school.

In the previous chapter, I explored the relations between students within the contexts of what I termed a 'competition', drawing inspiration from Mark Liechty's (2003) analysis of middle class patterns of consumption in Kathmandu. I was seeking to explore the ways in which students came to understand their lives as students of North Point in comparison with their fellow students. In Chapter 3 I explored this through proficiency at sport, but there was a comparable case with assemblies. The students relied upon this 'grade' to compare their efforts with those of other Classes. In addition to the sketching out of the 'ideal' and the realisation of a collective 'reflexivity', I wish to highlight how the enactment of assemblies was also a 'competition' in the ways in which it offered a space whereby students could compare themselves with one another.

In this regard, there are two points that I seek to highlight, which speak to the concept of social imaginary that I am seeking to illuminate in the course of this thesis. The first is that of performance, which I discussed in Chapter 2. Assemblies were acts of performance.

Students stood up on a stage in front of an audience of their teachers and peers. The second point is with regard to reflexivity. The pedagogical aim of the school sought to instil students with the capabilities to critically reflect on their lives. This reflexivity is then enacted and performed through assemblies, offering students a platform upon which to assess themselves against others. As I will illustrate in the ethnography that follows, it is not the act of reflection alone, but rather how it combines with the performance of assemblies. Somewhere within the dynamic between performing and reflecting is a creative space where student imaginaries take root.

First I wish to explore a fundamental aspect of the role of assemblies within the North Point imaginary. Much in the same way that ‘History’ facilitated a broader framework within which to imagine the world, a specific concept of ‘reflection’ reverberated through school life, coming to a head, I suggest, with the assembly process. In the following section I will consider a number of assembly rehearsals, which serve to demonstrate how performing assemblies was perceived to be a vital cog in the North Point education process.

### **Assembly Practice: Learning through Reflection**

The assembly itself was timetabled amid the usual array of lessons that constituted the school day. As intimated above, they were not simply compulsory presentations but constituted an important component of the schooling process at North Point. Assemblies were part of the encouraged ‘competitive’ exchanges between students in offering a forum where students could compare themselves to one another. The competitive edge was further sharpened by the involvement of class teachers, who saw them as a component of their own individual assessment, and not purely of their students. In this section I will seek to explore the process of constructing assemblies at North Point and through these examples illuminate how the ‘competition’, which was discussed in the previous chapter, spread into more formal domains of school life. Perhaps more crucially, I will also examine how reflexivity was nurtured and appropriated amongst the students. This reflexivity is of vital significance in the scope of this thesis as it demonstrates how the students maintained a critical eye on their social world and analysed their role within it.

It was midway through the morning and classes were in full swing. I was making my way across the quadrangle when I happened upon a class of senior students gathered in the

centre of the quadrangle. I watched as they carefully aligned themselves on the white marble stage at the centre. There was some jostling as the teacher standing amidst the blue blazers pointed at some of those already on the stage, causing them to move about, like a photographer carefully lining up his shot. Once all the boys were on the stage, one by one they came forward from the crowd and delivered short speeches. I stepped over to ask what was happening. 'This is for our assembly. It's tomorrow and the boys haven't had any practice'.

I didn't know much about the assembly process at this stage so this was something of an education for me. It turned out that generally classes took a couple of periods off from their usual timetable to practice their class assembly. This was my first clue that assemblies held certain significance. I asked about the assembly and what theme they were presenting. I was told that each class had to perform an assembly and in this instance the students had been charged with coming up with their own theme. These students were from class XI science, among the senior most students at the school, and thus were challenged with more tasks in conducting their own assemblies than their younger North Point brothers. Their teacher told me that the students had decided upon 'responsibility' as their theme, breaking off mid-sentence to shout at one of his boys to 'speak louder', gesticulating his hands upwards. As we were chatting the students on the stage seemed to be organising themselves rather independently of their teacher: forgetful students were reminded of their lines, and particularly forgetful students were given a nudge if they missed their turn. The class teacher told me that he had contributed very little input towards constructing either the theme or the articulation of the assembly. I asked whether the teacher was worried that the students hadn't really practiced, and whether or not he would be held responsible if the students didn't perform well. The class teacher knew I hadn't been around North Point that long, so he smiled perhaps out of nervousness, perhaps at my naivety. He told me that on one hand he was worried: just like students heading into an exam, he could help them prepare but he could not do the exam for them. This was their task. On the other hand he was not worried at all. The students were relaxed and kept reassuring him that all would be fine. He summarized this point in a line which stuck with me. 'The students know what we [the teachers] expect from them. Also [what] they expect from themselves.'

At this stage, it struck me that assemblies were symptomatic of a broader pedagogical aim at North Point: to enable students to stand up by themselves. There could be an argument here that this was an embodiment of the expected behaviours bestowed upon students by the teachers and the governing forces of the school as a whole, but this is only a small part of the picture. It was true that student assemblies were performed with a certain ritual repetition, as with the major school events, but it is also true that the students, particularly the older students, wished to communicate something of their own through their performances. This resulting reflexivity was, I shall argue below, central to understanding the NP imaginary. The space to reflect upon their lives opened up an imagined platform from which students could situate themselves more broadly within the world. This specific kind of reflecting was a key foundation stone upon which students were able to imagine all other things. The school assembly was a space where students learned the significance of reflexivity.

This was illustrated, in part, in the senior students' brief practice session. The fact that they were permitted time away from class in order to prepare themselves indicated that the assembly itself was considered part of the formal learning process at school. It also demonstrated how the students progressed to a stage whereby the teacher was a near bystander. 'I'm only here to make sure they don't just fool around', he told me. I asked him how he could be sure that the students would put together a good assembly. The teacher smiled 'These boys are the most senior boys at the school, many [of them] have been doing these assemblies for five or six years. It's like when they start off we need to hold their hand, but by the end they hold our hand!'

At this juncture it is vital to make reference to the role of the school's Jesuit heritage in exploring the specific themes of this chapter, in particular the issue of reflexivity. I mentioned the school's Jesuit roots in the introduction so in this brief passage I will focus my attention on a specific ideology which held influence over school life, the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP). This mode of thought (discussed below), which derives from the founder of the Jesuit brotherhood, St Ignatius of Loyola, represents the overarching pedagogical process at work within the school and goes some way to sketching out the ultimate aims of learning from the North Point perspective. A key component of the IPP was to encourage and nurture reflexivity in students to empower them with the requisite

decision making skills to negotiate their futures. This can be summarized through the processes of experience, reflection and action.

### **Men for Others: Living the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm**

A Jesuit school incorporates a centuries-old schooling practice that dates back to a 16<sup>th</sup> Century knight, Ignatius of Loyola, who established the Society of Jesus in 1540, which would become popularly known as the Jesuits. This order, which followed the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, was instrumental in bolstering the ailing Catholic Church in Europe in the wake of the rise of Protestantism (Chapple 1993). The Jesuits instigated a brand of schooling to enlighten hearts and minds, incorporating the classical forms of Greek, Latin, literature and philosophy, as well as science and the arts. They espoused an approach that sought God in all things, advocating a strong sense of ceremony in Catholic ritual and practice, and championing performing arts and music (Cesareo 1993). The Jesuits were charged with spreading their message and within months of their recognition from Rome in 1540 they had arrived in the subcontinent. The principal exponent of this message was Francis Xavier, the chief disciple of Ignatius. They began to establish a presence in the Portuguese occupied region of Goa and within the French Enclave further south, building seminary schools to train priests. However their notoriety spread beyond the European traders and there were records of Jesuits being welcomed into the court of Akhbar the Great in 1579 (Chapple 1993). By 1750, The Jesuits established over 600 schools and colleges, the majority of these seminary schools, but many also accepted ‘externs’: those not studying for the priesthood, a mixture of both European and Indian students. There was a strong emphasis on the formation of well-rounded persons, driven by a Christian desire to be closer to God. These schools were not intent on the aim of converting laypersons to the church, but were rather keen to enable them with the means to better themselves, and to be able to reflect upon the world around them. Ignatius foresaw a schooling system which enabled students to graduate into people who would play important roles in the world:

*‘From among those present who are merely students, in time some will depart to play diverse roles – one to preach and carry on the care of souls, another to the government of the land and the administration of justice.....since young boys become grown men, their good education in life and doctrine will be*

*beneficial to many others, with the fruit expanding more widely everyday'*  
(cited in Casereo 1993: 27).

This quote from Ignatius demonstrates how much of these core messages, albeit reflected towards a very different world to the one today, points poignantly towards a similar conclusion to the one I am suggesting here. Schooling in this model was a stepping stone enroute to something grander. Ignatius' ideology had two significant aims. Firstly, the aim was to enable students to live meaningful lives and assist others in doing so. Secondly, schooling had to be a pathway to an occupation significant enough to facilitate a societal role that would enable the achievement of the first aim.

The essence of this centuries-old message has been encapsulated in a very modern Jesuit brand of schooling, which is referred to as the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (henceforth IPP). The IPP follows three guiding principles: experience, reflection and action. Experience broadly refers to the experience of learning, or acquiring knowledge within the school. Reflection is key to understanding that knowledge, as it locates the individual learner within the process of education. This is not a passive figure absorbing everything, but one who can be critical and think independently. Finally, action infers what choices are made based on the previous processes of experience and reflection; the act of being a 'good person'. This thesis is interested in how this particular Jesuit shaping of a particular idea of how a person should be filters down to the student imaginings of being 'North Pointers' and in particular what it means to be an 'ideal' student.

Ignatius and his followers championed a form of education that didn't seek to proselytise the Word of God, but rather sought to produce enlightened, critical minds that would be able to discover God for themselves. In essence, Ignatius sought to promote a particular way of critical thought, which he believed would lead others to make the right choices, or at least the choices Ignatius deemed right. In this sense, Jesuit schooling was tasked with enabling a specific 'social imaginary', a certain analytical framework with which students came to understand their relations to one another and to the society around them.

There are some connections between the world of North Point today and the Jesuit schools of Ignatius' era. Ignatius' students were instructed at a time of religious upheaval and thus the focus stressed personal spiritual development to enable students to navigate a world of social unrest. At North Point students learned about the world in which they were situated,

stories of key players in India's past, whose lives have had a profound impact on the way people live today. Students in both instances learned of their capacities both to have a meaningful life for themselves but also to help others. But what exactly is this meaningful life? This is a question which, I suggest in the ethnography detailed below, the senior student assemblies sought to explore, illustrating the modes of critical thought inherent within the Ignatian educational model. These senior students reflected upon their own lives and acted out their views in front of the other students. This action, I will argue, is crucial as it was imagined by the students to form a crucial landmark with respect to their future. Students recognised the importance of performing on stage first and foremost. The combination of the act of talking on stage was supplemented with the content of the performance. The assembly itself presented a theme which offered a moral message: an idea, or the life of a successful person, which presented an array of examples of what a meaningful life entails. Implicit within the assembly was a projection of potential futures.

### **Some Assembly Required: Experience, Reflection and Action**

The very word 'assembly' conjures certain images in the mind. It is a concept of bringing parts together, of unifying a number of pieces into a whole. If you throw the word school into the mix then new images emerge. We see hundreds of school children clustered together in a hall or common space all gathered to hear the week's or day's news from their principal or head master. Here, I wish to explore the school assemblies as realised within North Point and how the move for student participation and involvement create opportunities to put all that has been learned in the classroom into practice.

I will focus my attention on the Tuesday assemblies, which were regularly utilised as the 'class assemblies'. Each week, one class would be nominated to present the assembly for the week along the lines of an annual theme, which had been set by the Rector at the start of the term. This year's theme was 'Good to Great – the year of Performance', a rather ambiguous theme which could be applied to many things. In the contexts of the assembly themes, however, the classes were challenged to present the story of a great personality in order to offer glimpses on what greatness is and how it can be achieved. Many of the classes drew their inspiration from the portraits that were hung along one wall of the colonnade around the quadrangle. There were some predictable candidates on the list, including Nelson Mandela, Mahatmas Gandhi, Mother Teresa, but also some more

unlikely individuals such as Brazilian author Paolo Coelho, Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero and former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold.

The assembly preparation begins with the picking of a theme or, in this instance a personality. For the younger classes, this was done by the Class teacher, who was assigned to each of the four Class sections, A, B, C and D. The role of the Class teacher was largely in terms of administration and also for other academic matters, such as report cards and parent teacher meetings. The Class teacher then works with their class to produce a twenty minute assembly to present their version of a life story. With the younger classes, the teachers take a stronger role in the production of the assembly, in selecting the order and producing the segments for the students to learn and execute the performance on stage. The teachers will identify their strongest speakers to deliver important lines of dialogue, such as the opening speech which welcomes all to the assembly and outlines the theme. But a key component of these assemblies is that no boy speaks for more than a couple of minutes, and no boy speaks twice. In doing this, every boy gets a chance to do something either by acting out short skits or delivering some dialogues.

Content of the assembly aside, the students themselves were more interested in the opportunities to get up on stage and perform. I observed some classes during their practice sessions in order to get a greater insight into what lay behind the assembly process. Classes often found some place to practice around the front of the school, usually along the tiered seating along the edge of the basketball court to the side of the flat, or under the shelter of the pavilion on the far side of the flat away from the main school building. This area was usually selected on the basis that it provided the space to try out the routine and was also far enough away from the other classes to not disturb anyone. The following example demonstrates a rehearsal of a Class 6 assembly. The majority of these students had just moved up to the senior school and although the Primary sections of the school conduct their own assemblies, the Class 6 students were aware that life was different in the senior school. As such, they would express slight anxieties within the move between the Divisions. The main difference was that the Primary students did not sit end-of-year exams. For the Class 6 students, this represented a shift in expectations and thus they looked towards their Class Teacher for guidance.

Class 6B had been taken out of class for the period, and taken to the tiered steps at the front of the school, adjacent to where the Primary students had fought over cricket bats in Chapter 3. After carefully marshalling her students into order on the steps, the Class Teacher invited her students to begin. They had already been issued with their lines and been asked to learn them. Their assembly was set for the following day and the students had rehearsed previously. ‘Don’t feel shy Ashwin’, the Class Teacher advised one of her pupils who she adjudged wasn’t speaking loud enough. ‘Sometimes they feel shy when they speak out loud, they’re only small’, she thought necessary to explain to me. The student tried his dialogue again, this time straining his voice in an effort to get over his ‘shyness’. The class teacher flapped her hand to motion to the students behind to adjust their standing positions. One by one the boys came forward, delivered their lines and disappeared back into the fold. Occasionally the boys at the back would hold up quotes written on a long strip of cardboard, to reinforce certain points. This class was presenting ‘Mother Teresa’, narrating the story of the young Albanian nun who made her name helping the poor in Calcutta. The class teacher had lined up her boys as neatly as she saw fit, shouting at each boy to ‘stand straight’ on stage. After she seemed more content with the volume of her charges, I came forward and spoke with her. The assembly practice took place during lesson time. This should have been an English class, and with the first term’s exams imminent I asked how the students would catch up on the missed lesson. She smiled and said ‘what can we do, we need to practice’. She thought for a moment and then added, ‘But anyway they are learning; just because we are not in the class, I am still teaching them. They have to learn to stand up and speak’. However there was also personal pressure. ‘I am nervous, Father<sup>77</sup> is watching us; [the teachers] also’. The teachers had the incentive to forgo formal lessons in order to prepare for assemblies. After all, assemblies were more observable, whereas that which occurred in the classroom was seemingly unseen. As such, students needed to practice to prepare themselves for the event. At this juncture it appeared as though the ‘competition’ that flowed through student actions was also influential on the staff level. In this example the Class teacher demonstrates how she was motivated by the fear of being watched by the Rector and as such she did not want to be considered as lesser than the other Class teachers.

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<sup>77</sup> By ‘father’ this teacher was referring to Fr. Kinley. The school’s rector and indeed the other Jesuit members of staff were known by their ecclesiastical titles, either father for a priest or brother for a priest in training.

The students shared their teacher's view that this was an important stage of their learning process. On the short walk back to their classroom, two of the students, who had each taken turns in delivering monologues, expressed their feelings on assemblies. They noted how they were sometimes shy because they had not performed in front of such a large crowd before. Another student came across and boasted how he had experience of performing in the primary play so he didn't get nervous. This seemed to jolt a number of memories, as those boys who were nervous also revealed they too had been in that play. They then claimed that it was because this was senior school and they hadn't *seen* a senior assembly before. But they acknowledged the importance of public speaking. 'Sir this is opportunity for us. We can learn to not feel shy, so in our future jobs we cannot feel shy also'. At this moment the student demonstrated the importance of having witnessed previous performances. I reminded them that had all done assemblies before in the Primary Division which didn't offer any consolation. 'Sir, Class 6 is different. Now we have more subjects, exams also'. Contradictorily it seemed that the students' anxieties were in part due to a perceived raising of expectations the student acknowledged as they moved up the school but also that they didn't really know what those expectations were, specifically regards to assemblies. The unease of some of the students was due to a lesser awareness of what the expectations were; the students were not aware of what they were competing with, and thus relied on the guidance of their Class teacher, who was able to guide them from their own experiences.

The younger classes seemed to take more practice sessions prior to their assemblies, whereas the older classes took a more casual approach, with one session on the PD flat usually rehearsing a song and then one on the stage itself the day before, which almost all classes opted to do. The pragmatic reason given was that there was little time, as the senior students had more classes to fit in to the day and more examinations. Aside from these reasons, the staff and students seemed far more confident that they could pull it off. One teacher explained how he had planned to make his life simple by arranging an adapted version of his previous year's assembly. That said, it was also striking how the teachers' involvement grew less pronounced as the students grew older. In fact teachers often relied on the students to provide poems, songs or other skits to be performed. The teachers themselves would attribute this to a need to spend more time with 'corrections', more time

marking students' academic work, which seemed to increase over the school years. But they also sought to encourage the students to take more responsibility.

As I noted earlier, assemblies were highly repetitive on the whole. There was a predictable sequence of actions: one student would welcome the school and introduce the assembly, and then one by one a number of students would come forward to speak a brief dialogue about the theme. This would either be followed by or interspersed with a short skit, and concluded with further dialogue. A student would then lead the prayer and then the class would often perform a poem or song to conclude. There were slight adaptations here and there but generally this was the order. Or at least this was the assumed 'correct' way of doing things; there was a level of expectation of which the teachers were keenly aware. The earlier example had demonstrated how a teacher was aware that 'Father was watching', indicating their awareness of the assessment of both the Rector and of other teachers. The pressure of the assessment had led one inexperienced young teacher, who had never been a Class teacher before, to enlist help from a more experienced colleague in order to conduct his assembly. Firstly he was concerned that, like the young students new to the senior school, he wouldn't be able to live up to the required standard. But secondly he acknowledged the importance of the assembly and sought out a way of ensuring that his Class would be up to the standard of the others.

The stories of the practice sessions revealed that there was an awareness of a certain formula of the 'right' assembly. For the students it represented an opportunity they had to take; for the teachers, a need to live up to the required standards. This reveals a level of 'competition' arising between the Classes. There was no explicit desire to 'be the best', but rather to ensure that a required standard was met. The teacher was anxious that 'Father was watching' and thus sought to ensure that her Class would pass the Rector's assessment. Her students reflected a wider sense of 'competing' as they referenced their potential future careers. The students noted how they would need the practical skills of presenting an assembly, such as public speaking, which would enable them to 'compete' with students from other schools if they were to find themselves in competition for the same jobs. For the younger Classes, especially Class 6, 7 and 8, the Class teacher played a far greater role than was observable later on in the school, as I will describe later. However all this is one dimension of the assembly process. This completed section outlines how the

assemblies slotted in with the ‘competition’ which flowed through school life, which I introduced in the previous chapter.

### **Reflecting on the World:**

The assembly process was structured by the apparent ‘competition’ which engaged the students and also the teachers as a means of comparing one Class to another, and in doing so forming an unofficial assessment of each Class. However, this wasn’t simply the case of getting up on a stage and performing with perfect enunciation, suitably performed actions and accompanying props or even selecting the perfect song to round it all off. There was also an importance placed on the message of the assembly. By message here I refer to the theme of the assembly and also the ways in which this theme is communicated. For example, the above case outlined a rehearsal for an assembly revolving around Mother Teresa. The assembly featured the illustration of her life and work but also sought to identify the specific traits which were important to her story: humility, service to God, service to others. This is what was meant by the message. When it came to the staging of the Mother Teresa assembly, Fr. Kinley praised this Class’s efforts with regards to conveying the requisite message and illustrating well to the other students. However he surprised them by following his praise with the awarding of a grade B. Kinley explained that the Class made no mention of Mother Teresa’s early years in Darjeeling which, he claimed, were instrumental in converting the course of her life from a Loreto Nun to her work with the poor of Calcutta. On one hand he was pointing out that the students, themselves predominantly from Darjeeling, had missed an opportunity to relate the story of the life of Mother Teresa to Darjeeling itself and on the other, they had missed out the defining moment of the story: the moment when Mother Teresa developed her approach to helping others. This latter point Kinley highlighted as he brought the discussion about to encompass the North Point Jesuit ideals of being ‘men for others’. The failures of the Class to situate the message of the assembly within the broader message of North Point were what counted against the grading of the assembly in the end. However there were examples of assemblies which did achieve this. In examples such as the one below, the Class went to great lengths to illustrate the message in their assembly.

This dramatic example revolved around the personality U Thant, a former Secretary General of the UN. One day I was approached by the teacher who was organising the

assembly, asking for some musical assistance. Although he was presenting U Thant, he had planned an elaborate skit involving Michael Jackson's ghost. He designed the set up with two actors playing Michael Jackson, complete with black wig, dark glasses and hat. The plan was to have one Michael Jackson leaning out of an upper floor window, then disappear only to 'magically' reappear on stage as the second. There would then be a number of student dressed as 'terrorists', others carrying colourful rocket launchers representing war, and over the top the familiar strains of Michael's Jackson's song, 'Heal the World', as the terrorists and soldiers put down their weapons and dance around. This assembly argued that UN officials such as U Thant were instrumental in enabling an end to violence and war around the world, a message which related back to a part of the student pledge visible in the student diaries, which pledged to keep North Point violence free. The assembly received an 'A' and a loud cheer of approval from the watching students.

This example demonstrates how the importance of the 'message' in assemblies occasionally took precedence over the physical aspects of the performance, such as 'talking loudly', which seemed the grandest concern of the teachers in the previous examples. Part of a successful conveyance of a message was performing something enjoyable. More crucially it seemed was to situate the message within the frame of understanding of the social world of North Point. In other words, the assembly was only a success if it found a place within the 'NP Imaginary'. I was able to talk to the teacher responsible for organising the assembly afterwards and he explained his keenness for being involved despite not holding a Class teacher's post:

'I don't have my own class this year so I didn't get the chance to do this otherwise. These things are important for them to learn. People like U Thant are not well known people but they are important people. If I make this assembly entertaining then they will listen and they will remember. Sometimes these situations, like war, are so complicated for young children to understand. But they see the news so they know these things. This is the job of the teacher. To help them understand these big things. This is the important thing'.

For him the message was important. The assembly provided an opportunity to engage with and reflect upon wider issues in the world and he was able to facilitate a platform by which this information would be witnessed and learned.

Here is a suitable moment to return to the recurring theme of social imaginaries, in particular referring to the particular ‘NP Imaginary’ propagated at North Point. The message of the assembly was assessed in its relativity to either the school itself or the local region, as this message acted as a critical juncture which returns back to the ‘ideal types’, as identified within other school events. In the Mother Teresa example, the Class was adjudged to have failed to adequately accommodate the role of Darjeeling in shaping her life and more significantly failing to highlight this period of Mother Teresa’s life as one which defined her future career. The failure to identify the links between Mother Teresa’s charitable work and the North Point models of ‘men for others’ as established through the school’s Jesuit history, had weakened the assessment and the achieved grade. The second assembly had been far more elaborate, performed in a very different way from the first, but crucially this assembly had been deemed to have carried the requisite message.

So far this has been an exclusively teacher centred view of the process, which reflects students’ early engagement with assemblies at North Point. However as the students get older, their involvement grows. They begin to write their own dialogues, set their own skits and choose their own songs to perform. The students are the ones who run around looking for props and additional equipment to enhance their message.

My interest grew when looking at the assemblies of the senior students, the class XI’s. We saw, in the rehearsal I described earlier, how they took nearly full responsibility for the preparation and performance of their assemblies. Many of the students play instruments, for example, and were more instrumental in the writing of the dialogues and the composition of the assembly. I have three examples from the senior most classes, the class XI students, who drew upon their own views of the world, their own interests and hobbies as well as all they had experienced in previous years, to put together their presentations.

There are three class XI classes which are subdivided in three ‘streams’: Science, Commerce and Arts. These streams are designed to reflect the choices of the students with regards to a future career. Science is a class with the highest academic achievers. In order to merely opt for the Science stream students must meet achieve the highest marks in their boards exams at the end of class X<sup>78</sup>. The Science stream students will study science subjects, such Chemistry, Physics and Biology as well as Computing and Maths. The

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<sup>78</sup> The class structure and exam system along with other aspects of the schooling system was discussed in the introduction.

Commerce stream is less demanding in terms of entry than Science, and offers options for those considering business studies after school. Maths is a core subject, along with finance, economics and political science. The Arts stream focuses on the humanities, such as History and Geography. All the streams study English as a core subject.

These assemblies occurred at the end of 2010, and each Class were tasked with constructing their own theme and, as illustrated above, these assemblies were constructed with minimal or no involvement from the Class teachers. The Science Class had chosen 'responsibility' as their theme. They illustrated this with a dramatic scene, which combined hammy acting to produce a scene that showed a group of terrorists attacking the White House. The narrative followed that they were bent on convincing the President that he had failed in his responsibility to the people who looked up to him. In the end the terrorists literally blows up in their faces when the terrorist responsible for the explosives neglects his duty and the bombs explode. The students affirmed this humorous play with messages of how important it is to take responsibility for things in our lives or be prepared to live with the consequences. The Commerce students were slightly more stoic in their approach. They chose 'humility' as their theme, drawing on the story of a businessman who had come from humble origins but had forsaken his origins refusing to offer any help to his family one he had made his own fortune. The businessman, however, would one day find himself penniless through bad business deals and frivolous spending. The businessman was then left with no choice but to return home to beg for forgiveness and help. The Arts students built their assembly around the concept of 'emotional intelligence'. Their skit illustrated a student struggling with his studies, trying to come to grips with the subjects he was studying at school. This student bemoaned his inabilities to study and claimed that he could only fail because he was not as good at school as others. Then a timely intervention, rather bizarrely, from a time traveller, reminded the stricken student that there was more to school and indeed life than could be found in school books. The time traveller took the student on a journey through time to explore the lives of many historical figures who had struggled at school, yet went on to achieve great things. And far from simply focussing on school, the performance outlined skills beyond the ability to memorize dates and numbers, noting that the skill to speak, to be creative and think for one's self were all notable skills. The performances of this assembly appeared to highlight

that there was more to life than academics, other factors that could lead to future success apart from high grades.

All three assemblies attempted to tie the narratives of the assemblies with the messages of North Point. The Science Class argued that their theme aligned with the Jesuit inspired call for students to be 'men for others'. Their performance indicated how those who were entrusted with powers over others, whether through democratic elections or through other means, had a responsibility to wield that authority for the service of the whole society; the betterment of the many rather than pandering to the needs of the few. The Economics students built their assembly around two lines of the school chorus '*lend a hand to a faltering brother, here's a lift for the lame and the slow*'. This message was engendered in their story of the businessman who, even though he shunned his own kin during times of prosperity, was still welcomed and aided at his hour of need. Here the emphasis was not simply that one should always look to help others if one is able to do so. In their example the family refused to turn the businessman away even though he had spurned them. The Arts assembly targeted the model of the North Pointer itself. The final assembly of the three questioned the nature of being all-rounders and uncovered that there was equal importance and significance to skills other than those applicable in a school classroom. Here they also invoked the school motto 'Sursum Corda' ('lift up your hearts') when they highlighted the distinctions between North Point and other schools as the perceived capability to 'lift one's heart' to perform better, faster, stronger and win.

The irony here was that the class who had claimed that there was more to life than 'good grades' were awarded the highest mark for their assembly. The Science group were awarded C, Economics got a B+ and the Arts class achieved an A+. As I previously stated, these 'grades' were an assessment by the rector by way of offering some feedback to the students and were not included within student's 'official' assessment in their monthly report cards. That said, the grades awarded were still desired by students and, as I indicated in the example above, by teachers. There was one occasion when all four sections of Class 9 were graded A for their assemblies and they were rewarded with a whole Class visit to the cinema. Perhaps more crucially, the grading of assemblies offered another means through which the students could engage in their 'competition'.

In the example of the Class 11 students, I was one again able to observe the ‘competition’ amongst students. The awarded grades for the assemblies reversed expectations with the Arts students. I had repeatedly been told by Class 11 Art’s teachers that they were a difficult group of students to teach who rarely applied themselves to their studies. In contrast, Class 11 Science were often noted as being the complete opposite of their cohorts from the Art’s section and thus the grading of the assemblies were something of a surprise. It lead to a number of the Arts students happily boasting their success to their Science cohort. This would normally happen as students passed each other in the quadrangle between lessons, where I once heard some of the Arts Class asking the Science students if they needed any help with their homework.

A few days later I was invited to substitute in the absence of one of Class 11 Art’s teachers. I took that opportunity to speak with the students about their assembly and the subsequent interactions with the Science students. They told me that the concept of their assembly was based on a book that one of them had read. The book in question explored the concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ and was written in a ‘self-help’ format offering steps for the reader to improve their own capacities to control their emotions and so on. The students, apart from the one who had read the book, didn’t seem to know precisely what emotional intelligence was but to most of them they perceived this concept as the ability to think ‘differently’. The Arts students highlighted to me how their assembly offered them a chance to show the whole school what they could do. The students then claimed that they spent longer preparing their assembly because they possessed greater ‘emotional intelligence’ than the Science students. This was represented, in the eyes of the students, by the higher grade that they were awarded. The students were then able to use this platform to ‘compete’ with the Science students. One of the Class 11 Arts students explained to me:

‘Everyday they joke with us about our grades. They are just joking but it is nice to be able to joke back. This assembly gave us a good chance, because this is our speciality. The Science students, they are the best at studies but they don’t always have a mind for [conducting assemblies]. This is also [an] important lesson to learn’.

In this vein, the Class 11 Arts students were hinting towards their perception that they were able to reflect better than the Science students. This was attributed to different ways

of 'thinking'. Fr. Kinley had earlier stressed that grades were only awarded to assemblies by the request of students and this example proves his point. The Arts students relied upon the assessment of the higher grade in order to affirm their perceptions that they were good at conducting assemblies. Perhaps more importantly, their high grade enabled them to compete with the Science students as the Arts students equated their abilities to reflect and the ability to 'study'. In this example the model of the all-rounder offered more opportunities for being a good student than simply performing in the classroom.

In this section, I have endeavoured to focus on the fact that the Class 11 students were largely independent in constructing their assemblies, that is to say, they did so with minimal involvement from their Class teacher. The students fulfilled the first expectation, which was to situate their theme and the message of their assembly within the framework of the school. The Arts students were the best example in this aim as they opted to critique the perceptions of their class as 'bad students'. Their argument attested that students were required to be 'all-rounders' so they argued that this must also include the emotional level. Most of all, the selected subject matter of each of the assemblies indicated quite strongly the respective scholastic positions of each group as the students reflected upon their positions in the school. The Science group, with the highest academic achievers who were expected to go on to study, science, medicine, and law among other things, were also expected to progress into high level employment as future politicians and leaders. As such they invoked a story of how the elected leaders and those with the positions of power and authority have a responsibility to exercise their positions in a certain way. They invoked the call to be 'men for others', which emerged as consistently the most popular theme across assemblies during that year (2011). The Economics group pulled few surprises by casting a businessman in their lead role. The Economics syllabus was always entirely geared towards a future business lifestyle, which meant that possibilities of a career outside of business or commerce almost unthinkable. Their dual position as the students 'in the middle', neither the highest nor the lowest, and their expansive knowledge of business practice lead them to the subject of humility, a concept that both acknowledges one's place in the world and also - despite one's successes - reminds one to always remember where one comes from. The key message that anchored this assembly was drawn from the school chorus, 'lend a hand to faltering brother, here's a lift for the lame and the slow'. This line was invoked as this group of students reinforced the imagined

ideal of North Point students as ‘servants’ of society akin to the Jesuit ideals which flowed through school life particularly in the form of the IPP. The final assembly adequately illustrated how the lowest achievers of Class XI, many written off by teachers as ‘uninterested’, can come up with a concept that demonstrates how it takes more than intellect to succeed in the world. The final assembly invoked the theme most relevant to the school targeting two big markers of North Point, the school motto, *Sursum Corda* (lift up your hearts) and also the North Pointer.

## **Conclusions**

Assemblies serve as an example of how the students were able to articulate their understandings of the Jesuit teaching, which echoed through their experiences at North Point. Through the prism of the Jesuit ideals of education to which teachers at the school were bound, we can observe how the students’ imaginaries were shaped in relation to a number of different factors. Primarily the stage of the assembly provided a public platform where the students could come to see themselves in the company of their fellow North Pointers and through the grading system be able to compare themselves to the other Classes.

The school assembly was an important site for the establishment of the ‘NP Imaginary’ as it invited students to reflect upon issues or significant figures from world history and bring them into the contexts of North Point. Within the examples here I have endeavoured to illustrate how the student assemblies were driven by a certain ‘competition’, driven in part by the Class teachers who were anxious about being assessed themselves. For the students, the opportunity to compare themselves with other Classes, particularly in the case of the Class 11 students, was an opportunity to affirm their perceptions that they could ‘think’ better and thus were not weaker but simply ‘different students. Perhaps most significantly, all the assemblies touched upon various Jesuit themes, such as being ‘men for others’, but also other aspects of North Point, such as the school chorus. A successful assembly was one which encompassed a meaning which related the subject matter of the assembly within the fabric of the ‘NP Imaginary’, thus serving to shape the ways in which students situated themselves amongst their fellow students and also within the world beyond.

The themes of ‘success’ which have been an undercurrent of this chapter lead us full circle back to the premise with which this chapter begun. The Jesuit proverb declared that the

formative years set the groundwork for the life ahead. In this sense the students were shaping their views of themselves and others, both at school and beyond. In this sense they projected the North Pointer into the potential future and there were questions as to where this was all headed. The Arts assembly best represented this question as it debated the value of studying as the pure means of assessing whether a student was good or not. The following chapter will explore this theme of 'success' and how it wasn't purely grades that defined how students framed their goals. The example of the assembly did affirm that grades were an essential part of student imaginings of weighing themselves up against others, but in the course of my fieldwork there was only one setting that was more effective in defining the comparison between students. In the following chapter I will explore the wins and losses on the sports field and how students prized a victory in the colours of North Point, above all else.

# V

## ‘Stories to Tell Your Children’: Imagining ‘Success’ through Sports

### **Introduction**

From the moment I walked through the grand wooden doors of the main entrance way of North Point I could tell that sports played a big role in life at this school. The significance of sport was evidenced in the scores of shiny trophies of various shapes, sizes and ages dotted around the entrance parlour. Some of the trophies dated back almost twenty years, with some of the awards displayed in the cabinets around the edge of the quadrangle dating back even further. Over the months of my fieldwork, I witnessed a steady stream of trophies added to the collection. The newer additions to the trophy collection were presented during the school assemblies where the players, the team captain and the coaches were lauded and the silverware paraded in front of the whole school. These ritualised performances, as detailed in the previous chapter, marked out aspects of the North Point Imaginary. The presentation of trophies not only sought to define models for ‘success’ but also to outline the ways in which the students of North Point shaped up against the students of other schools. This chapter will focus on the engagements with sports across the school, seeking to highlight how sports played a vital role in shaping student expectations, experiences and indeed their imagined perceptions of being North Pointers. I will argue here that sporting events became the symbol of success which served to underpin North Point as a school. Sporting engagements pitted the students of North Point against others, and thus reinforced the idea that North Point was ‘the best’.

In the previous chapter I indicated how the Jesuit heritage of the school had impacted upon the desires to nurture particular forms of reflexive thought which offered students a means of imagining themselves within the world. In this chapter I will continue to explore the ways in which the story of North Point has been shaped in by wider historical processes, such as the 19th Century concept of ‘Athleticism’ (Mangan 2000) which championed a

greater role for sport at private schools. I indicated in Chapter 3 that participation in sport was imagined by students as an opportunity to compete with one another and to explore their positions within North Point. I will continue the theme here with a greater stress on the students' endeavours to seek out opportunities to write themselves into North Point History.

In this chapter, I will continue to explore the recurring theme of 'competition', that is to say the ways in which students came to understand themselves in relation to the world of others with whom they considered themselves most alike. I will explore how this competition shaped student aspirations to 'make History' as they each sought to assure their place as North Pointers. I listened to students as they told the 'stories' of their sporting exploits with reference to how their achievements were situated in relation to North Point History within a social world of other North Pointers. By 'story' I mean the ways in which students located their experiences within the North Point social landscape (Ingold 2000: 189) and the NP Imaginary (Taylor 2004), providing personalised perspectives on how the students positioned themselves in relation to a social world and in the process were actively engaged in the creation of that social world.

I will begin by exploring some further 'symbols' (see Chapter 1)<sup>79</sup> within the school landscape such as trophies on display, a banner that adorned the quadrangle during the year and the presentation of sporting prizes in assemblies as integral components of North Point. I will then examine how student used stories to frame 'success', by situating sporting achievements in relation to the achievements of others. In the example of the basketball tournament the students were concerned with their own personal position with the story of North Point. In this example the students reiterate their wish not to be forgotten as 'losers', as only winners find a place within North Point History. I will also note how students told each other stories of international football stars, relating themselves to their favourite football teams and players in the process exploring how observing professional sport added further legitimacy to student experience as it aligned with those of others across the world. The final section will focus on how sports were associated with student 'character'. In this vein sports teams were only accessible to those who were

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<sup>79</sup> I use the term 'symbol' to refer to an empirically observable object, activity or relationship which could be interpreted as pertaining to something else (Turner 1967). In Chapter 1 I argued that 'symbols' within the school landscape enabled students to 'blaze a trail' through the imagined world of North Point and create meaningful lives.

adjudged to have good ‘character’ at school. Also I will explore how sports such as cricket illuminated that success was about winning ‘the right way’. These examples conclude with an example of defeat, and how this event demonstrated that despite the constant rhetoric at North Point, the school didn’t always win. This final case demonstrates the fears of the earlier students as such resounding defeats are quickly forgotten. Sport was a story of ‘success’ for students, as a victory in an event resulted in a student’s recognition as a North Pointer, paraded in an assembly, decorated with a medal or a trophy and a name enshrined in North Point History.

### **‘Continuing the Winning School’: Sports as a model of ‘success’**

Within a week of my arrival, five grand silver plated trophies, each standing about a metre high, were given pride of place in the school’s entrance. These trophies were placed in front of a host of others which I had previously mentioned above, just below the school honours board. This silverware had been recently acquired through team victories at an interschool athletics competition hosted at North Point. These trophies were a temporary exhibit in the parlour but in their company were more permanent fixtures, such as the school’s honours board, which sat on the wall above. In the first chapter, I examined the role of the honours board as a ‘symbol’ of North Point. Returning to this thread, in this first section, I will explore how the student’s imagined North Point as a ‘winning school’ as they experienced the presentation of a constant stream of trophies and awards being performed to them during school assemblies.

The five silver trophies I met in the entrance hall had been presented to the whole school on a Monday assembly, which was the first school day since the tournament. The Rector proudly announced that North Point had won five out of six possible trophies for the event, declaring that the school had the ‘best athletes in the hills’ and these trophies were the ‘proof’. The entire athletics team were invited onto the stage to receive the applause of the school. The team captains, one captain for each of the six divisions of whom one was the captain of the whole school, were invited to stand forward and their individual achievements were read out. Each of them had won at least two events, cementing their status as leaders of the team. The two Athletics coaches were invited to join in the celebration, joining their teams on the stage, before the senior most captain of the group, a Class 12 student, lead the gathered assembly in a *three cheers* for North Point. There was

an honourable mention for a particular student who had broken a 40-year-old javelin record, who received a special applause to mark his achievement.

This assembly to herald the winners of this tournament was a crucial component in shaping the 'NP Imaginary'. Sports victories were always performed in an assembly. A team would be commended and applauded, their captains singled out for praise and the trophy or trophies presented. The performance of sporting victories was the most prevalent performance across the academic year. There would be more presentations of this kind than any other as there were more competitive sports events than any other kind of event such as interschool quizzes or spelling bees. Thus sport offered the most opportunities for students to earn their moment in the spotlight. In Chapter 3 I explored how sport was on the whole a hugely enjoyable activity for students. I also showed how it served as a platform for inciting a concept of 'NP Spirit', which facilitated student imaginaries in envisaging the students together as one united group of like-minded individuals. The stage performance of decorated victors, in front of an audience of student peers, collectively performed North Point as a school synonymous with winning, thus constituting a further 'ideal' (Taylor 2004; see Chapter 2) to which students could imagine themselves.

The ideal of 'winning' was anchored within another observable symbol in the school landscape, notable within the banner which hung above the assembly stage. This banner had been put up in collaboration with Rector's Day, celebrating a particular message based upon the year thus far. The banner at the point of my arrival (in October 2010) was composed of a collage of sporting triumphs, serving as a reminder of the connection between North Point and its representative sporting teams. The central image captured sprinters in the midst of a hurdles race with the familiar white visage of Kanchanjunga<sup>80</sup> on the distant horizon. Above this image artistic script lettering read: 'At North Point, Every Child is a Winner'. Beneath the image the theme for the year was written for all to see: 'We Continue the Winning School'. Either side of the main image were pictures of various teams, the majority of them sports teams, captured in the aftermath of various victories with trophies in their hands and broad smiles on their faces. There was little context for the trophies and tournaments depicted, whether they were large competitions or featured only a handful of other schools. However these snapshots sought to portray North Point as a

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<sup>80</sup> Kanchanjunga is the third highest mountain in the world. The mountain is located on the Border of Nepal and the Indian state of Sikkim. The peak is visible from Darjeeling in clear weather and viewpoints of this peak are popular tourist locations and images of the mountain are common across tourist paraphernalia.

school that won. All of these photographs featured sports such as football, badminton, volleyball, athletics, table tennis, and swimming, among others. This banner, which remained hung in the quadrangle for the year, until it was replaced the following Rector's Day, stood as a 'symbol' of success to the students of North Point.

I was keen to explore some opinions of the students to this regard, as I assumed that within a school of this size there would be someone who didn't like sports. Kalden and Ayush were two of these students. They were from Class 11 Arts; Kalden was a boarder and Ayush a day scholar; both were 17. I met these two students during the rehearsals for the school's Major Play (discussed in the next chapter) and we started a conversation when I overheard them complaining quietly to each other about some of their class mates arguing over football. They stressed to me that the main reason they disliked sports was that believed it created divisions amongst the students. In particular, these two students disliked the affect caused by the widespread popularity of English football, which many of the students fanatically followed via satellite television and through newspapers. Kalden pointed out that different students supported different teams and lessons were being disrupted by students arguing about who was the best. 'The worst thing is when there is a match on', Kalden recalled, referring to the Saturday night routine during the football season. 'Every Saturday no one even eats their dinner, they just want to rush back to the study hall and watch the game'<sup>81</sup>. Kalden described the scene in the study hall. The supporters of one team would take up position on one side of the television and the rival supporters on the other, mimicking the form of seating which occurred at live matches. He claimed to hope for the occasional fight to break out so that the following week's football privileges would be cancelled. Ayush noted how it affected everyday life at school. 'The guys walk round with their team muffler (scarf) and suddenly it's like everyone are enemies when last week they were best friends'. Ayush and Kalden were specifically talking about watching football here, but they also emphasized they didn't care for playing sport either. They had tried multiple times in the course of the schooling careers but never

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<sup>81</sup> The study halls were spaces the boarder students used for morning and evening study. The rooms were divided as per each section of the school, Primary, Lower Division and Upper Division, with Class 11 having their study hall combined with their boarding facility. Class 12 students would study in their dormitories, although they shared a room with only one other student. The study halls were equipped with a television, which was used on weekends to watch films in the evening. The televisions were connected to satellite television and on certain occasions the students were permitted to watch football matches. During the 2011 Cricket World Cup, lessons finished early on one occasion to allow students to watch India Vs Pakistan in the semi-final.

really enjoyed participating. ‘Except TT (table tennis)’, Ayush retracted. ‘Sometimes I like to play, but only if it’s for fun’. He clarified this statement by arguing that too many of the students participated too seriously ‘as if they would win a trophy’.

The tone changed when I asked them about the North Point teams. ‘We won’t play but it is fun to watch’ Kalden explained ‘We can get time off lessons sometime so that is also good’. Joking aside Ayush and Kalden were happy to watch North Point play at any sport ‘It’s different [to watching the English football]. At this time there is no ‘my team’, only ‘our team’. Everyone is on the same side’. They noted how they were not necessarily interested in the game and frequently had to ask others who was winning but they clearly had a different opinion regarding witnessing North Point teams play when contrasted with English football or even participating themselves.

Kalden and Ayush highlighted that not all students were obsessive sports fans who would play any sport or even enjoy watching it. Both students struggled to ‘compete’ with others preferring to play sport for ‘fun’. Their approach followed others who I had followed in Chapter 3, who refused to play with other students who they believed didn’t know ‘how to play’. It was evident that students were continually engaged in learning their relations to one another and exploring how they constituted a whole as ‘North Point’. Sport possessed the power to bring groups together in shared support for a team. In the case of international football this seemed divisive, but under the banner of North Point, sport unified the students.

For Kalden, watching sport meant enjoying time with friends. These moments were about celebrating the ‘belonging’ to North Point as I have emphasized earlier in the thesis (Chapter 3). Ayush identified that he did enjoy playing table tennis but only if he participated with someone who was playing for ‘fun’, not ‘for trophies’. Much like Rahul, the ‘loner’ from Chapter 3, Kalden and Ayush were peripheral figures at school as they shied away from ‘competing’. However they did indicate the significance of the imagining of ‘North Point’ as an ideal around which the group could unite.

To be a North Pointer was in part to be successful. Winning defined ‘success’, not only for the individual or the specific sports team, but for the school as a whole. The physical presence of the banners, coupled with the hordes of trophies spilling over into the entrance hall, presented observable examples of ‘success’. Trophies were always talked of as if they

belonged to North Point. ‘Our cup’, ‘that trophy eluded us’, and so on. In this sense, the students spoke of North Pointers as the best sportsmen in the region (some would even venture to extend this to all of India!). Students would always back up their claims by inviting me to compare their trophy cabinet with those of other schools. Much like the honours board discussed in Chapter 1, the trophies were an observable part of the school life. They stood for victory and success. They stood as a blaze in the trail of the North Pointer, markers which guided students through the intangible, imagined world of North Point. These were always presented in assemblies, offered up as symbols of success, remaining visible in the school landscape, in some cases for decades afterwards.

But the question remained in my mind, why was sports so keenly observed? Why was there such an array of sports available to students and why was it constantly utilised, such as in the Rector’s Day banner, to emblemise North Point? In search of some answers I will now turn to the particular historical development of the school intertwined with the late 19th century concept of ‘Athleticism’ (Mangan 2000), which offers some clues to the importance awarded to sport in schooling at North Point. Sport has evolved at North Point and now forms the focal point of student lives. I will outline here how a concept of ‘telling stories’ (Ingold 2000; Arnold and Blackburn 2004) offers insights into personal perspectives of students, how they position themselves within North Point and how these perspectives served to construct North Point.

### **Athleticism and Hill Stations: A History of Sport**

In the previous chapter, I argued that the NP Imaginary was in part composed in relation to wider historical shifts such as the rise of Jesuit schooling and the social role of the Jesuits in India. Here I seek to continue to explore North Point in relation to the wider social world in relation to the transformations in the approaches of private schooling in Britain and how such changes reverberated across the Empire. I will begin with the changing world of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the private and public school systems within England were adapting in response to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, creating a growing middle class. The principle dilemma was caused by rising student numbers, creating increasing disciplinary issues. Thus in order to maintain their stance as the premier educational institutions, a number of schools began to introduce dedicated games classes, replacing the more liberal ‘free time’ where students were free to roam unattended outside

of formal classroom spaces. This new idea was popularised as ‘Athleticism’, referring to a particular ideology that physical exercise was a:

‘highly effective means of inculcating valuable instrumental and impressive educational goals: physical and moral courage, loyalty and co-operation, the capacity to act fairly and to take defeat well, the ability to command and obey’ (Mangan 2000: 9).

The Jesuit schools in Britain and elsewhere were slightly advanced in this regard, as they had already pioneered the concept of specified playing spaces within a school and also had dedicated members of staff to supervise the student’s play (ibid.). As such Jesuit schools were pioneers in the field of education which led to Jesuit schools becoming coveted sights for schooling (see Chapple 1993).

This ideology of ‘Athleticism’ soon spread across Europe and spread into the schools of the Empire, and thus to schools within India. In Darjeeling, ‘Athleticism’ combined with the colonial project of establishing hill stations across the subcontinent as spaces for recreation and leisure (see Kennedy 1996: Chatterji 2007). The hill stations were developed for leisure, health and for families with a host of houses, shops, churches and schools catering to the European families who had settled there. Social life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was shaped by sports with numerous sports clubs offering recreational activities for the European families and reserving spaces in the Darjeeling landscape for football matches, cricket tournaments and even a racecourse. The schools of Darjeeling were built along a similar project with considerable spaces reserved for sports. A testament to this would be the ‘Edinburgh Shield’ cricket tournament which was an interschool cricket competition which celebrated its centenary year during my field work.

This historical departure provides a context within which North Point now finds itself. The school was developed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as such was developed during the height of Athleticism and indeed the height of Darjeeling’s development. I would argue that this was significant in establishing a sporting legacy, which persists to the present day as evidence by the continuation of the Edinburgh Shield cricket tournament. Within this historical framework, a picture emerges where sports has offered a means of shaping social life, in school as part of the learning process but also throughout the region in forms of leisure. It has been argued elsewhere that the origins of ‘Athleticism’ have created a legacy

within the contemporary private schools of India, which modelled themselves on their counterpart schools in England (see Srivastava 1996; MacDougall 2005). I would not argue here that ‘Athleticism’ represents an entire focus upon sports as the sole means of educating students, but rather that sports were utilised to supplement formal classroom learning and offered different dimensions through which students could develop different skills such as leadership, courage, loyalty and teamwork. In order to understand the contemporary importance of sport I will turn to the ‘stories’ students.

I will utilise Tim Ingold’s (2000) concept of ‘stories’ to frame the ways in which students sought to demonstrate how their own performances aligned within the broader History of North Point. The most important factor of these ‘stories’ was that they situated the students’ sporting experiences within the wider social landscape of the school and thus brought meaning to their actions, thus a key component of the NP Imaginary. I argued this previously in relation to a concept of ‘competition’ through which students identified the significance of how they compared with one another. This was perceived by the students through belonging, which as imagined by even the most reluctant sports observers such as Ayush and Kalden, introduced above, was considered a vital part of North Point life. This chapter will emphasize the interconnections between the social bonds between students, victories in sports as landmarks of ‘success’, and the shaping of the NP imaginary.

### **Telling ‘Stories’, Making ‘History’**

‘History’ here refers to a far more specific concept than the broad academic discipline which the students themselves studied. I argued in Chapter 1 that the students of North Point each demonstrated an awareness of something intangible, an imagined dimension of the school, which was often referred to as ‘History’. This imagined dimension extended beyond the building to encompass an ideal way of being encapsulated within the category of the North Pointer. The category of the North Pointer and the ‘History’ of North Point were engaged in a dialectic relation whereby they were mutually constitutive of one another. While North Point was a point of genesis of the North Pointer, the idea of North Point could not exist without North Pointers to imagine and perform it. The result of this engagement was the imagining of the ‘story’ of North Point which provided the contexts within which student lives played leading roles. Perhaps the most accessible example of this process was during student engagements with sport. Students stepped out into sports

tournaments imagining those temporal performances within the prism of a greater context; the 'History' of North Point. Or at least it would if the team won. A losing team, as I will show in the final example of this chapter, risks being forgotten. The 'History' of North Point was a *story* of success. Those victories were not possible without the North Pointers to achieve them, but inversely 'History' could not exist without students to tell the *story* of North Point.

I should clarify at this juncture precisely why I refer to the North Point History as a story and how this offers insights into the ways in which students imagined their relations to their school. I draw this reading of 'story' from Tim Ingold's (2000) ethnography of the Cree of circumpolar Canada. For Ingold, stories were not abstract recollections or manifestations of the mind but perceptual engagements with a particular environment. This indicates that the telling of a story was an act of situating one's self within a given landscape. In the contexts of my thesis I apply this theoretical stance to explore how the students perceived sports as a means of positioning themselves within North Point as a whole. However this concept of story does not stop here. The landscape itself was also considered as a story, or rather an 'enduring record of and testimony to the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it' (ibid: 189). Stories, in other words, were not attempts to cover or fictionalise reality, but rather to draw attention to it. Stories were vocalised accounts of hunts which were performed, by hunters to other hunters as a demonstration of their awareness of the landscape and their connection to it. In doing so, these hunters consolidated their social status within the group. Thus these performances of stories demonstrated connections within a group of individuals and a connection between that group and the landscape within which they reside. In the same fashion I will argue that the students described sporting events in a performed telling of their own connections to North Point and their own claims at being North Pointers. It was only through the imagined world of North Point that the fragments of student experience were given a structure and meaning.

The use of narrative and story-telling has been demonstrated across anthropology as a window in the perceptive world of others (Rosaldo 1989; Rosaldo et al. 1993; Narayan 1989). a means through which the ethnographer can begin to learn about life from the perspective of another. Anthropology in this guise is 'our stories of their stories' (E. Bruner 1986:10); a means of discovering not some ontological realities of existence but

rather the meanings to which people attribute to the moments, actions and representations which they experience in their lives. Arnold and Blackburn (2004) discussed how observing life histories and biographical narratives present opportunities for observing how various people perceive their relations to the social whole within which they are located.

The Arnold and Blackburn volume 'Telling Lives in India' argues exploring personal stories in the subcontinent was ignored in the wake of a trend to observe life in the region as 'dividualistic'. The telling of a story is a culturally constituted act and the subcontinental engagement with autobiography draws from a distinct history of overlapping Hindu and Islamic mythic tales which has subsequently positioned storytelling as a grand narrative of existence which contextualises social action within a cosmology of being and morality (See Narayan 1989). Charles Taylor's (2004) approach echoed those above noting how the secular nation state created an imagined whole, comprised of a public sphere for the contesting and challenging of morals and ethics, which gave structure to social lives. These more everyday forms of morality and ethics resided in stories and images which circulated across a social milieu allowing social imaginaries to take root. Such stories carry within them the meanings which inscribe a relation between a person and the social group to which they belong.

As with the performance of assemblies, the stories I describe here demonstrate how students envisaged the connections between themselves and the whole; in essence how the NP imaginary functioned at school. Primarily, I wish to argue that the collective imaginings of the story of North Point provided a centre around which the fragments of student experience could be structured and oriented, thus providing meaning for student lives. Furthermore I would argue that the participation in sports was constitutive of the North Point landscape, indirectly, as the acquisition of trophies, perpetuated through their consistent presentation in assemblies, displayed in the parlour and further propagated through the Rector's Day, all act to construct the very landscape within which students wish to locate themselves.

The examples in this chapter are not just the performed telling of stories but the active pursuit of them. Renato Rosaldo (1989), adopting a similar stance to that of Tim Ingold,

observing how Ilongot hunters actively sought out story making opportunities. For Rosaldo's hunters, the story of their hunt demonstrated to those listening, especially other hunters, their proficiencies at hunting outlining their qualities, bravery and heroism. As such, the hunters deliberately embarked upon dangerous hunts to return with a story worthy of telling and thus propagate their own reputations as fierce hunters. Evidently the wilds of the southern Philippines where the Ilongot reside are a distinctly different social world from that of a private school in Darjeeling. However I invoke Rosaldo's ethnography to demonstrate how stories structure social action in that individuals seek the chance to tell a story. I wish to explore how students, like the Ilongot hunters, relied on their story-telling to locate themselves within a collective whole.

There is a danger of overuse with 'stories' which impacts upon its efficacy as a term for analysis. After all a story is a flexible term that could potentially refer to anything. However I have employed the term 'story' in lieu of theoretical perspectives etched out above and in light of the ethnography I will present in this chapter and throughout the thesis. I have argued that North Point was a 'story' in Chapter 1 by which I infer that the school was imagined as 'the Home in the Mountains', a place which had existed before the students and would exist after them. The students imagined the school as a sequence of events, a story, to which their own performances were influenced by and also contributed.

At North Point, students were not waiting for 'History' to simply happen to them but rather actively pursued opportunities within the world of sports for 'stories to tell their children'. These stories then become the model for success which would be heralded at the moment but also echo across time.

### **'Stories to tell your children': Finding one's place at North Point**

This thesis has been engaging with the ways through the students of North Point have come to imagine themselves within the story of North Point. I use the term story, following from Ingold's readings of a constitution of landscapes, to explore how this school, comprised of an assortment of students, staff and affiliated parents, came to be understood by those who experience it. I have argued that the school was imagined as 'the home in the mountains' as a place where students developed particular perspectives on their roles in the world, which I have termed the NP Imaginary. In the course of their school careers, students were offered specific spaces from which they could reflect upon

their lives, such as the Class assemblies explored in the previous chapter. However, the most coveted space for participation within North Point was the sports field. Sport went hand in hand with North Point and part of the ideal all-rounder imagined by students in Chapter 2 was a proficiency in some kind of sport, if not two or three. Sport was also a highly prized recreational activity as I revealed in Chapter 3. The combination of being both enjoyable and participating in North Point made sport a big part of student lives. Whether talking about the events of the English Football Premier League with friends, or competing in the colours of North Point against other schools sport shaped student experiences.

I wish to draw attention to how the students imagined their participation in sports within the wider contexts of their lives. This was best encapsulated in a phrase iterated by one of the teachers at the start of a cricket match. The phrase was actually uttered before the team set off for the neighbouring school, where the match was to be played. He began with the usual discussion of technical points and tactical strategies and so forth. But he closed by inferring the significance of the events which were to follow. He reminded the students that not all lessons were learned in the classroom, and events such as the impending cricket match offered unique opportunities for students to develop further. He told the students that these were the moments that they would look back on and remember when they leave school. They would one day enjoy telling their children about how they took three wickets in a certain match or scored 50 runs to beat the rival school. These moments, the teacher continued, would give the students ‘stories to tell their children’. This example demonstrated the importance with which sport was considered, at least with the teaching faculty of the school. Here one can see a shadow of Athleticism bleeding through to contemporary scholastic practice. In this example the teacher is reinforcing how not all lessons were learned in the classroom, suggesting that the temporal events on a sports field had longer term realisations.

I demonstrated in the first chapter how the ‘North Point History’ was the overarching framework which held all that the students experienced in place. ‘History’ was embedded in the physical landscape of the school, but it was also experienced as a ‘story’. This returns us to the theoretical angle proposed by Tim Ingold (2000), noted above, in what he called the ‘dwelling perspective’ (ibid: 189). Here, the world of North Point was envisaged as a story, which offered students the space to write their own chapters, to make their own

mark. To see how this was achieved, I will turn my attention to these attempts at ‘creating history’ in the participation across various sports. I will explore how a couple of students, Karma and Steven, were disappointed at their perceived failures to live up to the to the ‘ideal’ victorious North Pointer, and thus they utilised their ‘stories’ to explain this ‘failing’ as ‘not living up to their potential’.

### **‘Bring Our Cup Back’**

There was seemingly a curious rhetoric which I began to notice with regards to the cups, trophies and other shining silverware at North Point. Such prizes were often referred to by students possessively as ‘our trophy’. This was particularly interesting in the cases when the school had not won the event in question for a number of years, as was the case with the interschool basketball tournament. As a statement of intent Fr. Kinley had recruited his brother, who worked as a basketball coach in their native Bhutan, to prepare the North Point students for victory. Kinley’s brother was himself a former student at North Point and was a former ‘blue coat’<sup>82</sup> for performances in basketball. This became more evident in the conversations with some of the basketball players who had experienced defeat in a previous year’s competition. The 2011 tournament was being hosted at another school, and on the day the team departed, the players gathered outside the rector’s office. It was customary before such events for the rector to wish his students good luck before sending them on their way. He gave them one simple instruction: ‘bring our cup back’. The Rector’s words reflected a sentiment that reverberated amongst the students at North Point. They expected to win every tournament they entered. Perhaps this is a slightly arbitrary point, as indeed anyone would want win. But in this instance there was something more than simply winning or losing at stake. Winning was an essential part of being a North Pointer; losing wasn’t.

I wondered how all this rhetoric regarding ‘our cup’ affected the ways in which students prepared for such tournaments. Did they believe they were going to win? Was it a foregone conclusion? Or were they anxious about realising the expectations of their Rector and their coach? I spent time with the students in their practice sessions in the days leading up to the tournament and I often questioned students about whether or not they felt under pressure to perform.

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<sup>82</sup> A ‘blue coat’ was a pale blue blazer awarded to students who had demonstrated proficiency in one field. If one student acquired three ‘blue coats’ they would receive the rare honour of a ‘white coat’.

To illustrate, consider Karma and Steven, class 12 students who classed themselves as ‘veterans’ of last year’s tournament. They were a similar age and had grown up alongside one another at North Point so were well placed to offer me an insight into the sporting world of North Point. ‘There is some pressure, but mainly from ourselves’, Karma told me, scratching at the dusty playing surface with his feet. ‘We lost last year so this is our last chance’ he said. Last chance for what, I asked. Steven picked up where his friend left off. ‘We are class 12 so next year we will pass out [graduate], so this is our last chance to win’. Both Steven and Karma confessed their disappointment at losing out last year and were clearly driven by their past experience. They didn’t seem perturbed by the new coach and seemed more motivated by something internal. ‘We know we didn’t play well [last year], we didn’t play to our full potential. We were the best team but we didn’t have the best game’, Steven continued. Karma nodded along with his friend, adding that the trophy was ‘ours to lose’. I asked them why they thought it was so important that they won. Were there any teams better than North Point? Steven and Karma seemed amused at this thought. It seemed rather strange that another school could have a better team. ‘We know we [North Point] are the best because every team wants to beat us’, Karma admitted, ‘so they try every *trick*. They know that we are the best and they can’t beat us in a fair fight’. The pair continued to explain that other schools were jealous of North Point’s success in the past, winning year after year. They turned my attention towards the trophies in the parlour, and the pictures that adorned the walls of the quadrangle. ‘We are a *winning school*. That’s why students want to study here’.

Karma and Steven imagined North Point as a school of winners, reiterating the message of the banner in the quadrangle. Yet their own experience excluded them from this vision. They had not personally won anything and as such their own personal ‘stories’ did not align with the ‘NP Imaginary’. However the story told above sought to position their experiences within the NP Imaginary. The two students claimed that the competition was not ‘fair’ and their defeat was due to ‘tricks’ rather than their own insufficiencies. Furthermore, Karma and Steven claimed that they possessed the ‘best team’ but they didn’t realise their ‘best game’. By the ‘best team’ they were referring to themselves but they were also referring to North Point as a whole. Karma and Steven knew they were playing for the winning team, but in their eyes they first had to experience being part of a winning sports team themselves. What was important here for Karma and Steven was to

end their stories, that is to say the stories of their North Point lives, in the right way. In their eyes this meant winning the tournament. This was, perceptively, the only way their stories as North Pointers, could end. In this sense they were actively pursuing a ‘story-telling’ opportunity (Rosaldo 1989). By continuing on with the team despite the earlier defeat they were seeking the opportunity to make up for their earlier failures by winning and thus affirming their status as North Pointers<sup>83</sup>.

For now, it is important to note that this ‘*winning school*’ was the way in which Karma and Steven framed North Point. ‘Winning’ shaped their expectations, their desires and their thoughts in ways that brought meaning to their experiences as students. The story that they told was a story of defeat which contextualised their experiences within the wider imagining of North Point. In this sense, ‘the winning school’ was a way in which these students framed their NP imaginary. Thus in order to imagine themselves as belonging to North Point they desired their own ‘story’ of victory to legitimise their imagining of themselves as ‘winners’. I should stress here that success, particularly the model of success propagated by sport, spread much further than the school and nowhere was this truer than with football. I have already briefly hinted at the fanatical support which some of the students indulged in, by supporting various teams, predominantly from the England.

### **Opportunities of Football**

Football was the most popular sport in the hills. The Football World Cup and other global football tournaments such the European Champion’s League were celebrated with great enthusiasm in Darjeeling, and formed the basis of lively discussions on many a street corner across the town. Around the time of the 2006 World Cup I was staying in and around Darjeeling and I noted how each and every household, business, shop and street was decorated in the colours of one of the participating nations, which the occupants of said building had adopted for the duration of the tournament. There was a popular local football tournament known as the ‘Gold Cup’ which was a football competition open to teams across India hosted on the grounds of North Point<sup>84</sup>. The public of Darjeeling were

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<sup>83</sup> The basketball tournament was a success. Karma and Steven fulfilled their desires to complete their stories with a win, and they too had their moment on the assembly stage, taking the applause for their victory.

<sup>84</sup> This was one example of sport practiced outside of school. Although this tournament was enacted on school grounds the school had no involvement in its organisation or management.

required to pay 100 Rupees<sup>85</sup> to see a match whereas the students of North Point were able to watch for free as the school campus overlooked the ground below (see Appendix B for a map of the campus). For many students, this was a rare opportunity to watch live sport at a semi-professional level and during the tournament there were classes of students who would try and convince their teacher to let them go and watch that afternoon's match rather than study in the classroom.

One of the popular attractions during this tournament was a team from the neighbouring state of Sikkim, which had caused a great deal of excitement as this team was coached by former Indian national football captain Bhaichung Bhutia. This footballer hailed from Sikkim<sup>86</sup> and was something of a local hero in the region. One day he caused quite a stir by making the short journey up the steps from the school ground to visit the school and meet some of the students, some of whom were understandably excited to meet one of their heroes. This truly became a day that created a 'story for the children', one which I am certain a number of the students, particularly those from Sikkim, would bore their relatives and friends with over and over again. One of the students from Sikkim, Chogyal from Class 10, couldn't contain his excitement about the incident. He rushed over to tell me that he had just met his hero. 'It makes me thankful to be a North Pointer. If I was not here I would not get these chances'. In Chogyal's eyes North Point had facilitated this encounter and it was only through being a part of North Point that opportunities such as this would come about. Attracting tournaments such as the Gold Cup and the big name players such as Bhaichung Bhutia served to reinforce student imaginaries that North Point was special. Only a school with the right ground and the right facilities could attract tournaments such as the Gold Cup, first and foremost a rare opportunity to watch live professional football and where the students could meet their heroes. However it wasn't just national football from around the region which influenced students. Students also demonstrated a keen awareness of international football and sought to represent their heroes on the playing fields.

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<sup>85</sup> I should contextualise that this amount constituted a reasonable expense for the average income, such an amount could pay for the weekly groceries for a family of four for a week.

<sup>86</sup> Sikkim is the state which borders Darjeeling to the North. This social world of Sikkim was very similar to that of Darjeeling, as the hills of Darjeeling once belonged to the Raja of Sikkim prior to the arrival of the East India Company (see in Darjeeling section of the Introduction to the thesis), which many having family across both these places. The most widely spoken language of Sikkim, like Darjeeling, was Nepali and many students from this northern state came to Darjeeling for schooling.

Football as practiced at North Point was seemingly always in relation to the wider world of football. For example, the Primary Division annual football tournament, an internal competition between North Point Classes, was always branded in relation to a larger international football competition. One year this tournament was known as the ‘World Cup’ and the classes were invited to choose a country which they would ‘represent’. The year of my fieldwork was the year of the Primary Champion’s League, mirroring an international club football tournament in which the best teams in Europe competed. On this occasion, the students were invited to choose their favourite European Club teams, such as Manchester United, Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and AC Milan, amongst others. The results of some matches would lead to students comparing themselves to the real teams. Following one particular result one young student said ‘AC Milan would not beat Barcelona, Barcelona is a better team’. In this case the youngest students of North Point related the experiences of their football teams to the experiences of the ‘real’ teams, situating their own experiences in contexts of the broader world of sport. In moments such as this the NP Imaginary was enacted in relation to a wider world beyond the North Point landscape. It wasn’t just the Primary teams either. The senior players were also liable to play out matches not as their favourite teams but embodying specific players.

The senior football team would compare their members to the star players from across the world such as Argentinian Lionel Messi and the Portuguese Cristiano Ronaldo. The entire first team were each awarded nicknames by their teammates based around the particular position on the pitch they played but also a nickname which was said to invoke that player’s ability. In this sense the football teams were casting their models of success not within the framework of the school or even school History, but within an international field of football stars. In adopting nicknames the students project the prowess of such international players, perceived to be amongst the best in the world onto their own team. I recall one particularly lengthy conversation with the captain of the senior football team where he told me all about a whole range of player whom he admired and which he discussed with his team mates. He explained to me that his dad lived in England and thus he sent his son copies of the newspaper sports sections, from which he claimed to have acquired his extensive knowledge about various footballers and football teams. The captain was an exceptional case but it did outline how students were not simply confined to positioning themselves within North Point History. There was a larger international

dynamic at play which was perhaps more salient in football than any other sport due to the larger amount of football available to watch on television, for example.

Football played a key role in the North Point imaginary, particularly in respect of its relationship and links to the international world. Football was a global brand and students followed teams and league competitions from across the world. Devotion to such teams was apparent amongst North Point students, and this was cited above by Kalden and Ayush the chief cause of arguments between students. But crucially I wish to draw attention to how student imaginaries were facilitated by a broader international frame of reference. In the case of the Gold Cup this was encompassed in the visit of Bhaichung Bhutia and reflected through the students' own performances at sport by acting out their favoured teams and/or players.

Sport was not available to all. There were limitations imposed upon students, such as those I highlighted in Chapter three, where the school's youngest students were asked to find a way to 'play together' or not to play at all. The cases that follow explore in far greater detail how there was a further dimension to participating in sports, and this was to possess the requisite character. In the following sections I will emphasize how school authorities such as the Rector and Headmaster's wielded authority over students, offering the final say on who could or could not play. Poor character, in the classroom or on the sports field, would prevent students from accessing sports opportunities. As such poor behaviour thus became viewed as an obstacle to 'success'. This was demonstrated to an extent in the previous chapter as students deemed to be 'joking' or 'messing around' were stopped from having important roles in the assemblies; it will be made more visible in the next chapter when I discuss the major play. Where the major play offers something of a critique of the ways in which the school restricts students, as we shall see below, there was often little room to rebel when it came to sports. The students were aware of this monitoring of their behaviours and sought to ensure their right to play sports by conforming to the expectations placed upon them.

### **'Be Gentlemen': A Story of Success'**

It was the first day of the cricket season, and I stood with the '10 and below' cricket team awaiting the arrival of the Rector before we could head off. This team was comprised

predominantly of members from Class 10 (thus 10 and below<sup>87</sup>) with a few Class 9 students. Today's opponents were Mount Hermon, a co-educational school quite literally down the road from North Point which remains, alongside North Point, one of the most reputed institutions in town. However this school had suffered in the wake of the political unrest the previous winter, combined with a local distaste for co-educational schools<sup>88</sup>, and the numbers had dwindled. The team weren't expecting much of in the way of an opposition. Still the coach was keen that the match should go ahead. He told me that there were usually three teams from each school that would play against each other; however Mount Hermon had just managed to scrape together two teams. At North Point, the 12 and below team were hosting the Mount Hermon first team, which was comprised mostly of senior students from Classes 10 to 12. This had left only a small number of students to make a second team, composed of a group of students aged between 11 and 15. This would mean that the North Point team comprising mainly Class 10 students of around 15 and 16 years old would be considerably older and larger than many of their opposing numbers. I pondered why they had organised a match if they felt it was so uneven. The coach's reply was simple. The result didn't matter as this wasn't a match for trophies but was simply a chance to play. North Point would be expected to win, but that was no different from any other situation. The most important aspect here was that the students were able to play a game. In this example, the opportunity to play a game was considered important with regards to forthcoming events. From a practical perspective, the coach wanted to try out some players before the prestigious Edinburgh Shield match later in the month, as that team would be selected from the best players from across the senior school teams. From the student's perspective this match was a means of accessing the Edinburgh Shield team.

As I have stressed, winning was expected, but what I have yet to divulge is that winning alone was insufficient. There was a way to win. The 10 and below cricket team were not

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<sup>87</sup> There were 4 cricket teams at North Point which offered opportunities to students across age groups. There was the PD 11, open to students from Class 3, 4 and 5; then the senior school teams were 8 and below, for Classes 6, 7 and 8; 10 and below for Class 9 and 10; and finally 12 and below for Class 11 and 12. The team for the Edinburgh Shield cricket trophy, detailed in this chapter, was selected from the best players from across 10 and below and 12 and below.

<sup>88</sup> Many of the parents within whom I spoke generally ruled out Mount Hermon as an option because it catered to both boy and girls. There seemed to be an assumption that mixing boys and girls was somehow negative, based on a series of cases emerging from Mount Hermon with students being caught in possession of drugs and students being discovered sharing intimate moments. As such a handful of cases over a number of recent years, have seeped into local perceptions of Mount Hermon and its reputation has suffered ever since.

expecting much of a contest, but their teacher, who would later be the same teacher to oversee the defeat of the senior cricket team, was keen to warn them against ‘arrogance’. There was the usual mixture of advice about ‘playing to your potential’, but also about the general character of the performance itself. The students knew they were being monitored. They knew the reason for their Rector’s words. If they were found to be misbehaving or adjudged so by their supervising teacher, then they would be cut from the team regardless of their strength as a player.

This character was a point of distinction which student identified as a marker of being North Pointers. The performance of the ‘gentlemanly’ character as demanded by the Rector occasionally took precedence over the result itself, perhaps because it became tiresome to report too many victories. The students who had travelled to the cricket match above received a commendation from their host teachers, a commendation which was relayed to the rest of the school through the forum of the school assembly. This served to reinforce the success. It was a ‘victory’ in every sense: the students had overcome their opponents but they had done so by performing with the character deemed constitutive of a North Pointer.

But such ‘victories’ require the occurrence of matches. I had spent some time with the lower division cricket practice sessions, as students tried out for places. I sat with the hopeful candidates who were upset that there were only two matches scheduled for this team that year. This meant fewer opportunities for players to get a chance to play and thus fewer opportunities to cultivate their ‘North Pointerness’. This was surprising as I was aware that every effort had been made to ensure a game for the 10 and below team despite the weakened opposition. That was in part a reason for the lack of fixtures for the junior side but there was another reason. One of the members of the previous year’s team told me the story. They used to play at a school across the valley in the town of Kurseong, but Father Kinley had said they wouldn’t play against them again. The reason was that the ‘umpires’ (cricketing match officials which were often selected from the host school) of this particular school would often accuse the North Point students of cheating. As a result, on the last occasion, when the North Point boys departed this particular school, some stones were thrown at the school bus. There was some speculation about where these stones came from but the message was clear: there would be no further matches with this school.

In this instance, the character of the North Point students had been called into disrepute and thus they were unable to win 'fairly'. Furthermore, the behaviour of the other school's students, demonstrated by the stone-throwing incident, had laid a further black mark against the occasion. The fixtures could not go ahead, even under the pretence that students needed an opportunity to play. They might win but they would not be able to win fairly if they were adjudged to be cheating.

A final example I would offer with regards to the connections between sports and character at North Point occurred during a badminton tournament hosted at the school. As the hosts, North Point were to provide the facilities and a number of student volunteers to act as line judges to assist the umpires in officiating the matches. Their sole task was to signal if the shuttlecock had landed inside or outside the court of play. As was expected, the North Point students progressed through the tournament and the final was contested between North Point's star player and an equally impressive student from a rival school.

I stood at the side lines with the North Point crowd, who cheered enthusiastically, reeling the entire collection of North Point chants and songs to support their player. They jeered when the opposing player snarled at them for cheering too loud. The students around me remarked on the strong difference between their player and the other. The boy from the other school was irate, shouting at the line judges, complaining about decisions; this was in stark contrast to the calm and steady NP student. This comparison was also drawn with the coaches. The other student was desperately upset with one particular line call and complained for a few minutes to the umpire that the host students were cheating. The North Point student won easily in the end and the other student begrudgingly shook hands and slumped off. The line judges were left staring at one another, discussing what had just happened. Their immediate concern was whether or not they had made the right decisions. They argued with each other that they were being fair, each supporting the other, venting their visible frustrations that their 'character' had been called into question.

These examples demonstrate how sports affirmed certain models of being at North Point as encapsulated within the category of the North Pointer. In this instance the right 'character' was viewed as both a prerequisite to access sports in the first instance, but also the way to be 'successful'. Defeat was often blamed on 'arrogance' or being complacent; in short, possessing the wrong character. A win was retrospectively deemed positive, and assembly

presentations stressed the victory of character in addition to a victory of athleticism. The particular character of those participating in sports, in other words, was not only situated within the North Point framework.

### **The Edinburgh Shield: The Forgotten Defeat**

The year of my fieldwork, 2011, marked the centenary of the Edinburgh Shield, a prestigious cricket tournament contested between three schools: North Point, St. Paul's and Mount Hermon. Once upon another time, this tournament was open to a range of teams in a similar fashion to the Gold Cup but now the competition was limited to the three school teams. Nevertheless the tournament remained a prominent fixture on the school's calendar and I had already observed how keen some of the 10 and below cricketers were to participate in this event. The tournament had been delayed several times due to bad weather but despite this the students, both the players and the supporters, were in a positive mood regarding another potential North point win. On this occasion, however, the North Point team was destined for defeat. The purpose here is not to highlight defeat as a rare occurrence, but rather to discuss how the aftermath of losing in a prestigious event was seemingly not even counted by the students.

So far I have explored how 'continuing the winning school' was an act of success. Success at sports was not only the ability to win but to 'make History'. It seemed there would be no better chance to do so than in the Edinburgh Shield. The stage was set, the crowd was full of North Point students chanting away, singing their songs and summoning the 'NP Spirit' as best they could. The crowd tried their best to cheer up their team as it quickly seemed to be the case that victory was slipping away. St Paul's came out winners in the end. But come the final moments of the match when St. Paul's Victory was all but confirmed many of the crowd had already begun to make their way out of the ground to head on home. The few who remained were those boarders who would rather stay rather than return to the study hall. The intent here is not to focus on the act of defeat but the manner within which it takes place within the 'story' of North Point, which is to say that it doesn't.

A week after the event no one spoke about the tournament. There were no dissections about what went wrong or who was to blame. It was just forgotten. The coach, however, was willing to point fingers and he suggested that the students were complacent and arrogant. In the coach's eyes they did not treat their opposition with respect and thus they

defeated themselves before their opponent had a chance. For the coach, defeat lay not in a failure of ability but a failure in application. His words echoed the sentiments of Karma and Steven in the earlier basketball example. Those two students placed their failures to win not as a failure of ability or being beaten by a stronger team, but rather a defeat from within. Both cases attributed defeat to a failure to play the game the team was perceived to be capable of playing.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter provided further examples of how students imagined themselves within the social world of North Point with a particular focus on how ‘success’ was imagined at North Point, primarily through sport. I do not mean here to indicate that ‘success’ could only be achieved through sports, but rather the model of victory laid out in sporting contests provided the model for how ‘success’ could be achieved. On the one hand, this was about belonging. A student could only be successful if they fitted in with the NP Imaginary. The example of Karma and Steven identified that if one was not winning then one was not part of North Point. Failure to win would risk being forgotten, like the defeated Edinburgh shield team, and thus not becoming part of North Point History. On the other hand, as the instances of defeat alluded to, success was about ‘character’. One had to possess the requisite character to access sports in the first instance. Furthermore, success could only be achieved through winning with the right character. The examples of the cricket match and the badminton tournament illustrated that North Pointers were imagined to be of good character and thus any examples which challenged that did not fit.

I have also explored how North Point developed a scholastic approach, which drew inspiration from a historical engagement with athleticism embedded within the colonial landscape of Darjeeling shaped as a place of health and leisure. These concepts bled through the years to become envisaged through contemporary participation in sports, which extends the reach of lessons beyond the classroom.

This chapter, finally, has explored how student imaginaries were shaped through participating in sports. The acquisition and subsequent parading of trophies, in assemblies and in the school entrance way serve as a central tenet of what constituted success at North Point. However the trophies alone were an insufficient part of the story of how they were earned. The assembly would play the part of situating the sporting victories within North

Point History and as such bring meaning to these successes. In other words, this was less about winning and more about being ‘successful’: successful in becoming North Pointers.

In this chapter I have explored how students utilised stories to align themselves within the vast ‘History’ of North Point but as the next chapter shows, stories were also a means for orienting student experiences outside of ‘History’. The following chapter explores the Major Play, an annual event where the senior students were able to showcase their theatrical skills, offering a further space where student could explore their reflexivity, as nurtured in assemblies. The play had been written by two of the Class 12 students and the plot focused upon the ambiguous future that lay ahead. What happened to students when they left school? What was the future of the North Pointer once they left North Point?

# VI

## Students in Rehearsal: The Importance of Being ‘Talented’

### Introduction

It was the 31<sup>st</sup> October, a day auspicious for some as ‘Halloween’, a festival with roots drawn from Pagan and Christian traditions, which called on observers to forgo their own identities and disguise themselves with masks and costumes. This was truly a fitting day for the beginning of the rehearsals for 2011’s ‘Major Play’<sup>89</sup>, one of the most auspicious occasions on the North Point calendar. This was an annual theatrical production which provided an opportunity for the senior most students of North Point to cast off their everyday personas and adopt new avatars fit for the stage of the Fraser Hall; a space which had hosted North Point plays for almost a century. This chapter tells the story of the 2011 Major Play which had been authored by two of the Class 12 students. That year had suffered numerous interruptions, from the political unrest which had truncated the start of the school year (see Introduction) to a series of natural disasters which had caused disruption to a series of school events and cancelled others. The staging of the

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate how a large theatrical production known as the ‘Major Play’ became a space where students were able to put their ‘North Pointerness’ to the test. I had seen how students used narrative to contextualise their experiences, most notably with sports, and how student experiences were contextualised within the ‘story’ of North Point. However, here the ‘story’ comes into question as the play, involving predominantly Class 12 students, began to look towards a future beyond North Point. I had outlined in the previous chapter how student were engaged in what Tim Ingold (2000: 188-9) referred to as the ‘poetics of dwelling’, which is to say the students were engaged in a perceptual

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<sup>89</sup> The term ‘Major Play’ was how this theatrical production was referred to by staff and students at North Point. This distinguished this production from the two smaller plays for the Primary and Lower Division, which were known simply as the PD Play or the LD Play. I have used ‘Major Play’ opposed to major play to denote that this was a particular ethnographic category

relationship with the landscape of North Point. The stories which students developed through sports brought attention to the grand story of North Point, and students found meaning in their lives as North Pointers through finding belonging within this story, as they acted out what they imagined as ‘talents’. ‘Talents’ was a broad term the students applied to their various articulations of creative prowess, in this the example of the Major Play these were most notably music, singing and acting. These ‘talents’ formed both the backdrop and the context for the student authored production in which the students explored their future prospects. It soon emerged that rehearsal spaces were part intended for the production, but these spaces were also rehearsal for the larger story of students’ lives.

It had been alleged that this was the first time that a group of students had been entrusted with the task of scripting their own play. At least within the memories of those at school it had not happened within the past few decades. I have already offered an insight into student lead performances through the construction of Class assemblies, observing how students employed a certain level of reflexivity in that process. I argued in Chapter 4 that assemblies provided a practical space within the school landscape where students could reflect upon their lives. The ‘Major Play’ provided a further space for student reflections; for the purposes here I will focus my attention on the processes of rehearsal through which the students were able to prepare themselves for the performance, and indeed their potential lives ahead.

The ‘Major Play’ was a regular part of the school’s annual programme of events and for many it offered opportunities for a break from the school routine. I would often find students who were looking forward to the event in one way or another. Some were actors or musicians, excited about a chance to practice what they enjoy; others were relishing the opportunity to watch and experience a live show. Expectations of the 2011 show were raised by the ambitious staging of *Love Never Dies* the previous year. This show, the sequel to Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera*, had only made its public debut in London’s West End a few months earlier. The production at North Point had been so successful that additional presentations were staged later on to allow more parents to

see it<sup>90</sup>. There was evidently a long line of past productions which a number of the students had seen over their years at North Point, and as such they eagerly awaited the next year's show.

For the purposes of this chapter, I wish to explore the notions of performance at North Point, with particular regard to the 'Major Play' of 2011. I will examine the ways in which students utilised the stage and the various roles they played as a space where they could reflect upon the wider ideologies of the school, and from popular media sources such as films and music. I will argue that apparent extra-curricular spaces at North Point provided opportunities for student reflection, where they could experiment with their sense of identity in an apparently 'fun' environment. Finally, I will argue that we can consider the Major Play, alongside other events at North Point, such as Rector's Day, the Investiture Ceremony or prestigious sports fixtures such as the Edinburgh Shield, as playing an important role in shaping the NP Imaginary.

Before drawing such conclusions, I must first offer a brief overview of what I am defining here as 'performance', both with regards to acting on a stage and in terms of how it served to constitute the 'NP Imaginary'. So far I have interpreted the significance of performances to offer a platform through which the students of North Point can come to witness the school as a whole, encapsulated within 'ritualised performance' (Turner 1969; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1996) in grand events such as the Investiture Ceremony and Rector's Day. It is through participating and performing in such events that the students come to conceptualise themselves as 'North Pointers'. The students come to 'imagine' themselves as North Pointers within North Point as they perform to an audience of others who are also imagined to be North Pointers. This is how the 'NP Imaginary', the reflexive framework that structures students' lives, comes into being. In order to progress this argument further, I will situate the concepts of performance and social imaginaries within North Point's annual theme for the year, which for 2011, as noted in a previous chapter, was 'Good to Great – the Year of Performance'. In this theme, 'performance' seemed to indicate a particular trajectory of 'development', calling on the students of North Point to raise themselves above perceived good levels of achievement, in sports, in studies and in character to realise the best they possibly could be. Here I will explore how the senior

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<sup>90</sup> I also benefited from this as I arrived after the original run of performances. During the winter holidays the show also travelled to Kathmandu, where the NP alumni there had collaborated with a number of parents in order to finance a couple of special performances.

students who were engaged in the creation of the Major Play drew parallels between their experiences in rehearsal for the play and their wider experiences as students of North Point. To the actors and musicians, practising lines and songs with their friends were acts of socialisation. The fact that students were less focused on the end product of that rehearsal process, namely the performance of the Major Play itself, suggested that the process of ‘becoming’ was more meaningful to them.

Following this overview I will present an insight into the historic value of the school productions at North Point and highlight the significance of the ‘Major Play’. Finally I will close with the details of the Major Play, its composition by students and the various ways in which students sought to appropriate their identities through performance.

### **The World’s a Stage, and the Stage as a World: Anthropology and Performance**

The 2011 theme, ‘Good to Great – The Year of Performance’, had been chosen by the Rector, Fr. Kinley, who had selected themes each year during his tenure. Such themes began as simple messages of character expectations, such as ‘NP Smoke Free’, where any teachers who were smokers were encouraged to give up, and the students engaged in anti-smoking campaigns in the town. More recent years had become more ambitious, and included ‘The Year of the Word’, which had focused on the celebration of the written word, through literature, through poetry and through emphasizing the power of literacy. The year in which I arrived (towards the end of 2010) was known as ‘NP Nurtures Nature’, a theme which had encouraged a number of ‘green’ initiatives, such as recycling bins on the campus, awareness campaigns for global warming, and sponsorship of endangered animals in Darjeeling’s zoo. Within the contexts of these other themes, The Year of Performance was perhaps a little more abstract. The prefix of ‘Good to Great’ indicated that the school was moving from its present state of being a good school to becoming a ‘great’ school. In this sense, ‘performance’ was referring to an act of fulfilling the expectations of being a North Pointer. The act of ‘performing’ was equivalent here to an act of progressing from good to great, referring to performance across schooling life from the array of sporting opportunities, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, to performing in the classroom, to performances in assemblies.

In the course of the thesis thus far I have explored how ‘performances’ at North Point were integral in shaping the ways in which students imagined their social world. The readings of

‘performance’ upon which I have drawn have emphasized the ways in which students were ‘seen’ enacting themselves as North Pointers, or situating themselves within North Point. In this chapter I will seek to explore a more subversive interpretation of ‘performance’ in lieu of the annual theme’s interpretation of this term, focusing on performance in ‘becoming’.

The term ‘performance’ was rather prevalent within the social sciences in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however its use seemed to differ from author to author (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996). ‘Performance’ was a term utilised in anthropology to describe the dramaturgical nature of various socio-cultural enactments most intimately connected with ‘ritual’ (Turner 1969, 1988; Bloch 1986; Tambiah 1985; Schechner 2003). Such accounts stressed the ways in which certain ritual acts were ‘performed’, that is to say enacted, before an audience. Crucial to this picture was the ‘indexical’ (Tambiah 1985) nature of these performances, which were enacted both within and for the purposes of a social milieu. These approaches utilised a dramaturgical approach in order to explore how social relations were understood and enacted with given social settings. However, a performance is not merely the action that is seen; it is not just the actor on a stage, or the people conducting a ritual, but was also constitutive of other accompanying performances. An example of this is an audience of a theatre show, who enact or play the part of the audience as they understand it to be, entering and exiting at certain times, sitting in a certain designated area, suspending, remaining quiet during the show, and so on (Schechner 2003). This latter point draws me on the dynamic of performance, which I contend is crucial for this chapter, and which lies behind the performance: the rehearsal.

Inherent within a reading of performance is the concept of ‘rehearsal’ (Schechner 1977). That is to say that performances, in the way I am using the term here, were facilitated through first being rehearsed or prepared in some way. A rehearsal is a social process encompassing a careful selection of actions. These are worked and reworked until they reach a ‘threshold of acceptability’ (ibid: 77), after which they are ready to be shown. Within the rehearsal, all the elements of the performance are laid into place and all the participants gain clarity over the roles they must play in the course of the performance. Schechner (ibid.) argues that all kinds of performances, whether a play by a theatre groups or a ritual performance by Australian aborigines, involve a certain period of rehearsal or preparations. These rehearsals are not simply laying the foundation for grander act to

follow, but are the context within which the performance is able to gain its meaning and salience.

In this chapter I will explore the concept of ‘rehearsal’ and consider this in relation to the preparations for the Major Play. I will explore the ways in which the students rehearsed, as they practised their lines, learned to play new songs and generally prepared for the show ahead. More importantly, I will focus on how the notion of a rehearsal seemed to shape student imaginaries beyond the scope of the Major Play.

It is important to note that this chapter offers a very different stance on narrative and story, as well as performance, from the rest of the thesis. Here, an elaborate narrative, which formed the plot of the Major Play, acted as a window into the student imaginaries as they turned their attentions beyond the world of the school. These are the stories of those students set to depart North Point and head out into the world. At this juncture one can observe the trajectories which began in the previous chapters of Part 2, most notably the theme of reflexivity from Chapter 4 and the story telling concepts from Chapter 5. Reflexivity is realised here through the script written by the students, as the story reflects on aspects of the students’ social world, notably the importance of friendship, how their lives are in part subject to powers beyond their control and how a value of the strength of character through adversity. However the stories in the construction of the Major Play were not seeking to align students within the NP Imaginary but rather project them beyond it. This was no longer about ‘making History’, this was about moving towards a future.

In essence, this chapter explores how the Major Play served as an analogy of the futures of the students who were performing it. The Major Play marked a ‘rehearsal’ of the students for their own real life departures from the school. Within this the students began to understand that the model of the North Pointer, who they have all endeavoured to become, was all one big rehearsal for the ‘final show’, by which the students did not mean the Major Play, but rather their final act as North Pointers, the act of leaving<sup>91</sup>.

However I would also seek to stress here that the Major Play of North Point was not the only show in town; other private schools of Darjeeling were also known to put up similar plays. Before I delve into the rehearsals for the Major Play I will now offer some insight

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<sup>91</sup> I will pick up this point in Chapter 8 when I explore the ‘Leavers’ Dinner’, when the Class 12 students explore what happened when one leave

into the how the Major Play of North Point was compared with the shows of others. I observed how North Point had invested in a large auditorium, which was nearing completion at the time of my fieldwork. This new auditorium, I suggest, demonstrated how theatrical productions and the Major Play in particular, featured as points of ‘competition’.

### **The ‘Major Plays’ of NP: Years of Performance**

One of the very first things an anthropologist is prone to do when arriving in the field is to orientate him or herself, socially and spatially. I began the mapping out of North Point more or less as soon as I arrived, when I was given a guided tour, albeit rather brief, of the school campus. I was shown the various school facilities, the boarding dormitories, the washrooms, the classrooms, staff room, and dining halls - all fairly standard aspects one would expect of a boarding school, although on a much grander scale than anything I had previously witnessed. (See fig. 1). There was a surprise in store, even grander than I could of imagined. On the far corner of the campus a new building was being constructed. It was October 2010, and it was just a shell at this stage; however the scale of it left little to the imagination. This was the beginnings of the North Point auditorium, a 1500 seat theatre complex with a stage to rival those on the West End. But this was not all. In the layers beneath the theatre, there would be space for a computer room, large enough to accommodate a hundred computers, and a series of science laboratories and extra classrooms. This was a vast project which had allegedly cost somewhere between 5 and 10 crore Rupees<sup>92</sup>, depending on whom one asked. In either case, this constituted a considerable investment on the part of the school. This building represented the future of the school<sup>93</sup>, but for now it signalled the significance of staged performances within North Point.

However North Point wasn’t the only school which put up plays each year, and I would argue here that the investment in the Major Play demonstrated how such theatrical productions could be considered as a means of ‘competition’ (Liechty 2003) with other schools. I should stress here that by investment I don’t refer purely to financial capital.

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<sup>92</sup> Indian numeracy is demarcated in terms of Lakhs (Rs 1, 00, 000) and crores (Rs 1, 00, 00, 000). At the time of research, the going rate of exchange was Rs/70 to £1, making the comparative cost of this project (according to various individuals) between £700, 000 and £1.4 million. It is more likely to be at the lower end of that estimate. Although the precise cost eluded me, it was significant that a number of opinions, mostly teachers, valued the auditorium so high, monetarily reflecting their own perspectives of how significant a construction this was, both in terms of its physical size but also its financial investment.

<sup>93</sup> This will form a greater part of the analysis in Part 3.

There was obviously a certain financial investment most prominently displayed in the construction of the auditorium, although this new structure was not purely for the benefit of theatre productions. But more importantly I would suggest that the accommodation of the Major Play, despite its proximity to the end of year exams, and also its initial clashes with the science practicals, indicated how this event was considered equal to the more academic aspects of schooling. Just like with sport, discussed in the previous chapter, theatrical plays were seemingly considered an important dimension of school life. As I already mentioned, other schools were also engaged in producing plays and as such North Point's construction of the auditorium marked what I have termed in this thesis as 'competition'. If North Point was to maintain its perception of itself as one of the elite institutions in all of India, it had to stay in touch, that is to say, it had to offer comparable facilities and comparable opportunities to other elite schools.

The private schools across the Darjeeling hills were all seemingly putting up plays and theatrical productions equivalent to North Point's Major Play. There were often invitations from other schools inviting students and teachers to come and enjoy a show or two. These could involve full musical productions, such as the 'Major Play' at North Point, or smaller 'cultural programmes'<sup>94</sup>, which involved an array of Nepali and other ethnic dances and music. St Joseph's School's closest neighbour in this regard was Mount Hermon, a co-education school mentioned in previous chapters, located further down the hill. Mount Hermon was renowned for its dramatic stage shows. Both the present directors of North Point's shows were alumni of this school, and both cited their school days as central to the development of their present skills for putting on a show. However, owing partly to declining student numbers, Mount Hermon's reputation has faded. Prior to this, the school had relished in years of Shakespeare classics, Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and various other classical plays, dabbling in the odd musical or two. North Point's other great rival, St. Paul's, had a lesser reputation for shows, but nevertheless continued to put up a large scale production each year. Outside of these schools there were others schools that would put up plays and then invite other schools to attend.

The crucial point to note here is that the Major Play was by no means something unique to North Point. Quite the contrary, theatrical performances were found across all private

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<sup>94</sup> The term 'cultural programme' was used locally to refer to an event that involved local ethnic dances and music, often in apparent 'traditional' dress and/or with regional instruments. I will discuss these programmes later on.

schools. As such, I could argue here that North Point, considered to be one of the best amongst the schools in the Darjeeling hills, would need to offer some form of performance in order to ‘compete’ with the others. But competing in this sense was not enough to imagine North Point as the ‘best’ school. Demonstrations didn’t come much grander than the new auditorium, a declaration of intent as to the facilities North Point offered over others. Such physical facilities were often referenced by students and teachers as what marked out the school from other schools. This provided a backdrop within which the analysis is situated, linking up with the wider concerns of this thesis with regards to student imaginaries, particularly with reference to the ‘competition’, which enabled students to position themselves in relation to others. Now I wish to turn my attention to the Major Play of 2011 and briefly ascertain how this particular show was envisaged within the contexts of the year and the school in general.

The importance of the ‘Major Play’ was evident by the fact that it was staged at all in 2011. The Lower Division play had been cancelled, as some events had to be sacrificed to accommodate the various interruptions to the school calendar. The latter part of the school year had been affected partly by building work on the school campus, but most significantly by an earthquake in September, which unsettled the fragile landscape of Darjeeling, causing a number of landslides in the region, the largest of which had devastated the arterial road which connected Darjeeling town with the northern suburb where North Point was situated. The disruption to this road caused the postponement of Rector’s Day and Sports Day, as I had indicated in Chapter 2, and also had delayed the Major Play. There was only a small window available and, despite being only one week away from the end of year examinations, the ‘Major Play’ was given the go ahead. This was the first indication of the significance of this event.

There was further evidence to suggest that the Major Play, like Rector’s Day, was considered to be a vital part of school life at North Point. The after school practice time allotted for the rehearsals clashed with the practical experiment lessons for the Class 12 Science students, who were also attempting to make up for lost time<sup>95</sup>. The practical experiments composed a certain percentage of the students’ marks, and thus were

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<sup>95</sup> The laboratories were moved out of their temporary rooms at the back of the Fraser Hall and into the custom built rooms at the base of the new auditorium complex. However, the new building suffered some damage during the September earthquake, and therefore practicals were suspended until the rooms were repaired.

compulsory for the Science students. However the ‘Major Play’ was deemed significant enough to force the Science teachers to have to rethink their catch up, as the Rector stated that the rehearsals would take priority after school. Much in the same way that lessons gave way for classes to practice their assemblies (see Chapter 4), the production of the Major Play was given equal footing with more academic pursuits. In this sense there are strong parallels here between the Major Play and participation in sports, outlined in the previous chapter, whereby these activities that might be defined as ‘extra-curricular’ were in fact considered as important to the learning process as the acts of formal learning in the classroom. The collective efforts of Part 2 of this thesis have sought to combine in this effort to stress that schools such as North Point were focused on producing ‘all-round’ students. In order to achieve this, North Point facilitated opportunities in fields beyond the classroom, such as with assemblies (discussed in Chapter 4), with sports (discussed in Chapter 5) and the Major Play, which is the subject of this chapter. I would suggest that the Major Play engendered an important role at North Point. It was firstly a means through which North Point could ‘compete’ with other schools, inviting visitors to come and witness the production first hand. Secondly, the theatrical environment offered a further space where students could develop their all-round prowess, much like assemblies or indeed sports.

I will now delve beneath these generalisations now to explore the specific details of this year’s Major Play. Here I will present the story of the play’s creation as told by its two student creators. I will argue that the students demonstrated how they reflected upon their own experiences in order to create a story for each other. I will present some detail with regards to the plot, which posed questions about what happened when one leaves school. The students were themselves set to leave North Point in a couple of months, and their story seemed to indicate that they were seeking to navigate their way through the uncertainties of the future. This was evident in as much as the script that was handed out to students on the first day of rehearsals was missing one vital element: the ending. This, I suggest, was the consequence of two authors who were struggling to understand their own ending as they contemplated life outside North Point.

### **‘A Matter of Pride’: The Students’ Play**

'So where do we go from here?', Kevin asks JJ. The two principal leads stood, as the last remaining actors on the stage, contemplating the vastly different journeys that had brought each of them to that same moment. These two leads were also the authors of the play and the sentiments of this moment appeared to resonate within their 'real' lives: their lives off-stage. JJ paused before responding in his usual nonchalant tone, '*we go on. Where we go from here, it's a matter of pride*'. With those words the curtain closed to the gentle echoes of hands clapping rippling through the crowd.

This was the final scene from the Major Play, closing with a reiteration of the title, *A Matter of Pride*. This was a title and a scene as a whole, which appeared to reflect the perspectives not only of the two authors, but more broadly of the group of Class 12 students who were involved in the construction of the Major Play. The questions and the uncertainty over what lies ahead were emblematic of the students' own questions about the potential lives ahead of them. This scene, as I mentioned, did not exist until a few days before the first performance, and the uncertainty surrounding the fate of their characters, two individuals modelled on the authors themselves, represented doubts over their upcoming departures from the school from which they were due to graduate. In the discussion that follows, I will offer some insights into the ideas of the two authors, their backgrounds at the school and how they used the play as a 'dress rehearsal' for the future.

I would also argue here that the plot of the play was a reflexive account of 'being North Pointers'. Here the idea of the North Pointer, which I have outlined in this thesis so far as an 'all-rounder', a gentleman in character, a 'man for others', came into question as the students seemed to suggest that one could contain all the traits of the perfect North Pointer. Yet there were always elements of life which lay beyond the control of the individual. The plot itself was a curious pastiche of settings, characters, and music, which ultimately combined together within a distorted dystopian vision of the near future, which reflected the student authors' anxieties about the ambiguous nature of their lives which lay ahead. The narrative of the play above all else was a projection of the future. In this sense the plot marked a theoretical rehearsal for potential future lives. As I explored the plot in detail with the play's authors, it became apparent that the students were not trying to 'make History' like the students' stories with regards to sports. Instead the students looked beyond the world of North Point, beyond History, to rehearse the future.

The basic script had been written by two students with a fleeting collaboration with the school's recent musical director<sup>96</sup>. The first point of note was that the authors took the joint leading roles and adopted characters, Kevin and JJ, with the same names as their real names. Kevin and JJ were both members of the cast of the previous year's play, *'Love Never Dies'* which I mentioned above. The production of that Major Play involved the two authors' first experience with writing a play. The production team only had the CD *Love Never Dies* in their possession, and so they were required to fill out the rest of the plot, with synopses taken from the internet and a script written by the students. The full story of that occasion became evident as I chatted with Kevin and JJ, during a tea break of one of the rehearsal days.

'We were making up as we went', JJ proudly declared. 'The school had done *Phantom* a few years back, so we saw that show, so this one was like adapted from that'. Both JJ and Kevin were in the Lower Division of North Point at the time of the performance of the *'Phantom of the Opera'*, but it seemed that this experience had laid the foundations for last year's production. Kevin admitted he had less of an involvement. 'I didn't do as much, not like this show [*A Matter of Pride*] but it was a new experience, I couldn't imagine to do a whole play without that experience'. Both authors were insistent that it was the experience of creating the previous year's show which had whetted their appetite for writing their own play. Last year they were not the only students involved and they were also acknowledged that they had learned a lot from last year's Class 12 who had more *experience* of performing at North Point. But I was curious as to how they were selected to write this play and no one else? 'Actually we just wrote it and showed it to [the Musical Director]. She liked it and we carried on'. JJ said. There was an indication that it was the past experience of witnessing and performing in plays at North Point which had laid the foundations for these students to write their own. But it was also their personal contacts, their friendship with the musical director, which had offered them the opportunity to perform what they wrote. However Kevin stated that they weren't always optimistic. 'It was not our decision [referring to himself, JJ and the director]. We thought Father [Kinley] would say no. But he thought it was a good idea. Maybe he thought it was 'good to great'. Kevin here invoked the annual theme part in jest, but in part as an explanation in how they were given the opportunity.

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<sup>96</sup> She was formerly a permanent member of staff, and had left the school the previous year only to be called back to help in the production of the play.

Before I proceed any further I should provide the details of the plot in order to add some context to the analyses of Kevin and JJ's perspectives. The plot told the story of a group of young students finding their way in the world following the completion of their college lives. The story was set somewhere in America, with the majority of the narrative focusing on the two leads, Kevin and JJ. The show begins with the final performance of a school band, the members of which begin to contemplate their futures as they look to life beyond school. JJ is adamant that he will be a rock star and his ruthless ambition causes his girlfriend Kate to break up with him. JJ would discover that his fellow band mates had no intention of 'living the dream' as rock stars, as they preferred to head off to seek white collar careers, leaving JJ to go alone. However unbeknownst to JJ, his friend Kevin is spotted by a shifty talent agent and signed to a recording deal.

The action catapults ahead several years where we find JJ near destitute on the streets of Las Vegas, making little money as a Tattoo artist. He was bitter about Kevin's success and he began to seek out his former school friends to find out what happened to them all. One by one he discovered that each of his friends' plans were derailed by circumstances beyond their control. One had to surrender his career in order to look after an alcoholic dad, others who had got married were now separated, and one had lost his Harvard place and all his money in battling against Leukaemia. JJ seeks to help this stricken friend and accepts an offer from a mysterious femme fatale. He then found himself as the front of a fake recording company for a gang of violent gangsters seeking to hide their ill-gotten gains.

Meanwhile, Kevin's star continued to rise, although he began to question whether this was the lifestyle for him. A concurrent plot follows the story of JJ's ex-girlfriend who now struggled to overcome her decision to leave the love of her life, performing at a seedy club to feed a cocaine addiction. JJ's offer of help was shunned by his ill friend, who refused to accept money earned from illegal dealings. The gangsters then take over the recording scene in Las Vegas, forcing JJ to surrender his dream not to compromise his 'pride'. Meanwhile JJ's ex-girlfriend spirals into depression as she perceives her life having no future, and this leads to an overdose, which claims her life.

When rehearsals began, this was the end of the play, or at least this was where the script finished. The words 'to be completed' appeared on the remaining blank page. The final

scene, which I described above, was unwritten at the time. It was rather fitting that the story didn't have an ending, as the students who were constructing the story were yet to experience their own 'ending' in leaving the school. I was interested in how the students who were themselves about to complete their own studies would opt to explore their impending departure from school and what life held in store for them.

Kevin and JJ made no secret of the intended purpose of their script. 'We wrote this for ourselves, and our friends. We just wanted to have our own play, tell our own story, rather than use all these other ones'. Kevin, noticeably quieter, added 'We were inspired by these other plays to write our own. It's like our own expression, our feelings, our emotions'. It was interesting that the two main authors were distinctly opposed to their selected roles. Kevin was a rather shy and retiring young man, quiet and reflective, whereas JJ was more vocal in our discussions, more confident with his ideas and more certain about what he wanted to achieve with the play. The stage version reversed these roles and we see a confident, high achieving Kevin opposed to a shy, self-deprecating JJ. I asked them about their difference between their stage personae and their own 'true' selves<sup>97</sup>. JJ reacted quickest, as usual. 'We didn't try to make this about us but I guess it is. We all don't know what is gonna happen, like where we are gonna get after NP, so we just thought about it'. Kevin joined in. 'It's fun to be on stage and, you know, lose yourself for a while. We can pretend all these different things, like singing in clubs and mafia and all'. JJ wanted the last word. 'This is our last chance to perform with our friends so this is our story'. On that last point I asked them if they hoped this play would be remembered. 'I hope they enjoy it! This much I am happy' Kevin laughed, but JJ was more philosophical 'I think maybe some guys who are leaving might think about this more than the others. They can understand this play'.

The authors were clearly using 'story' to perceptively engage with their environment (Ingold 2000), however this environment had been altered because of their impending departure from the school. Kevin and JJ claimed they 'just thought about' their potential future and this inspired their story. In this sense the students articulated the sense of reflexivity as outlined through the practice of assemblies (Chapter Four). They were clearly reflecting on their position. However in this instance they perceived themselves as caught between North Point and the world beyond. The two authors also indicated that this

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<sup>97</sup> The students use the word 'true' to describe their 'real life' selves.

play was something of a ‘dress rehearsal’ for their own futures. ‘These things aren’t going to happen’, JJ declared to me, although Kevin interrupted ‘you never know?’ In lieu of this JJ amended his statement. ‘Ok we don’t know, but I think this has helped us to think about what is gonna happen. This is our dress rehearsal!’ The last point was intended as a joke, but JJ’s metaphor seemed to summarize the scenario. The story of the play mirrored the student experiences, the ‘story’ aligned the students with changing landscape, shifting from life in school to life outside. The story centred around the students themselves and provided a space where they could ‘rehearse’. Or to put it in Schechner’s (1977) terms, the principle actors of the performance gain the clarity as to the roles they are required to play. The performance for which the students were gaining clarity was the act of leaving the school. However aside from situating themselves within this environment between school and the world beyond, the play offered an opportunity for the authors to reflect more personally within themselves. This process of reflection emerged as the students found value in their student lives through being ‘talented’, a term which the students employed to describe their perceptions of students who were able to play music or act on stage.

The writing style of the two authors mirrored the way they spoke and the particular life experiences of the students themselves<sup>98</sup>. They were both boarders and had each been at the school for a number of years. Kevin in particular had frequently been at odds with the school authorities, namely the Prefect and the Rector, who had threatened him with expulsion on a number of occasions. Kevin was a quiet student who kept to himself and was often very modest of his own achievements, including producing the play. JJ, on the other hand, was almost the complete opposite, tall, with meticulously styled hair and confident demeanour with more than a swagger of arrogance about him. He seemed more sociable than Kevin and was often seen walking around the school surrounded by friends. He however seemed on better terms with the Rector, and I often saw him confidently joking around with staff. Also both these students represented different spectrums of the academic system at North Point. JJ was a Science student and Kevin an Arts student, leaving each open to different realms of opportunities when they left school. Their two different scholastic positions reflected the ‘competition’ that I had earlier observed through assemblies. The pair of authors emphasized that they complemented each other. JJ stated: ‘He [Kevin] can think a little different to me, we have different experiences, but we like

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<sup>98</sup> Both these students were editors of the student magazine, ‘Among Ourselves’, and so I had seen examples of their writing previously.

the same music. That helped us'. However the environment of the play and the use of fictitious characters negated the potential differences between the students as they adopted different personas to their everyday lives.

The play was evidently an opportunity for both students to experiment with different modes of being, shedding their 'true' selves and transforming into something else. The script was not simply a carnival-like reversal of roles, like Bakhtin, (1984), but contained within it blatant themes that demonstrated aspects of the students' lives that lay beyond their control. All of the characters are presented as 'talented', but each lost out in various ways, afflicted by drunken fathers, illness, or corrupt businessmen. The emphasis lies on the students identifying the meaning within the lives of the students interpreting that such 'talents' can be manipulated by others. The plot of the Major Play projects the students into the future albeit a distinctly dystopian future which over exaggerated considerably on the students present fears that they were powerless in their lives. The use of the Major Play's narrative in this way demonstrates a certain reflexive ability to be able to comprehend one's surroundings. More importantly, we see greater use of 'story', as I have explored in the previous chapter, in order to comprehend and understand one's place within a social world. In this example the 'story' the students employed was of an 'imaginative horizon' (Crapanzano 2004) that is to say an 'in-between space' of the near future. Here they sought to bridge the gap between their lives at North Point and the ambiguous space of their future lives which lay beyond. These projections of the future also told the story of the student's place within the present.

It was evident, not only in the moments stated above but generally throughout the play's rehearsals, was the sense of the students of how the play revealed perceptions of their respective positions at school. The two authors were peripheral figures at school, popular enough with a large friendship group yet not fulfilling the full ambitions of their teachers. By this I mean to say that they were acknowledged as possessing the abilities to achieve high standards in the classroom, on the sports' field and generally throughout school life, yet they never quite achieved those standards. In the Play, both student adopt the personas of characters who each have been identified as 'talented', gifted singers in this case, who never quite live up to the promise of the senior figures, such as managers and businessmen, who surround them. The students felt uncertain about what lay ahead, and the fates of a number of the characters demonstrated how students imagined themselves to be subject to

things beyond their control. Kevin admitted he was concerned that the Rector held the ultimate decision over whether or not the play would go ahead; and within the script the array of school friends, despite finding good jobs and successful careers are forced to re-evaluate their lives in the wake of things beyond their control, such as serious illness or drunken parents. So on one hand this was a narrative about the ambiguities of the future but on the other this was also another ‘performed telling’ (Ingold 2000) of their orientations to the school landscape.

This process could be seen as a culmination of the theoretical ideas put forward in the two previous chapters. The reflexivity of the assembly process, combined with the use of ‘story’ (Ingold 2000) to position themselves in relation to their social experience, served as a ‘rehearsal’ for the student’s upcoming departure from North Point. JJ imagined the Major Play as a ‘dress rehearsal’, the penultimate rehearsal as close to an actual performance as possible without actually being that performance. The two authors came from different personal backgrounds and also different aspects of North Point. However the fictitious dimensions of the play negated the potential competition, as both JJ and Kevin created different characters for them to fulfil. This shifting environment of leaving North Point had seemingly opened up a gap in the NP Imaginary where the roles of school life were transformed into something else. In this ambiguous space, the students were able to rehearse for their future lives, gaining clarity as to what the process of leaving actually involved. There is an evident separation here, where the students begin to doubt that being talented all-rounders would enable them in their future lives. The talented group of students in the Play are subject to a series of unfortunate fates of which they have no control.

What also emerged here was the importance of the Major Play as a social event. The authors declared that this was a play for their fellow students, but beneath that, the process of rehearsing the play was an intensely social process, which played its own part in the structuring of student imaginaries. I will continue to explore here the themes that have echoed through this central part of the thesis which regard students telling ‘stories’ (Ingold 2000) in order to position themselves within the school landscape. However in this particular instance, the physical terrain within which they had based their understandings had changed. Here I explore how change was an important part of imagining North Point.

### **The Pit and the Performance: The problems of change**

I quickly became aware that what happened off stage was as much a performance as that which occurred on it. I observed that the process of constructing the play, rather than the performance of the play itself, was in itself a source of meaning for those involved. I first came to notice this when the group of students and teachers, many of whom had been a part of the previous year's production, first entered the hall to begin production. I noted their reactions to the recent changes to the hall, inflicted by a shuffling of classrooms and utilisation of the Hall's former backstage area for the purposes of teaching. There were many reminiscent conversations which began with 'do you remember when...', but much of the conversation turned towards 'the Pit', or rather the absence of it. The Pit referred to the sunken area of the hall which had been used to accommodate the band and the play's directors.

'The pit is gone', one of them said, staring at the teachers as if hoping his observations were wrong. Instead he got a knowing glance in return. The extension of the stage had covered over the original 'pit', the front of which was designed to accommodate the musicians. I lost count of how many times the various musicians or stage crew members made an observation or comment about the missing 'Pit'. Many of these would start a conversation beginning with certain nostalgia towards the 'Pit' and the fun times that were had there. One of them told me, 'We were, like, hidden from the audience, so we could joke with each other, have fun without anyone noticing us. It was our own private play'. Another noted affection for the claustrophobia of the cramped space. 'It was so small, and we had to fit all of us and the instruments also, we had to be real good friends after that'. There was a hint of a joke in his words but also undeniable sentiment, and that student emphasized his disappointment. 'I was hoping for last show with the pit before leaving'.

There were few recollections about past performances. Instead, the focus of the conversation was on the 'fun' behind the scenes. 'The Pit' was remembered as an intimate space, which brought the students closer together. This space slotted in with the imagined notions of student togetherness and the loss of the pit seemed to suggest the senior students' own sense of impending loss in leaving North Point. This sense of loss became more evident when students began to talk about the impending move of future Major Plays from the Fraser Hall to the new auditorium. Two of the musicians, Pravesh and Atul

argued that the Major Play ‘belonged’ in the Fraser Hall. These two students were both day scholars who had been at North Point since Class 3 and the Fraser Hall was imagined as part of their North Point heritage. ‘This place has always been for the Major Play, not just for our time but back 100 years. I can’t imagine a Major Play without the Fraser Hall’. Pravesh’s discontent at the future changes were echoed by his friend Atul. ‘I don’t think this is a good thing, the Fraser Hall was made for music, it has that atmosphere’. Pravesh was imagining the Fraser Hall to be intrinsic to the North Point he had grown up within, and thus the proposed change involved a change in his way of imagining the school. His imagining of the Major Play was entwined with the environment of the hall. An environment which Atul had declared was imbued with a certain ‘atmosphere’ which he imagined as connected with the music that they played. This ‘atmosphere’ formed a key part of the significance that these two students placed on the Fraser Hall. ‘It’s the same now like when it was first built’, Atul continued. ‘It was made for music. Every North Pointer has sung in this hall’. Pravesh agreed with his friend, ‘If we lose the Fraser Hall, we will lose a part of North Point’. The importance of preserving the school landscape was evident in the students’ words. The Fraser Hall encapsulated the heart of many ‘stories’ for students and its gradual transformation was imagined as an transformation of the students’ own memories. Much like the students in the previous chapter orienting themselves to the school through sports, the students in the Major Play had nurtured their sentiments of belonging through performances on the stage of the Fraser Hall.

This example furthers the inquiry of the thesis as a whole, exploring how the students came to experience North Point through engaging within the landscape. The stories of the ‘atmosphere’ of the hall, the memories imagined through ‘the Pit’ and the ‘stories’ students told to one another each elaborated upon a specific imaginary of how North Point appeared to its students. There are further examples of the significance of ‘belonging’ at North Point, only this time the students envisaged how various constituent elements of the school landscape, such as ‘The Pit’ or the Fraser Hall itself, belonged to North Point. Without those elements, the students imagined that North Point would be changed.

As intimated in the discussion thus far, this year (2011) was set to be a year of finales, at least in terms of the ‘Major Play’. As I have previous iterated, it was the final year for many of the performers who had been an integral part of the last few productions, as they were in Class 12 and poised to head out into the world. Perhaps more significantly, it was

billed as the last major production that would be staged in the Fraser Hall as the mammoth auditorium steadily growing across the campus was slated to be completed in time for the following year's performance. The loss of the pit was evidence of the more significant change of moving the plays to the new setting. The changes to the school campus reflected the students own sense of change as they looked towards a life outside the school.

However although the Fraser Hall was imagined here as being a place in which 'every North Pointer has sung', gaining access to the Major Play was not a simple act. Below, I will describe how students obtained their roles through friendships, but also through possessing a certain character. In this sense students had to demonstrate that they were able to endure the intensity of the rehearsal period, which, as I previously stated, only lasted 10 days. Students with a bad attitude were dismissed and any students who wished to 'joke around' were sent away as the director responsible for putting up the play reinforced how important this event was for North Point as a whole.

### **Selecting Roles**

It was on the first day of rehearsal for the Major Play and the key players gathered in the Fraser Hall. The two musical directors and myself sat at the front of the hall. The first few rows of benches were occupied from one wall to the other with students from Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12, all hoping to get a chance to strut their stuff on the stage. The students who had already been cast in the main roles came forward and sat on benches at the front, along with all the musicians. All of these students were from Class 12 and the majority had been part of the previous year's Major Play. This had been billed as an 'audition', which I had assumed would involve students putting their claims forward for particular roles. However selections seemed to be predetermined and all the main characters were already cast.

The main characters were all selected from Class 12 and the casting had been completed even before the script had imagined the characters into being. The Major Play's authors were approached by fellow students and asked for a role in the play. As such the social networks of Kevin and JJ comprised most of the main cast. Students were not selected on the basis of their acting talent or even their 'all-roundness', but rather through a combination of friendships and the students' prior experience of Major Plays. As such this made Class 12 students central to the Major Play, as they would likely have the most

experience of such performances either as members of the audience or in performing in previous shows.

However this did not account for all the roles and there was a healthy number of extra characters to be cast. There was no ‘try out’ to speak of, and the final casting was enacted by one of the directors, who simply walked over to the gathered Class 9 and 10 students and began reading through the available roles and inviting volunteers. The director, who was himself an English teacher who taught many of the students, cast his own assessment over the students, questioning whether some of them had the ‘dedication’ for the play. I asked this director after he had accounted for all remaining roles, for his reasoning regarding the ‘audition’ process. He reasoned that there was little time to explore potential new actors or musicians and even less time to accommodate students who would ‘just mess around’. He would offer a role to a particular student or group of students and repeatedly ask them if they were certain that they would be involved. He stressed repeatedly the expectations of the rehearsal process, emphasizing having to spend long hours after school every day in the Fraser Hall and having to be available at weekends in order to adequately prepare for the Major Play.

The director explained to me that he was always nervous and in his seven years of producing the Major Plays they had always been given very little time. He was nervous as he was responsible for the Major Play, a play that would be open for other schools and parents to see. He reiterated that this was an important event for the school and that everyone was ‘watching’ North Point. ‘People judge this school on these things. They can see your students and on that they decide whether North Point is a good school or not. We can’t have students joking around’. The director’s words reiterated the ideas of ‘competition’ I outlined above, where the Major Play formed a means of comparison with other schools. The director expanded this to declare that such events were a means through which the school developed part of its reputation. The director’s reasoning for this was that this event was one of the few public events when almost anyone could come and see what North Point was about. He was also keen to stress that it was important that the students they did select ‘got on’ with one another. ‘This rehearsal process is intense. We may have some disagreements and arguments over the coming days. We have to work together otherwise we will not get this play done’.

Here the importance of students being selected on the basis of being friendly with one another became perceived as an important means of negotiating the potential difficulties in producing the play in a short space of time. However despite being chosen on the basis of friendships, this did not make cast members immune to being replaced. I arrived for the after school practice a little late to discover the practice already underway. However I had noticed that one of the actors in the scene was different from the previous day. I enquired with the director as to what had happened to the original student. The director's response was simple 'He had an attitude problem, so we had to replace him'. This student had not learned their lines, was always asking questions about what his character was supposed to say and trying to change his role. The director reiterated that they could ill afford any disagreements and in this instance the director had confronted the student in question with regards to the problems. 'We talked about it, and he decided to leave'.

There was no time for 'jokers' and any student with a 'bad attitude' was either brought into line with the rest or ejected from the cast. Here we see further reinforcement of the 'ideal' and discipline as I expressed in Chapter 2. In this instance, the student was adjudged to not have fulfilled the role of the 'ideal as an actor and thus the subsequent discipline was to take away an opportunity from that student and give that to someone else. It is important to note that students were never guaranteed opportunities and students were constantly required to aspire to certain imagined standards of being before they could first access the opportunities that they coveted, such as performing in the play.

### **Improvising and Experimenting**

In this section I wish to draw attention to the ways in which students 'experimented' and 'improvised' during the rehearsal process. By these terms I seek here to invoke how the students imagined themselves within a social world, which was ultimately not under their control. By this students accepted that there were aspects of the social environment beyond their control. The plot of the play itself made reference to this whereby the characters befell unfortunate circumstances such as contracting illness. However the students acknowledged that there were things within their control. In this section I will stress how the students imagined their own 'talents' as enabling them to improvise, an ability which would permit them to respond to any situation. In collaboration was the concept of experimenting, whereby the student performers, and particularly the band, were able to use

rehearsal spaces to explore new sounds and new musical capabilities. As we shall see in the example below, by experimenting, the students imagine themselves to be cultivating new abilities, such as new dance moves, new sounds, which would complement their ability to improvise.

I had seen one performance staged by more or less the same group of students the previous year, with their particular version of 'Love Never Dies'. I had heard stories about how that play was pulled together with little more than a CD of the soundtrack to go on. Furthermore, the student performers had only been given a couple of weeks to prepare for the performance. And it is important to note that on top of that, school was carrying on as per normal. So they improvised a musical score from the CD, developing a script from that as well, built sets and made costumes, and still managed to find room to add two dance routines and a fashion show. This example demonstrated that the students were accustomed to operating with small time frames and with minimal concrete material to work with. In the previous year's example, the students were tasked with learning the music for the CD, filling in the blanks of the script, and within all of that, construct sets and costumes and learn lines.

Even with such a short space of time, it took a few days for the rehearsals to hit full throttle. By this I mean that the jostling between the science practicals and other academic commitments described above provided enough of a barrier to hinder the first few days of practice, leaving little option but to wait until all parties required were able to be present. This in itself was my first introduction to the students' perceptions of a rehearsal. The clashes with the science practicals were acknowledged as 'one of those things'. 'We can't worry about it' Atul, the musician from the earlier example, told me. He was unable to being practising with his fellow musician, Pravesh, because he was busy with his science classes. They calmly acknowledged the obstacles and accepted them as inevitable drawbacks of the process. Surprised at the lack of urgency, I spoke with one of the students who had featured in the previous year's play. 'Don't worry it's always this way'. In this instance, the merit of employing students who had experienced the plays before came to the fore. They had experienced the delays, the clashes, the problems and they were aware that this was simply how rehearsal was done. This was also evidenced in the fact that students demonstrated that rehearsals were social events. For the Class 12 students in particular, the rehearsal spaces offered an opportunity to hang out with friends. As such the

rehearsals were perceived as social events and a chance to have fun with friends. 'When else do we get the chance to play music and sing with friends', Atul asked. 'This is our time, we have teachers here and all, but it's not like class, all my brothers are here, and we can relax and go our own pace'. This was a space where students perceived themselves to be operating under their own rules and in their own time. Or at least this was how the students saw it.

It was the third day of rehearsals and so far only after school time had been allotted for students to practice. It was the first day that the 'whole' band had been present. It had been decided that this particular evening would be devoted to musical practice and so much of the cast not involved in singing or playing were not present. As such, the hall was eerily quiet, with the only lights focused upon the stage, leaving large expanses of shadows at the rear of the hall which could easily have concealed a secret audience. However, there was no audience to hear the players, save for each other, along with the two principal directors and one solitary ethnographer. There was quiet as the vocalist for this particular song, also the principle actor and co-author of the play, knelt by the small CD player, flicking through the buttons to locate the particular track of interest. There were a few stifled squeals and noises as he tested each track for a second or two, snorting in disappointment each time until at last, with a cheer of delight he found the one he was looking for.

The singer played the first 30 seconds of the song before stopping the track and looking at the drummer who was listening intently, sitting patiently at the back of the stage behind his drum kit. He nodded back at the singer, drew up his drumsticks and began to 'experiment', trying to recreate the opening sounds that he had just heard. Neither he nor the guitarist, who was also listening in, had ever heard this song before and now they planned to repeat it. As the drummer continued to experiment with different sounds, the guitarist asked to hear the song again. However, the CD player stopped working. There was some cursing and some arm waving, before an inspection of the power socket discovered a rather dodgy wire was the source of the trouble. Power supply was erratic in Darjeeling, and the students were used to this. Soon enough, the CD player burst into life again, and this time the drummer and the guitarist joined in with their own experimental impressions. Following the second play, there was some discussion and some nodding at each other. The drummer banged at his drums and looked toward the guitar player for approval. There was a bit of head shaking, some more drum bashing, until the three seemed in agreement

that the drums sounded as they should. The guitarist fiddled with the dials on the pedals connected to his guitar, searching for the necessary sound to mirror the particular sound of the song. After a few failed attempts the drummer and the guitarist eventually managed to co-ordinate their efforts into a sound remarkably similar to that of the track from the CD.

In this example the various members of the band had experimented with sounds, looking towards their fellow band mates in order to interpret whether or not their experiment had worked. The musicians had essentially learned a song that they hadn't even heard previously in minutes, something they would have to repeat again and again to learn the all the music for the play. As future songs were learned, the band would rely on their past experiments in order to learn the new songs. By experimenting with sounds and gaining the approval of their peers the student musicians were able to build up their repertoire of musical abilities to facilitate the learning of future songs. In fact it was evident from the blank spaces in the script that not all the songs had been chosen. There would be more long nights of improvising ahead. However the prospect of this excited the students. This was rehearsal in action.

During the rehearsals I often chatted with Ritesh, one of the actors in the play, as he had a speaking part which was peripheral enough to ensure that he was often present during most rehearsals in case he was needed but yet often finding himself sitting around waiting. On one of these chats I asked about the timing of the play<sup>99</sup> and the apparent lack of time available to complete it in. At this stage there was less than a week left and the entire second act of the play hadn't even been rehearsed yet. He shrugged at me. 'What can we do? We are given this time only, what to do? We all want to do this play, we won't get another chance, so this is our time. We get this time to have some fun, and we enjoy whatever we have'. Ritesh was one of the Class 12 students who would be leaving after the board exams so this would be his final 'Major Play' at North Point. He seemed to be resigned to the fact that the scheduling of the school year was out of his hands so why should he worry about it. I asked him if the play would be finished in time, and he shrugged again. 'We'll see', he smiled and looked at the musicians who were busy practising another song in the corner 'Like these guys are so talented, we can do it'.

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<sup>99</sup> The Major Play was being staged later in the year than usual, and was now close to the end-of-year terminal exams.

His last comment touched on the apparent ‘talent’ of the students which enabled them to maintain a level of confidence that the play would be completed on time. In contrast, the musical director seemed far more overwhelmed by the occasion. I spoke with her during a brief tea break and she didn’t share her student’s optimism. The two directors both reiterated that there was simply ‘no time’ to manage the Play but were quick to remind me that this was the usual turn of events. Every year the Rector allotted only a short space of time, usually two around weeks, to rehearse the production. Despite only being given a limited timeframe, there was an expectation on those involved to deliver. The two directors informed me how they felt under pressure with regards to what the Rector demanded in terms of standards, but also from their own expectations of what a North Point Production should look like. The directors were not as laid back as their students and the rehearsal process was a period of great anxiety as they placed their experiences within the expectations of being a member of staff at North Point and thus saw the dwindling amount of time as pressure on them to perform.

Despite acknowledging that her students were ‘talented’, the director felt under pressure as she viewed her experience within the time constraints of work and thus simply a list of tasks to fulfil. The students on the other hand saw time as a concept that they had little control over. Scheduling was something done by the Rector or the head master but ultimately something the students themselves did not determine. In the students’ eyes this gave them a space to enjoy themselves, to enjoy the opportunity that they had during the limited time that it lasted. Furthermore the students relished the chance to be with their friends, socialising and playing music that they enjoyed, imagining their belonging to North Point, through their participation in the Major Play. Above all, this space enabled them to come to see themselves and their fellow students as ‘talented’ which provided legitimacy to their involvement with the play and also oriented them to the landscape of North Point. The ‘talented’ students were thus justifying their belonging within the NP Imaginary in coming to tell stories of their

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has explored how students rehearsed for their future lives through their experiences at North Point. In previous chapters I have sought to argue how performances were important in defining the ‘NP Imaginary’ and thus outlining the ways in which

students learned to imagine the social world around them and imagine their positions within that social world. Here I have sought to develop the concept of performance to acknowledge the performances around the main performance, namely the rehearsal process. Rehearsing offered students a space where they could experiment and improvise in order to prepare for the performances ahead. In this sense, these experiences were visualised by students not simply as preparation for the Major Play, but for their lives beyond. Here the process of rehearsing was a means of ‘gaining clarity’ (Schechner 1977: 77) over the roles that the student would be required to play. The story explored what happens when one leaves school and ‘experiments’ with a number of potential possibilities. Here the ‘story’ was not aligning the students with North Point but rather exploring the ambiguous space between the imagined world of North Point and the imagined world beyond.

On a more pragmatic level, the Major Play was a social space where students further cemented their sentiments of belonging and togetherness. The student performers and musicians found common ground through listening to music and an appreciation of theatrical performance. Experiences such as this enabled students to imagine themselves as like-minded North Pointers and thus underscore the importance of the ‘NP Imaginary’. The various physical elements of the Fraser Hall, which provided the axis around which their own stories of North Point revolved, were seen to be changing. This change provided a cause of anxiety as this space, which each student had relied upon to tell their own ‘stories’ and find their own sense of belonging within the school, as the space was seen to be changing. The observations of the students coincided with their own anxieties about their futures beyond the school and the new forms of belonging they would need to nurture in their future lives.

However the play also challenged the sense of belonging. A number of nostalgic reflections from the students belied their sadness at their impending departure. In this moment, the ‘NP Imaginary’ had no salience, as students were becoming detached from the school’s ‘History’. This was evidenced in the student critiques of the changes to the campus and that the students were saddened by the moving of the Major Play away from the Fraser Hall.

Ultimately this chapter has been about change. The Major Play emerged out of the experiences of the senior students as they attempted to navigate the ambiguity of the road ahead. This aspect of change and the future of North Point each form the central analytical thread to which I will now turn. The final Part of this thesis will explore how North Point has sought to navigate the changing social world around it, yet remain 'North Point'. In the final two chapters I will summarize how the student imaginaries were constructing in relation to a rapidly transforming social world. The school was competing with other schools, in the same fashion as the North Pointers were amongst each other. The result of this competition was the production the NP Imaginary, as experienced, reflected and enacted by the students of North Point, inside and beyond the school landscape.

# Part Three:

## Brands of Schooling

*'Some things have not changed [such as] the values, religious and human, that have inspired the college since that first bright day in February 1888. Such values are honesty, religious conviction, dedication to learning, love of God, of neighbour, of country, and the quest for excellence in all of these things. If these values were to alter, then North Point would surely be a different place'*

### - A Century Observed: North Point Annual Centenary Edition 1988

The students may have imagined North Point to have been more or less the same across each of its hundred years of existence, however in practical terms the school had changed. The custodians of North Point, encompassing predominantly academic staff, the administrative team but also an increasing number of ex-students, have sought to keep the school at the forefront of educational and scholastic attainment. This was encapsulated within an initiative known as 'Vision 2K', which had outlined a projected view of how North Point should progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this final section, I will present how the 'NP Imaginary' was not simply a reproduced ideal injected into students, but constituted a creative force that arose from the 'productive tension' (Moore 2011) of change and mobility and realised through an increasing array of possibilities. I will argue that the NP imaginary was not static and was in part defined by its transformative qualities. The concept of being 'all-rounders, when internalised through the NP imaginary', paved the way for a certain life ahead; a 'good life' (Brosius 2011: 324).

Within this final section of the thesis I will seek to explore how North Point was itself engaged in wider landscape of Indian education. In this context, North Point found itself competing with other schools, in the same manner that students were competing with one another. North Point was seeking belonging amongst a host of other elite institutions, in the same fashion that students were seeking belonging within the collective prism of the North Pointer. The school was itself engaged on a national level, and to an extent the international level, what students were engaged with on the local level. In this section I will envisage North Point as a 'brand' like a consumer product, packaged and marketed in specific ways with the express aim of exploring how North Point was constituted as a

school in relation to wider shifts in schooling and also more broadly reflecting the expectations across the nation as a whole.

In Chapter 7, I will centre my attention on the advent of explore ‘Smart Classes’ which were new digital teaching apparatus installed into the classrooms with the express aim of enhancing the teaching on offer. I explore how very little physically has changed in the classrooms over the years and now through this shift, was construed by students as further facilitation of opportunities. It was apparent that the students own backgrounds held influence over their experiences at school, in particular as they had familiarity with computers and digital technology thus the ‘Smart Classes’ aligned with this knowledge. Students demonstrated an involvement with a wider world, one where computers and other media populated their lives. This chapter contextualises the changes at North Point within a wider social map of transformation across Indian schooling as I examine an interschool workshop staged at the school which provides an example of North Point facilitated spaces of reflection beyond the students.

Chapter 8 expands upon the discussion on the school as a brand, and explores how North Point equated to other kinds of products in a saturated marketplace. I explore how North Point was ‘like Colgate’ which is to say that the idea of the school was comparable to market based companies. This chapter explores the nuances of perceiving the school as a brand and how various experiences throughout the school year served to reinforce how North Point was competing in a world of other images and products, not just with other schools. I examine how the image of the school was negotiated through the production school annual but also how students themselves situate their schooling experiences within their own immersion in a world of brands. Whether thought the collective lenses of the school’s photography club or through the careful selection of new textbooks, practices at school were managed and negotiated with the aim of presenting the school with the best image and relating the brand of North Point with other brands deemed to be of similar quality.

This section brings the discussion of this thesis full circle to the points of order with which I began. This thesis began as an investigation into the role of private schooling in providing the foundations for middle class lives. This final section explores how a school such as North Point was another brand in a world of brands and how student imaginaries

were shaped in relation to factors beyond the school landscape. Here the landscape of North Point which I etched out in Part 1 of the thesis is revealed to be embedded itself within the broader landscape of Indian Schooling. What emerges is a picture of an academic landscape of schooling, in which schools 'compete' with one another in the manner which I have described in the course of this thesis. Here, North Point becomes situated in the competitive middle class world within India, constantly striving to preserve its imagined story all the while endeavouring to keep up with the world of other schools and brands.

# VII

## The Time Traveller's Classroom: The NP Imaginary in Transition

### Introduction

I have attempted to argue in the previous chapters how students came to imagine their school as the 'Home in the Mountains'. The student imagined North Point through prolonged engagements within the school landscape, experienced, imagined and outlined as a story embedded within a cavalcade of symbols. This process leaves students imagining 'North Point' as something which has persisted unchanged over time, perpetuating an 'authentic illusion' (Skounti 2009:7) that the students of North Point today were near identical to the very first batch of students over a hundred years ago. However if this was the case how would the students react when their environment changed? This chapter explores how North Point has negotiated its way through time, having to change and adapt to enable the school to continue being perceived as one of the best in the country. Here I will explore changes to the classroom through the onset of 'Smart Classes', digital white boards, which were thought to offer new opportunities for teaching and learning. The students were able to incorporate changes within the fabric of the school landscape as they were enabled through the NP imaginary to imagine these 'new technologies' as yet further examples of the 'opportunities that the school afforded its students.

This chapter will explore how student imaginaries were not actually challenged by this change to the classroom but rather affirmed. Change and transformation is inherent in the model of social imaginaries as outlined by Charles Taylor (2004), which I have sought to utilise in order to frame the experiences of students at North Point. The 'North Pointer' wasn't a static concept, but rather imagined as something creative, inventive and capable of improvising, changing and adapting. In the previous chapter I explored how students at

North Point envisaged their capabilities to improvise based on their belief in their individual skills and ‘talents’. In this chapter, I will argue that the student imagined the North Pointer as creative which was reinforced by changes such as ‘Smart Classes’. I will situate the changes and transformations of this year at North Point within the contexts of an era of steady redevelopment which had been modelled in the shape of the school’s past. New classrooms, new buildings and new equipment such as the desks were each modelled on a format which hadn’t altered, or at least were imagined to not have been altered, since the school began. This was particularly evident within the ‘Vision 2K’ initiative (see Appendix B) which saw a consortium of teachers and former students conducted around the turn of the millennium, sought to continue to develop North Point as a school at the forefront of Indian schooling, yet ensure that it retained the particular characteristics which made North Point what it was. This initiative introduces the notion of North Point as a ‘brand’ comparable to other global products in a world of other consumer goods. Regarding a school such as North Point within this frame, speaks to the market place of middle class consumers which private schools seek to attract. I aim to illustrate this point within this chapter by exploring the events of a workshop hosted by North Point entitled ‘The Role of Technology in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education’. This event demonstrates the wider debates surrounding schooling across India, as a host of teachers, past and present, as well as other academics and educationalists gathered to share their views with an audience of teachers from schools across the Darjeeling hills.

Central to these discussions was the classroom. The lead speaker, a former chairman of the national certification board CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), suggested that the classrooms found within India’s schools were more relevant to 19<sup>th</sup> century England than 21<sup>st</sup> century India. In this chapter I will argue that this seminar example opens out into larger debates within middle class life in India, pertaining to negotiating one’s life as a ‘modern’ person. However I will contend, in line with Brosius (2010), that the Indian middle classes utilised certain ‘traditions’ as forms of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1984), which formed a crucial part of imagining oneself as a global person. This imagining, according to Brosius(2010: 329), was integral to what her informants termed a ‘good life’. This ‘good life’ was defined by one’s abilities to negotiate one’s heritage and family background, and to maintain ‘traditions’ and simultaneously engage with a modern global lifestyle. I will then explore this theoretical analysis in line with North Point’s own attempts to retain

‘traditions’ in order to remain distinctive from other schools yet also remain at the precipice of modern schooling. I will explore how the classrooms were, despite recent remodelling and new building extensions, still constructed in the fashion of the original classrooms. This re-development was driven by ‘Vision 2K’, which endeavoured to preserve North Point’s distinctive character. I will then delve into the social relations within those classrooms and explore how the students perceived the classroom as a place where they could come to ‘know’ the teacher which, they argued, was integral to student imaginaries of being North Pointers.

### **The Global Network Society**

North Point was not just a school, but also a venue for hosting events. On this occasion the event was organised by the ‘Global Network Society’, a Kolkata based distribution company dealing predominantly in scholastic supplies<sup>100</sup>. This event had been organised to bring together a consortium of teaching staff from schools across Darjeeling to explore new directions in education. Primarily this event seemed to be bent on promoting the particular products which the organising company distributed. However this event brought to the fore the problems faced by schools within the social milieu of India today. This event was not only promoting products, but a particular ideological approach towards teaching itself. I will demonstrate here how such events served to bring the challenges of schooling in India today to the fore. I will also illustrate the challenge faced by a school seeking to continue that which it had always done - producing batches of North Pointers - but also trying to keep one eye on maintaining its outward image as one of the best schools in the country.

The event had been solely organised for the benefit of teachers in Darjeeling as an introduction to new directions in educational technology. This was a seminar that had been awarded the rather grand title of ‘The Role of Technology in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education’, and was being staged at North Point by the consortium of publishers and distribution companies calling themselves the ‘Global Knowledge Network Society’. A number of senior figures from a number of local private schools had been invited for the event and all the English and Maths teachers from North Point’s senior teaching staff were requested to

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<sup>100</sup> This group were an affiliate of the S. Chand Harcourt publishing group, which produces and distributes textbooks and other educational materials for schools across India. Many of the publishing house’s products were being showcased outside the school hall, and this was very much a showcase event designed to promote their brand of products within schools in the hills.

attend<sup>101</sup>. There were a number of nominated speakers for the day, among them the former head of the CBSE Board, perhaps the most common exam qualification board in India, and the present head of the ISCE Board, the exam body that is adopted by many of the top schools, North Point included.

The majority of the day was given over to speakers who, as practicing teachers, were on hand to offer insights into teaching methods employed in their classrooms. The speakers focused on particular phrases such as ‘key skills’ and ‘ideal learning’, with a leaning towards the subjects of English and Maths. The lecture on English presented learning software which utilised digital teaching media in the classroom such as the ‘Smart Classes’ recently installed at North Point. The speaker, a teacher from a private school in Mumbai, offered her reasons for using such a methodology in the classroom and the benefits for the students. She demonstrated a part of the programme which sought to teach children a poem. There were a few quiet groans amidst the North Point teachers at the back of the hall. ‘This is for primary level’, one teacher whispered to her colleague. ‘How does this help my boys to study Shakespeare?’ The teacher giving the talk was a primary level teacher so her presentation made sense, but no primary teachers had been invited from North Point<sup>102</sup>. The teacher giving the demonstration continued, illustrating the computer software’s capacity to offer an audio – visual interactive experience to learning, which facilitated higher student involvement. The software read out a poem, simultaneously displaying accompanying images on the screen. A projector had been set up, beaming the computer image onto a white sheet that had been hung up for the occasion.

The following speaker continued the focus on the use of new technologies to aid teaching; this time the talk centred on Maths. She was a teacher from a Delhi private school and she championed the idea of a ‘maths lab’, a space whereby maths could leap out of textbooks and be interactive, much in the same way as practical experiments in the physical sciences. She demonstrated how students could use a simple apparatus to explore concepts such as shapes in real space. However this required actual, physical space, something that wasn’t lost on the watching teachers. ‘These ideas are nice, but where are we going to find the space, we don’t have enough room in the class’, one teacher observed. Another teacher

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<sup>101</sup> Perhaps requested isn’t exactly the right word. The event was held on a Sunday and many teachers would have preferred the day off. However, the Rector had met each one personally the previous day to ensure their participation in this event.

<sup>102</sup> Fr. Kinley had ‘invited’ all of the English and maths teachers from the senior school to attend. There were limited places, and to accommodate teachers from other schools priority had been given to the senior staff.

noted that the speaker was only utilising a small sample in her example. ‘If we did this then other kids would joke around when I teach’. It seemed that the teachers were at odds with the techniques on show.

These examples demonstrated how the teachers of North Point remained reticent towards the technologies on display, expressing that they were either not applicable or impractical for their classes. On one hand this was a problem of immediate space. The old building of North Point had not been constructed with the present day capacity in mind and as such the classrooms were straining to accommodate the demand for places. On the other hand, they accepted that there were good ideas on show, which would improve teaching and aid student learning. The classrooms mirrored the teaching that transpired within them. The rooms were designed and built in the style familiar to those at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There were Rows of wooden benches, with a teacher wielding chalk and a blackboard in front of the class. Students learned Shakespeare by poring through the text in books like they always had, and the teacher questioned how a computer screen could help them in this aim.

Their questions formed much of what the most prominent speaker of the morning had to propose. This final speaker was Ashok Ganguly, the former head of the CBSE examination board. At present he was an advisor to various educational groups such as the one presenting this seminar. His tenure as chairman, as the lengthy introduction suggested, was punctuated with the introduction of a number of reforms designed to enhance the learning process, most significantly ‘Higher Order Thinking Skills’<sup>103</sup> (HOTS). His talk started with a fantastical proposition. ‘I want you to imagine a time traveller’, he said with the whimsy of a story teller addressing an audience of starry eyed children. ‘I want you to imagine a time traveller from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Imagine that time traveller was transported to present day India. What would he find? Well, he would find change in every area of life. He will see changes in towns, consumer products, even religion but one thing will be the same. The classroom. He will look into that classroom and he will see rows of students at their benches all staring at one teacher standing at the front of the class’.

His premise suggested that the Indian education system was built around a hundred year old model, and thus offered an outdated means of teaching. Ganguly argued that the

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<sup>103</sup> This in essence demonstrated a move towards critical thought and individual interpretations of subjects. The aim of this was to move toward a student centric education system across Indian schools.

position of the teacher in India - and here, he utilised the Indian concept of the 'guru' - had long positioned the teacher at the centre of the learning process. Thus the Victorian classroom structure familiar to his time traveller had simply served to reinforce the guru's position. Ganguly then produced a number of graphs and charts to illustrate his views. The statistics he employed were designed to show how the reforms he oversaw, the championing of HOTS and student-centric learning, had led to significant improvements in school results. Evidently there was a bias in his arguments towards supporting his own personal views on education but nonetheless his central premise posed an interesting question. How has the 'old fashioned' classroom survived in modern India? Or to put it another way, how can a school like North Point develop in light of its recent technological acquisitions such as the 'Smart Class', despite the restrictions of apparently 'old fashioned' class spaces?

The seminar posed questions of the spatial organisation of the classroom within India. The talks and presentations from teachers and educationalists from across India were keen to highlight a varying degree of teaching techniques facilitated through technological advances such as 'Smart Classes', which were said to improve student academic performance. However, as Ganguly's speech highlighted, the space of the classroom was a hindrance to the potential progress. This seminar seemed to suggest that the conventional form of the classroom, that is to say the straight lines of desks facing a blackboard, was a relic of a bygone era which was inhibiting learning and did not relate to the world around it. This rather evolutionary view of 'progress' disregarded a fundamental question. If the conventional classroom is so apparently incompatible with contemporary teaching then why did such spaces persist? Hosting events such as this seminar, and the recent arrival of the Smart Classes, suggested the school's desire to address this question. Such events also illustrated the School's aim to remain at the forefront of educational advancements, and the recent installation of the Smart Classes further cemented this aim. Kinley's insistence that the science and maths teachers attended also signalled his desire for the teaching methods employed at North Point to remain in keeping with the best around India.

However there was a potential dilemma here as the North Point Teachers were seemingly at odds with the contemporary methodology on offer during the above seminar as they couldn't relate the advice of the seminar to their everyday experience of teaching. Their anxieties related to methodologies which were seen to be designed for particular classroom

spaces and not seen as compatible with the classrooms of North Point. Ganguly's proposition brought to the fore the contrast between the desire of the Rector and other teachers to be a pioneering school within India, or possibly even the world, yet the school was poised in a delicate balancing act. On the one hand North Point had to remain 'intact', by which I mean maintain the core practices and symbols which, as I have illustrated over the course of the thesis thus far, stood to represent the 'distinctive' quality of North Point. This distinctive quality was imagined as vitally important to enable the school to remain coveted above others. I have demonstrated how the school building itself was an important 'symbol' of North Point, that is to say, an observable entity that was interpreted by students to encompass the heritage of all North Pointers. To significantly change this building, which would be necessary to incorporate potentially larger classrooms, would risk losing this heritage and thus losing what makes the school unique. On the other hand, North Point could only remain a coveted school for the middle classes if it could incorporate the changes occurring in the wider world, namely the advent of computer technology, but also the new array of potential career trajectories available. Ganguly's presentation suggested that North Point was by no means alone in this quandary and that this apparent tension between continuity and change seemed to define the world of Indian private schooling.

The point of this seminar was to explore and demonstrate the role of technology in contemporary Indian schooling. This event suggested that the administrators of North Point, such as Father Kinley, were seeking to expand the facilities of the school and position North Point at the very forefront of educational facilities, not just regionally but nationally. The debates here centred on the space of the classroom, and in particular on Ganguly's interpretation that the majority of classroom spaces across India would not be out of place in Victorian England, brought the nature of the classroom into question. What was the purpose of a 19<sup>th</sup> century space in a 21<sup>st</sup> century nation? The further assertion brought forward at the seminar was that such outdated spaces nurtured an 'out dated' teaching which focused upon the teacher and not the student. Such critiques were prevalent in educationalist writings within India, suggesting that schooling in India was structured around the particular social order established during the colonial encounter and thus was incompatible with Independent India (see Kumar 2005; Advani 2009).

However the example of North Point suggests something else is happening. The school campus had been significantly reformed in recent years. Growing student numbers had led to the building of a new annex to the existing school building to encompass some new classrooms. However these classrooms, despite being just under 20 years old, were all structured around those few classrooms which were a hundred years older. This suggested that the classroom at North Point was imagined in a particular way. However the installations of the new Smart class equipment and the hosting of the seminar described above indicated intentions to align the school with the latest teaching techniques and approaches. What emerges is an apparent negotiation of change which, as I will demonstrate in the discussion below, spreads across theoretical debates pertaining to middle class lives in India today. As I have emphasized in the introduction, schools such as North Point were coveted in facilitating middle class lives (Donner 2008). I set out to explore what made schools such as North Point desirable to middle class families. The negotiations of change, as embodied within the example of the changing classrooms of North Point, reflected a wider engagement with a changing social world, suggesting that negotiating change was an important lesson for students to learn if they were to successfully establish middle class lives of their own.

### **Between Tradition and Modernity: Changing Lives**

In this section I will explore how the Indian middle class has incorporated changes in the social world of India over recent decades, such as the liberalisation of the economy and expansion of the consumer market, and in doing so explore how the middle classes have utilised this process to carve out ‘distinct’ identities, not only within India but within the world. Being middle class in India is seemingly synonymous with being ‘modern’ (Brosius 2010; Savaala 2010; Donner 2011). But this concept of ‘modern’, which is often employed by the informants themselves, is often contradictorily bound within concepts of ‘tradition’ (Donner 2008; Lukose 2008; - in Nepal - Liechty 2003). Such ethnographic approaches have explored how new opportunities for employment and consumption have not swept away or displaced institutions of Indian social life such as the family, religious practice or caste, but rather are enacted with and through these institutions. Donner (2008) for example observed how the sense of motherhood had adapted following the rise of the ICT sector across India. The influx of computing in schools and the lucrative array of ICT careers that lay beyond required mothers to undertake computer classes in order to fulfil

their role in assisting in the children's homework. This example demonstrates how the middle classes were being forced to adapt to the new opportunities in order to secure potential livelihoods to continue the levels of consumption which would underscore their middle class status

However, such dynamic relations have brought about certain anxieties within the Indian middle class as to precisely where they now fit within India. Such anxieties were exercised in the example of the Global Network Society seminar described above, where the world of formal schooling has become a space for debate as to its purpose and direction. Donner (2008) illustrated how anxieties over the role of education in middle class life arose in light of the weakening of relations between the Indian middle class and the state. The introduction of Caste reservation in schools and in government jobs threatened to undermine middle class status as they now competed with the lower castes for the government jobs that were once the preserve of the middle class. In order to preserve social status, the middle class has been required to change.

However this is not to suggest that new practices are displacing the old. I would suggest here, much in the same vein as Brosius (2010) and Liechty (2003), that the categories of 'tradition' and the 'modern' play a key role in shaping middle class lives. These authors refute the Orientalist readings of tradition and modernity as polar opposites and instead seek to assert these categories as different opportunities which require a certain negotiation in order to be considered as 'middle class'.

In Liechty's (ibid.) suburban Kathmandu ethnography, middle class families were located within a complex field of new opportunities and new occupations, paving the way for new livelihoods. Here, class was not a universal way of life or a uniform set of practices, but rather a shared project of locating oneself in the world. As such, identifying a 'suitable' balance between the traditional and the modern was a social demonstration of one's social class. One of the ways this was most observable was through clothing, in response to the influx of international brands and products offering new opportunities for presenting oneself to others. Liechty noted how informants would analyse the class of others based on appearance with clothing. One was required to dress in a 'suitable' fashion for one's class position. In the case of Liechty's middle class informants, this meant being able to best dress in a way that, on the one hand, articulated one's capacities as a modern individual,

but on the other hand belied one's sense of tradition. Observations of clothing formed what Liechty termed 'narratives of status and value which people draw on to claim and contest social positions' (ibid: 86). It is within such contexts that the middle class consumers of Kathmandu came to situate themselves within a 'competition' to assure their social status. This 'competition', which I have relied upon throughout this thesis, encompassed the desires of the middle classes towards a lifestyle, such as possessing certain consumer goods and dressing in a certain way, all the while comparing themselves against others.

Christiane Brosius' (2010) ethnography of middle class urbanites of India's capital, Delhi, witnessed similar patterns of identification, whereby lifestyles were constituted through a juxtaposed observance of concepts of tradition and the modern. Brosius' observations of a new temple complex on the outskirts of the city witnessed the fusion of the realm of modern Indian consumption with the apparent traditions inherent within religious practice. Brosius argues that to consider acts of consumption or religious observance squarely as acts of tradition or modernity respectively essentialises the notion of what it means to be part of India today. Instead she suggests that engagements in modern consumerism and 'traditional' practice are simply different parts of what Brosius termed a 'Globalised Indianness' (2010: 329). The theoretical focus of this latter point is to indicate the ways in which apparent 'traditional' concepts underpin this cosmopolitan image of the modern Indian; family, caste and religion, for example, have prominent roles across the spectrum of contemporary public life in India, from education to electoral politics. There is a danger here of essentialising certain aspects of Indian social life as 'tradition', which is not the intention here. The aim is to highlight the specific ways in which the middle classes of India share certain desires and aspirations with regards to being seen as 'global' whilst remaining 'distinctly Indian'.

Brosius' analysis, as indeed does Liechty's, draws inspiration from Bourdieu (1984), observing how the respective middle class groups place importance on certain 'values' as a marker of 'distinction'. In Brosius' case this was demonstrated through the temple complex, which combined the worlds of religious ritual and practice with engagements within a consumer marketplace. Liechty's example demonstrated how particular approaches to fashion and consumption were conceptualised as markers of one's social position and were utilised to 'claim and contest' those positions. Bourdieu's (ibid) perspective argued that social classes were defined through aesthetic dispositions or

‘tastes’, which were cultivated through the social conditions of one’s background. Bourdieu proposed that the ways in which one was able to articulate one’s tastes defined one’s social status. This process performed a ‘distinction’ from others. In the cases of the Indian middle class described above, this ‘distinction’ from others was performed through being able to navigate and negotiate the changes to the Indian social landscape; to engage in religious practice and be at once modern and traditional; what Brosius (2010: 330) termed being ‘cultured’ or indeed what Liechty (2003: 86) termed being ‘suitably modern’. In Brosius’ case, traditions defined a specific heritage which carved out a ‘distinct’ place for the middle classes, which would enable them to live meaningful, ‘good lives’ (Brosius 2010: 329), dedicating time to family, to religious observance, and yet still reaping the benefits of a life as a global consumer.

It is these kinds of processes that I seek to encapsulate within the discussion of the changing of the classrooms at North Point. I will argue here that the kinds of processes witnessed by Liechty and Brosius were visible at North Point. Furthermore, the negotiation of concepts of tradition and modernity are instigated during schooling when potential middle class Indians learn the potential values of maintaining traditions and nurturing a certain heritage. I will argue that the classroom became a key space where the perceived ‘traditions’ of North Point played out alongside the modern. In the introduction I argued that certain forms of education, such as that provided by North Point, were perceived to be constitutive of being middle class. In this fashion I would argue that it is during schooling when students come to encounter change and incorporate this into their social imaginaries. Above all I seek to assert that the process of change was constitutive of the NP imaginary, particularly in imaging North Point as the ‘best school’.

I shall begin by exploring how the school structured classroom spaces, by way of a retort to Ganguly’s assertion that the class spaces of India were outdated and served a defunct purpose. I would argue that classrooms were imagined, like any other aspect of the school building, to have a particular appearance, which if altered would alter the perception of the school as one of the best in India. In Chapter One I argued that the school building was an important symbol through which the students imagined North Point from others. The importance of this distinction was shared by the consortium of ‘Vision 2K’ who would seek to maintain North Point’s distinctive appearance as the school renovated and redeveloped over the years. Here the classroom was not a Victorian relic servicing a

defunct social purpose, but rather a space imagined to align with the image of what North Point should look like. In order to illustrate this I will now turn to the underside of school life, the workshop, and a meeting with some of the figures who quite literally had a hand in building the school: the carpenters.

### **New Desks, Traditional Style**

I was on a mission to get some swords. I was accompanying the primary school art teacher, Simon, who had been tasked with creating a number of props for the primary school play. We were headed to the school's workshop to put in a request to the school's team of carpenters and Simon had brought a sample wooden sword with him to demonstrate precisely what was required. Simon had been keen to describe to me that he had brought the sword for a purpose. This was a style that he liked. This sword was a veteran of many primary plays, an anomaly of sorts, as Simon claimed that most swords were broken soon after they were first handed to the students. Besides, the carpenters were accustomed to working in this way. Most of their assignments involved working with a predetermined style as I was about to discover.

The school had a full time staff of workmen, from carpenters to electricians, who were responsible for maintaining the school environment. Their workshop was concealed underneath the senior school class building, which jutted out from the original quadrangle of the school. The workshop was adjacent to the school's kitchen, where all the food for the school was produced, both just above a garage area where the school buses lay dormant during the day. The carpenters were hard at work when we arrived and it turned out they were in the process of making new desks to furnish some of the newly established classrooms. It seemed they had been working at this task for some considerable time, as the back of the workshop was filled with some of their completed efforts. The three shiny new desks had been lined up as if they were practicing for the classroom. Despite being brand new, these desks looked identical to the older ones found in the other classrooms with a flat stool seat incorporated into a hinged slanted desk with storage area inside. Simon wandered over and played with the hinged desk. 'Same, like the old ones', he noted.

It seemed that Ganguly's observation of the never changing classroom was in full force. With our own work on hold for now, Simon and I chatted for a moment with the

carpenters as they continued in their task. It turned out these desks were for one of the new classrooms which had been created to accommodate the shifting of the primary school. Simon stressed how experienced these carpenters were at their work. 'He has been at North Point before me'. One of the carpenters had spent 15 years at the school and had personally been involved in the construction of all classroom desks and benches in that time. The carpenters at school were not just responsible for desks, but any woodwork or metalwork construction or repair for the school. I asked if the carpenter had been instructed to build the desks in any particular way. The answer was a formidable yes. It was important that the new ones fitted with the old. The moving of classrooms did not necessarily mean an entirely new set of desks but perhaps a small number to accommodate increased numbers or a change in the shape of the room. Simon reminded me of the sword he had brought in before. He had wanted a number of new swords to match the old one he had. The carpenter revealed a further dimension to his request for more concrete examples of what he was required to reproduce. 'This school likes to make things the same. The same desks, same style, like before. This place is like that, they know what they like'<sup>104</sup>.

There was a precedent for his words. The significant amount of development going on across the school campus had been conducted to be in keeping with the structural and aesthetic quality of the buildings. The new classroom and canteen building had been designed to look as though it was built around the same time as the original building. The new auditorium and the recently refurbished primary building also stood as a testament to this endeavour, which all stemmed from a school initiative entitled 'Vision 2K'. This initiative came about in the 1990s in order to bring North Point into line with the changing world, North Point made its own plans for how the century old school would survive into the new millennium. A part of its pledge, it seemed, was reflected in the work of the school's carpenter and his aim to make desks 'like before', perhaps in the custom of his own skill and ability, but also in keeping with the demands of those in the school management who wanted to retain the classroom as it was. In constructing the new in the model of the old there are parallels for students to observe. The school building, as discussed in Chapter 1, was observed by students to be the same now as it always was. In shaping the new buildings and indeed the classroom furniture in the model of the old, there is a suggestion that these styles have perpetuated across all of North Point History. This

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<sup>104</sup> Translated from Nepali with some help from Simon.

acted as one example through which students could imagine that the environment of their school exists today as it always has. The importance of this was, as Brosius (2010) pointed out through her implementations of Bourdieu (1984), that there was a certain distinction created through observance of ‘traditions’. Maintaining a ‘distinct’ image of North Point underscored the school’s desire to stand out from other comparable schools and thus continue to perpetuate the image of North Point as the ‘best school’.

What Ganguly didn’t account for in his earlier observations was that schools such as North Point were actively engaged in reproducing the, what he had termed, ‘out dated’ shape of their classrooms. ‘Vision 2K’ had outlined a forecast for North Point’s future which was as much about transforming the school as it was about reinforcing and protecting what was already there. The refurbishment of the main school building and the array of new buildings constructed in keeping with the old reflected a desire within ‘Vision 2K’ The style of the buildings was built to accommodate the educational approaches of 19<sup>th</sup> century, with classrooms arranged with rows of desks all facing a blackboard at the head of the class. This was, as the carpenter indicated, how those at North Point imagined the classroom.

This latter point leads into the following discussion, which explores the ‘Vision 2K’ initiative which played a key role in recent developments at North Point. I will argue that the outcome of this endeavour defined the directions in which the school was headed. A key aspect of this initiative was to identify the aspects of North Point which needed to be preserved and protected that which needed to change, be adapted or developed. What followed was a ‘reimagining’, of sorts, which appeared to reflect wider changes in the social world around the school. However it is vital to note that ‘Vision 2K’ was not brought about by just anyone, but was the crafted vision of a consortium of former and current teachers, alongside a number of ex-North Pointers, with the express aim of crystallising what North Point was and where it would be headed.

### **Vision 2K: Reimagining North Point**

No one knew more about North Point than Manuel. It is often said of those who have many years of experience that said person has ‘seen it all’. Perhaps this phrase is often used too freely, however Manuel was one figure at North Point who would be deserving of such a description. He had over 50 years of teaching experience, the vast majority at North

Point, including being the teacher and mentor for NP's rector incumbent, Fr. Kinley. Perhaps most importantly, he was an ex-North Pointer himself, still clinging proudly to his blue coat awarded for his proficiencies at cricket, and often speaking passionately about the school in general. He became a key figure in my research, a living legend, who embodied the very history of North Point, and who had an unsurpassable knowledge of all things NP.

Manuel and I were standing out in the afternoon sunshine, chatting away as we frequently did, conversing about the on-going cricket match amongst numerous other current affairs. We wandered out into the centre of the quadrangle, a place that Manuel once called home as a North Pointer and continued to occupy as a vastly popular English teacher. On this occasion I took the opportunity to probe a little into his memories of the school as a student. 'You know, the school has changed a lot in recent times. This quadrangle was the only school building; we grew up in it'. He recounted some memories from his school days. 'Of course there were fewer students in those days. Then we had only about 300, now we have over a thousand'. Manuel has overseen six decades at the school, and his sense of pride was evident in his voice. He seemed to enjoy the fact that I had chosen his school out of all in India as my object of study.

I was intrigued to ask if he had any negative words towards his beloved school and I was unsurprised to hear him say 'no', although he did suggest that the school had ridden through rough times, referring to the social unrest which Darjeeling endured in the 1980s (see the background history section in the Introduction for details). Manuel reflected upon that time and noted how the school had declined after this for a number of years. There were various reasons offered for why this was but I was more intrigued by the remedy which arose. 'That is why Father Van<sup>105</sup> introduced Vision 2K', he told me, revealing how this initiative was instigated to rectify a perceived decline in the school standards. There was a concern that North Point was not only slipping in academic standards but was losing the sense of what made the school 'distinct'. The school was changing: various practices such as Rector's Day were stopped, the post of the Headmaster was incorporated into the Rector, and the boarding division was nearly phased out entirely. Some of these changes were evidently in response to the political unrest which had devastated Darjeeling in the

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<sup>105</sup> Fr. Van Wellegeran, popularly known as 'Father Van', was Canadian Jesuit who was the Rector at the time but now an emeritus occupant of the school.

late 1980s (see the Introduction of this thesis), but as Manuel, Father Van, and others saw it, North Point was becoming something else. I was able to gain insights into the negotiations of change during the introduction of Smart Classes.

Manuel's response to this change was immediate. 'It's a good thing. North Point is always at the front of education in India, it needs to stay there, so it needs to change'. He was hinting at the imminent arrival of the Smart Classes as a potential change to the status quo. 'But I think it is still North Point, it is still the same school I fell in love with as a student but it is important that it stays the same too. We have to change because the world changes but school is still important. This is why fathers send their sons to this school, because they want the traditions of North Point, but they also want the best for their sons'.

Vision 2K seemed to represent an origin point of sorts for the present imaginary, which the students learned in their engagements with the school. This project seemed to be an official incarnation of what Mark Liechty (2003) visualised in action amid the middle class consumers of Kathmandu. Liechty proposed that perceptions of class lifestyles were not a universal set of values but a collective project of orientation towards the world. In this sense Vision 2K performed the same role for North Pointers. In essence, this was not one person's vision but the collective approach of an appointed group of individuals adjudged to each possess a suitable connection to North Point and thus best placed to guide the school into its future. The school building itself was a monument in time, remaining relatively fixed. However, as Manuel himself acknowledged, the world around the school has changed and so the school needs to change too.

There was an importance awarded to preserving the essence of the school, and this 'essence' is what I am referring to as the 'NP imaginary'. I have explored how the school was imagined to be consistent across time, and how this 'authentic illusion' (Skounti 2009: 7) reverberated through a maintenance of a certain aesthetic appearance of the school environment, propagating a sense of heritage. This heritage provided a background to which all the students of North Point could imagine themselves as belonging.

The development of this process began in 1988 at the celebration of the hundredth year of the school's founding. The aging school building was in need of significant maintenance work and was starting to struggle to accommodate the numbers flooding through its doors. The process was powered by the North Point School Alumni Association in collaboration

with then Rector Father Van, and together they staged a number of meetings at the school, with various alumni members and teachers each offering their input. They sketched out a vision, as their eponymous project title had suggested, as the school moved towards the new millennium, encompassing plans for a new auditorium, a redevelopment of the sporting facilities, a general refurbishment of the school campus with plans for a new student canteen and classrooms and also for installing vast underground water tanks to accommodate the growing number of students at the school. While all these new developments were deemed necessary to bring the school in line with the 'modern' world, it was stressed that they should not at any stage compromise what North Point was or rather what it was imagined to be.

This was a monumental task for anyone to bring to fruition and it was only with the arrival of Father Kinley in 2003 that the vision began to take shape. A new extension to the present building began in 2003, along with a new primary building, both of which were inaugurated in 2005. The new extension offered a dedicated dining and kitchen area on the ground floor, but more crucially two levels of classrooms above and in the roof a dormitory for the primary. The plans understood that the growing numbers would mean a growing need for water on campus and as such six vast water harvesting tanks were installed in 2006 with the combined capacity of around 800,000 litres of water in order to support the strenuous demands of over five hundred boarders. These plans also sought to develop the sports facilities, with new pavilions for the 'flats' and also an auditorium complex.

Although classrooms had moved around and in some cases were entirely new, the layout remained the same as it always had been. The rooms remained relatively small and were constructed around the same format as before. Each room was fitted with a green chalk board and several rows of wooden desks to accommodate each lesson. The plans talked extensively about expanding the school and 'taking [the school] into the new millennium', however the new classrooms drew their design from the previous one. Furthermore, the overall style was developed in keeping with that of the original school building. The distinctive roofing style with the blue trim flowed from the quadrangle rooftops across the new classroom building. In the same vein, the new clock tower, the renovated primary building and the new auditorium each reflected a certain desire to maintain a particular

visual appearance across the school campus. Once again we can observe the articulation of the school's appearance in establishing a school distinct from others.

So we can see from the testaments of the carpenter, Manuel and the plan of Vision 2K, that North Point treads a fine line between moving into a new age, adapting to find meaning in a changing world but all the while wishing to retain a certain sense of what the school is and what it stands for. The desks were built based on the tried and tested model of the previous ones, and the school planned its future based on those who knew it from its past. And finally, there are those such as Manuel who have continued to watch over the school as it undergoes its transition into a new era. So there appears to be a greater underlying issue which has enforced a maintaining of classroom spaces. It was not, as Ashok Ganguly suggested, a failure to acknowledge the changing world, but rather a consequence of it. Some things have to change, but in order to preserve the school some things must remain. The classroom appears to be one of these elements.

So far I have endeavoured to offer insights into the ways in which what we might term the traditional and the modern, in the sense of the way these terms have been used by either Liechty or Brosius, and the ways in which both play an equal role in structuring school life. The classroom was imagined as a 'traditional' element of North Point, in that it was imagined to have existed across all of North Point History. However as I have also endeavoured to argue in order to retain a reputation as the best school, North Point had to introduce some changes. These changes were necessary to incorporate new developments in teaching techniques, and as this chapter has shown, new technology.

Integral to this end was the 'Vision 2K' initiative, which recognised the importance of being a modern school but also the significance of remaining within a sense of what the school was. In the following section I will examine the day to day interactions within the classrooms and observe this tension between the old and the new with the advent of the Smart Classes. I will argue that the students were adept at incorporating the new, seeing it not as contradictory but as complimentary to the older methods.

### **A Student-centric space?**

I took my place amid the swarm of students rushing up the staircase, like salmon swimming upstream, peeling off into the required corridor and disappearing into the necessary doorway. Each classroom was marked with a small printed sign posted above

the doorway, with the class written in roman numerals<sup>106</sup>, with each hallway generally accommodating 8 classrooms, hosting all 20 classes between 6 and 10 over three floors. I found class 7C, which was to be my first indoctrination of a class at North Point. Class 7 students were around 13 years old, located one Class above the youngest of the senior school, Class 6. The majority of the students in Class 7 had been at North Point since the Primary section and as such had been at the school for around 5 years. There was a monotonous chorus of ‘Good Morning Sir’, as the whole classroom rose to its feet in response to my arrival. I thanked the class and invited them to sit down prompting, a second dulcet chorus of ‘thank you sir’. As this was my first appearance in the classroom and my stay at North Pint was merely weeks old, I was immediately bombarded by some questions ‘Sir, sir, where are you from?’ ‘What do you teach?’ ‘Sir, you are our teacher today?’ This was the first lesson of the day and there was a register to be taken so I immediately went into autopilot and was about to call out names when one voice shouted, ‘Sir, only Avneet is absent’. I asked if this was true, and there was a roomful of yeses and nods. I checked off all the names bar the absent child and the register was complete. All that remained was the small matter of the outstanding 40 minutes of the lesson. I soon discovered that although the space was oriented towards a teacher, the space belonged very much to the class. Students would spend the majority of the day in the one room, leaving only for lessons such as art, music, games and second languages. The core subjects of English, maths and science were all in one location, along with others such as geography and history. As such the students seemed to see the classroom as their space. They confessed that it could get a little boring being in the same space all day, and they often attempted to alleviate this by switching seats several times, sitting next to different students. Despite spending so much time in the classrooms during the day the students also saw the space, ironically, as an escape from teachers. During lunch breaks teachers were generally out patrolling the outside areas while no one looked in the classrooms.

The rooms themselves are fairly uniform in size, just about large enough to accommodate the 35 or so students in each class and the chunky wooden benches they sat at. Each bench accommodated two students which, after accounting for each of their books and stationery on the desktop, and their overcrowded schoolbags underneath, left precious little space for the two students to sit comfortably. However, this physical structure encouraged a sense of

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<sup>106</sup> This was common to most schools that I had experienced in Darjeeling.

sharing, with the desk ‘partners’ frequently borrowing each other’s pencil sharpener or eraser. However the importance in the space was not about it belonging to the students; rather it acted as the intermediary by which students came to ‘know’ the teachers and thus a significant part of their schooling experience. Coming to know the teachers enabled them to have a better relationship with them, and thus put the students on the path of full immersion within North Point and becoming North Pointers. Students’ analyses reflected the wider debates within this chapter regarding the potential conflicts arising in the collision of old and new. Students would observe how teachers combined methods in their learning, the outcome of which served to frame who they saw as good and bad teachers.

### **He is our best teacher, he can do everything**

Due to teacher absence, I had once again found myself the temporary custodian of a group of Class 7 students, this time section 7B. I arrived at the class to find them deep in conversation - so much so that they almost didn’t notice my arrival to stand up and greet me. I asked them what they were talking about and initially they were reluctant to say but eventually one student plucked up the courage. ‘We were talking about the history lesson, sir’. It turned out that something of a debate had broken out as one of the students had protested when another had said he didn’t like the previous teacher. ‘He gives too much work. Sir, look there’. His evidence was illustrated by a blackboard with barely an inch to spare, covered in writing detailing various aspects of the lesson with a small box outlining classwork and homework to be completed. I tried to be diplomatic and invited the other boy, who was becoming shy in the face of more students joining with the rivals view, to air his views. ‘He writes it down then we can copy’, he said meekly, almost apologetically. The other student didn’t need an invitation to reiterate his view. ‘He is always writing sir, he uses all the chalk, because he is a little old sir’. This student was backed up by other students. ‘The older teachers always write on the board, their lessons are little boring’. The emphasis on ‘old’ suggested that the students related the techniques of a particular teacher to the respective age of said teacher. The older teachers were using ‘boring’ teaching methods, whereas younger teachers were more liable to be more creative in their approach. However, the younger teachers often employed different techniques and the students were also liable to find them confusing. They told about one of the new teacher’s from Kolkata, who had tried to bring his methods of teaching from another school to North Point. ‘He doesn’t remember our names’, one boy complained. ‘He doesn’t write anything down and

we can't understand him also'. The students said they couldn't follow what was being set and were occasionally confused about what was being asked of them.

This led into a discussion about the students' views of the teachers and which teachers were liked and why. It became apparent that opinions were reserved for teachers with whom the students had lessons, and students admitted that they rarely interacted with certain teachers if they had no time in the classroom with that teacher. 'If we don't have [a] class then we don't know what that teacher is like', one of the students told me. 'That's why we didn't talk with you also, because we didn't know you'. 'Knowing' teachers was an important part of school life, as for many students, the relationships between students and teachers typified the uniqueness of being at North Point. Students who had been to other schools often spoke of the difference in teachers at North Point compared to their former schools. 'Teachers here are more friendly, more like parents actually'. Imagining a teacher 'like parents' was common across students, and the references by students who had been to other schools reinforced the student imaginaries that this was distinct of North Point.

As can be seen in this example, it seemed there was a balance which the students perceived to be the ideal, somewhere between the chalk-wielding older staff and the fast-talking new recruits. The Class 7B students were not shy to offer me some examples of their favoured teachers. In doing so they identified the key skills which defined being a teacher in their eyes. First and foremost the best teachers were friendly. 'They should know our names'. Teachers also needed to understand the academic expectations of the students. One of the most common complaints I heard was about teachers who consistently got students' names wrong. These teachers represented teachers who the students perceived as uninterested and confusing. However students reserved judgement over teachers to those with whom they had lessons. In this sense the classroom was an important space for students to get to know teachers. Other students enjoyed the 'relaxed' nature of the staff and the more familial relationships which tied those at NP together. It was only in the classroom where the relationships between students and teachers were first nurtured before spreading out into the school environment as a whole. Furthermore, the classroom interactions were central to student imaginaries regarding their sense of 'distinction' over other schools. The students imagined this distinction through the teachers who were, despite their pitfalls, 'more like family'. These distinctions, cultivated through classroom encounters, underscored the

importance of the classroom at North Point. The space encapsulated the relationships between students and teachers.

There was an ominous change on the horizon, however, as the Rector announced that the school would finally be fitted out with ‘Smart Classes’ as a means of maintaining North Point’s desire to offer a brand of education in keeping with the present age. The seminar referenced at the beginning of this chapter signalled how this aim sought to align North Point with some of the largest schools in the country, as prominent figures across India’s national educational landscape all came together to present the future of the country’s schools. The introduction of ‘Smart Classes’ was set to place North Point among these schools.

### **Smart classes**

The process of acquiring the Smart Classes goes some way to reflect the careful negotiation apparent within the transformations of North Point in recent years. Vision 2K demonstrated how the governing powers of the school, as well as the alumni, sought to preserve what they considered to be the key components of what made North Point what it was, all the while keeping the school in touch with the changes in the world at large. As I mentioned earlier, the introduction of Smart Classes was on the cards from the moment of my arrival, almost a year before it actually came to pass. It came about in my very first meeting with the Rector as I sought to negotiate my entry to the field. I had come prepared to sell myself and demonstrate what I had to offer the school in order to be allowed to be there, yet I found almost the opposite process in action. It was almost as though the Rector was selling the school to me. He waxed lyrical about how I had chosen a good school for my project and that I would find everything I needed at North Point. He stressed that the school was at the forefront of education in the region and was poised to become the first to introduce Smart Classes, and he gestured that I would already know about those, making assumptions about my background. He claimed that there were three or four companies each vying to sign up North Point to their brand of digital equipment, which demonstrated, in the rector’s eyes, how North Point was regarded as a pivotal educational institution, leading the way for others to follow. This initial meeting was, without me knowing, my first introduction to the ‘NP Imaginary’. Here the school was imagined as one coveted by a

host of unnamed companies, each wanting the school to adopt their equipment as a means of promoting this equipment across the Darjeeling hills.

I had been accepted and now I was being immersed. I was being bombarded with rhetoric of how North Point fared against other schools, about how the teaching and learning going on at school compared regionally and about how the name of North Point represented a place with a significant past and pioneering future. Nowhere was this more apparent than with the Smart Classes.

In February 2011 the Rector announced to the staff that sometime during the academic year, the classrooms would be fitted out with the interactive white boards and projectors, which would elevate the methods of teaching and learning to an as yet unseen level. It transpired that it was not just a simple case of acquiring the physical technology but finding the right company to suit the brand of education at North Point. It was in part a concern of cost, and ensuring on one hand that the school would make the most out of its investment and not drive the annual school fees higher than necessary. On the other hand it was a case of finding a company that could offer a product that would help keep the association of North Point with the forefront of global education<sup>107</sup>. It was interesting to note that it was not simply a case of upgrading to Smart Classes; the process involved a negotiation between maintaining the image of North Point simultaneously being perceived to offer the best education. There was a delicate balancing act at hand. This was an example of what Liechty (2003) observed with his middle class informants in Kathmandu, with regards to their clothing. Finding the suitable balance defined how one saw themselves in a world of others. In Liechty's case this was finding a balance between the modern clothes in the shopping malls and the traditional dress which belied a national identity. In the case of North Point it was straddling the balance between the modern equipment of Smart Classes without compromising the traditional core of what North Point was. This made the selection of the company providing the new equipment as careful a negotiation as choosing what kind of clothes to wear.

The term 'Smart Class' was used frequently around school to describe the new equipment which had been installed in all of the classrooms. Here I will explain a little about what this term refers to, how it was used at school and how the concept as a whole came to

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<sup>107</sup> I expand upon this in Chapter 9.

represent the wider aims of North Point. As intimated above, a 'Smart Class', generically speaking, referred to a classroom enabled with digital teaching equipment particularly an interactive white board which would form the basis of most lessons conducted within. Most commonly this set up would be linked up to a projector, which would project the images drawn from the computer to which the entire system is connected. The system installed at North Point was linked up to a central server, which controlled all the classroom equipment. The teacher can interact with the computer screen projected through the white board with a specially calibrated stylus that looks like a silver marker pen, with support from the good old fashioned keyboard and mouse. The central server stored and managed the software and the files that flow through each system in each classroom. At North Point, the particular software contained a central database of 'lessons', focused on certain topics relative to the school's ICSE syllabus. These varied from basic PowerPoint presentations to more elaborate animated sequences or pre-recorded videos. The new equipment required a weekend long training for the teaching staff to learn the ropes. These initial forays into Smart Classes highlighted the teachers' concerns of how the changes would affect the school as a whole.

The teachers' primary concern was that their role would become obsolete. The older teachers who had spent a number of years teaching at North Point, some over twenty years, feared that the purpose of such technologies was to supplant teachers altogether. During a question and answer session with some representatives from the Smart Class company, the teachers were able to air their difficulties. 'They can play the computer without us!' one of the teachers cried. 'They can just learn from a video', said another. Although the representative was able to answer the questions, the teachers still seemed ambivalent as to how this equipment would assist in their teaching.

Whereas the teachers had struggled with change, the students on the other hand seemed to take it in their stride. On one hand they were accustomed to computers and other digital media whereas many of the teacher's grievances were that they would be undermined by their computer illiteracy. However, there was more to it than a familiarity (or unfamiliarity) with computers. Students recognised the significance of the new developments and recognised the change as part and parcel of North Point.

### **The change in the classroom**

I was able to witness the effect of the Smart Classes across the range of school life, from the Primary classes to the seniors. Following the grand opening of the new equipment during the annual Teacher's Day celebrations, classes were soon into full swing, with teachers keen to put their training programme into practice. There were a number of teething problems, none of which went unnoticed by the students. After a couple of weeks of Smart Classes I made concerted efforts to ask students about their experiences with the new classes. When things started to go wrong with the equipment, I was able to see how change was incorporated into the 'NP imaginary'.

I conducted some focus groups with an assortment of students, predominantly from the Lower Division, seeking to explore how the classroom had been changed by the new equipment. The very first session encountered a problem. As soon as I had asked the question about how the new classes were going, I sensed eyes looking up. They were looking up at the explosion of exposed wires hanging where the projector had been. 'Broken, sir', was the simple response. It turned out that this Class 7 group had witnessed only a few minutes of Smart Class action and didn't have much to offer in terms of insights into it. They were disappointed that other classes had an opportunity that they didn't but they seemed to think this was fairly normal. 'This always happens'. The students recalled a story of how the school invested in some new computers a couple of years ago and a similar thing had happened. The student reminded me that power cuts were common and although the school had a generator, disruption to technology was often problematic.

The problems weren't limited to the realms of technical faults. The next group of students, a Class 6 group, pointed me towards the difficulties teachers had with accessing the system. They were quick to suggest that the students would try to help the teachers by offering suggestions on how to operate the software. 'We are used to computers, so we know some things. We have computer classes'. The students were already accustomed to some of the practices involved with computers. However this was not just a case of computers in the classroom; the students were beginning to observe that the Smart Classes had offered a change in how lessons would run. 'It is more interesting now. We have more things in each class'.

The students were excited about the potential for the software, in particular the ways in which subjects they had once considered to be boring were now revitalised, particularly geography, history and science. The students had expressed that a number of aspects of these subjects had been difficult to imagine but the visual demonstrations available through the new smart boards brought about new opportunities for imagining. The best examples were through the videos and animated sequences, included within the history syllabus. In those situations, students admitted that the Smart Classes had changed their perspectives of some teachers. One of the Class 7 students described this as helping to communicate between teachers and students. 'Some of the teachers they don't explain so well. With the Smart Class if we don't understand, then we can see it on the board'.

Above all, students seemed to consider the smart classes not as something new, but rather as something which had made lessons more interesting. The students had also compared the Smart Classes with their knowledge of computers which they had developed during their computer classes. As such, the 'Smart Classes' were not a radical departure from previous experiences; the structure of the classroom was more or less the same and student still sat in their neat rows. The only difference was that there was an interactive board instead of the old blackboards.

The digital media made the difference in teachers or subjects that had previously been considered 'boring'. But this was not just a case of making dull classes exciting. In this sense, the Smart Classes helped students get to 'know' teachers and thus further assure the NP Imaginary of teachers as 'family'. The change of the Smart Classes had not been imagined as such a change by the students. They assimilated the new technologies with their prior understandings of computers, drawn from their classes at North Point but also from their more general experience. The students adapted more seamlessly to change than their teachers. Where the teachers perceived the technology to be distancing them from the students and ultimately replacing their authority as teachers, the students imagined the opposite. The Smart Classes facilitated greater communication between student and teacher. Change, it seemed, was part of student lives. There was an expectation, for example when the Smart Classes arrived that there would be technical problems, and there were. Students accepted this as part of the change.

## **Conclusions**

We began this chapter with a seminar that suggested that in order to develop, Indian classrooms had to radically change. On the evidence of this, we saw in this chapter that there was far more to the classroom than a simple arrangement of space. Ganguly's time traveller may find certain parallels between the 19<sup>th</sup> century classroom and those at North Point; however such spaces were deeply rooted with the NP Imaginary. He may also now find space which is physically caught between times. On one hand the classroom is still furnished with the same desks like it has been for decades, yet at the front of the room lies the interactive white board. The desks and the space are shaped in relation to a plan, laid out by 'Vision 2K', to ensure that North Point retains the essence of what makes it what it is, and all the while maintaining a reputation as one of the finest school's in India, upon which the earlier point is predicated.

The classroom encompasses what we might term the traditional and the modern, encapsulating the debates which I highlighted in this chapter regarding being middle class in Indian today. The classroom of North Point was thus a space where students came to imagine change within their lives. Firstly it was a space that had remained static for a period of time. The arrangement of desks and the blackboard had been unchanged seemingly for a hundred years, but even within students' immediate experience they would have spent year upon year in near identical spaces building up their perspectives of what a classroom should look like. Incorporating the Smart Classes was not a radical change but rather an upgrade, replacing the blackboards for interactive ones. In this sense change was seamlessly incorporated into the established structure of the classroom. This negotiation of change demonstrated the 'suitability' of a school such as North Point to outfit students with the capabilities to navigate their way towards middle class lives in the future.

The technology introduced to the classrooms was not strange to the students who were able to incorporate these transformations into their imagined views of North Point. After all they imagined North Point as the 'best school' and as such the best school should have the best equipment and the best teaching. The students understood North Point as something transformative yet also stable, much in the way that the 'Vision 2K' initiative sought to establish a future for the school built on the foundations of its past. Within this development project, it was evident that the school was seeking to change to adapt to the demands of education in a new age. The workshop hosted at the school further cemented the case that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presented new challenges to teachers and

students. The brave new world of neo-liberalism had transformed the parameters of the educationalists who were no longer providing future heads of state but future leaders for global enterprise.

This leads us neatly in to the final chapter of the thesis which explores the impact of this new world of opportunity beyond the school and how we might situate North Point within the national landscape. I will argue here that we can view schools such as North Point like marketable 'brands' whose aim is to sell themselves to a specific market. In this instance North Point is competing with other elite schools, not wishing to be left behind and ignored. I will explore how social life of students, teachers and all those at North Point was populated with a range of competing images and in order to achieve success one had to find a way of making sense of it all.

# VIII:

## ‘Like Colgate’:

### North Point in a World of Images

#### Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have tried to show that North Point was more than a school. It was imagined by its students to be an idea, which gave rise to generations of all-rounders: ‘North Pointers’, each grounded in the distinct traditions of North Point but each primed to take on the challenges of a rapidly changing global world. This imagined North Point gave rise to the NP imaginary which presented the framework within which the students were able to orient themselves to their fellow students, within the world of Darjeeling, and within the wider world beyond. It was not just the students who were being oriented towards the world. The school itself was engaged in a world of other schools, competing for the best students in the North East. In order to perpetuate the reputation of North Point as the best school in region, it needed to attract the best students to become the next generation of North Pointers.

In this chapter I will explore ‘North Point’ not as an idea or even a school, but as a ‘brand’. I will explore how students demonstrated an acute awareness of an interrelated world of competing brands, which were not simply labels but stood to represent something deeper beneath. During the course of fieldwork, I gradually learned that the rector and the teachers were aware that ‘everyone’ was watching North Point, quite literally, as my first ethnographic example will show. I will also examine the ways in which the school affiliated itself with other brands, in particular through the acquisition of textbooks and the introduction of the Smart Classes. I will focus my attention on how North Point was nurtured and perceived by those at school as a ‘brand’, reflecting a certain image out into the world, and thus reflecting the brand of students that come from within. This, I will argue, gives the final shape to the North Pointer as a person of a certain quality.

### **A Certain Kind of Building: North Point as a recognisable image**

Advertisements have an uncanny knack of invading our subconscious. They offer memorable catchphrases, jingles that echo in our minds, cuddly mascots or celebrity endorsements, each of which craft a story of a certain product, without which our lives are apparently unfulfilled. I was always drawn to the parade of advertisements, particular those on television, which targeted the kinds of middle class people that I had found myself researching amongst, keen to gain insights into what was being sold and how it was being represented. On such occasions when I was flicking across the channels I invariably happened upon a rather familiar sight. It was North Point. The advert in question was for life insurance, a fairly common advert on Indian television, with each bank or financial enterprise offering some kind of policy which frequently targeted the family, in particular focusing on the schooling of children. Many of these adverts portrayed children at school, or growing up, or perhaps at university, simultaneously acknowledging and reproducing the apparent high regard for certain forms of education in the subcontinent and the need for personal investment of financial capital in order to attain that. The advert featuring North Point was no different. It began with a young girl, resplendent in a blue pleated school uniform, running around her school, beaming smile on her face as she dives into the welcoming arms of a nun who offers a smile back. As the advert progresses, the girl grows up, and we meet her smiling parents, and follow her life through to university and a smiling graduation photo. The advert offers a potential life, targeting parents' aspirations for their children, offering a potential pathway to achieve this vision. North Point provided the backdrop for the opening scene of this advert, and as the young girl frolicked along around the quadrangle, I reflected on this image.

I recalled the day when I encountered the film crew that was charged with the filming of this advert, a few months earlier. I was leaving the senior staff room after one of my usual chats with some of the staff who were enjoying a well-earned free period, when I was confronted by a man frantically waving his arms, armed with a clipboard, shouting 'Please move, we need you to move from here', ushering me back from where I came. I disappeared back into the staff room, but most of the staff were too engrossed in their 'corrections' to be able to tell me what was going on. Later I found the man still holding his clipboard, looking decisively stressed. There was a small team of five buzzing about with a camera, lights and microphones, in front of them a woman dressed as a nun and a

small girl. The two actors were receiving instructions in Hindi and the others were each gesticulating and talking loudly at each other, giving off the impression of a tense environment. I was intrigued about why North Point had been chosen for this advert. The company had come from Kolkata, and there were lots of potential buildings there. After the shoot, as the team packed away, I spoke with a man from the company. ‘We wanted a certain kind of building, old, traditional kind, this was what we wanted’. North Point had ticked all their proverbial boxes, but above all it reflected a certain image, which the company had sought to convey. ‘This [school] is unique, it has something special, what we wanted to show. We needed to show the audience that this is a private school and that is what this [place] says’. It was evident that advertising was a world in which image mattered, especially when a message needed to be conveyed across a limited timeframe. In this instance, the company wanted an image that screamed ‘private school’, perhaps more specifically, a convent school. In essence, this is what the advertisers charged the crew with finding: an image that sold this lifestyle; a privately educated girl, who would go to acquire a degree, and obtain a lucrative white-collar job, most probably in the private sector.

So from the evidence of the above example, the visual façade of North Point was indicative, at least within the realms of marketing executives, of a particular brand of schooling in the subcontinent, a brand that offered certain grounding for a future life ahead. In this thesis, I have endeavoured to piece together the various components of the school in order to examine the various processes apparent within the world of private education in India. I have done so with the aim of unpacking what makes these schools desirable for certain people in society, and what connects these schools so intimately to certain forms of social status.

In the pages that follow, I will explore a significant part of this puzzle as I delve into how the school constructs itself as a brand. I will examine how members of the school environment, from the students, through to the teachers and administrators, construct their image of North Point in relation to other kinds of brands, maintaining the notion that a sense of being affiliated with a given brand or product is related to the kind of person using it. I will argue that thinking about schools as brands, akin to the kinds of labels and logos we might see on a trip around one of India’s shiny new shopping malls, offers an insight into how schooling in contemporary India operates, and perhaps more importantly, into the

kinds of people that such schools produce. I will begin with one of my very early experiences at school. This example explores the lives of some of the Lower Division students who demonstrated an awareness of the global network of goods flowing around them, introducing me to how they see themselves within it.

### **A Landscape of Brands**

In order to set a context for the contents of this chapter, I will take a leaf from philosopher Richard Kearney (1988) who argued, along with contemporaries such as Castoriadis (1987), for a greater consideration of the role of imagination in transformation of social life. Kearney's assertion built from the notion of a world increasingly immersed in imagery. Imagination for Kearney quite literally refers to the 'image making power' of people in constructing their social worlds, thus the images and symbols which populate our lives are themselves the products of collective imagination. This premise returns us to the theoretical thread of social imaginaries which has stretched throughout this thesis. This chapter seeks to explore how a specific array of images, most notably those within the commercial domain encompassed the wider experience of the students and others at school, locating North Point with a wider world of images.

In the introduction of the thesis I expanded upon the specific lives of the Indian middle classes with a focus upon the kinds of practices which defined this group. One of the most frequently referenced practices was that of consumerism which has understandably formed the basis of a number of sociological and ethnographic studies of the subcontinent (Corbridge and Hariss 2000; Mazarrella 2003; Brosius 2010). Such accounts have crucially marked out how certain relationships with consumer products were particular to the Indian middle classes. The notable ethnographies of Mazarrella (2003) and Brosius (2010) explore the specific nature of Indian consumerism but also the structuring role played by commercial advertisements particularly in facilitating notions of the institutions of social life such as religion and the family unit. Both Mazarrella and Brosius' accounts accommodate the ways in which consumer advertising targeted the unit of the 'traditional' family, noting billboard advertisements portraying a particularly middle class family, with distinct undertones of an authentic Hindu ideal echoing the rise of the BJP in the early 2000s. Advertising in this domain served as a form of legitimizing notions of tradition and designed explicitly to counter the perceived influx of 'foreign' images which had arrived

in the wake of neo-liberal economic practice. Brosius' (2010) account developed Mazzarella's observations to explore how the process had come full circle with the establishment of modern temple complexes, which married apparently 'traditional' Hindu values with contemporary consumerism to create spaces which served to define the 'ideal' middle class life. In such out-of-town complexes, there was at once a space in which the middle classes could participate in lifestyles imagined to be modern yet retaining a sense of 'Indianness'. In the previous chapter, there was a similar engagement at hand within the 'Vision 2K' initiative where the committee of former students and present staff were tasked with developing North Point to remain at the forefront of Indian schooling yet retain the 'authentic illusion' (Skounti 2009: 7) of the school. In that chapter I hinted towards the wider landscape within which North Point is located, referring to the social landscape of the Indian middle class. This chapter widens this discussion in an attempt to more explicitly explore how North Point was perceived in relation to other 'brands'.

The ethnographies cited above provide the backdrop for the lives of the students who would pass through the gates of North Point. In the introduction to the thesis I argued, as with the Darjeeling case study, that the new opportunities facilitated through the post-neo-liberal era had given rise to new anxieties such as that experienced through the resurgent 'Gorkhaland' Movement. For the purposes of this chapter, I wish to contend that the students were immersed in a world of 'images' as purported by Kearney and as such the ways in which they imagined North Point were conceived in relation to this world of brands. I contend here that picturing North Point as a 'brand' contextualises the NP Imaginary within the wider commercial world which engulfs student experiences. The following section demonstrates how the students displayed a keen awareness of the landscape of brands which surrounded but also denoted how they perceived those brands in relation to one another. The discussion here and throughout this chapter thus seeks to crystalize how the NP Imaginary was constructed in part with an engagement with social life beyond the school, in particular the consumerist lifestyles which were familiar to the predominantly middle class students.

### **Competing Images**

I was only a few months into my field work when I came to understand the social backgrounds from which most of the students hailed. It was the last day of term, the end of

the school year 2010. My stay in the school was only months old but already I was packing my things. I was moving out of the school boarding facility, as they would be closed over the winter holidays, and seeking accommodation elsewhere. My room was adjacent to the Lower Division dormitory and as the lessons had finished for the year the boarders were free to occupy themselves until dinner. While I was packing, a group of free-roaming Lower Division students peered through my open door to see what I was doing. They took particular interest in my phone, my computer, and more or less every item I was packing. They seemed specifically focused on what 'kind' of thing each thing was, demonstrating an acute knowledge of an array of brands of mobile phone, computer and other forms of technology. The students' articulations of their knowledge of brand names suggested a 'competition' amongst them whereby they came to understand their status within their social groups through comparisons of values.

One student asked what computer I had and I told him it was an HP (Hewlett Packard). He replied that he also had an HP, adding that he thought they were good computers. He smiled seeming pleased with himself that I had bought a similar computer to him. His friend disagreed and claimed that Sony had the best 'kind' of computer. His argument ran that Sony had a better design, it cost more money, and it worked 'better'. He furthered his claims by suggesting that this was also evident in Sony's Playstation 3, a popular games console which some of the students owned or if not owned knew someone that did.

This student also explored my mobile phone. 'Which one [do] you have?' When I told him it was a Samsung he asked to see it. 'Sir, it is Galaxy?' I said I didn't know what its name was, so he asked to play with it. I handed it to him, 'Sir does it have [a] touchscreen? It is [a] Smartphone?' The boy standing to his left butted in 'Chhya, it's not an iPhone, eh?', the boy fiddling with my phone then responded angrily. 'Samsung is also Smartphone, eh!' The huddle of boys around added some other comments 'My dad has Samsung Galaxy, that new one'; 'Yeah, my sister also has'; 'My parents have iPhone, aunties and uncles, all of them have'. I asked them which one was best. 'Samsung is best, sir, they have nice design, and different phone also'; 'Yes sir they have many phones, iPhone has only one [design]'; 'Samsung is also cheaper than iPhone, so more people can buy'; 'But I like iPhone sir it has so many games, I like *Angry Birds*'. This student was then angrily corrected by another. 'Samsung also has *Angry Birds*, you don't know these things'.

It was evident from the students' interactions here, that they each possessed certain ideas about various 'brands'. The students equally demonstrated an awareness of an assortment of 'brands' of each product and which was more they each held specific ideas about each brand. We could say at this moment that the students imagined each brand possessing certain values or qualities which were compared with the values and quality of other brands. It was unclear where precisely the students learned their knowledge of these brands from but there were a few references to family backgrounds which suggested that students learned a great deal through interactions with relatives. It was also apparent here was that the students themselves contrasted with one another as with the example above one of the students corrected another's claims about a particular phone.

What we can see emerging here is similar to what Mark Liechty (2003) termed 'competition' as observed amongst the middle classes of Kathmandu. In Liechty's example, middle classes would observe the consumption of others, comparing such practices to their own. In this example desiring goods was not a need but a case of prestige. Desire for a refrigerator was not driven by a practical desire for somewhere to store food, but rather because another family nearby has one, or that families of a certain economic standing and social status should have one. In the above scenario the student related to one another through their articulation of various brand names and their understandings of each one. As one student claimed to possess one item this was an open invitation for others standing nearby to claim their own ownership of a similar product or perhaps propose an equivalent one they understood to be better. The student would correct each other in their assessments, such as reminding other students that iPhones were not the only 'Smartphone' or that 'Samsung also had the 'Angry Birds' game.

This process explores the shared project of value and prestige which Liechty observed as constitutive of what people understood to be the 'middle class'. The consumer world of Kathmandu was thus conceptualised as a domain for the fulfilment of 'real values' (Liechty 2003: 86), that is to say it was through articulating material goods that revealed the social status of various individuals. Liechty identified that such consumer ideals are not 'natural' in that those who hailed from villages outside of Kathmandu did not interpret the consumer world as a meaningful social engagement, seeing products in light of their functionality. As such, a particular pattern of consumption was as social process engendered in specific ways within particular social spaces. In this example it was not the

material object in itself which contained value, but rather the certain intangible, imagined qualities of that object and how these imagined qualities related to a particular social milieu. Such an approach relates to what Arjun Appadurai (1986: 7) termed the ‘spirit of the commodity’. Appadurai critiqued the Marxist perspective of commodities as purely existing through exchange and arising only through capitalist engagements, identifying instead the ‘social potential’ (ibid.) of commodities. This potential alluded to what we witnessed in Liechty’s example, that consumer goods were articulated as units of prestige and the value of such goods only became apparent within the contexts of a group of like-minded others who shared the same values. However the consumer goods in the students’ perceptions were not understood as face value units of prestige and the students would also articulate, as explained through their examination of ‘fakes’ in the example below, that negotiation of the world of commodities was not simply a case of buying what everyone else was buying.

The boys began discussing the recent school trip to China, on which some of them travelled. ‘Sir do you like my wallet?’, he said proudly holding out the object for inspection. I looked intently at the racing green coloured fabric, nodding politely. One of the other students burst into the conversation suddenly as if he had been straining to contain himself from revealing a big secret. ‘Sir it’s a fake!’ I asked him what he meant, but the owner of the wallet continued, ‘Sir look here it says ‘POLLO’, this is spelt wrong, it should only be one ‘L’’. The other student still appeared to be unable to contain himself. ‘Sir it’s from China’. The boy with the wallet nodded at his friend’s statement. ‘Sir, we went to China this year, they have whole fake markets there. Everything is fake. But this is good quality’. There was a gentle tear of Velcro as he opened the wallet to support his statement. ‘If you buy a fake here [in India] then the quality is very less’. I asked him if it mattered that the product was not ‘original’. ‘No’, was his abrupt reply. ‘It is not original but it looks the same, same quality, but cheaper for us’<sup>108</sup>. The quality in this example revealed the inaccuracies of the brand name. There was a recognition that fake did not always mean bad quality.

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<sup>108</sup> There was another occasion when I was chatting with one of the other teachers about a gift she had bought for her nephew. She told me she had bought an ‘Ed Hardy’ shirt, a brand of clothing with unmistakable colourful, often floral designs. She explained to me that it was not a ‘real one’. She claimed that someone had told her that the fake items were made in the same factory as the real and in her eyes it was ‘all made in China anyway’. She asked why should she pay more for what was she perceived to be essentially the same product. Her perception echoed that of the students, that the only discernible difference between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ was the price.

The students acknowledged that the ‘genuine’ products were often beyond their reach, financially, but they still desired an affiliation with the brand, as it reflected their personality to the wider world. As long as a ‘fake’ product displayed the desired image then its genuineness didn’t matter. While perception of particular goods was mediated through the prism of the brand name, there was a suggestion, as demonstrated through the student discussion of ‘fakes’, that brand names were only part of the negotiation with a world of brands. Here, we begin to see how the students at School envisioned ‘brands’ and how the articulation of certain brands underscored a competition amongst the students. There was also a perception that the brands themselves were competing with one another, each vying for the consumer’s attention. The students demonstrated a wide knowledge of consumer brands but also indicated how they sought quality, which was assured through certain names in certain products. They were not afraid to admit that they would also willingly buy ‘fake’ goods, when such goods matched the quality expected of the genuine article. This example has parallels with the ethnographies of Mazzarella (2003) and Brosius (2010) in exploring the specific contexts of consumption which confronted those living in the subcontinent. Here the students were reflecting on the products which populated their environment. This is a small scale example, yet coupled with the previous observations with their knowledge about phones and the like, demonstrates a student body immersed in a world of images and the reflections that result from that.

I wish to turn this example back toward the NP Imaginary which I have explored in the course of this thesis. The earlier student discussion of brand names suggested how idea and brands were explored in relation to other things they were alike, a concept which forms the central premise of Taylor’s (2004) social imaginaries. Here the students imagined a landscape of brand relations, each vying for their money. I wish to cast the net further by exploring how North Point as a school compared itself among a world of other ‘brands’. In this sense I am seeking to examine how a particular image of North Point was perpetuated outside of the school environment, through encouraging certain practices at school and outside, intending to project a requisite image outward. In doing so I wish to expand upon the students’ perception here of the world of competing brands vying for their attention, to explore how North Point perpetuated its self as a particular ‘brand’ of schooling in a landscape of other schooling options, and also how the school could be imagined in relation to the wider consumer marketplace.

### **Our School is ‘Like Colgate’: The Image of ‘North Point’**

I have mentioned previously how the social landscape of Darjeeling was prone to social unrest (see Introduction of the thesis) and during the winter holidays the unrest flared up again. The general strikes during January and particularly in February 2011 caused long term disruption to life in the hills forcing every shop, business, office and school to close, creating delays to the start of the academic year. I ran into Fr. Kinley in the town as life was beginning to return to normal and he gladly revealed to me that the school would reopen, or to use his exact phrase the ‘circus began’ on the 1<sup>st</sup> March. The day before that there would be a staff meeting to discuss strategies for the year ahead, particularly in light of having to alter the calendar to accommodate the lost time. The staff meeting at the start of the year was a regular occurrence and such meetings were held the day before or a few days before the first boarders returned to school in order to formulate plans for the coming year. The winter disruption, which had delayed the start of the school year by over two weeks became an incident which would highlight how North Point positioned itself in the social world around it.

The teachers sat at their desks, arranged in neat rows, akin to the rows of students in the classrooms. At the front of the room a large noticeboard loomed, just like a blackboard in the classroom, displaying the various notices and announcements for the teachers’ attention. The murmuring came to an abrupt halt as the Rector suddenly rushed into the room. There was a screeching of chairs as the teachers jumped to their feet, greeting the Rector as they expected their students to greet them, with a monotonous chorus of ‘Good Morning, Father’. Father Kinley flapped his arm awkwardly, ‘Please sit, don’t worry, I just have a few things to say then we can all get on with the day’. Most of the staff had been in their post long enough to know that when Kinley said he had a few things to say they would be there for the best part of an hour. ‘Now teachers’, his voice strained under the duress of a thick cold, evident from his reddened nose, and thick scarf wrapped tightly around his neck. ‘I wanted to thank you all for your efforts, it hasn’t been easy these last few days, but y’know, this is what North Point is all about!’ There was a generous ripple of laughter. ‘But seriously it has been a difficult winter for the schools in the hills, I have had so many phone conversations with worried parents, enquiring about the situation in Darjeeling, so that is why I decided to delay the start of the year until 1<sup>st</sup> of March, then we could keep parents’ minds at ease’. He paused for a moment, then continued. ‘There have

been some other schools, I won't name names, but you probably know who they are'. There were a few knowing nods amongst the teachers. 'These schools have lost 150, 200 students this year; one school lost one third of its boarders'. This was a startling statistic, considering that these schools relied on the financial injection provided by boarding students to continue operating. 'Two schools have completely relocated to the 'plains'<sup>109</sup> because of the situation, so this is a serious thing, but y'know I am very proud to say that we have not lost a single student. Well, some Thai boys left last year because their family relocated to New Zealand, but we have not lost a single student because of the political problems. Every other school has lost some students, but not North Point. This is how important North Point is'.

Father Kinley had presented his opening case, as if offering a closing remark as a lawyer at a trial. He had demonstrated to his staff the statistical evidence to support his case; North Point was held in higher regard than other schools in the district and even a difficult political backdrop would not deter parents from sending their sons. However this was just the backdrop; he had further reasoning to offer. 'Now after that I have some better news to follow; that is this year we are going to introduce Smart Classes<sup>110</sup>'. There was a curious mixture of excitement, intrigue, confusion and nonchalance amid the faces of the teachers. The Rector explained, 'We have to keep up with the times and now everything is about computers, and so if North Point will continue to be one of the best schools in all of India then we must have the best teaching tools also'. There was some polite nodding across the room. Kinley continued, 'I have just agreed a deal with one company, they have all [the Smart Class companies] been chasing me, all want to be at North Point. North Point is 'like Colgate', we are a 'trusted brand'. [The other Darjeeling schools] will look at what we will do and they will follow us. We are the first school in Eastern India to have Smart Classes. So it was important that we had the right deal for North Point'. This wasn't 'news' as such, as a few teachers had known about the potential introduction of the digital teaching systems the previous year; it had simply been rubber stamped, although a start

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<sup>109</sup> There were four subdivisions which constituted Darjeeling, three of which were hill regions and one located in the flatter plains area. The general strikes of that winter had only affected the hill regions and life in the plains district had gone as normal, The reason for this was rooted in a political divide between the plains district, which contained West Bengal's second largest city, and the hill areas (See Subba 1992; Chatterjji 2007).

<sup>110</sup> The Rector is referring to the Smart Classes, discussed in Chapter 7

date was still a way off. ‘I will keep you posted when we will start but most likely after the summer holidays [July]<sup>111</sup>’.

Kinley had compared North Point with *Colgate*, justifying his comparisons with underlying assurances of being a ‘trusted brand’, playing in to popular conceptions of a popular everyday household product, that was apparently comparable to North Point as well. The Rector, a man with in-depth business and marketing experience in an international company, had deliberately chosen the example of an established brand such as Colgate as one familiar to all. This brand analogy was contextualised within the example of the Smart Class companies who allegedly all wanted North Point as their customer, as a means of furthering their own reputations. The Rector anchored his analogy with the examples provided by the recent political turmoil from which North Point had remained relatively unscathed, aside from losing a couple of weeks of academic activity. According to Kinley, no registered student at North Point had opted not to return in light of the political turmoil in contrast with other schools who had lost hundreds.

This example situates itself in this chapter in two ways. Firstly it demonstrates how the NP Imaginary was shaped in relation to the outside world. The comparisons between North Point and Colgate return us to the idea of ‘competition’ as envisaged by Liechty (2003: 116) and as demonstrated throughout the thesis, although on a larger scale. The Colgate example suggested how North Point was imagined in relation to a world of other brands, in this sense North Point offered a comparable level of professional reliability and assurance to international companies such as Colgate. The evidence of this, Kinley claimed, was through the array of Smart Class companies each seeking to use North Point as a springboard to engage with more schools in the Darjeeling hills. Secondly, the articulation of this example served to reinforce the NP Imaginary, the particular social imaginary (Taylor 2004) of North Point in offering an example of how North Point had negotiated the political strife better than other schools. Furthermore the school was argued to be one which ‘everyone’ was watching, indicating that North Point was an example which others followed. However this example was not a given and, as the following example demonstrates, was understood to be realised through social practice

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<sup>111</sup> The summer holidays are a two week break in July sandwiched in between the first term (February to June) and the second (July to December).

Kinley had something to ask of his staff. His tone had shifted noticeably from the excitement of the Smart Class announcement to something more sincere. ‘I wanted to say this last year but y’know it was exams and winter so I delayed ‘til now’. I had noticed a trademark in Kinley speeches, often offering up a criticism as if he has been generous, and this owed a favour in return. ‘I want to talk about the teachers’ dress. At the end of last year things got very sloppy, teachers coming into school wearing all colours and things. I walked past the classrooms and saw teachers wearing coats and caps [woollen hats], but I don’t want this to continue. The male teachers must wear suit and tie, you can bring a coat, or umbrella or whatever no problem, this is Darjeeling you get every kind of weather here! But when you get to school you remove your coat and hat, and wear your suit only in the classroom. That is the same for the ladies, you can wear your *kurtas* or *sari*, and coats, but no coats in the classroom. It looks untidy’. On this note he had some further requests. ‘And please remember you are 24 hour teachers, you are all ambassadors of North Point. Darjeeling is a small place, everyone knows that you are from North Point so they are watching you. Y’know, the newspapers they are always looking for story. They can say, today is a slow day nothing happening with the GJM [political party] oh what is happening at North Point. So when you are in the town you are ambassadors of the school. So you must carry yourself in that way’.

As illustrated in this short anecdote, Kinley had offered an outline of the brand of North Point. He had demonstrated the positive perception of North Point held by those outside, the parents and the students, in comparison with the other schools. He had presented a means of retaining this prominent position by keeping in touch with the progress in teaching methodologies and technologies, with the introduction of Smart classes. Perhaps most significantly of all he had reinforced the importance of the schools’ ambassadors, the staff and students who represented North Point in their time outside the school. The comparisons with ‘Colgate’ and the fallout from the latest round of political action had offered an example of how other schools, and the general populous of the locality were watching North Point. With this in mind, those who were ‘brand’ ambassadors from the school such as the teachers and students were adjudged to be embodiments of everything the school stood.

However this anecdote also offers an insight into certain ways in which the school or certain actors within the school constructed their individual sense of what North Point was.

This was buttressed in their minds by the perceived interest in the school, as depicted in newspaper articles, which would be posted up on the noticeboard outside the school office, or through the form of the various international visitors coming to the school throughout the year.

The importance of what I have termed here the ‘North Point brand’ is referring to ways in which the imagined view of the school is projected out into the wider world. I wish to highlight where the ‘NP Imaginary’ was prevalent within the school and realised through the school environment. The imaginary facilitates an imagined connection to world whereby North Point is amongst those elite institutions setting standards for others to follow. All those who belong to North Point are then said to ambassadors of it, thus cementing both a sense of belonging within the school but also to the outside.

In this moment the ‘NP Imaginary’ comes full circle, and the ways in which the students and staff imagine North Point to be the best school in the region informs the images of the school which are distributed. Much of this distribution flows through the various printed materials, such as the annuals, calendars, diaries and now DVDs, which the school produces annually and distributes to the students and staff. The majority of this is intended for the families of staff and students to enable them to share in the activities of the school, even if they can’t be present for them. I will explore briefly in the following section how materials such as the school annual were constructed with an eye on the potential perceptions of this audience of outsiders, with particular regard in this instance towards the style of photography applied within. I will then expand this discussion to encompass the school’s most active extra-curricular club, the photography club, in order to demonstrate how images were perceived to be ‘good’ only in their assessment by others.

### **Taking Good Pictures: The Images of North Point**

The annual, a school year book of sorts, is something of a school tradition, which has been carefully formulated by a select group of teachers across the ages, to reflect upon the school year just past. The vast majority of school annuals contain photographs of the various members of the school community, documenting life at school across the ages. In the following section I will argue that such objects are the end result of a longer process, a process which demonstrates how the school’s own brand was constructed in relation to how it would be perceived outside the school.

‘Line up height-wise!’ shouted Father Prefect, as the latest batch of students arrived. It is the first day of class photos for the senior school, and the prefect was in no mood to permit the students to waste lesson time in the critical run up to the impending terminal exams. ‘Hurry up, so we can do this quickly’. His desire for speed was at odds with the wider aim, driven predominantly by the Rector, for precision, to ensure that the end of year is completed only with pictures of the highest quality. Prior to the arrival of the students, I had watched Father Kinley instructing a group of senior boys who had brought the tiered cast-iron steps across from the Fraser Hall in order to set the scene for the day’s photography. The aim was to complete the class photography within the day, leaving only the assorted clubs and teams, and the considerably larger boarding section photos for the following day. In the interests of saving time there was normally only one class in the quadrangle at a time, and in the time it took them to complete their photograph, the next class would have arrived, fetched by a student from the previous class. Then one of the departing students would be called upon to fetch the next class, and the cycle began again.

Each photo was constructed in much the same way. The Prefect, or even the Rector himself on occasion, would loiter about the designated class, asking them to put themselves in height order and then squinting carefully to assess their students’ ability to compare their heights. After a suitable amount of jostling, the students were lined up and then they were sent to their standing positions on the cast iron steps. The tallest student would be sent first, taking up the central position on the upper most tier and then the next student is sent to stand by his right, the next on the left and so on, until the line is complete, moving on to the next line. Once all the boys were aligned there was the task of ensuring that they all stand correctly. ‘Hands at the back’, the photographer instructed ‘smile, don’t laugh’. There were often some words of advice from the class teacher who sat in a chair in the front row ‘let’s make it a nice photo boys, you don’t want to show your parents a bad picture’. Where necessary, the class teacher was joined by the ‘blue coat’ winners in the class, who were also seated at the front, exempt from the normal rules of height order. The photos were styled to reflect the school’s idealisation of particular models of students. The teacher sits at the front, as is often the convention in school photos<sup>112</sup>, and the ‘blue coats’ sat alongside, adjudged to be the best emblems of ‘North

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<sup>112</sup> I speak here from personal experience in school photos in England, but also from seeing a number of school photographs from other Indian schools.

Pointerness' and placing them at the front singles them out as 'ideal' (Taylor 2004: 24) students.

In other words, this serves to construct the image of the North Pointer, as those who are the most successful find themselves at the front of the crowd. This positioning of the 'blue coats' towards the front awarded them prominence in relation to their teachers.

The class photos were followed the next day with an assortment of extra-curricular photos, which documented the various sports teams and clubs active at the school. The previous day I had observed the various members of such clubs, such as the NCC (National Cadet Corps) students and the Scouts, being instructed to bring their relevant uniforms. Such students had been asked to make sure their uniforms were washed and 'clean' in preparation.

The importance of this image extended beyond the students. As I mentioned earlier, the teachers were also under the microscope and their appearance was being monitored by the Rector as he had made his feelings clear in the meeting at the start of the year. The teachers had their own place in the school's 'History' to contend with. Those who were class teachers would appear alongside their students, and those who managed the clubs and teams would also appear in print. There was no escape for the remainder, who would also be captured in the staff photo. As such, teachers were reminded by the Rector to 'dress nicely'. But teachers themselves were conscious of their photographs and how they would appear in them. I watched with some amusement as some of the male class teachers disappeared off into the nearby bathroom, comb in hand, checking their hair, flattening out creases and straightening ties before their date with the photographer.

I was keen to explore their views with regards to the past years of annuals, copies of which were stored in the library. One afternoon I asked the librarian for a look at the past years' annuals for a little context to the parade of photography I had just witnessed. He nodded and slid open the cabinet behind him, revealing a mountain of books stuffed rather unceremoniously inside. He steadied the pile to prevent the whole heap coming down as he pulled out a random assortment for me to look at. I was expecting to be given a collection of recent years, however the cupboard mostly contained a range of much older annuals, from the 1940s and 1950s, with a few from either side of those years. A quick glance through the annuals of the 1940s, which indicated an editing style in keeping with print

journalism of the era, mostly text with the occasional grainy picture. However in every annual I encountered there was a whole host of class photos and sports teams proudly displaying the trophies that they had won that year.

What was telling in the construction of the 2011 annual, in relation to the older annuals that I looked through, was the participation of the students in its construction. The vast majority of the photographs used in the annual were taken by the students, most notably the school's photography club. It was also significant to note that out of the pages of clubs apparently active at school, the most active amongst them is the photography club. Earlier in the year the club had organised a photography exhibition, showcasing the photographic exploits of all at North Point. This club had received considerable funding from the school to put up the exhibition, which had been organised to coincide with World Photography Day<sup>113</sup>. I was drawn to the wide range of photographs on show that day, but far and away the most popular topic was landscape. When I asked the bored-looking student who had been tasked with sitting behind a desk at the end of the exhibition drawing feedback from the visitors about the themes of the photos, his answer was to the point. 'This is a beautiful place and we want to take beautiful pictures'. I was intrigued to know how he knew he had taken a 'beautiful picture'. He smiled, 'sometimes I take a photo and I like it but I show it to my friend and he says it's not so good. So we can learn from showing others. That is why I am feeling nervous today, as my friends are looking at my photos'. I asked if the members of the club help each other with taking photos and so on, 'yeah we do, we learn from each other. It is like that here [at North Point]. If we have some problem in class then we help each other, same with our cameras. If I have a Canon and my friend has a Canon then we can teach each other, y'know'.

Once again there was a sense of branding emerging with regards to taking photos, with regards to the use of particular camera equipment. Once again the student demonstrated the 'competition' within them, particularly with respect to the benefit of 'keeping up' with

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<sup>113</sup> The Rector, whose decision ultimately defines how and where the school's financial resources are spent, awarded the club around Rs. 50, 000 (approx. £650 –this is the same amount each day scholar pays annually in school fees). It was my understanding that this substantial amount was awarded on the grounds that the photography club were an 'active' club, by which it was meant that they met regularly and conducted activities, such as day excursions to the zoo and other sites to take photos. However this was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy as the club attracted members because it was active and thus getting financial support from the school.

others. In this instance, possessing the same camera as their fellow student enabled them to learn from one another.

I became increasingly interested in finding out about the construction of their photographs, and in exploring whether or not this ‘competition’ realised itself through the production of the images. I milled about amongst the photographs, which had been arranged flat on tables laid out in neat rows in the Fraser Hall. The tables were roughly subdivided into categories such as landscapes (a category which covered a good part of the hall), people and the school. There were also flowers and fauna, even food, but the section that caught my eye was the section entitled ‘black and white’. This encompassed a range of images including a rather gloomy image of the school, but also some staged shots involving objects. The picture that I lingered on the most was a shot of a guitar amp. The picture was focused on an extreme close-up of the amp plug, with a guitar lingering slightly out of focus in the background. The perspective of the photograph lingered heavily on the foreground image of the amp plug, making the tiny object appear larger than the guitar it was connected to. I was fortunate enough that the photographer of this image was standing by and noticed me admiring his photo. ‘Sir, do you like my photo?’ I asked him about his photo and why he chose to take it the way he did. ‘Actually, sir, I was inspired by some of the past students here, they used to be in the photography club. They took pictures of their guitars with black and white, I liked that. They showed me to take it like this to make the guitar seem small. It’s like a poster’.

There were indications that the photography club were simply reflecting what they witnessed around them as indeed any photographer would. They were able to take beautiful pictures because of the beautiful landscape, but what is more crucial for the analysis here is that students placed emphasis on the help from their fellow club members, both in operating the camera and judging what is and isn’t a good photo, but also in developing a certain way of styling shots and organising objects in front of them. Here I would allude to the shaping of a particular ‘taste’ (Bourdieu 1984) for the photographic image. Bourdieu himself observed in his explorations of class distinction, how varying perceptions of photography were demonstrative of particular tastes, revealing a certain aesthetic relation to the world. Bourdieu compared the middle class photography clubs, comparable to the students of North Point, travelling around the countryside and collecting images of landscapes and so on. This contrasted with the lower class Bearn villagers for

whom photography was purely perceived as a means of capturing moments of celebration such as weddings and Christenings, purely as a means of marking out life events rather than the sociable, more aesthetic concept of photography realised in the middle classes. I would argue this here, that by a 'good image' I am not inferring that any photographer would set out to deliberately take a bad one but rather that what is perceived as a 'good image' is itself a cultural construct rooted in a particular social world and realised through interactions with like-minded others who, as the Photographers of North Point did, adjudged which images were good and which were not.

This became more evident when the photography exhibition was opened to other schools. There was a steady stream of students flowing through the exhibition all day and then periodically a jeep or two would pull up outside, releasing a group of uniformed visitors into the hall. They came from the neighbouring private schools at the invitation of the North Point photography students. These occasions were a further cause of anxiety for some of the club members who had been made aware of the importance of the day. 'Sir [the teacher in charge of the club] told us that we have to choose the best photos only, this is not just our photo[s], but it belongs to the whole school, so we wanted to show our school in the best way. Because Father [Kinley] has given us so much of money for this so if we don't do well then we get no more money'. The weight of responsibility was drawn from the club's need for the school's support, but also from the desire for the club to continue. More significantly the responsibility was also drawn from an obligation to represent NP successfully.

As I watched the students from other schools in their slow procession around the hall, I chatted with some of the club members who were on hand as monitors. Their task seemed primarily to remind students not to touch the photos and to keep the guests moving to prevent a gridlock from forming in the rows. They seemed happy to chat to alleviate the boredom of standing around, and I used the opportunity to ask them how they felt about their pictures being on show for all to see. 'I like it, it's [a]good feeling when someone tells me they like my photo'. Another student added, 'but we don't get a chance for these things [to see an exhibition] so most people they like it'. At this point I picked up on the different ways in which the students saw other schools compared with their own. Their friends were able to judge the quality of their photos better, and students from others schools, even when some were friends of the students, were not as equipped to offer

advice. One of the monitors told me, ‘my friend is coming later, he is excited to get some time away from class! But he is not so interested in photography’. This raised another question: why were North Pointers so keen on photography? In response, I was told by one student, ‘well we have a good club here, sir runs it very nicely, so we get the chance to take photos and show them like this. I don’t think other schools have the chance’. Another student was blunter in his explanation. ‘Anyone can have a camera, but it takes some talent to use it well’, he implied that he and his cohort were the talented few capable of dealing with the equipment.

As intimated in the ethnography above, the photography club represented a smaller scale version of the wider processes at hand at North Point. The club was first and foremost keen to do something they enjoyed, but when the stage was set for an exhibition they knew they had to choose their best photos. They demonstrated how this was an opportunity that didn’t come along often, or even at all in other schools, and was something that they were required to live up to. There was also a certain inheritance of technique, as the club was composed of members from across the student body, mixing young and old, with the senior students passing on their skills to the younger generation. It wasn’t all about the final image. A nice picture was the final result, but the students of the club recognised that there was a great deal of investment, both financially and practically, in making that happen.

Now that we’ve seen how the ‘NP Imaginary fashioned certain ‘tastes’ as evidenced in the photography, I now turn to explore how such ‘tastes’ were realised on an academic level. The photography club explored their activity socially, discovering ‘good’ pictures through interactions with their fellow club members, I will now explore how teachers’ discussions over potential textbooks and explore how the teachers themselves had imbibed the concept of the North Point ‘brand’ demonstrating an awareness of which books were suitable and which were not.

### **‘Don’t judge a book by its cover, but if you flick a few pages, you know’**

Towards the end of the school year it was common to see two or three well-dressed individuals waiting for an audience with the Rector. The visitors were ambassadors for various companies, championing the latest range of textbooks for various subjects. These ambassadors would come bearing a number of samples of their books hoping to convince

the Rector to allow them to peddle their wares to the teaching staff. A few daring souls attempted to bypass the Rector and simply target the staff directly. I witnessed on more than one occasion, a number of these salesmen being discovered and the Rector, angered that his permission had been overlooked, ‘politely’ asking them to leave<sup>114</sup>.

This all happened in the space of about a month, from around about the beginning of November to the end of term in the first week of December. Some of the companies were already well known producers of academic books, such as Oxford, Cambridge or Orient Longmann, and of these many were offering either new editions of current books or new subject books being promoted. There was also a fair representation for new companies trying to gain access to the large market place of private schooling, and the salesmen from these companies certainly recognised the importance of selling to a school like North Point. One of the young men trying to sell a new computer textbook told me, ‘we know this is a big school; if we can tell those other schools that North Point uses this book then I know they will buy it’. The young man was highly confident that others would follow North Point. ‘There are so many books, and some schools, some small schools they will ask you, who is using this book. We tell them that is they buy it then they can say to their parents that they teach like North Point’.

Theoretically, textbooks have often been critiqued with regards to presenting a ‘ruling class’ ideology and serving to reinforce social inequalities (Scrase 1993; Apple and Christian-Smith 1994; Advani 2009; Majumbar and Mooij 2011). The majority of these theoretical approaches have examined state education and in this instance I would present a more nuanced perspective in examining how the teachers came to select textbooks at North Point. The teachers had a considerable choice of books to choose from and subject teachers were requested to meet together to review the new options before deciding to stick with the existing book or migrate to a new one. I observed how new books were analysed based on their publisher, whether or not it was a known name affected teacher perceptions. Changing books didn’t happen often, which I demonstrate below, but in their assessment of the various options, the teachers reveal how you may not be able to judge a

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<sup>114</sup> Permission was often based upon what ‘mood’ the salesmen found the Rector in. If they were to meet the Rector after he had just been disciplining some students, or if, as happened in 2011, the school were preparing for sports day, then the people trying to sell textbooks were accused of preventing the teachers from doing their job.

book by its cover, but if you flick a few pages, you will soon realise if the book was right for North Point.

It was November 2011 and the final weeks of my fieldwork. The students of the Major Play had staged their final bow and the senior school students were all buried in their exam preparations. During this period I spent my days almost exclusively with the Primary Division as the students and teachers were not anxiously pouring through revisions, as the Primary did not have exams, thus the students and teachers were in a more friendly and relaxed mood more conducive to an anthropologist's questions. It was during this time that I was privy to a number of occasions when a textbook-bearing salesman would come and present their wares to the primary headmaster, hoping to secure a deal for some of their textbooks. However, each of them left empty handed. He assured them that he would collect all of the books together and at the end of the year, he would counsel with the teachers and ask if they wished to change any books for the coming year. The weeks rolled by, and the books piled up, making it almost impossible to get into the headmaster's office.

The headmaster opened his doors one evening and invited all the teachers to discuss potential changes to the books for the following year. He had only a day or two to assemble the official list, which had to be sent for 'approval'<sup>115</sup> so while he had the opportunity he wanted the teachers to pass judgement on this year's hopefuls. 'I want to change *Impressions*<sup>116</sup>, so boring doing the same stories every year'. 'Oh ya!' another teacher agreed 'but we have to find a nice one, *Impressions* is nice'. A change for one meant a change for all, as the headmaster would have only one brand of subject book per subject, across all classes. His aim was to keep the purchase of books as simple as possible for parents, but he was equally concerned about the quality of the learning on offer.

It was decided that only one of the English books would be changed, but with so much choice on offer the teacher's debated the merits of each. 'I like this Oxford one, the new one'. Two of the current English books were also published by Oxford and so there was comfort for the teachers in a known quality. 'Oxford make very nice books, because they are English, no sir'. There was a joking glance and a snigger in my direction, a jibe at my

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<sup>115</sup> This was a largely bureaucratic process in which the Rector had to sign off the list of textbooks, which would then pass over to the office administrators, who would then send the list to the school's book supplier, who would then ensure that they have the correct books on order for the coming term.

<sup>116</sup> The name of the English Literature textbook used this past year, comprised of a compendium of poems and stories.

presence that I had become accustomed to. But I was also aware of how much my presence had reaffirmed certain expectations that various members of the North Point community held about the school<sup>117</sup>. This was an English book, produced by an English publisher, albeit an Indian-run section of the global publishing company, and this affiliation alone seemed to put it ahead of the others.

Soon the teachers were passing around the Oxford books, without so much as considering the others in the pile. ‘I like the covers, they have nice design’, observed one teacher. The others nodded, ‘nice pictures inside also’. The teachers thumbed quite casually through the pages without really stopping for more than a glance or two at each page. ‘It has a CD, they showed us *that time*<sup>118</sup>’. This particular book had been presented to the teachers by a pair of laptop-wielding sales representatives, who wished to demonstrate the interactive capabilities of their product. The representatives were happy to hear that the school had recently installed ‘Smart Classes’, which they claimed would be aided by their software. On this occasion this particular teacher was reminded she was mistaken. ‘No not this one, that other one’, referring to another Oxford produced book, which focused on English Language<sup>119</sup>, a grammar based book, rather than the poetry and prose based material in this book. The teacher had made the affiliation in her mind that Oxford were producing books in keeping with the latest methodologies in teaching; namely the Smart Classes. She was not alone in this assumption ‘I also thought this had a CD, don’t all Oxford have CD?’ The other teacher responded again ‘No, that English [Language] only has. This is a book only’. This revelation didn’t deter the confused teachers. ‘Maybe they will make a CD later’.

In the above anecdote, the teachers demonstrated a particular orientation towards certain brands of books. There is a kind of seduction in the imagery which was presented, drawn in by the brand name, the presentation of the books itself, but also the additional services which that book provides. The inclusion of the CD was itself part of the imagined view of the ‘Oxford’ chain of products. The presentation by the sales representatives had given rise to the idea within certain teachers that all Oxford books offered a similar service.

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<sup>117</sup> See the Introduction of the thesis, where I discuss my arrival and incorporation into North Point in more detail.

<sup>118</sup> ‘That time’ was a commonly used English phrase used to denote a time before the present when an event occurred. In this instance they were referring to a previous occasion when a couple of salespersons from Oxford gave a digital presentation to the staff in order to demonstrate the merits of the additional materials their books on offer.

<sup>119</sup> The NP term for English language classes, English II being literature. There is an equivalent system with Nepali I and Nepali II, and other Second Language classes.

On the other side of the teachers' room, the three Class V teachers were seeking to replace one of their books which they claimed was full of inaccuracies. 'There is wrong information in there, how can we teach with that?' This opened up the question about how a textbook riddled with mistakes get chosen in the first place. 'Actually GK, (General Knowledge)<sup>120</sup> is a new subject really, so I think when they chose this book there weren't that many good books. Best of bad bunch, I think'. Defending the choice, then, the teachers acknowledged that although flawed it was chosen as the best of all that was available. This observation also hinted at how much the market of books had grown in recent years, and the present crop of books was deemed better. Once again the class V teachers were doing little more than flicking through the book, looking at the colourful pictures and overall layout. They were spurred on by the initial desire to change the current book and were surprised about the company that had produced it. 'I haven't heard of this company before have you?', one of the teachers shook his head but the other, a new teacher at the school who had arrived midway through the year had prior experience. 'I remember we had this book before, we used a lot of this company. They are new but they are good. They have good science books also'. This teacher had spent a few years teaching in the Gulf and his endorsement helped ease the initial apprehension about an unknown company.

This example further expands on the examples above, where the teachers were drawn into a series of books because of its brand name. In the second example, the teachers were uncertain of an unknown brand, despite witnessing its quality first hand. However with a recommendation from one who had knowledge of this brand, the teachers were happier to put faith in this product.

Part of the reasoning for selecting known brands seemed to lie in the understanding that more established publishers understood the level of education required, and sought to provide material that challenged students but also offer a comparable standard against other schools. The above example illustrated that teachers, although admiring the look of the book, were unsure about the book, until they discovered that the schools in the Gulf were offering similar books to their students. This endorsement of the Gulf, through interactions with the teacher who had formerly worked there, suggested that in the view of

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<sup>120</sup> This subject involved teaching students simple facts and figures about the world around them, such as the names of Indian Prime Ministers, states and their capitals, rivers, famous landmarks of the world and so on.

the teachers, the Gulf was a place associated with educational excellence. Incorporating this book in to the syllabus was thereby a means of ‘competing’ with schools from the Gulf. This uncertainty about newer brands was reinforced by the computer teacher, who was sitting quietly by herself, flicking through the various computer books available for next year. She concurred with the assessment of the Class 5 teachers with their uneasiness towards new brands. She pointed out a book to me. ‘Look at this book, Adam. It’s hopeless’. I began to look through the pages myself and she elaborated, ‘it’s too low a level, this is supposed to be a Class 5 book, it’s not even the same as our Class 3. This is the problem with new brands, you can’t trust them’. She offered a few examples from the book, comparing them with examples from her present book, to demonstrate her point. ‘I think I’ll stick with [the current book]’.

These examples illustrate the ways in which the selection of books was based on an assessment of a number of factors which incorporated the content or quality of the material and information on the pages. Quality and content of certain books lend teachers to make certain interpretations of certain brands of book which made certain company’s future attempts to sell their books problematic as the teacher’s relied on their previous experiences in selected potential new books. Furthermore teachers also leaned on recommendations from others who had prior experience. One of the Class 3 teachers offered a nice quote with regards to the assessment of books, which reflected the wider ethos to brands that I have reflected on in this chapter. ‘You can’t judge a book by its cover. But if you flick a few pages, you know?’ The selection of new books was guided by a series of principles. First and foremost the book had to adhere to the correct ‘image’, which refers not only to the literal appearance of the book, but also to the appearance of its company and the content or the quality of the product. Similarly to the students who had earlier explored the relationships between brands, there were a number of imagined connotations which were held in relation to certain companies and not for others. In the case of Oxford, the company was known for producing ‘good’ books, which adhered to a level of academic quality which was perceived to be in keeping with the overall school appearance. Furthermore, there was a marker of comparability which allowed teachers to situate themselves within a wider network of schools, to assess how good or bad a book was. Referring back to what the salesman told me earlier on, smaller schools monitored what larger schools like North Point were doing, particularly in terms of textbooks. This,

then influenced the way the teachers, as was the case with the Class 5 teachers, made decisions with regards to their preferred book for the coming year.

I have offered an insight into how North Point selected its textbooks. I have presented a series of negotiations through which the teachers appropriated a 'taste' for some books and not for others. There were some companies that stood out on reputation alone. Orient Longmann and Oxford, were two such names. However teachers also illustrated how names or 'brands' were not defining attribute of a book. Much like the earlier students who discussed 'fakes', the teachers accepted that the overriding factor in their decision over a book always lay in an underlying quality which defined a book as 'suitable' (or not) for North Point. By 'suitable' I refer back to Mark Liechty's (2003) ethnography of middle class consumers of Kathmandu, a framework I have employed consistently throughout this thesis. 'Suitable' in this sense refers to a particular ability to navigate within a n array of options to select one which reflects and reinforced social status. Choosing a textbook was a careful social negotiation which invoked consideration of a number of elements of the book, acknowledging that the final choice would reflect North Point as a whole. The book couldn't just be good it had to fit within the carefully nurtured North Point brand.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have sought to outline what I have termed the 'North Point brand'. I have chosen to invoke the term brand in order to adequately situate the school within the social world around it. My interactions with students, as illustrated in this chapter, demonstrated how student perceptions of the world were partly mediated through interactions with a world of consumer goods. These goods were not just mechanical items or functional objects but were conceptualised through the image that they perpetuated; their brand identity. As such I have sought to argue here that we can consider North Point in the same vein. Guided by the Rector and further perpetuated through school publications such as the school annual, the 'North Point brand' represented a careful management of the school's image over time. I say guide by the Rector here as Kinley's business background seemed to influence his style of management at school as reflected in the 'Colgate' example. This is not to say that Rector alone was responsible for the school brand. The teachers were reminded of their ambassadorial roles particularly as they walked around town, thus they acted as agents of the school brand. This careful consideration to the presentation of image

was also visible in the latter examples within the chapter as the photography club demonstrated an equal care and attention paid towards their artistic pursuit. It could be said that photography is a hobby to which many across the world are equally invested in taking 'good' pictures, however I argue that which is crucial here is the socially negotiated means through which the students learned what a 'good' picture was in the first place. I conceptualised this within Bourdieu's analysis of class 'tastes' observing how the selection of some pictures over others not only resonated with Bourdieu's own interpretations of photography clubs in France, but also suggested that facilitation of the photography club at North Point, and also the financial support it received was an act of nurturing 'tastes'. These 'tastes' were also demonstrated in the teachers' selections of textbooks, as they negotiated through an array of options to find one which was 'suitable' both in style and content, to fit within the 'North Point brand' as a whole.

Whether it was the students selecting their photos along the lines of some aesthetic interpretation garnered through social interactions within the photography club, or whether it was the Primary Division teachers who exercised their judgement over the textbooks within the apparent quality it possessed, choices at North Point suggested a collaborative project of 'taste' as argued by Bourdieu (1984). This resonates within the wider aim of this part of the thesis to engage with the connections between North Point and the world beyond. In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which North Point was shaped in order to perpetuate a particular imagined view of the school as the 'best school' in the Darjeeling hills. In order to achieve this, North Point had to conform to a particular 'taste' a particular orientation to the world. IN this sense we can imagined the North Point brand as the 'NP Imaginary' only reflected outwards rather than within. As the North Point brand compares itself with other, 'like Colgate' we can imagined the 'NP Imaginary' in a world of other competing imaginaries, not simply other schools but other frames of reference entirely. The students here demonstrated for example how they compared themselves and each other through consumer goods, each of which possessed their own 'brand identities' which competed for the consumer's attention.

However, the most pertinent example this chapter was the television advertising campaign, which used North Point for its location. This advert told the story of a young girl growing up, moving from the convent school of younger years to her university graduation. This was an advert for life insurance, advertising a guarantee to protect family security through

ensuring enough money would be kept aside for a child's education. His then reverberates back to where this thesis began, with the question why do middle class parents choose certain schools? Perhaps it would be a glossy advertising campaign, a recommendation of a friend or family experience of a given institution. But what is clear is that certain forms of schooling are consistently imagined to be intrinsic to a successful passage from childhood into a fully-fledged middle class citizen not only of India but of the world beyond.

## **Conclusion:**

# **‘As Onwards Through Life We Go’: Beyond the Landscape of North Point**

There is one thing that is certain about each and every student at North Point. One day their lives as a student will end and they will have to leave the school. There were always a few that would not last the distance. Some students moved away with family and transferred to other schools. Some students had been found to be in severe breach of the school rules and excluded. But for the most part students would leave at the end of their public exams; their final hurdle as North Pointers before they are ready to head out into the world. But what happened to students when they left? I was fortunate to have known a handful of former North Pointers in Darjeeling. My landlord was one and both his sons were also members of the alumni. As it happened, there were North Pointers everywhere in Darjeeling, many remaining engaged with school life. I knew my landlord had a number of items of North Point paraphernalia adorning his cabinets, such as silver plated tankards, North Point *Kadhas*<sup>121</sup> and a wooden shield displaying the school crest. I would notice similar items in other houses that I would have the chance to visit during the course of my fieldwork, learning how North Point continued to play a role in the lives of those who had long since departed. I do not wish to focus upon those who had left, predominantly as the sample I had available was limited to those who had remained in and around Darjeeling. Instead I wish to focus the final discussions of this thesis upon the final moments of the North Pointer as it was experienced during my fieldwork. In particular I wish to draw attention to the moments of reflection at the end of the school year which provided a productive space where the whole story of North point could be imagined. Leaving the school it seemed was contradictorily constitutive of the school. After all leaving was embedded within the very symbols which constituted North Point in the first instance. In order to explain a little further, I will return to a practice I referred to in Chapter 1, the

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<sup>121</sup> A Kadha was a silken scarf reserved for bestowing a blessing on an individual, place or object. It could form part of a religious ceremony but it could also be secular. It is related to the wider Indian custom of offering garlands to distinguished guests or notable persons. The Kadha is descended from a Tibetan custom, which has come to influence much of contemporary Darjeeling.

school assembly and specifically I want to return to one of the most important North Point symbols, one which gave this thesis its title; the school chorus.

Every Monday morning, weather permitting, the week would begin with the students gathering in the quadrangle for a school assembly. This assembly would often end with the school captain calling the school to attention, bringing their arms tightly to their sides, standing bolt upright and then singing the school chorus with the fervent vigour normally reserved for performances of the Indian National anthem. With the singing of the first line of the song, 'hurrah to the home in the mountains', the students were performing North Point. This 'home in the mountains' would prove to be a socially productive space for the students who would come to call themselves 'North Pointers'. Though this utopic imagining of North Point, the students learned to reflect on their lives in certain ways and imagine their relations to others. In this moment of performance the contours of the world of North Point are traced for all students who sing the words; words which they learned upon their first days in the school. These students then become paradoxically both the embodiment of North Point and also the products of it. The students throughout their experiences at school were engaged in performances of North Point, engaging in sports competitions, assemblies, theatrical productions and more everyday practices such as 'hanging out' in the quadrangle or on one of the 'flats', wearing the uniform, being at school; these were each elements in the story of North Point. Inversely, the students' imaginings of what playing sports or conducting assemblies were for example were placed within the contexts of what North Point was, which is to say that students performed in the ways in which they did as they aspired to become 'North Pointers'. So I have argued thus far that the students and the school were engaged in a dialectic process where they were constitutive of one another.

Through the thesis I have examined how the students imagined their 'home in the mountains', a moniker for the school which was drawn from the routinely performed school chorus. The regular performances of this school song performed an imagined unity amongst students, offering a sense of belonging and legitimacy to social action within the school. Within these same words of the chorus which gave life to North Point there was also an acceptance that one day students would have to leave. The chorus ends with the lines;

And our school on the hill  
Here's a cheer for it still, (Hooray!)  
As onward through life we go!

These words invoke the final journey of every North Pointer as they are each inevitably headed towards their departures from the school. The lives they are bound for are relatively unknown, but what seems certain from these words is that they will always remain connected with the school. They will continue to 'cheer' for the 'school on the hill' as they move 'onwards through life'. The act of leaving in the school chorus does not mean disconnection. The visits of ex-North Pointers, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, were a living testament to this fact. The repeated visits of former students served to suggest potential futures for departing students, that they would remain attached to the school even decades after their departures. Not only were they attached, but able to be engaged with school life, and continue to contribute to the story of North Point. However, the moment of departure was an anxious time particularly for the Class 12 leavers who I would meet that year. One of whom I met in the introduction of the thesis in Prakesh.

At the outset of this thesis I accompanied two students, Rajah and Prakesh on their way to school. For Prakesh, his days of walking to school were almost over. He was a Class 12 student and thus this was to be his final year at school and his immediate future was dominated by the impending board exams. I ran into Prakesh on the final day of the school year which as it transpired was a rather subdued occasion as the school environment seemed quiet and empty as the classes for the year wound down and only terminal exams remained. This quiet atmosphere reflected in Prakesh's demeanour, who seemed relaxed despite the challenges ahead. We had chatted briefly about exams previously, in the discussion I referenced in the introduction of the thesis and also in other conversations throughout the year. I had found him to be more tense on those occasions that at that moment on the final day of the year. Prakesh told me that he had something other than exams on his mind,

*'These are my last days at North Point. We all want to enjoy this moment....I don't want to leave but we have to. I don't think any of the guys here want to leave, but we have to move on now. It's not finished yet.... We should have a nice dinner tonight to remember'.*

Prakesh was talking here about the ‘Leavers’ Dinner’, which was the final event of the school year. Prakesh was coming to terms with the reality that he would be soon leaving North Point. This was a big moment in his life, and indeed all his cohort’s lives. It is not just the moment when a student moves out of school and into the world but rather the moment when students who had been striving for years to become North Pointers and to (re)create the world of North Point, now find themselves confronted by new horizons.

By way of conclusion I intend to explore the events of the Leavers’ Dinner, which was the final event of the school year barring exams. This event was significant as it marked the final event for the school’s senior most students, Class 12; their final act as North Pointers. Or was it? As I argued in the course of this thesis, the landscape of North Point unfolded like a story, with each action, performance, sports result, etched in the fabric of the building. What I aim to demonstrate is that this story does not end when one leaves this landscape. The significance of ‘being a North Pointer’ transcends the story of a school in the mountains, as students acknowledge that their lives as students is simply the ‘first chapter’ of their lives. North Point was a story inside a larger narrative. This larger story hints towards the future livelihoods which denote a particular global middle class, which I explored in the Introduction. Here the thesis comes full circle as the North Pointer graduates from North Point to take up their place as a producer of middle class life. Within this final ceremony of the year, we can observe the full gamut of performances and actions which have served to constitute the NP imaginary in the course of this thesis. What I seek to demonstrate here is how the NP imaginary begins to peel away and open up students to the wider life that lies ahead. In this case they are transforming from North Pointers to Ex-North Pointers.

### **The Final ‘Hurrah’: Learning to Leave North Point**

My last day at North Point coincided with a number of ‘last’ days for a number of students. On a cold December night, the outgoing Class 12 were gifted an evening in their honour, celebrating the completion of their journeys at North Point. This wasn’t the last time they would set foot in school; they would all return for the board examinations in March, the outcome of which could determine their futures. But there would be no more classes, no more opportunities for glory on the sports fields, no more assemblies or plays. This may have not been their last act as students, but for all intents and purposes it felt that

way. The words that were spoken, the feelings that would be expressed, pointed towards the fact that the Class 12 students were coming to terms with the change in their lives. The course of the evening, all of the themes which I have alluded to in the course of this thesis came to light. This evening demonstrated another performance of North Point, however in this instance the student imaginaries extend beyond the landscape within which they are situated, hinting towards the lives that lay ahead.

The Leavers' Dinner was left exclusively in the hands of the Class 11 students to organise and orchestrate proceedings, making the occasion distinct from the other events which were officiated by members of staff. As such, the event had a more improvised and relaxed feel where there was no definitive order or timing in which actions had to occur, yet from what I was told the event had been staged without fail as long as anyone could remember<sup>122</sup>. There were strong parallels in this event with other events that I have described with the role of the students remaining central to the orchestration of the occasion, such as with the class assemblies (Chapter 4) and with this year's Major Play (Chapter 6). The Leavers' Dinner stands to typify the NP imaginary which have explored in the course of this thesis, as in this one event, the world of North Point, the ideal student of the North Pointer and the collective imagining of the NP family were each performed. Furthermore, all of the above aspects of North Point were placed within a wider landscape, the future lives of the students, as the speakers conceptualised their experiences as part of a bigger journey.

The evening began with a Catholic Mass at the school's chapel, where only the Class 12 students would be in attendance. The service was conducted by Father Kinley himself, and followed the order of a weekly Catholic Mass with hymns performed by the Class 12 members of the school choir. Kinley's sermon offered words of encouragement for the future, inviting the students to 'enjoy the occasion' before the 'hard work ahead' (referring to the exams)<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> My points of reference here were the teaching staff who had spent over ten years at the school. These teachers were invaluable in the course of my research in offering an outline of North Point over the past few decades.

<sup>123</sup> The final board exams would not be undertaken until March of the following year. The schools of Darjeeling followed an alternative school year from the schools in other parts of India due to the cold climate of the winters. As the board exams were a nationally orchestrated affair, the students of the hills would conclude their Class 12 year in December and have to wait until the following March when the board exams were set for the rest of India.

After the conclusion of the mass the students made their way across the quadrangle to the canteen, where the Class 11 students had formed a ‘guard of honour’<sup>124</sup> in the corridor outside. All those who passed through, including teachers, were playfully bumped and jostled by the Class 11 students, with each final year student ricocheting their way through the horde to reach the site of their final dinner. Here the conventional order of the school was being playfully inverted where the top students, Beadles, teachers and even Rector were at the whim and control of those junior and subordinate to them. This was all in apparent good spirits as one of the Class 12 students waiting to head through noted ‘we did to our seniors, now it’s our turn I guess’.

The Class 12 students were invited to sit in two long lines of benches with the teachers just behind them, and the Class 11 and Class 10<sup>125</sup> who had also been invited to attend sat towards the back of the hall. A small space was made available in the entrance way to the canteen, which would act as a performance area for the evening. The Rector had been offered his own individual seat at the centre of proceedings. There was an MC nominated from class 11 who dictated the events of the night. First he invited Father Kinley to speak, in order to commence proceedings. ‘I guess this is what I do’ The Rector joked as he took the microphone to a few sniggers in the crowd. This act hearkens back to my discussion of ritualised performances in Chapter 2, as the Rector was the head of the school, when he was present he was required to ‘open’ an event. The pattern continued as this opening speech was followed with some musical performances from the Class 11 students before opening up the floor to the departing students.

There was no formally prearranged order of speakers rather an ‘open mic’ invitation to any who wanted to share their views with their fellow students. ‘The stage is yours’, the MC declared, offering the opportunity for speakers to come forward and share some words with the group. The evening continued to honour the stations of school authority by gifting the Beadles first use of the microphone.

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<sup>124</sup> A route lined by people as a mark of respect to those who would pass through it. This is common on formal state visits, and is also common at sporting events, where one team may offer respect to the other or perhaps a specific player in the other team in the wake of some accomplishment or achievement.

<sup>125</sup> Some of the Class 10s would move on from North Point after their own board exams in March, but this decision was normally predicated on the outcome of the exams themselves, whereas all of the Class 12 students would be departing regardless of their results.

The event, as I have described, was orchestrated by the students for the students making this particular event informal in nature. This was significant as, unlike larger events such as the assemblies, Rector's Day, sports events, this occasion was only open to three year groups, Class 10, 11 and 12, thus the students who would be organising the occasion had potentially one previous example to base their event on, which would be the experience of the previous year. Therefore a significant element of this event was the passing of the baton from one group to another. The senior most group were leaving their position to the Class 11 but the Class 11 were offering a sample event for the Class 10 students who would be responsible for their 'Leavers' Dinner' next year. The relationship between the year groups was constantly referenced throughout the evening as the Class 12 leavers offered the fruits of their experiences to their younger cohort:

*'The memories that you make here will be the foundation memories of all your lives'*

*'Just enjoy it because when you come to realise it, it is too late, so just start enjoying it from right now'*

These words, and others like them spoken across the evening, emphasized the core objective of students during their lives at North Point and in some ways reinforcing why they coveted being 'North Pointers' so greatly. North Point was their 'home', a place where all their memories start and a place where they have enjoyed being. This returns to the conversation with which this thesis began as I discovered how Rajah and his friend Prakesh saw North Point as the hub of their social universe. North Point offered opportunities for students across the spectrum of their lives and also opening up avenues that had previously been unknown, such as the learning of musical instruments they had not previously heard of. At the Leavers' Dinner, those students who are coming to terms with the ending of their North Point journeys are reinforcing their sentiments to the next year's leavers, imploring them to 'enjoy' themselves before it's too late. Most of the evening was given over to speeches with the majority of these given by students, and a few by staff.

The first student to Beadle to speak was incidentally the only one to have a carefully prepared speech. He was also the only speaker who had joined in Class 11 and thus had experienced less of North Point than others. However, this student had risen to attain the

highest accolade available to any Class 12 North Pointer; the Stanford Gold Medal. His speech spoke of personal transformation, as he recounted how he had made the best of himself at North Point constantly comparing his North Point life to his previous experience, all the while affirming that North Point had given him opportunities he didn't have before and how he was a 'better person' for having North Point in his life.

*'This is not the end. This is just the end of the first chapter of our lives. I am really happy that I had you guys. I really hope and pray that we'll always have each other, no matter what. I guess that's what NP is also about, lending a hand to a faltering brother. This is not a goodbye speech, it's a farewell speech. And we will come back to relive these memories. I really hope you do well and get all the things you deserve'.*

This first speech referred quite directly to his schooling experiences as a story. More precisely, his experience was a part of a story. In this speech, the Beadle also noted the lyrics of the school chorus invoking what he felt what North Point (NP) stood for. This student's autobiographical assertions proclaimed that North Point provided more for its students than his previous school. It is telling that this other school was another private English medium school which also dated back to the region's colonial history. This speech operated much like the students' experiences against other private schools on the sports field, as the students were not regarding North Point as 'distinct' from just any other school, but highly regarded and respected amongst a particular group of schools. Here, I would harken back to the assertions of the introduction which proposed the Indian Middle Class was far focused more on intra-group comparisons (Savaala 2010; Donner and De Neve 2011). Part of the social fabric of experiences at North Point regarded how a student of North Point was able to come to see themselves in relation to a world of particular others and subsequently comprehend their place amongst that group. This first speaker spoke to the student expectations of how North Point measured up against other schools which was attained primarily through sports competitions (see Chapter 5).

Aside from the comparative analysis, the first student touched upon the school chorus with his reference to 'lending a hand to a faltering brother', expressing his own sentiments of what North Point was about but also reflecting a popular tendency to reference words in school chorus in defining North Point. He also spoke of a hope for the future that he would

remain in touch with the school as his life progressed. This latter point was one which reoccurred through the course of the evening. One of the other Beadles expressed his sentiments:

*'Well I guess this is it. Eight years in NP and all you get is a speech to express how you have felt. But life has to go on, people have to grow old, we marry, become fathers [laughter/jeers] have sons, strong sons, they'll keep up our legacy'.*

This example reflected upon the potential future of those leaving North Point. This speech and previous one above both reflected upon the future engagements with the school as visitors and as potential parents. Their experiences of both of these instances, such as the visit of former students in Chapter 1 and the celebration former student parents during Rector's Day in Chapter 2, offered a context for students to comprehend their own lives. Each of these speeches, and reverberated through all the other speeches that evening, alluded to the brotherly bonds established between students which I elucidated in Chapter 3.

In the above two examples we can see the outlines of North Point and a North Pointer performed. The first speaker had the particular position of coming to North Pointer later than others, but in doing so simply reinforced how North Point was viewed in relation to other similar schools. Both speeches opened up the topic of the future and how students

The impending future also opened up a space for students to reflect on their past experiences in a performance alike those conducted during class assemblies, which I explored in Chapter 4. These speeches voiced the students' reflections of their experiences as North Pointer's in a manner which hinted towards the Jesuit models of teaching to which the students had been engaged in their years at North Point. In the Leavers' Dinner, these reflections took the form of confessional admittances, as the students sought to offer apologies for they deemed to have been 'bad' behaviour. In doing so, these students indicated how they imagined one should be at school, which is to say the 'ideal type' I examined in Chapter 2.

*'It's not that difficult to be good in life, to do good things in life, ah, just be happy, just listen to the teachers. You don't have to listen all the time, it's not*

*always good to be right sometimes, sometimes you have to, to make mistakes in life because to err is human, to forgive divine like they say'*

*I'm not going to say anything original....Father rector, father prefect all those years since Class 10 you might have thought I'd become 'bad boy' maybe I had become also I don't know but, Like the 'bad cop', I'm the bad student I had to play the role of the 'bad student' ....I'd like to say sorry for my friends I have hurt, all those people that I have hurt, I'm really sorry, I wish I had more time. Sorry father, sorry for breaking the [rules], that was unintentional'*

These students offered varying degrees of self-reflection and differing interpretations of the 'bad' that they had done. Here the students were indicating the 'ideal' (Taylor 2002: ) model of the North Pointer to which life at North Point was oriented. In speeches like the one above, they acknowledge those behaviour which deviate from this perceived 'ideal' and thus seekin the process to move closer towards realising that ideal. Furthermore, these speeches followed the same lines as the basketball team discussed in Chapter 5, who were desperate for a second chance to get the victory that they held in such high importance. For the basketball team they longed to win to avoid being forgotten; needing to achieve the status of trophy winners to write their own chapters in North Point history.

This model of the ideal was further reinforced in other speeches, in particular those who referenced the impending exams. The speeches often highlighted how 'studying' did not purely rely on one's academic prowess. This particular student suggested that he believed man of his fellow Leavers could achieve 90<sup>126</sup> or higher in their exams:

*'Now I would like to quote [our teacher's] words: you need a heart to study you need not have a mind to study, so guys if you have a heart you can do it!'*

This speech also loosely inferred the symbol of the school chorus and indeed the school motto, Sursum Corda which called for students to 'lift their hearts'. The symbols of the school were in full force during the evening. The school motto, the school chorus, the North Pointer and all the various events and occasions which occurred throughout the year were referenced as the students reflected upon the year just completed. This evening itself

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<sup>126</sup> The examinations were awarded an overall percentage mark to which the student was referring, suggesting that the students could all average over 90% in their exams.

was an act of the NP Imaginary, in as much as it affirmed a sense of North Point and the family of North Pointers.

Each speech without exception offered personal insights into each students as they each sought to align their own personal journeys with the collective experience of North Point. The first speaker proposed how North Point had brought more out of him than his previous school. Another speaker spoke of his ‘bad’ behaviour. Another student spoke about the sudden death of his parents in a road accident, the previous year.

*‘...what more can I want from you all. You have been the best, without you I wouldn’t have survived. Without you I would have been some drug addict making some lame excuse. Making my family’s problem an excuse to become a drug addict or a drop out or something like that but thanks to you all, you have pulled me out of that’.*

This student had identified how significant North Point was, specifically the role of his friends, in preventing a potential tragic future. Here, the student is imagining what could have happened in his life had he not been at North Point.

The speeches of the evening each aligned the past experience of each student with their respective futures. The public displays of reflection were acts of reconciliation, exploring the past and the future alongside one other. This itself is what Timothy Mitchell (2000) referred to as ‘contemporaneity’, a distinctive act of the modern age, with the ability to imagine oneself existing simultaneously across multiple time frames and multiple spaces, projecting oneself beyond the present experience, and imagining ourselves in sync with a world of others who are equally experiencing the same spaces and times that we are. Here the NP imaginary enables a sense of reflection which transcends the temporal present, and students were able to express their sentiments towards the past in relation to their progression forward in their future lives. This demonstrates how the students leaving North Point were each showing their own levels of ‘reflexivity’ which had nurtured through their engagements with the Jesuit models of learning and purported in Chapter 4.

What is significant to note here is the kinds of students who are leaving the North Point gates. Here I have presented a brief summary of their reflections, and ‘performed tellings’ (Ingold 2000: 187) of their lives as North Pointers. In exploring these reflections, I have outlined the ultimate products of North Point and the students who will now head out into

the wider world. At the outset of this thesis I posed questions as to why schools such as North Point were desirable and highly prized and what processes were apparent within such schools. This Leavers' Dinner offers some explanations to these questions. Firstly, we can observe how the students make sense of their own lives in relations to others with whom they imagine themselves to share certain values, experiences and ideas. For these students, the 'home in the mountains' was the imagined space which the students shared and the symbols of North Point marked out the contours of a larger 'story' within which students played their parts. Secondly, the students demonstrated a level of reflexivity whereby they were acutely aware of the various components of their social world and illustrated how each of these components played a role in their lives.

These points were summarized in the words of the final student speaker who opted for some rather tongue in cheek remarks. He declared that he had to keep his speech short due to 'orders, as usual' referring to the fact that despite the student management of the evening, the authority of the Rector always prevailed. This student opted to propose questions as to the sentiments of the evening:

*'Has anyone noticed how throughout the whole year we've been called shit and now at the end 'you guys are the best'. No matter what you do, at the end of your life, everyone loves you. That's the moral of the story, even father [prefect] loves us!'*

The frustration expressed in this speech indicated towards the same contradictions the students outlined in the Major Play (Chapter 6). He acknowledged the transgressions of this year's group of students, as others had done (which I explored in Chapter 2). This speech followed the speeches of some of the staff, the rector and Prefect included, and thus he was voicing frustration at how the transgressions of the year seemed to have been forgotten. The words spoken here were assessing what had been a problematic year for North Point with a number of high profile disciplinary incidents which I have noted previously in this thesis and how these took their toll on the students' imaginings of their own lives.

The event of the Leavers' Dinner offers an 'in-between space', where the Class 12 students are positioned between their life at North Point and their life ahead. In the course of this thesis I have explored the role a series of other such 'between' spaces where students have

been enabled to reflect upon their positions at school and their relations to each other. Some of these between spaces take the form of events such as Rector's Day and others more banal such as hanging out on the 'flats'. These spaces, I have argued, were crucial in coming to constitute the NP imaginary.

In this final event, the students offered one final performance of North Point. In this final performance, the students negotiated their 'belonging' to North Point, assuring their status as North Pointers. For some this meant righting their perceived wrongs, for others it meant reinforcing their 'brotherly' affection for their fellow students, and generally it meant reaffirming gratitude from the students towards North Point itself. The event of leaving was paradoxically about one thing: belonging. In the course of this thesis I have argued that the students were engaged in practices of becoming North Pointers in acts of social praxis which served to create a social world to which they belonged, which gave meaning to their lives and most significantly of all, nurtured their relations to others through a specific 'social imaginary'. In the act of leaving, the 'NP imaginary' is performed, as the students seek to affirm their status as North Pointers in order to reify their sense of belonging to North Point. This affirmation was the moment which every student at school was seeking. The students came to see themselves as like others and thus in the process see themselves. Until this moment I had only seen North Pointerness performed in relation to the 'landscape' of North Point. However, it was apparent, in the act of leaving, that the landscape stretched beyond the school. The landscape to which the students were orienting themselves was the wider world of the Indian middle class, albeit unbeknownst to the students themselves. The Leavers' Dinner was a particularly pertinent example of this but there were other stages for students to speak from. I would return briefly to an assembly a few days before the Leavers' Dinner which was to be the final assembly of the school year. This occasion presented the same opportunity that was available at the Leavers' Dinner but for the whole school.

### **North Point: A Land(scape) of Opportunity**

The Leavers' Dinner offered yet another example of how North Point provided space for its students to reflect on their lives. This reflection was also significantly performed to an audience of others witnessing their school performed. This event, as all the others demonstrated within this thesis speaks to the 'opportunities' to which the student

themselves associated North Point with. Rajah and Prakesh in the introduction talked of the opportunities afforded by North Point as unlike those offered elsewhere. Prabin, the dreaming father we encountered in the brief prologue sought a school for his son to ‘opportunities’ of a future life ahead. The ‘opportunities’ of North Point have been outlined in the course of this thesis and it was these practices which students perceived as the markers of what defined the school as a whole.

In Part One, I argued that North Point was a landscape in the mould of Tim Ingold’s (2000) analysis, conceiving of North Point as a perpetually unfurling story which existed through the lives of those who practiced within. These practices were conducted in relation to the social world of the school to which the students referred to as ‘History’. This North Point landscape was composed of ‘symbols’ which I have identified as observable objects or relations which stood to represent something else. That something else was the intangible world of North Point. I argued in Part One, that this landscape was composed of North Pointers each performing and enacting North Point through their daily practices, drawing from the landscape to shape their own experiences of being North Pointers, but in committing to such practices, these North Pointers subsequently were engaged in constructing a particular idea of what the school was.

All throughout this thesis I have sought to explore what Rajah and Prakesh, and to an extent every student spoke about with regards to North Point, which was ‘opportunity’. North Point was imagined by its students to offer students the chance to do things that would not otherwise have had the chance to do. I have argued that North Point facilitated spaces of reflection which enabled the students to imagine their school and indeed their own lives in specific ways. Whether through the class assemblies, through the elaborate staged events such as Rector’s Day, within the performances of sports matches, or through theatrical productions, North Point offered a stage to its students from which they could both bear witness to the story of North Point unfolding through its symbolic elements but also a stage from which they could write their own chapters. The Leavers’ Dinner was another example, perhaps more relevant than most as the students were being directly invited to reflect upon their school careers.

A similar event to the Leavers’ Dinner occurred earlier that same day within the final school assembly of the year. During that assembly, after Father Kinley had offered his own

personal closing remarks of the year, he invited the students themselves to take the stage. He offered the chance for any student from any of the gathered Classes (6 -12) to step up onto the stage and issue their own review of the year just completed. What followed was a revolving door of short speeches, whereby the students would step up onto the stage, often spurred on by roars of encouragement from their peers, and thank their families, the Rector, and various other figures from the school environment for the year just passed. The seven boys that spoke came from various classes across the school spectrum and offered a consensus of the idea that North Point had presented each one of them with an ‘opportunity’. There were many parallels with the Class 12 Leavers who would take the stage that night. Many students would offer thanks to members of staff and other students as well as to the school directly. But the focus was on the opportunities each of them had been presented. The term ‘opportunity’ was a rhetoric that reverberated through North Point and in particular served to reinforce student imaginaries. The term ‘opportunity’ cropped up time and time again during my field work, primarily as a term through which students described what was special about North Point.

The ‘open floor’ final assembly presented a stage for students to talk to the school, not specifically to an audience of like-minded others but rather to the school itself. This returns to the sketching out of the physical environment of North Point which flowed through the first part of the thesis. At the outset I proposed that the school itself was not simply a part of a wider network of institutions and places, but rather positioned as a ‘special place’ which had a unique value all of its own. This was imagined by the students as a ‘special place’ to which each of them belonged as North Pointers.

### **There’s Something about North Point: Imaginations, re-imagined.**

I began my research with the very simple premise of exploring the relations between private schooling and the middle classes in India. The subject of enquiry was to decipher the specific details of such schools which made them so desirable and identify the specific traits which distinguished them from others. I was searching for answers as to why schools such as North Point were perceived as the kinds of schools which best aligned with the desires and expectations cultivated in the Indian middle classes. In other words: what did North Point offer as a school which made it a precursor for a middle class life? The answer I have offered in the course of this thesis is the ‘NP Imaginary’. I have explored how this

imagined dimension of school life, constructed through social relations within the specific social landscape of the school, shaped and oriented student desires, expectations and ideas in order to offer the reflexive interpretative framework which enabled students to navigate the vast array of opportunities and changes apparent within wider Indian social life.

This has been the story of how a vast group of students come to understand themselves in relation to particular school, North Point. Those students came to understand themselves as North Pointers, ideal gentlemen ‘all-rounders’, able to navigate any opportunity that might come their way. The North Pointers were distinguished from other schools through an adherence to the ‘NP Spirit’, which unified a potentially disparate group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds into one group. These various dimensions of the NP Imaginary map on closely to those which I have identified within the Indian middle classes.

Even I as draw towards a conclusion her, many questions remain unanswered. What happened to students when they left North Point? How did family background affect school performances? How did concepts of friendship affect student participation (or lack thereof) in school events? For the most part many of these questions demonstrate the gaps in my own experiences and my own inability to sufficiently grasp the full depths of the NP imaginary. My data was limited to my experiences, and at points in the thesis I have only be able to hint at possible answers in certain places. That said, this is not meant to demonstrate the entirety of a school, but rather to demonstrate how a number of elements of school life echoed through various temporal student experiences to create their respective imagined worlds of North Point. After all, the fragmented and incomplete experiences represent a truer picture of each student’s own experience as no one student will encounter the full picture of North Point but rather only encounter it gradually in temporal fragments.

I would not argue that I have presented a full account of life as experienced by students at North Point. Rather this thesis speaks to a provoking question with which my investigations began: what makes certain forms of schooling desirable to the Indian Middle Classes? The answer I offer is to suggest that such schools transcended above a concept of formal learning which offered good grades but rather a school which offered ‘opportunities’ to its students. Schools such as North Point facilitate ‘opportunities’ such

as sports events, a chance to perform speeches and assemblies before large crowds, a chance to learn musical instruments others many not even know exist, a chance to learn to speak English and, perhaps most significantly of all, to learn how to compete with others. By 'compete' I invoke the framework which I have employed in the course of this thesis, suggesting that students experiences were shaped in relation to others they adjudged to be like themselves, others they learn are like themselves through the schooling process itself.

The school, in this picture, becomes a central tenet of orienting students within a particular social world, cementing a middle class status which they have in part inherited from their family backgrounds. I have framed this orientation as the 'NP imaginary', a self-reflexive framework, through which the students are both imbued with a particular world view, but also agents in its construction. I opted to follow the stance of Charles Taylor's Social imaginaries as opposed to a similar concept of habitus as purported by Bourdieu, as Taylor's model explores the ways in which intensified forms of communication have vastly expanded experiences of the everyday beyond the present moment increasing the significance of one's capacity to contemplate one's place within this milieu, but also that these acts of imagining are socially negotiated. In my ethnography, I have sought to outline how student imaginaries are negotiated as an act of a group rather than individuals. This is not to argue that Bourdieu is not relevant here, but rather that I wish to highlight the significance of imagining socially, and the wider ramifications of this on the experiences of middle class life in India as a whole. In particular I have alluded to the importance of a sense of belonging which lends legitimacy to social practice. In part this is achieved through an 'authentic illusion' imagining one's life to be set within a long heritage of other lives who have come before you. A sense of authenticity creates a foundation upon which one's own life gains meaning. At North Point the students imagined their own lives as students as following in the step of those who had come before, those who had won the trophies, those who had been awarded Gold Medals, those who had performed plays and so on.

North Point was an idea as much as a school. North Point was an idea to which students affiliated themselves, transforming into North Pointers and singing the NP Spirit together. Through their negotiations of the complex array of school life, students came into contact with the array of challenges, changes, opportunities and situations which will serve to

enable them to orient themselves within their future lives as members of a cosmopolitan global citizenry, 'as onwards through life' they go.

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# Appendix A

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Darjeeling Town: All Photos taken by A. Connelly 2011



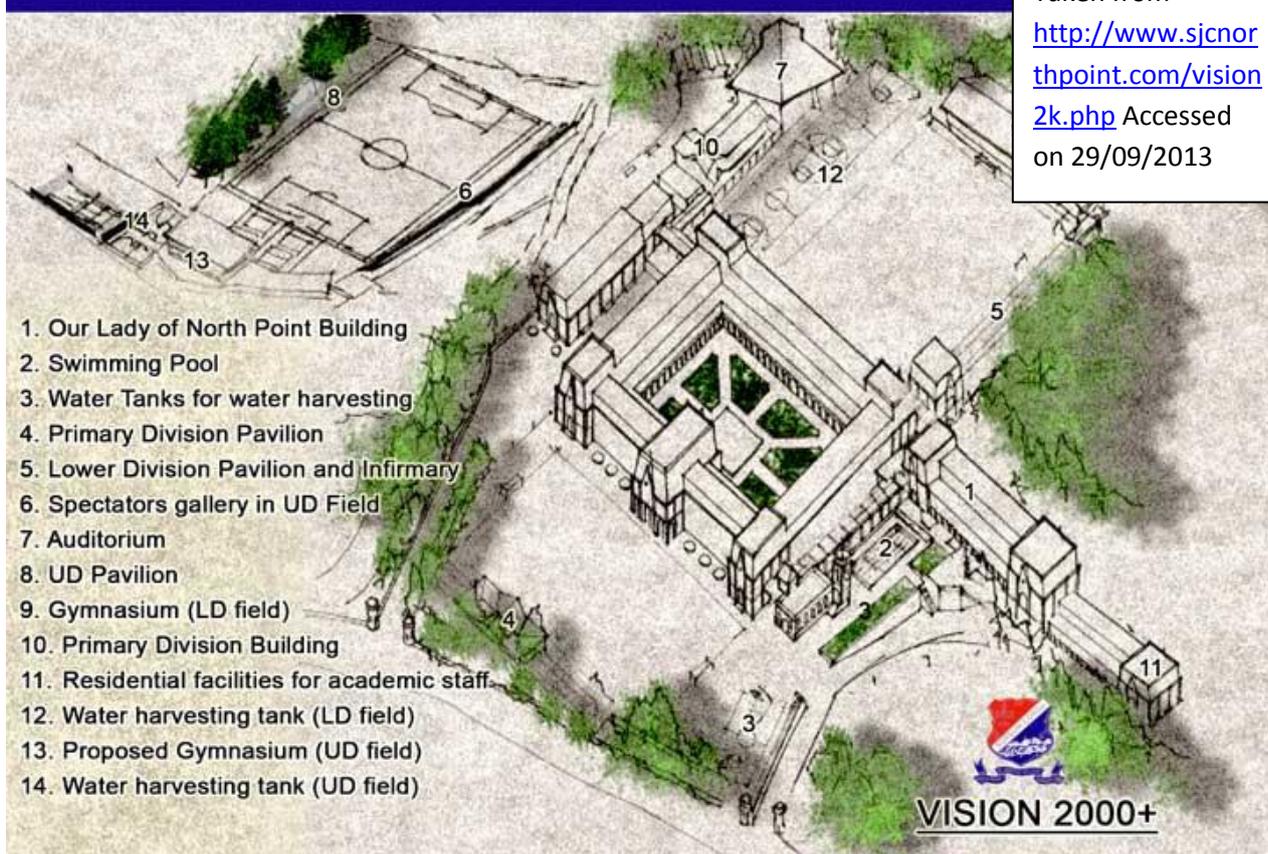


**Above:** North Point as seen from the main road.  
**Below:** The students gather for assembly in the quadrangle.



# Appendix B

Taken from  
<http://www.sjcnor.thpoint.com/vision2k.php> Accessed on 29/09/2013



## Works completed:

1. Construction of Dining and Kitchen Block (Our Lady of North Point Building):
  - The refurbishment of the dining facilities will include the improvement and revamp of food service support at all levels. Establishment of kitchen office.
  - Creation of Control station for goods and the Establishment of dedicated Dining hall in ground floor.
  - Classrooms in second and third floors. Primary division dormitory in the attic floor.
2. Construction of Swimming Pool:
  - This is four lane out door swimming pool with modern water purifying and heating equipments and facilities
3. Construction of Water Tanks for water harvesting:
  - Construction underground and overhead water tanks with the total capacity of 90 Kiloliters.
  - Revamp of water supply, storage, pumping facilities and distribution system
4. Construction of Primary Division Pavilion:
  - The PD pavilion would also incorporate adequate changing areas, locker facilities and toilets. Adequate provision of space for equipment storage and indoor games.
  - Reorientation of PD play field towards maximizing spectators participation. Redesign of layouts for optimum utility, improvement of drainage
5. Construction of Lower Division Pavilion and Infirmary:
  - This area also includes toilets for Lower division students, canteens and day scholars dining area in ground floor and language classes and music classes in first floor.
  - This also include infirmary with improved medical facilities, paramedical staff and emergency response capabilities.
6. Construction of Spectators gallery in UD Field:
  - Revamp of entire sitting area for spectators and realignment of staircase towards the field.
  - Reorientation of UD playfield, redesign of layouts for optimum utility and improvement of drainage system.
7. Comprehensive revamp of electrical system in the school campus.

## Works in Progress:

1. Construction of Auditorium
  - Auditorium would be the centre of performing arts for the school having the capacity of 1500 sittings.
  - The ground floor and first floors consist of Science laboratories with adequate storage space
  - This also complements the existing LD ground and enhances the precinct.
2. Construction of UD Pavilion:
  - Replica of existing UD pavilion with the facilities of toilets, changing room and equipment storage units
3. Boundary Wall fencing :
  - Areas immediately surrounding the school campus to preclude encroachment and misuse

## In Planning and waiting for permission:

1. Construction of Primary Division Building behind Fraser Hall:
  - This new construction will provide a separate primary division with a distinct ambience, geared to flexible enjoyable and creative learning.
  - This consists of toilets and utilities in basement and an open hall in the ground floor. The first and second floor comprises of classrooms for primary division and the attic floor as dormitory.
  - (Present primary building to be the staff residence)
2. Water harvesting tank in LD field
3. Gymnasium in UD field
4. Water harvesting tank in UD field
5. Total fencing of school property in phases to preclude encroachment and misuse

# Appendix C

## The North Point School Chorus

First performed on St. Joseph's Day, March 19<sup>th</sup> 1897

Words written by Fr. Nash, then the parish priest of Darjeeling

Music by Fr. Hipp, a teacher at North Point

(Whelan 1988)

1. Hurrah for the home in the mountains  
Hurrah for the monarchs of snow  
For the land of the forests and fountains  
And the torrents that ever flow  
And the torrents that ever flow

Chorus: Toil up from the valley below  
    'Lift your heart' to the breeze and the glow  
    And our school on the hill  
    Here's a cheer for it still, (Hooray!)  
    As onward through life we go!

2. From the sweltering south and the islands  
From the plains where the hot winds blow  
We have met in the heart of the highlands  
At fair India's gates of snow  
At fair India's gates of snow

3. Here's a hand to faltering brother  
Here's a lift for the lame and the slow  
And we stand boys, like men to each other  
As onward through life we go  
As onward through life we go