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### A Lesson in State Formation: Schooling, Moral Regulation and Gender Relations in Uttaranchal, north India

### **Background**

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I want to begin by recalling a conversation that I had Shobhan, a young man from a village in Uttaranchal, north India, which to me highlights the importance of thinking critically about the ways in which mass participation in public schooling is reconfiguring the social landscape in this primarily mountainous and rural area. Amartya Sen had recently won the Nobel prize in economics. Shobhan asked me rhetorically why Amartya Sen had received the Nobel prize for arguing that education was essential for economic security, and added that here education was in fact a big part of the problem, that education was making people poorer (conversation with Shobhan). Shobhan works for the Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalaya (SIDH), a small NGO engaged in running alternative schools and conducting critical research around education in the Jaunpur Block of Uttaranchal state in northern India. Over the last ten years, I have visited Jaunpur several times and contributed to a range of SIDH's educational and research projects. When I visited SIDH last winter, this statement was repeated to me by one of SIDH's founding members: 'schooling and health care are making people poorer in Jaunpur' (conversation with Anuradha Joshi).

Shobhan and Anuradha's comments suggest that 'poverty' here is conceived of partially in material terms, as an indicator of the significant economic cost of sending children to school—both in terms of fees and expenses, and the loss children's contributions to the household economy—and the experience that these costs may be greater than the returns. But the 'poverty' implied is also social and relational: it is about perceiving oneself and the village as 'backward' in relation to places and social contexts more 'developed'; for older people about

feeling that their knowledge, skills and resources have no place in the future if they cannot even pass them on to their own children, and for youth the experience of being caught in-between the intense desire to lead an urban, middle-class consumptive lifestyle and the realities of their social and political-economic marginality.

### Introduction

This paper focuses on schooling as a site through which ongoing processes of state and subject-formation intersect and are both encountered and negotiated by young men and women in rural Uttaranchal, north India. Through an analysis of a lesson from a National Center of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) environmental studies textbook, I look at how schooling practices constitute "social itineraries" which aim to orient identities and aspirations of rural youth along lines which coincide with goals of development (Pigg 1992). Lessons in textbooks are coded in ways which marginalize rural identity markers, and actively prescribe identities that are coded as urban middle-class. The delegitimization of rural experiences and knowledge through dominant schooling practices negatively affects not only self-identities and confidence of youth, but undermines interest in agriculture and is related to high out-migration among young men in search of "more desirable" yet generally unattainable employment. But research conducted by Sanshodhan, SIDH's research and advocacy wing, indicates that shifting aspirations associated with schooling are resulting in changing evaluations of work and family for women as well as men. Building on Sanshodhan's research in Uttaranchal, I argue that processes of state-formation constitute and are constituted by complex gendered negotiations over the meanings of becoming 'modern' and 'developed' subjects (Klenk 2004).

In the context of postcolonial India, state-formation necessitates practices of moral regulation through which a developmental state and a developmental world-view are legitimated as normative and desirable. In Corrigan and Sayer's words, moral regulation refers to "...a project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word 'obvious', what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order." (1985:4) Schooling is pivotal in the construction a range of normative expectations in ways which indicates how state and subject-formation operate as overlapping material and epistemological claims (Rousmaniere et al 1997). In India, education has become equated with schooling and literacy; schooling for boys, and increasingly girls, is experienced as non-

negotiable, and schooling is seen as a key link in a progressive chain of social, economic and geographical mobility. These assumptions give shape to and legitimate the developmental mandate of Indian state agencies as equally inclusive of all Indians in overlapping projects of development and citizenship, But as Rousmaniere et al point out, "State schooling in capitalist societies forms an important set of sites where such invitations are differently ordered, and where "freedoms" are made available in ways that claim generality and equality, while producing and reproducing relations of power and difference" (1997: 6). By establishing particular claims to social categories of meaning and agency as implicit boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, schooling practices therefore also work to legitimate particular subjectivities, or notions of one's place in the world, and exclude others.

The regulation of aspirations and terms of mobility has been central to a project of developmental state-formation. While education is generally recognized as essential for both individual and social development worldwide, statements such as that made by the Indian Education Commission of 1964-66 that "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms" expresses the particular significance attached to education as a 'moral ethos' of developmental, postcolonial nation-states (Education Commission 1966). In a context where there is such a strong "...discursive insistence of the idea of schooling as opportunity" (Raissiguier 1995:83), both education and social change are narrowly defined in terms of the aspiration for and ability to achieve social mobility through improved employment opportunities. Education policies of the post-colonial Indian state have reflected broader shifts in national imperatives and dominant development theories, but I would argue that they continue to resonate with the ideas and prescriptions of modernization and human capital formation. This has translated into curricula that attempt to convey what are seen as skills and attitudes to attain the goal of an idealized, urban, middle-class life.

The continued poignancy of modernization ideals means that being marked as belonging in terms of being 'developed' is linked to 'catching up' to some other place and time. However, in the current historical juncture, claims to both resources and meanings by middle-class, urban Indians are bound up with projects of development through liberalization and globalization that cast 'being modern' primarily in terms of individualized market-oriented production and consumption. The images through which modernity is represented and imagined are changing, and definitive representations of urban, middle-class utopia are extremely explicit in

contemporary television and advertising in India. In looking at recent Indian school textbooks I was struck by the parallels between the different media in their idealized "India Shining" representations of social reality; parallels which suggest how state formation entails overlapping private-public claims to a particular vision of what it means to be an Indian in the present, and of the future.

### "A Day in My Life": A lesson in textbook reality as moral regulation

In Indian government primary schools, the textbooks used are primarily produced by state-level educational boards. However, the central Indian government produces school textbooks through its National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and through command of superior resources and control over recommended 'minimum levels of learning' (MLLs), NCERT textbooks tend to serve as a 'model' for textbooks published all over the country (Rampal 2002). The text that I draw on is a part of a series that has been identified as a key site for the Bharatiya Janata Parishad (BJP)—leader of the coalition that was defeated in the May 2004 national elections—to further its' Hindu nationalist ideological agenda. The deconstruction of Hindutva ideology in NCERT textbooks is an important project and has brought much-needed attention to the politics of curricula in India. However, much less attention has been paid to how these textbooks are also implicated in contemporary state projects of development and liberalization, and how they make claims on identities marked by gendered and rural/urban differences.

The ubiquity of a developmental vision of self and society is both constituted by and contributes to the shaping of school curricula and practices. Representations of everyday activities in ways that idealize 'modern', middle-class, urban lifestyles and choices are not unique to NCERT texts, in fact they can be argued to form the underlying ethos of most public and private school texts in use in India (conversation with Pawan K. Gupta 2004). The printed words of the school textbook take on a reified existence of their own through practices inside and outside the classroom which naturalize these particular claims as universal and neutral truths. So while the knowledge that children go to school to learn is often thought of as 'obvious', as a collection of 'ought-to-know' stuff, it in fact represents "A knowledge claim…a symbolic mapping of some aspect of reality as experienced by some observer who makes the assertion" (Sarangapani 2003: 184). As I will illustrate with examples from textbooks, these are not simply

assertions about 'scientific facts', but represent attempts to regulate everyday behaviours and ways of thinking about the world. Through particular practices of ordering and meaning-making, they attempt to construct notions of individuality and mobility as universal, gender and location-neutral categories by erasing differences and inequalities.

In order to examine how schooling practices contribute to normative social categories, I look in detail at a lesson from a 2002 NCERT Environmental Studies textbook for Class III (for children at around age 8), a part of a series titled "Let's Look Around the Learn". 1 The introductory unit to the Environmental Studies textbook for Class III is titled "Knowing Myself", and includes three lessons: "Who is More Important", "A Day in My Life", and "Me and My Friends" (Gupta et al 2002). In the "Hints for the Teacher" section which initiated each unit, the teacher is told that the lesson is intended to teach the child about self and environment, their values and differences, and how to care for the physical self, other living beings and the environment. The teacher is also told that the lessons have been 'presented in three different forms' in order to simulate interest among the children (Gupta et al 2002). "Who is More Important" is a lesson about the equal importance of different body parts to the body as a whole, presented as a competitive dialogue between the eyes, nose, mouth, etc. "A Day in My Life" presents a detailed and 'exemplary' daily routine of a fictional girl, and in "Me and My Friends" a girl presents her human and non-human friends, and recounts ways in which they are similar and different. Seen together, these three lessons attempt to establish normative standards of individuality through representations of exemplary individual behaviour, and boundaries of selfhood in relation to other things and beings. "Knowing Myself" is therefore a part of "...discourses in which we come to see ourselves as certain kinds of people" (Rousmaniere et al 1997: 3).

I am particularly interested in "A Day in My Life" as it uses the fictional voice of a girl in a middle-class nuclear household to present 'model' behaviour for all children. The lesson represents this ideal behaviour as a detailed and carefully ordered everyday routine that is 'exemplary' and should be aspired towards, yet is at the same time told as a 'real' day if the life of Nisha, the narrator of the lesson. We follow Nisha through a numbered list of activities

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 'Environmental Studies' is a relatively new subject in Indian schools; it was introduced by the NCERT in 1986 and has since been incorporated into state curricula as well. The explicit aims of the subject are to 'bridge the gap between science and social science knowledge and learning processes', and creating opportunities for 'bringing the child's surroundings into the learning process' (Gupta et al 2002).

outlining model behaviour (see Appendix, Illustration I): "1. Greet our elders after getting up in the morning. 2. Wash our hands after going to the toilet. 3. Brush our teeth in the morning and before going to bed at night. We clean our tongue also..... 9. Go to school on time. 10. On returning from school, keep our bags and other things at their proper places." (Gupta et al 2002). Each activity is accompanied by an illustration of Nisha and/or her brother engaged in the activity, and at times adding a further note through a speech-bubble on how one 'should' conduct the activity or why it is important (e.g. "No water should go inside the ears while bathing").

While the rhetoric surrounding the subject of environmental studies has included terms such as 'participation' and 'local relevance', such rhetoric can be seen as legitimating everyday forms of regulation in accordance with market-driven objectives of neo-liberal state and subjectformation (Sundar 2001). The subject of 'environmental studies' therefore frames 'realities' of self, society and nature so that inclusion of 'local knowledge' into the curriculum means filling in a blank that is predetermined by the references surrounding it. Here the use of a girl as narrator and the insertion of idealized practices into a 'reality' represented as middle-class through particular references indicates these are not just instructions for hygiene and moral behaviour, but an attempt to represent particular ways of being in the world as universally desirable. For example, the illustration of the children greeting their parents in the morning has them seated in a sofa, drinking tea and the father reading the newspaper; children was their hands in a porcelain sink with water flowing out of a tap; teeth are brushed with a toothbrush; sliced white bread is eaten for breakfast etc. These are clearly commonly encountered practices and objects, yet they are objects acquired from the market and do not necessarily represent the 'norm' for children even in urban India. Looking at this lesson, it appears that there is a conflation of 'model' behaviour and its contexts with 'normative' realities: this is how 'a day in the life of any girl or boy in India' should look, this is an 'itinerary' of an everyday life that ought to be aspired towards.

These idealized behaviours and the contexts in which they are practiced are legitimated as 'facts' about the environment, self and society through references to both scientific and moral 'truths'. The conflation of these referents of truth makes these prescriptions appear universally applicable, thereby establishing a false notion of neutrality which erases social realities of difference and inequality. It erases the fact that for many children in India, physical work and impoverishment are experienced as 'routine'. It erases gendered differences in everyday practices

of children, and the systematic deprivations of girls in many contexts. These erasures have the effect of suggesting that these norms are equally applicable to everyone—if not in the present then as a future aspiration—thereby eliding the fact that 'model' behaviour is not an automatic passport to idealized middle-class life.

The regulatory practices and their representation as universally desirable embodied in the content of lessons are reinforced by a section of oral and written activities which follows each lesson titled "What We Have Learnt". The 'oral work' following "A Day in My Life" asks the following questions.:

- 1. What do you do at home?
- 2. Which activity do you like the most?
- 3. What do you use for cleaning your teeth?
- 4. Why do we wash our hands before taking our food? (17)

It could be argued that these questions reflect increasing sensitivity to 'child-centered pedagogical practices' through creating spaces for children to voice examples from their everyday lives in the context of the classroom. But I suggest that there are several reasons for thinking about classroom activities which claim to incorporate children's experiences into the classroom as practices which in fact attempt to regulate children's everyday lives in accordance to developmental values, while simultaneously eliding the fact that these are regulatory practices marking boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The generally restrictive and extremely hierarchical relationship between teacher and students in the classroom, as well as the need to adhere to answers from the textbooks due to the emphasis on testing and 'correct' answers (Sarangapani 2003), suggest that questions such as "What do you do at home" are not openended opportunities for discussion of different life experiences—for example between boys and girls in the class—but rather perform as cues for children to recite the points covered by the lesson. Questions which necessitate a value-judgement, such as "Which activity do you like the most?", again do not necessarily provide a moment where the child's experience matters, but rather requires the child to imagine him or herself in the idealized routine of the lesson. From this perspective, the logic the question shifts to 'if my life looked like this, my favourite activity would be playing with my friends in the evening', thereby reinscribing a universalized notion of selfhood.

The activities under the 'written work' section further reinforce the moralizing and prescriptive tone and potentially regulatory impact of the lesson. The first question here asks "How many times do you clean your teeth in a day?", and provides spaces for the students to 'tick the correct answer' out of 'once, twice, or thrice'. The lesson has already established that a toothbrush is the correct instrument to use for cleaning teeth; here the suggestion is that there is a normative number of times that one should clean one's teeth: one to three times a day. The rest of the activities in this section make similar claims about 'correct' and 'incorrect' behaviours. There is a 'fill in the blanks' section with incomplete sentences such as "We should......our elders on waking up in the morning", where each sentence includes a response from the lesson which 'should' be done. Another section provides a blank box next to a statement for the student to mark a check or a cross to indicate the true or false nature of the statement. For example, "Eatables should be kept covered" and "Sitting straight while reading is not good." And finally, the last exercise (see Appendix, Illustration II) provides nine images with a blank bubble for the student to 'number the activities in the order that you do them'. Again, the implicit assumption is that these are activities performed by all children, and that there is a normative order to their performance. Even if they do not correspond to the everyday experiences of most children, there is a sense that the universal child should be able to recognize this not only as an exemplary daily routine to be aspired towards, but one that must be performed in a particular sequence in order to be correct.

# Individual aspirations, "social itineraries" and gendered negotiations around work and family in Uttaranchal

I do not wish to suggest that children read these lessons and internalize the disciplining practices; it is likely to be clear to children that these representations are not 'true' in their distance from their own lives. But such claims to establish particular practices as normative both work through and give shape to social categories in ways which have significant social effects. For example, in a context where the social legitimacy of schooling is closely linked to notions of social mobility through development and modernity, there is a sense in which school lessons serve as a 'social itinerary' for young men and women in rural areas negotiating between different markers of identity and aspirations (Pigg 1992). The construction of such 'itineraries' should not be read as 'ideological' practices which determine social outcomes in a distinct

'material' realm; rather, they suggest that 'the immense material weight given to cultural forms by the very routines and rituals of state' (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Through the linking of education to employment, modern schooling is partially about shaping perceptions of self and society in the future—about ways of legitimizing particular ways of being for young people, particular ways of growing into and imagining themselves as grown-up, productive citizens. Within a developmental discourse on education, the skills and attitudes encouraged by lessons such as "A Day in My Life" contribute to shaping social norms of mobility in terms of forms of employment seen as conducive to a steady cash income and a consumeristic lifestyle.

But these lessons can be analyzed as much in terms of their modes of stating as their modes of silencing, and desires to lead an idealized, middle-class life simultaneously mirror social perceptions of rural space and livelihood practices as 'backward' (Pigg 1992). The unquestioning faith in the institution of the school and social legitimacy ascribed to school-based knowledge contributes to the terms on which different forms of knowledge and their associated activities are evaluated, so if farming is not taught or even mentioned in school, it cannot be of much worth. In Uttaranchal, Sanshodhan has found that modern schooling has contributed to a new categorization of work as 'superior' and 'inferior'. As an elderly respondent in one of Sanshodhan's research projects expressed it, "The current education has given us two *jatis* (categories) of work: superior and inferior work. The most superior work for men in rural areas is a desk job, preferably in the government, which earns a cash income. Inferior work is done with one's hands. For instance, today, a young man will be ready to become a teacher at half the salary of the farm hand." (Sanshodhan 2002: 52)

The desire for consumer goods is experienced by both girls and boys, men and women, but as Jeffrey and Jeffrey (1994) have also pointed out in their research in rural north India, urban, cash-based employment is an ideal male exercise in mobility. As a regulatory practice of state-formation, the link between education and employment has been cast to erase yet reproduce differences, including those structured along gendered lines. Sanshodhan's research reveals that in Uttaranchal, the categorization of work as "superior" and "inferior" by educated youth has both overlapping and different implications for young women and men. Women in Uttaranchal have traditionally preferred working outside the home in agriculture and animal-husbandry related work rather than within the confines of the home, reasons cited that the work is more varied; that they enjoy being outdoors; that it provides time to be with friends, and that the work

is more socially valued. As one woman in Sanshodhan's study said "... "Just like those who do a job and get cash, which is visible, a woman who gets a bigger bundle of grass is noticed and therefore respected. Even her mother-in-law will rush to get her a glass of tea as soon she comes home with her load. On the other hand the woman who stays at home may slave away the entire day but her husband may still end up telling her, 'What were you doing sitting at home the whole day?"" (Sanshodhan 2002: 57)

In contrast to the evaluation of field and forest-based work as more enjoyable by older women, young educated women increasingly share men's perception of "superior" work as nonmanual, non-agricultural work. Yet the option of individual migration and cash-based employment is often not an option open to women as it is to men. Instead, literate daughters-inlaw are preferring to do house work within the home. This shifting evaluation of work is seen as increasing conflicts over work between women in joint families, as the legitimacy granted to the more modern, literate women's opinions means that tasks that were previously coveted are not seen as "inferior". The different expectations and higher social status given to literate daughtersin-law in joint families was often seen as causing resentment among other daughters-in-law, as they often also had to carry an increased load of work perceived as "inferior", and among women it was most often such non-literate daughters-in-law who wanted to opt out of the joint family. An older woman noted how both literate and illiterate young women indicated their indisposition towards agricultural work through their style of dress: "They don't have to say anything, they only wear fine clothes now. If they wore *ghagras* or old clothes it would indicate their readiness for work. But they are giving us a message when they wear clean and fine *suits*. We cannot even ask them." (Sanshodhan 2002:59)

Young women confirmed that they were sending a message through practices such as staying in the home and wearing clothes perceived as fancy. They commonly referred to the appeal of belonging to a nuclear family in terms of having individual 'freedom' in relation to work, leisure-time and money. Sanshodhan's research indicates that in Uttaranchal, where most families are still engaged in some agricultural work regardless of whether the husband has some other source of income away from the village, women in nuclear families ended up bearing a heavier work burden than those in joint families. Nuclear families find it difficult to meet the heavy work demands of a mountainous agrarian economy; as a division of labour and a form of social security, the joint family system supports and is supported by an agrarian, largely non-

monetized economy. Nuclear families in Uttaranchal were therefore seen as becoming more and more dependent on the market, so that even if the husband was earning cash, the increase in household expenses was seen as leading to dept and impoverishment. Both men and women commonly expressed regret at their decision to split from the larger family; yet often the conflict surrounding the split meant that moving back was not a feasible possibility.

The desires expressed in women's reasons for favouring nuclear families do reflect real problems that young women experience in their husband's families and as 'traditional' bearers of agricultural work. One young also expressed the ways in which women's claims reflect demands to experience 'leisure-time' in the way that educated men have: ""All these years the men got educated and became useless. Let the girls do the same now. Let the girls take it easy now. Why not? At last it is their turn."" (Sanshodhan 2002:58). The point is therefore not to romanticize joint-families or rural livelihood practices. Rather, it is to bring forward ways in which education contributes to how young women and men come to define their problems and potential solutions in particular ways, or how developmental state-formation works through the representation of individual behaviours and market-oriented aspirations as universally normative, but produces and reproduces inequality along gendered as well as rural/urban lines.

### Conclusion

Schooling practices do not narrowly determine aspirations; rather, they suggest the historical and contested processes through which 'regulatory practices shape conceptions of capacities and possible ways in which life should be lived' at the expense of 'alternative forms of social organization' (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). The idealized routine in "A Day in My Life" therefore represents regulatory practices through which particular notions of what it means to be an individual are established simultaneously as norm and aspiration for both girls and boys. This claim to representing behaviours that constitute what it means to be a developed, modern individual are made as much through the content and form of the lesson as much as through the implicit references to the universal validity and attainability of these identities. As the experiences of recently nuclearized families in Uttaranchal illustrates, this sanitized and universalized invitation contributes to aspirations in the terms of neo-liberal development—as market-tied production and consumption—and does so in ways which reproduce material and epistemological differences and inequalities around gender and place-based identities

"A Day in My Life" can therefore be read as a lesson in how schooling practices constitute forms of state-formation, but it also teaches us about how particular 'social and political forms educate' (Rousmaniere et al 1997). The experiences of young women and men in Uttaranchal indicate that neo-liberal state-formation works through the moral regulation of desires and aspirations as much material resources. The relationality between gendered material claims and negotiations over material resources and epistemological meanings indicates that the production and reproduction of inequality and difference cannot be limited to reading school textbooks as localized representatives of a larger state interjecting to regulate the domestic sphere of rural subjects. Rather, attention to the relationality between overlapping meanings and sites implicated in the production and reception of school textbooks in Uttaranchal suggest that what may appear as 'the local state' is in fact mutually constitutive of historical and social claims and practices that are not restricted to a particular geographical location or state institution. A narrow reading of "the local state" may elide the ways in which neo-liberal state formation recasts terms of inclusion and exclusion. In this context, "The politics of inclusion and exclusion is not a binary in which some are excluded and others are included; rather, it is a way that the included represent themselves and appropriate the subjectivities of the excluded as well" (Zacharias 2001: 34).

The appropriation of subjectivities of youth excluded from the idealized urban middleclass life is producing new gendered categories of work and mobility, but one cannot help but
note that it does so in ways which seems to place the burden of negotiation between 'tradition'
and 'modernity' on women. Since the viability of agriculture in Uttaranchal is currently highly
dependent on the work of women, there is the possibility that young women's claims to homebased work will be identified as a determining cause of loss of resources and skills essential for
rural livelihoods. And while young women's expressed desires to work in the home indicates
attempts by rural women to represent themselves as 'domestic' in terms of idealized, middleclass urban housewives, it does also suggests that perhaps notions of male mobility in terms of
non-agricultural work and cash income are linked to a male visions of wife as housewife at home.
While these potential implications require substantiation through further research in Uttaranchal,
they are suggestive of the complex ways in which neo-liberal state formation constitutes a social
category of "development" in terms of liberal ideals of individuality and freedom, but is also

constituted by gendered negotiations over both material resources and social meanings in ways which may serve to reproduce socio-economic marginality and gender inequalities.

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LESSON 2

## A DAY IN MY LIFE

ly name is Nisha. I am eight years old. I study in Class III. ly mother wakes me up at six o'clock in the morning. I wake p my younger brother, Sanjay. Sanjay is five years old. He tudies in Class I.

both, my brother and I do the following everyday:

 Greet our elders after getting up in the morning.



Wash our hands after going to the toilet.



Brush our teeth in the morning and before going to bed at night. We clean our tongue also.



We can fall sick if teeth are not cleaned properly.



 Do exercises to keep our body healthy.



No water should go inside the ears while bathing.



- Take our bath. While bathing we clean our eyes, nose and nails properly.
- After taking bath, we dry our body with a clean towel.
- Comb our hair.



Take breakfast.

We should take breakfast at a fixed time daily. It keeps our body fit.





9. Go to school on time.

 On returning from school, keep our bags and other things at their proper places.

Wash our hands before taking food.

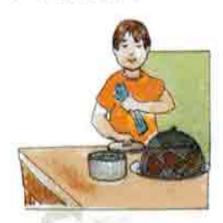
We should wash our hands properly and then wipe them with a clean cloth.

12. Play with our friends in the evening.

- Study for sometime. We sit straight while reading.
- 14. Take dinner on time.
- 15. Go to sleep on time.

We also do many other things like:

Keep all the eatables covered.



Throw garbage in the bin with a lid.





PPENDIX Illustration II

 Number the activities in the following pictures in the order you do them:

