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Aspiring india: The Politics of Mothering, Education Reforms, and English

Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnography of aspirational mobilities emergent under contexts of profound material and social change. To explore the unprecedented expansion of educational aspirations in post market reform India, specifically surging parental desires for English-medium schooling, I conducted fieldwork at a low-fee private English-medium school and a neighboring state-funded Malayalam-medium school in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Further, to record state responses to non-elite educational aspirations, my fieldwork was distributed along diverse agencies that supported and regulated English learning in Kerala and across the country.

This dissertation makes two key arguments. Firstly, transitions from a previously austere socialist economy to a consumption saturated society has radically altered gendered everyday lives and unsettled entrenched social hierarchies. Negotiating these changes, non-elite mothers are reimagining possible futures for their children. Since social recognition and economic security was and continues to be entangled with higher education and English proficiencies, this has intensified desires for English-medium schooling from the earliest grades.

Secondly, intensifying non-elite desires for English learning reveals how educational systems in India are geared towards meeting the aspirations of privileged citizens. Analyzing the provision of English language learning in state-funded and private school systems, I argue that emergent emphases on conversational skills defines “knowing” English as predicated on the ability to socialize in English. While this shift benefits internationally mobile elite Indians, it marginalizes non-elite learning communities whose pedagogic resources are skewed towards literacy rather than orality skills. To conclude, aspirational mobilities in contemporary India are diverse and even oppositional, and dependent on aspirational locations as well as the resources that groups are able to mobilize.

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Leya Mathew

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ABSTRACT

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Leya Mathew

Kathleen D. Hall

This dissertation is an ethnography of aspirational mobilities emergent under contexts of profound material and social change. To explore the unprecedented expansion of educational aspirations in post market reform India, specifically surging parental desires for English-medium schooling, I conducted fieldwork at a low-fee private English-medium school and a neighboring state-funded Malayalam-medium school in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Further, to record state responses to non-elite educational aspirations, my fieldwork was distributed along diverse agencies that supported and regulated English learning in Kerala and across the country.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During September 2014, the Kerala state government ordered the closure of a low-fee English-medium primary school on charges that the head-teacher had locked up a kindergarten student in a doghouse on school premises. The state was preparing to transfer enrolled students to neighboring state-funded schools when it ran headlong into a legitimacy crisis; school parents protested against the state rather than against the school. Parents insisted that if students had to be transferred, they be transferred to English-medium schools and not state-funded (Malayalam-medium) schools. In what quickly became known as the “doghouse controversy”, parents accused the state of “playing with the futures of their children [*kuttikalude bhavi vachu panthadukaya*].” Children’s good futures are sacrosanct, and parental responses reveal the intensity of aspirational terrains that underpin English-medium schooling in post market reform Kerala.

In a TV news panel about the event, Fr. Philip of Childline Services¹ and Dr. Nirmala, a child psychologist, joined the father of the child who had been locked up in the doghouse, Jomon. An interview with the mother was shown in brief clips during the program, but it was the father who was invited to the TV studio to participate in the discussion. On air, Dr. Nirmala, Fr. Philip, and the news anchor spoke in formal, “educated” Malayalam, for instance using the term “communicate” [*ashaya vinimayam*] instead of the more colloquial “talk” [*samsarichu*]. Jomon was the only person who spoke in “uneducated” colloquial Malayalam, apparent through his word choice and

¹ An outreach emergency phone service for children in need of care and protection

“accent”. However, as Agha (2007) points out, accents are “only perceivable as relational phenomena” but are only described as if they are non-relational, absolute facts about sound patterns; accents implicitly “presuppose a baseline relative to which some sound patterns - but not others – are focally typified as deviant” (p. 192). But it was not just Jomon’s accent that became non-normative as he conversed with the more “educated” others on the panel; his parenting practices and more importantly, his aspirations for his son also became non-normative and unintelligible. Dr. Nirmala expressed astonishment and sorrow at the event and then went on to admonish Jomon for sending his child to such a “cruel” educational space. Jomon clarified that the school maintained a “good educational standard [*nalla nilavaram*]”, and when he bolstered his claims by remarking that his older child stood first in her class in terms of test scores, Dr. Nirmala advised:

Education is not just about marks and ranks; education has to nurture good character [*nalla swabhavamulla vyaktitvam*]. ... Your child may get good marks, but he will not learn how to love. As long as a child does not know how to love, that child cannot become a good person [*nalla vyakti*], I am certain schools like this will not be able to present him [*pradanam*] to society as a good person.

Dr. Nirmala advises Jomon on how to bring up his child as a “loving person”, a “good person”, as someone with a “good character”. But Jomon continued to reiterate his desire to send his son to an English-medium school that could help his child achieve desirable academic competencies. According to the norms being assembled, Jomon became the problematic parent for desiring academic proficiency rather than humanistic education and he is to blame, at least in part, for the abuse [*pidhanam*] his child has suffered. Like Dr. Nirmala, the Kerala state patronizes a (mother-tongue medium) humanist education, focused on producing “goodness” rather than academic proficiency, especially for

children from the most marginalized sections since only the poorest are now remnant at state-funded Malayalam-medium schools (Ajaykumar et al., 2011; Padmanabhan & Komath, 2012). Jomon clearly did not want his child to experience that level of social isolation. However, within the norms assumed by his educated co-panelists, Jomon's desires became unintelligible, his parenting as deficient and compromised as his accent.

The National Position Paper on Teaching of English (NCERT, 2006) notes a similar nation-wide, non-elite, parental obsession with English schooling for the post market reform period. The position paper records both the unprecedented expansion of low-fee private English-medium schools and the primary level introduction of English in state-funded schools in 26 out of the 35 states or union territories of India (p. 1). But like the panelists, the national position paper too positions non-elite parents' educational aspirations as a "problem" rather than as resilient resources rooted in particular histories of inequality and emergent in specific contexts of transition. Educational researchers concur with the national position paper that an unparalleled intensification of educational aspirations has emerged in the post market reform period, but fail to account for the contexts that situate these surging aspirational horizons (De et al., 2002; Nambissan, 2011; Srivastava, 2007).

In contrast, this dissertation pays close attention to the social worlds inhabited by parents, especially marginalized mothers, to conceptualize aspiring as a situated cultural practice embedded in the transitions of economic liberalization. I argue that for those who participate in it, aspiring is a "practice of ethics" that makes the deprivations of the past and the precarity of the present profoundly meaningful. And yet this "ethics of

possibility” (Appadurai, 2013) evokes shock, anger, and even disgust. Therefore, my work with non-elite mothers prompted me to examine the construction of norms that made them and their aspirations unintelligible and subject to multiple contours of domination and violence. The transformation of a practice of ethics into a practice of depravity requires work, which however, never invokes comment or critique. It is always the “other” that is accented and defective. This dissertation first locates and recounts shifting non-elite mothering practices and aspirational horizons emergent in contexts of liberalization, and then examines social, moral, and pedagogic norms that delegitimize non-elite aspiring.

In the sections that follow, I first clarify economic liberalization and review key transitions scholars have noted for liberalizing India. Extending the review to focus more specifically on expanding aspirational horizons, I draw on research from post-socialist transitions in other parts of the world to suggest that liberalization can be conceptualized as a mass temporal migration into new material and social worlds. Nevertheless, aspirational locations are multiple and as indicated earlier, not all aspirations become accepted as legitimate or legible. Therefore, the next theoretical section frames the politics of aspiration, focusing in particular on dominant groups’ methods of self-cultivation that simultaneously define others as compromised and deficient. Then, I explore aspirational and political histories specific to Kerala, which offer some correctives to the more general theoretical review. Following, I briefly review literature about marginalized mothers and about teaching other people’s children to scaffold my analysis of mothering and teaching practices. A last theoretical section surveys histories,

practices, and privileges associated with “educated” English in India to build a framework for the extensive analyses of language-in-education policy and practice I undertake in the dissertation, necessitated by mothers’ yearnings for and experiences with English education. A methods section follows, after which I provide an overview of the dissertation chapters.

Liberalization in India

The opening up of India’s state-controlled market system to private enterprise and foreign capital in the early 1990s and the myriad structural and social transformations that accompanied the ascendancy of market logic is locally glossed as liberalization and/or globalization. Though India’s economic liberalization is now seen as an epochal episode that heralded the unprecedented growth of the economy and the nation, at the time of its announcement it was seen more as a form of crisis management (Gupta, 2012, p. 30).

When the new government took over in June 1991, the nation was close to defaulting on sovereign debt and it was to manage this impending economic crisis that the then finance minister, and later prime minister, Manmohan Singh announced key policy changes to reformulate the relationship between the economy and the state (Ghosh, 2006). Economic policy changes were both outward and inward facing—derestriction of domestic production, decontrol of foreign trade, reduction of tariffs, and reform of company law to enable majority shareholding by foreign corporations in Indian subsidiaries and new ventures, was accompanied by the entry of private enterprise into core sectors like education, healthcare, telecommunications, transport, energy supply, and a significant reduction in the number of people recruited for the all India civil services (Gupta &

Sivaramakrishnan, 2011, p. 2). Abolishing the license-quota-permit raj of the Nehruvian developmental state and subsequently altering the precarious balance between industrialist capitalists, rich farmers, and the bureaucracy, liberalization opened up the market decisively in favor of industrialist capitalists (Gupta, 2012). Though liberalization was introduced by the Congress government, successor governments have sustained the logic, “demonstrating an underlying, though unstated, consensus about the direction of macroeconomic politics” (Kaviraj, 2011, p. 43).

However, liberalization is not just a consensus about macroeconomic policies or a radical transformation of the state; not only have sectors like infrastructure, finance, health, and education altered visibly, but consumption patterns and values and moralities that organize everyday life have also shifted considerably (Lukose, 2009; Nakassis & Searle, 2013). With national development agendas shifting away from production, rationing, and socialist re-distribution towards notions of a consumerist good life, social membership is increasingly negotiated through consumption rites, practices, and moralities (Deshpande, 2003; Dickey, 2012; Mazzarella, 2005). For marginalized citizens, the radical changes engendered by economic liberalization fuels hopes and aspirations for material progress and dignity (Cross, 2009). As for parents, recalibrated possibilities are often discursively invested in educational projects, which government documents recognize as “demand-side interventions” boosting primary schooling in post-1990s India (Muralidharan, 2013, p. 24). If primary schooling has expanded to the point that over 96% of children in rural India aged 6-14 are now enrolled in school (Pratham, 2014), a position paper on higher education notes that the contemporary moment is “one

of the most dramatic instances of the democratization of access to higher education in human history as millions of families send children to college for the first time” (ACR, 2015, p. 25). The magnitude of non-elite educational aspirations hints at the urgency of anticipated mobility at the “bottom of the pyramid” (Cross & Street, 2009).

Post-socialist consumer societies and aspiration

In contexts of profound displacement, Berdahl (2005) argues that “people can lose access to the criteria that defines life” (p. 244) and be forced to re-conceptualize values, terms of recognition, and possible futures. Writing about the re-unification of Germany, she portrays East Germans or Osis confronting post-socialism as having “emigrated without leaving [home]” (p. 202). In particular, temporal migration from a previously austere socialist society to a consumption-saturated society, Rofel (2007) argues, engenders a “desiring subject” and desiring becomes the “key cultural practice” through which citizens “reconfigure their relationship to a post-socialist world” (p. 3). She argues that “yearnings, passions, or hopes need not be specified” as long as citizens can affirm their “capability of embodying the figure of a desiring subject” (p. 5).

If the notion of a desiring subject draws attention to new performances of social belonging in post-socialist contexts, the figure of a consuming subject underscores social belonging as a contested and contingent project (Dean, 2013; Dickey, 2012; 2013; Liechty, 2003; Lukose, 2009). Thus, though desiring and consuming may be key cultural practices through which citizens reconfigure their relationship to a post-socialist world, these are not devoid of contestations or politics; rather desiring and consuming become

the key site of politics in post-socialist contexts. For instance, the abundant availability and price depreciation of previously scarce luxury goods has engendered consumption practices that are simultaneously aspirational performances (Desai, 2010; Jha, 2014). Likewise, Kapur et al. (2010) point out how consumption practices have, by default, turned performances of social inequality “upside down” (p. 41).

To clarify, rather than merely a possession (or lack) of goods and services, consuming is a social practice and cultural performance through which notions of the self and one’s place in society are negotiated (Appadurai, 1986; Liechty, 2003; Mazzarella, 2005). Similarly, Nakassis and Searle (2013) theorize consumption as “social value projects”, wherein practices associated with consumption entail reflexive attempts to construe value both for the self and on things, which is “necessarily contingent and subject to misfires and failures” (p. 2). Further, Lukose (2009) clarifies that straightforward notions of inclusion and exclusion in consumption practices are far too simplistic and those on the margins of capitalist articulations are yet “fully formed by its structures of aspiration and opportunity” (p. 3).

However, to explain whose desires and aspirations become legitimate, and how, Appadurai (2013) proposes “capacity to aspire” as a framework to understand the imaginative and performative work entailed in socially acceptable future making projects. He argues that to believe in a better future requires a capacity to re-imagine terms of recognition, which however, has to be expressed in forms of “metaphor, rhetoric, organization, and public performance” that are legitimate in local cultural worlds. While this paradox—of imagining new worlds within unaltered structures of power—points to

the limits of aspiring, it also explains how the ascendance of consumption regimes precipitates the imagining of new worlds since it profoundly unsettles the metaphors, rhetoric, and performances that are legitimate in local cultural worlds.

To briefly consider how education is positioned within new cultural worlds, Osella & Osella (2000) point out that social distinctions exist between the consumption of “transient forms such as fashion, oriented towards the person and the body” and more “long-term and fixed forms such as land and housing” oriented towards “values of permanency and the household group” (p. 117). The consumption of education has a “privileged place” since it is oriented towards both “changing the very habitus of the schooled” as well as towards more tangible and permanent acquisitions like certificates and secure employment (Osella & Osella, 2000, p. 141). Or to put it bluntly, as an institution that embodies the future in the present (Cole & Durham, 2008), education is a crucial site of desire, hope, and politics in new cultural worlds that are marked by expanding aspirational horizons. To summarize, I suggest that conceptualizing liberalization as a mass temporal migration into new material and social worlds opens up the possibility of carefully attending to the aspiring subjects of post-market reform India. Further, the emergent explosion of educational aspirations, from primary schooling to higher education, draws attention to the crucial place education holds in the new aspirational landscapes engendered by liberalization.

Aspirational locations and the politics of aspiring

Appadurai (2013) reminds that the “rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire” (p. 188); they are better equipped to deploy rhetoric, metaphor, and public performance to skew debates about wealth in their favor (pp. 184-189). For instance, Chua (2014) details how elite Keralites’ anxieties about rising consumerism abetting suicide amongst children does not lead to desires for “brute austerity” (p. 176); rather, efforts to “bolster children’s anti-suicidal immunities” converge with efforts to endow children with cultural capital—confidence, resilience, adjustment, and even spoken English skills—that will gain them a competitive edge (p. 177). Chua (2014) concludes that saving children from suicide has become enmeshed with “the cultural production and elaboration of middle-classness” (p. 186). Thus, the production of norms works to legitimize dominant groups’ “risk reduction” (Appadurai 2013) through “self cultivation” (Davidson 2008; Lareau 2003; Sancho 2012).

It is important to remember that “middle-class” is a term that the ruling class in India prefers to call itself (Baviskar & Ray, 2011, p. 7). Describing how the first Prime Minister of India, the Harrow educated son of a wealthy Brahmin lawyer who grew up in one of the most elegant mansions in Allahabad, yet claimed middle-classness without disingenuity, Baviskar & Ray (2011) clarify that performing middle-classness is a crucial method for “concealing inequality” (p. 7). For instance, Mannathukkaren (2016) describes middle class self-narratives of merit and victimhood, in the wake of decreasing over-representation, that skew debates about education in their favor. Calling such narratives “an amazing act of sorcery in which privileged/ dominant/ oppressor groups

transform into victims”, he points out that institutional tropes like “merit” become “smokescreens in hiding privilege—social, economic, and cultural capital—accumulated over centuries” (para 5). Concepts like “merit” not only deny and conceal privilege but also accrue everyday violence on those without “merit” to the point of corporeal death (Insight, 2011). The aspirations and performances of privileged groups require that the poor subscribe to norms that “diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality, and deepen lack of access to material goods and services” (Appadurai 2013, p. 186).

Yet, contours of violence are multiple and Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2004) clarifications of the forms of violence—structural, symbolic, and everyday, are useful. Structural violence, defined as chronic, entrenched patterns of inequality perpetrated by social and political structures (also see Gupta, 2012) interfaces with symbolic violence, which conceals forms of domination and inequality, and produces everyday practices and expressions of violence. The normalization of dominant group resources and agendas as collective goals, and the associated definition of “others” as “backward” who need to be reformed into normative frames, produces self-cultivation as a form of violent domination (Gillies, 2007; Sreenivas, 2011). After all, as Baviskar and Ray (2011) remind, the power of the ruling class resides in their ability to conjure up claims of universality that summon legitimacy for projects that favor elites. Transmuting elite interests into universal national ideologies thus translates “relations of domination” into the “language of legitimation” (Deshpande, 2003, p. 139). Aspirational locations are therefore multiple and often conflictual, and since the ascendance of non-elite aspiring

and precipitous future making unsettles entrenched forms of privilege, it is equally important to consider the politics of aspiration.

Histories of future making in Kerala

The southern Indian state of Kerala has rich histories of re-imagined futures and re-configured terms of recognition: social movements during the colonial renaissance period [*navodhana kalam*], and later, the Communist Party during the post-independence period have aspired for and worked towards more desirable futures. Similar to some of the themes discussed earlier, Kerala's trajectory extends Appadurai's arguments by drawing more explicit attention to the material basis of future making. For both community organizations and the Communist Party, control over resources like land and education was crucial. In the field of education, community organizations like the Nair Service Society, various churches, and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam established educational institutions to ensure their community's unequivocal access to desirable forms of schooling (Tharakan, 1984). Post-independence, the first Education Reforms undertaken by the Communist Party in the 1950s established state control over the community-dominated school market to protect those discriminated against by the market (Leiten, 1977). In contrast, despite Ayyankali's revolutionary re-imagining of caste-sanctioned norms in early 1900s, the severity of Dalit dispossession continues to haunt and erode Dalit future making. As Dalit scholars point out repeatedly, the ability to skew debates about wealth is as closely tied to control over wealth as it is to the capacity to imagine new futures and to the ability to deploy metaphor and public performance.

Secondly, histories of future making in Kerala reveal how the “radical” reimagining of collective futures can yet be a method for upper-caste risk reduction and self cultivation. Scholars point out that dominant castes profited from both the land and education reforms not only in terms of material resources but also in terms of reserving for themselves the exclusive right to *define* what constituted ethical future-making (Devika, 2010; Kapikkad, 2011; Satyanarayana & Tharu, 2011; Steur, 2011). Most incisively, Kapikkad (2013) analyzes how dominant caste social movements and the Communist Party defined anti-caste struggles in ways that disallowed anti-caste thought and mobilization *by* “lower” castes. Radical reforms thus not only ensured that the weakest sections of society received “minimum entitlements” while dominant castes were distributed “productive resources” but also undermined marginalized groups’ moral imperative to imagine just futures (Kapikkad, 2011). Accruing what Padavala (2014) calls “radicalism capital”, dominant caste Leftists reserved for themselves the exclusive right to define ethical future making. Contested histories from Kerala thus draw attention to the intractable politics and complex configurations of future making.

Paradoxically enough, liberalization in Kerala and the erosion of the Left has opened up spaces for oppositional politics and a renewed commitment to the production of more just and desirable futures (Devika, 2007b). However, given the histories of future making peculiar to Kerala—where mobilizations for social justice have been communal struggles for control over productive resources—contemporary individualized struggles for market-based resource accumulation or consumption of market-delivered goods and services are considered anti-political and non-productive (Devika, 2008; Parameswaran,

1996). However, Waghmore (2013) points out that fears of neoliberal “re-feudalisation” of the market tend to elide enduring and extant caste feudalizations. On the other hand, new economies have opened up spaces for the “de-feudalising of local practices” that perpetrate Dalit exclusion (pp. 205-206). Likewise, Padavala (2014) contends that Dalits find capitalism and the Indian state, in some conditions, to be useful in their struggles against the intractability of caste society in India (p. 3). Histories of future making in Kerala thus caution me to pay attention to the material basis of future making, and to the possibilities of market-reform for Dalit resource accrual, without losing sight of the productivity of the affective.

Mothering on the margins and teaching other people’s children

Forced to inhabit institutions and social worlds that see them as deficient and/or dangerous, positioned in contexts of inequality and vulnerability, mothering on the margins is simultaneously oppositional and conformist, characterized by struggles to help children fit in as well as to produce more just social worlds for children to inhabit (Gillies, 2007). Likewise, Collins (1990) describes black mothering as a “fundamentally contradictory institution” (p. 195), where “even though her children are her hope, the conditions under which she must mother are intolerable” (p. 197). She writes that black mothers have to teach their children to live their life in one way and at the same time, provide all the tools needed to live it quite differently; in doing so, they become strong disciplinarians and overly protective but raise daughters who are self-reliant and assertive (pp. 184-185). She further cautions that black mothers’ “ability to cope with intersecting

oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation should not be confused with transcending the injustices characterizing these oppositions” (p. 195).

Taking cognizance of the contexts of material deprivation and cultural persecution that locate marginalized mothers, Delpit (1988) argues that educating “other people’s children” entails the explicit and critical teaching of “codes of power”—linguistic and cultural rules necessary for participation in dominant socio-economic orders—in ways that affirm and value the resources students bring with them. While not teaching legitimate linguistic, academic, and social skills can be economically impoverishing, normalizing the cultural practices of dominant groups as universal can be epistemically draining. The unmitigated urgency of dispossessed groups to acquire access to and control over material and symbolic resource prompts Delpit (1988) to orient her pedagogic work towards acknowledging and subverting dominant codes of power.

In contrast, proponents of critical pedagogy tend to oppose dominant codes of power and view the learning of skills required for participation in dominant socio-economic orders as irrelevant or even detrimental. If the goal of liberation pedagogy is to overthrow dominant oppressive norms, isn’t it counter-productive to teach learners to “legitimately” participate in these norms? For instance, Bartlett (2010) explains how Freirean adult literacy programs in Brazil attempted to conscientize and empower learners to become active citizens who advocated for their rights. However, learners themselves used literacy classrooms to gain cultural resources and social networks that might help them access employment. Similarly, Cody (2013) details how Freirean adult literacy programs in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu encouraged a questioning of

the power relations that were reproduced through existing social institutions. However, in the absence of social networks or economic resources, local questionings of dominant caste relations did not effect desired changes. While Freirean pedagogy originated in the context of adult literacy programs, the uncritical extension of conscientization to elementary schooling, and resistance to the teaching of academic and cultural skills necessary for schooling success, deprives learners from already deprived communities. Similar well-intentioned deprivation of codes of power by “progressive” pedagogies, Delpit (1988) writes, were viewed by black parents and teachers as ensuring that privileged children got sole access to existing socio-economic orders (p. 29).

Meanwhile, shifting discourses about education precipitated by the global rise of capitalism also disallows the explicit teaching and learning of codes of power. Anagnost (2008) explains that heightened anxieties about global competitiveness, and the accompanying regimentalization and managerialization of childhood, is producing narratives that consider childhood to be in “danger of becoming a time of ceaseless labor and struggle in a way that fails to respect children’s inherent nature” (p. 64). She describes how elites’ crisis narratives about childhood attempt to reclaim children’s “inherent nature”, but in ways that render them appropriately competitive for the global market. Likewise, writing about contemporary Kerala, Chua (2014) draws attention to how narratives about saving children and childhoods converge with elite projects of self cultivation, which also re-assert social hierarchies by pathologizing the other. Dr. Nirmala’s concerns for a “humane” education in the opening vignette articulate similar concerns of goodness inherent to a child that are being sacrificed in contexts of

heightened competition. While she elides concomitant processes of middle-class self-cultivation, the doctor produces the father's aspirations as the pathology that needs correction and reform. Similarly, writing in the context of the US, Davidson (2008) describes how high schoolers performed "mocking imitations of people who were crassly desperate about grades" (p. 2824) much like Dr. Nirmla did with Jomon. Thus, legitimate participants in new capitalist economies disparage those without legitimate skills in ways that also hinder their acquisition of the skills required for profitable participation.

"Educated" Indian English and English-medium schooling

Since the era of British colonialism English has been a central vehicle for achieving economic security and social recognition, but colonial and later national educational policies reserved English-medium schooling and subsequent higher education for privileged groups (Kumar, 1996; Ramanathan, 2005). To clarify, "doing" English literacy was not just about learning to read and write English but also about performing modernity, nationalism, and development. Bartlett (2007) explains that "performing" or "doing" literacy is about "developing command of literacy practices," which are "situationally defined and arbitrarily sanctioned" as "legitimate" (p. 54). Confronting colonial modernity, in part through English education, privileged Indians crafted legitimate ways of embodying the contradictions of colonization. While English education was indispensable for employment in the colonial bureaucracy it also became central in the struggle for national independence, and its contradictions became the languages of modernity and nationalism in the region (Srivastava, 1996a). In fact, Kaviraj

(1990) remarks that only those who were unable to speak any Indian language became the “real repositories of Indian nationalism” (p. 69). Meanwhile, the language that became “standard” English in India was synonymous with “educated” Indian English (Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998; Sedlatschek, 2009). Expanding Levinson, Foley, and Holland’s (1990) theorizations of the cultural production of educated persons, Bartlett and Holland (2002) clarify that the educated person “reflects a culturally specific definition” of desirable forms of knowledge and skill that “may or may not coincide with formal schooling” (p. 14). In India, a particular language as well as its users could become “educated.”

After independence, India pursued industrialization and scientific development and English became the primary language in the expanding realms of academic work, science and technology, and intellectual and management activities. The initiation of federal state funded English-medium schooling systems like Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas for diverse and even contesting groups of elites consolidated and expanded the privileges of English education in post-independence India (Nambissan & Batra, 1989; Rajan, 1992). Ramanathan (2005) explains that English-medium students could “*assume* that the system will work for them” not just because all prestigious disciplines at the post-secondary level were taught in English but also since the “thought structures” of institutions were aligned with their “cultural models” (p. 112). Meanwhile, critiquing the “double standards” of education policy that purportedly favored mother tongue education, Naik (1997) writes that “in the philosophy of our elite,” mother tongue education is the “best education for other people’s children” (p. 86). Elaborating, Faust

and Nagar (2001) describe the pervasive shaming of non-English-medium students or “vernacs” in the North Indian city of Lucknow. Bartlett and Holland (2002) contend that if becoming educated is the equivalent of becoming a “decent and honorable person,” people of lower educational status are considered “intellectually and even morally inferior” (pp. 14-15). Srivastava points out that this “backwardness of mind” or “anti-modernity” (1996b, pp. 139-140) set the stage for “the modern nation state’s assault on the primitivisms within it” (1996a, p. 404). Likewise, in the opening vignette, the educated Malayalam Fr. Philip and Dr. Nirmala spoke and the expert terminologies they deployed, of law and psychology, translated into moral value to the extent that they could advise the parent, authoritatively, on parenting practices.

As implied by the slippages between educated English and educated Malayalam, in Kerala, the privileges accorded by English have been somewhat concealed due to the region’s robust linguistic nationalism and histories of vernacular schooling. In southern Kerala—in what was then the princely state of Travancore—government jobs became linked to educational certification during the colonial period prompting dominant castes and communities to establish extensive schooling networks (Tharakan, 1984). Since the official language of the princely state was the vernacular and not English, unlike regions that were directly administered by the colonial government, Malayalam schooling dominated. Nevertheless, English schooling was widespread in early 1900s and a Travancore State Committee (1933) notes that the percentage of boys availing English-medium secondary schooling in the state was 2.8 when comparable figures in England were 1.2 (p. 174). After independence in 1947, princely states were integrated into the

newly formed independent nation and later reorganized along linguistic lines, and the states of Travancore and Cochin and parts of Madras Presidency merged to form the new state of Kerala in 1956. Drawn firmly into federal India, where national elites were consolidating English as the language of administration, law, technology, science, and higher education (Faust & Nagar, 2001; Kumar, 1996), the centrality of English in anticipating good futures was firmly established in Kerala. The dominance of English in higher education and desirable employment drove the establishment of limited English-medium sections in state-funded high schools to aid the linguistic transitions of college-bound students. Almost all post-10th education was in English; Sivanandan (1976), Franke (1992), and UN (1975) detail the caste compositions and occupational privileges of post-10th educated Keralites. Thus, though future-orientations became closely tied to English education the historic domination of Malayalam schooling and state-formation on the basis of linguistic identity downplayed the privileges of English education.

Furthermore, since Kerala lagged behind in industrial growth, many communities and castes including Muslims, Syrian and Latin Christians, and Hindu Nairs and Ezhavas sought emigration prospects, which discursively re-inscribed the privileges afforded by English. As the opportunity structures of emigrant capital accumulation are skewed in favor of English educated professionals, desires for English education are widespread (Kurien, 2002; Osella & Osella, 2000). Privileged, educated communities like Nairs and Syrians typically engage in professional work while others seek semi-skilled or unskilled work including construction labor (Zachariah, Mathew, & Rajan 2003). Although English schooling was widely desired, the state persisted with “protectionist regulations,” wherein

the only positions made available were either mother-tongue medium education *or* English-medium schooling (Pennycook, 2002). While language policy is often a symbolic statement that tolerates inconsistencies in practice (Canagarajah, 2005), protectionist policies render non-elite aspirations oppositional and compromised. Writing in the context of migration in Kerala, Kodoth and Varghese (2012) describe how state protectionism produces emigrant women domestic workers as “victims” who need saving while the women themselves confront the dilemma of “pursuing a livelihood in defiance of protectionism” (p. 57). They conclude that state and public discourse “are completely at odds” with non-elite aspirations (p. 64). Though education policy performs a similar protectionism, emergent non-elite defiance gestures to shifting aspirational resources.

Schooling structures in Kerala and research questions

The concept of school catchment area does not exist in Indian states; rather, education policies are focused on providing state-funded regional medium education in linguistically organized states (Naik, 1997). School education was designed to be the domain of individual states in the federal union to support this aspiration. However, as described earlier, the state undermined its own policy by disproportionately investing in federal state funded English-medium school systems affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) for diverse elite groups. Nevertheless, unlike many other Indian states, Kerala has an elaborate system of Kerala state funded schools. In these schools, Malayalam is the mandated medium of instruction in primary grades but English-medium schooling is widespread in post-primary grades. Further, responding to growing demands for English education, the Kerala state introduced English as a subject

in primary grades from 2008. Thus, state-funded Malayalam medium primary schools teach English as a subject from Grade 1 while English-medium schools teach subjects like Science, Math, and Social Science in English. To clarify, pedagogic materials at non-elite English-medium schools are in English but teaching is predominantly bilingual.

Post-1990s saw many changes in the schooling sector in Kerala, the most devastating of which has been a sharp rise in the number of state-funded schools classified as “uneconomic”: schools with classes of less than 15 students and therefore financially unviable for the state. A significant majority of uneconomic schools are in the lower primary sector where Malayalam is the mandated medium of instruction (GoK, 2013). Meanwhile, the surge in demand for English-medium primary schooling coincided with the privatization of higher education and the recent abundance of engineering, para-medical, management, information technology, and allied professional courses, which are available only in English. At the same time, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) was entrusted with the task of administering entrance exams to desirable professional courses and post-1990 the number of CBSE-affiliated schools across India grew by 460%. CBSE schools are not only English-medium but also explicitly oriented towards post-secondary professional education: a double promise on secure futures. In 2014, Kerala state recorded the fourth highest number of CBSE schools in the country. In this context, this dissertation explores the social and cultural worlds of non-elite parents to understand the unprecedented expansion and intensification of non-elite aspirations for English-medium schooling, as well as the implications and politics of these aspirational performances.

The specific **research questions** guiding the project are:

1. How do mothers attached to a low-fee English-medium school narrate their experiences of the past and the present to imagine and produce desirable futures?
2. How do mothers at an uneconomic Malayalam-medium school—denied the consumption of future-making practices like English-medium schooling—orient towards desirable futures?
3. How do key actors in state and market agencies a) respond to non-elite re-imagining of existing social hierarchies? b) fashion the provision of English pedagogy in response to non-elite desires for English learning?

Methods and sites: Since the dissertation attends to the social and affective worlds of uneconomic schooling, the fieldwork was situated in Pathanamthitta district, which has the unfortunate distinction of being the district with the highest percentage of uneconomic state-funded primary schools in Kerala. In a village about ten kilometers from the town of Thiruvalla, I was allowed to conduct research at an uneconomic state-funded (Malayalam-medium) primary school as well as a neighboring low-fee charging English-medium school to which many families had migrated in the present generation. I will call this village Edanadu. When I began fieldwork in 2013, the student distribution in Edanadu according to state-complied statistics was as follows:

Table 1.1 State-compiled statistics of student distribution in Edanadu for 2013-14

	State-funded Grades 1 through 4		Private English-medium Lower K through 4		Total
	Uneconomic	Economic	Low-fee	Medium-fee	
	Schools	11	2	2	
Students	201	359	621	123	1304
Student %	15.41%	27.53%	47.62%	9.43%	

The largest percentage of students were enrolled in two low-fee private English-medium schools, both of which were K-12 and affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Low-fee schools charged tuition fees of around Rs. 8,000 annually in the primary section, while the medium-fee school charged around Rs. 15,000. Though Edanadu did not have any high-fee private schools, a few students from Edanadu attended them in nearby towns.

I. School Surveys To understand the distribution of educational provision in the village, I surveyed all sixteen schools located in the village, as well as ten state-funded and private high schools located nearby that served children from Edanadu. In doing so, I found that of the thirteen state-funded primary schools, the two listed as economic in 2013 had opened English-medium sections in 1994 and 2003. According to state policy, an English-medium section can be *opened* in a primary school only if it has sufficient enrollment in at least two Malayalam-medium sections, but a 2012 government order clarified that an English-medium section can be *retained* if student enrollment has gone

down and only one Malayalam-medium section is presently operational. Schools that were economic in 2013 had prudently opened English-medium sections early on and retained them as the state revised and clarified its stand. Thus, though Malayalam-medium sections were uneconomic, the schools themselves were listed as economic on the strength of their English-medium students. Or to put it bluntly, Malayalam-medium sections at all state-funded schools were uneconomic.

II. Parent Interviews and Ethnographic Inquiry After the school surveys, a more careful investigation of historic and contemporary inequality was attempted through ethnographic observation and parent interviews at the two participating schools. I call the low-fee English-medium CBSE school The New English School and I refer to the uneconomic Malayalam-medium school as St. Thomas School in the dissertation. Of the 307 students enrolled at the New English School, 5.2% were listed as Scheduled Castes (former slave-castes) and 15.6% were listed as Ezhava, a former untouchable caste. However, state statistics obscure more than they reveal since Pathanamthitta has a significant Christian population; according to the latest census for which religious data is available, the percentage of Christians in Pathanamthitta is 39% (GoI, 2001). Yet, the state neither lists former Christian slave-castes as Scheduled Castes nor accounts for caste-like hierarchies within churches. To clarify, the caste system in Kerala had a two-tier system of untouchability and unapproachability. Though slavery was legally abolished in mid-1800s and former slave-castes were constitutionally listed as Scheduled Castes (SCs) post-independence, “SC” has also accumulated shame in the 60-odd years since independence (Satyanarayana & Tharu, 2011). Meanwhile, the political identity

“Dalit” has gained purchase, since the term affords a self-naming that foregrounds the radical potential of oppressed castes as well as social systems that produce abjection (Guru, 2009; Ilaiah, 1996). I privilege the term Dalit throughout the dissertation.

In comparison to the diverse student composition at the New English School, St. Thomas School had recently become 100% Dalit. Though St. Thomas had been established as a “slave-caste” school [*para pallikudam*] in 1895 for former slave-castes who were denied entry to upper-caste patronized schools, parental caste and family names from earlier admission registers revealed that Dalits and low-status upper castes—who had minimal land holdings and lived relatively proximate to Dalits—had patronized St. Thomas. School admission registers, available intermittently from 1914, reveal that new students enrolling into Class 1 at St. Thomas averaged around 28 from 1914 till the late 1980s, with only a few exceptional years where the enrollment fell to 11 (1929) or spiked to 51 (1916). Most landowning upper castes in the school neighborhood had studied at an upper-caste Malayalam-medium primary school till the first private English-medium primary school in Edanadu opened in 1979, and all low-status upper castes and a few Dalits had more recently moved to low-fee private English-medium schools. During my fieldwork period, St Thomas School was state-funded, Malayalam-medium, and uneconomic with twelve Dalit students enrolled in grades 1-4.

Parent Interviews

At the New English School, I interviewed primary caregivers in 22 families: 19 mothers, five grandmothers, and two fathers. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of high,

average, and low performing student families. At the uneconomic state-funded school, which had become an exclusively Dalit school recently with parent attrition, I interviewed all ten mothers whose children were enrolled there. Interview questions addressed a) memories of childhood and schooling b) family educational histories and aspirations and c) daily routines of mothers and children and everyday labors associated with schooling. In addition, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with four Dalit families in Edanadu whose children were enrolled at other English-medium schools in and around the village. Themes that emerged from interviews were explored through participant observation. Ethnographic sites included the two schools as well as parent homes in caste and class colonies that were segregated from upper caste residential neighborhoods. Other than the teaching activities described next, I observed parent-teacher meetings, attended festival celebrations, village fairs, weddings, and funerals with school families, conversed with mothers at bus stops, grocery shops, village offices, and walked to and from schools with mothers and grandmothers accompanying their children.

III. Examining State and Market Provision of English Pedagogy I taught English at both schools to understand classroom processes associated with the teaching and learning of English. At the uneconomic school, I taught the Kerala-state 2nd grade English curriculum to two cohorts of three and four students respectively (6 hours weekly). English was taught as a subject in Kerala-state schools from Class 1 but at English-medium schools, in addition to English as a subject, other subjects (Math, Environmental Science, Computer Science, and Moral Education) were also officially taught in English, and unofficially taught in translation. At the low-fee private school I provided supplementary

lessons in a weekly “spoken-English” class for 153 students in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6, in 45-minute classes scheduled with each grade.

Secondly, to examine how educational structures supported and directed English teaching and learning at the two participating schools I a) observed recommended teaching methods in three teacher development programs b) interviewed fifteen practicing teachers and eight principals in diverse schools (state-funded, high-fee private, and low-fee private) c) analyzed English textbooks produced for diverse target groups, and d) interviewed textbook writers in two state agencies (federal-state NCERT and Kerala SCERT) and two private publishing houses, and two members of the National Focus Group Position Paper on Teaching of English (NCERT, 2006).

Researcher positionality

I grew up in Kerala during the 1980s and 1990s and, like many Keralites from dominant castes and communities, I moved to a neighboring state for college education. During the course of a decade of study and work in various cities in India, I visited family and friends in Kerala often but for short durations. In 2010, I enrolled in a graduate course at a U.S. university and it was for my dissertation fieldwork that I returned to Kerala after thirteen years for a prolonged stay of a year and half. Migration is something Keralites understand well, with close to 2.28 million Keralites living and working abroad and over 931,000 Keralites in other Indian states (Zachariah & Rajan, 2012). My insider-outsider position was thus not unusual and even expected. In fact, my protracted absence became helpful when long time residents attempted to educate me regarding changes that had

transpired in my absence. However, my social status as an elite, English-literate emigrant positioned me in contradictory ways. As I will explain in the section on aspiration shaming, elite educators assumed that we shared similar perspectives on schooling issues that implicitly shamed non-elites. Such situations helped me understand that my long absences from Kerala and work with non-elites in other parts of India had helped cultivate in me ambivalences concerning dominant narratives and assumptions. At the same time, a few mothers and activists in Edanadu and elsewhere in Kerala invested in our relationships and educated me with “impolite conversations” (Daniels & Jackson, 2014), patiently and persistently challenging my ways of seeing and knowing. I was thus an ideological outsider with dominant elites and an experiential outsider with non-elites even though I am a “native” of Kerala.

Chapter outlines

The first data chapter details the temporal migrations, and stasis, engendered by liberalization in Edanadu and the shifting mothering practices and aspirational horizons that have emerged in these contexts. Recording how English is entangled with the “good futures” mothers yearn to bring into being, I suggest that aspiring is becoming a “practice of ethics” integral to becoming and being a “good mother”. However, aspiring as the practice of ethics became most painfully evident when that practice was fractured and the possibility of producing an ethical self was interrupted. Denied socially sanctioned future making performances, deprived of the material resources necessary to produce desirable futures, and aware of the inadequacy of hope in affecting radical material changes,

mothers at the uneconomic school became obsessively hopeful, pushing children to work harder and punishing them when they fell short.

The following four chapters describe erosions and erasures of non-elite aspiring.

In her 1988 lecture delivered at the University of Michigan, Toni Morrison argues:

Certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them (p. 136).

She goes on to ask what “intellectual feats” have to be performed to produce such ornate, planned absences. The bulk of my dissertation describes the “intellectual feats” performed by language educators, policymakers, public commentators, and various “experts” to erode and erase non-elite aspiring from education systems seething with its presence. Chapter three describes how the crisis of uneconomic schooling fragments the story of educational development narrated so often for Kerala, and then details how dominant groups work to assemble new narratives that reclaim social and moral hierarchies. Enduring categories like *sadharanakkar* [common, ordinary people, unmarked by caste or community] became crisis-ridden as narratives transition from the benevolent charity of the past to the compassionate cruelty of the present. Meanwhile, new assemblages at the national level draw attention to national-regional variations, and convergences. Though development projects at the national and at the Kerala level followed different trajectories—the nation pursuing centralized planning and rapid industrialization and Kerala entangled in more politically oriented social reform projects—the salience of “educated Indian English” in the national story shares much in common with the cultural production of “ordinary” Keralites [*sadharanakkar*].

Assembled along similar hierarchies, albeit different in its specificities, both national and Kerala articulations scrutinize and de-legitimize non-elite aspirations. I explain how shaming narratives gloss the same socio-economic and aspirational changes recounted by non-elite mothers, but in ways that erode the moral justifications underpinning their aspirational practices.

Chapter four analyzes three English language reforms undertaken during the liberalization years, which together governed teaching practices at the participating schools—i) CBSE English Language Teaching reforms ii) Kerala Second Language Acquisition reforms and iii) NCERT Teaching of English reforms. I explain how contesting state agencies manufactured a-historic, non-social, chronicles of language theories that effectively erased the long standing cultural production of educated Indian English. This a-historicization made it possible to produce a “natural” pedagogy, emptied of all social difference and linguistic inequality. Rather than institutionalizing mechanisms to alter unequal power relationships between English and regional languages, language-in-education policy mandated that non-elites learn English naturally. Policy configurations became reified in state-produced pedagogic materials, and natural pedagogy became a euphemism for resource deprivation.

Chapter five begins with a description of the textbook market and then analyzes the various pedagogic products available in the market. I argue that the a-historic “natural” approach of NCERT and Kerala SCERT textbooks systematized resource deprivations in already deprived classrooms by insisting on naturally occurring oral conversations even though reading and writing skills rather than orality was the more

readily available local resource. Following the textbook analysis, I describe ways of “doing literacy” (Bartlett, 2007b) prevalent at the two schools. At the New English School, these cultural performances took the form of “labor-full” pedagogies that sought to mitigate the constraints of material-less learning environments. At St. Thomas School, however, textbook hostility to culturally legitimate literacy performances engendered “labor-less” pedagogies with dire affective and pedagogic costs, both for students and for teachers. I conclude with one student’s transitions from labor-less to labor-full pedagogies and trace the contexts in which cultural performances of literacy consolidate as academic proficiency. In the next chapter I detail how peripheries of educational space were assembled through examinations, which made marginalization legible by defining a normative standard; those who “deviated” became “weak” learners.

While the consumers of education reforms—students and teachers in state-funded and non-elite CBSE schools—were thus pushed to the margins of educational spaces, the last data chapter describes how reform producers who aspired to serve the “public” and the “people” became state and society. Firstly, the NCERT reform was undertaken to rectify the Hinduization of curricular reforms but the production context only engendered a hastily-put-together “invented community”. In comparison, the Kerala state pedagogic materials were fashioned by a long-standing, committed community of Left educators who became the pedagogic state. Unlike these two reforms, the CBSE reforms were mobilized by a community of “advantaged parents” and crafted by privileged teachers with the help of British funds and experts (Mathur, 1995; CIEFL, 1997; Tickoo, 2001). However, becoming international entailed major re-structuring within the CBSE, which

had to re-fashion itself as an internationally oriented, pedagogic agency that was nevertheless fully Indian. In the process, the nation's emergent international positioning was extended to the entire nation with disastrous effects on domestic pedagogic discourses. The multiplicity of locations of power as well as coherences across these multiple locations assembled formidable challenges for non-elite educational development projects.

In the concluding chapter, I revisit the diverse aspirational locations traversed in previous chapters: those of Dalit mothers, poor and historically marginalized families, Left educators and language pedagogues, and internationally mobile elite Indians, to consider the aspirational subjects engendered by liberalization. I argue that aspiring has indeed become the key cultural practice through which differentially positioned citizens reconfigure their relationship to liberalization. But aspirational practices are shaped by existing relationships to society as well as by the material and symbolic resources individuals and communities can mobilize. For globally mobile elite Indians, accumulated material, symbolic, and linguistic privileges afforded the production of an “international” community, to whose agendas the nation must now orient. Meanwhile, Leftist language educators in Kerala became an enduring pedagogic state, which in its confident but hollowed out egalitarianism remained indifferent to the curricular violence it perpetrated. As for the “others” of the education system—mothers and students—they became a denigrated, persecuted, yet resilient, and aspiring majority: the *bahujan samaj*. When a *bahujan samaj* undertakes the imagination and production of desirable futures it dismantles unequal structures, like the Kerala state education system, even as it produces

new ones. What becomes “legitimate” and “ethical” in this process reveals the terms of domination emergent in liberalizing India.

CHAPTER 2
ASPIRING

This chapter details the transitions, and stasis, engendered by liberalization in Edanadu and the shifting mothering practices and aspirational mobilities that have emerged in these contexts. For most mothers at the New English School, if their growing up years and the experiences of their own mothers were characterized by material deprivation, difficulty, and suffering, the present featured the conveniences offered by internal plumbing, cooking gas, and a relatively easy abundance of food, books, and other supplies. Migrating into new material worlds, mothers produced new moralities and value systems even as they recalibrated aspirational horizons. Since socially sanctioned future orientations are already always entangled with English in India, aspirational mobilities necessitated English schooling as well as an array of pedagogic labors. Situating emergent aspirational mobilities in the transitions engendered by liberalization, I suggest that aspiring is becoming a “practice of ethics” integral to becoming a “good mother”.

Table 2.1 Shifting material worlds, mothering practices, and labors at the two schools

	Material worlds	Moralities of consumption	Mothers’ labors
Non-elite English School	From deprivation to convenience	Memories of deprivation evoked to urge children to respect their opportunities and to study hard	From domestic to pedagogic labors
Uneconomic School	Continued deprivation	Uncertain consumption and obsessive hope in education	From stigmatized paid work to domestic labors

However, aspiring as a practice of ethics became most painfully evident when that practice was fractured and the possibility of producing an ethical self was interrupted. Performing bygone social practices like scouring for firewood, collecting water, and walking children to Malayalam medium schools, Dalit mothers remnant at the uneconomic school found themselves unable to perform socially sanctioned future making performances. Though aware of the inadequacy of hope in affecting radical material changes, mothers at the uneconomic school yet became obsessively hopeful, pushing children to work harder and punishing them when they fell short.

Temporal migrations: Life is much better now

Sixty-two year old Annamma vividly remembers a different time, a time when there was nothing and when life was difficult [*budhimuttu*]. “There was nothing hereabouts,” she reminisced about life only a decade ago without running water, motorable roads, or a sturdy house that could weather the monsoons. As for her earlier everyday life, it seemed to her an odyssey of work: “In those times I didn’t even get to sit [*annu kuththi irunnittilla*],” she said of a lifetime spent cooking with firewood, scrubbing soot-blackened vessels with coconut fiber and ash, bringing up children, taking care of aging in-laws, and tending a cow and a goat that provided the crucial extra income that helped them subsist. Unlike Annamma, who had cooked with firewood, 38-year-old Abhiya remembers her mother cooking with dried leaves [*karila*]. Firewood supply discursively indicates the extent of land ownership, for firewood had to be collected off somebody’s land, and collecting dry leaves indexed destitution. For all the grandmothers and mothers I interviewed, the re-structuring of their material worlds through running water, cooking-

gas, and refrigerators had configured migrations into a “now” of comforts and ease [*sukha-saukaryangal*]. This temporal migration from a past dominated by firewood, soot, and buckets and buckets of water however also obliged aspirational work, for if their own mothers barely had time to “sit down [*kuthi irikkan*],” they now had to “sit with [*koode irrikanum*]” children when they studied.

Except for four upper-caste, previously high income or agricultural land-owning families, other interviewed families remembered the past years as subsumed in difficulty [*budhimuttu*], suffering [*kashtapadu*], and/or poverty [*daridryam*]. For six families where grandfathers had salaried jobs, the average monthly income reported for the late 1990s was Rs. 2000. Annamma’s husband worked as a turner in a company and his income during the late 1990s, just before he retired, was Rs. 3500. That was hardly enough to build a durable house and living conditions were dismal, Annamma explained. In comparison, salaried employees like senior bank officers from Edanadu earned around Rs. 20,000 during the same period. Unlike Annamma’s husband who had a steady job, Abhiya’s father did odd jobs, and Abhiya refused to give me an “occupation” that would fit into a neat category. When I tried to supply her with alternatives I had become familiar with from school enrollment registers like “farming,” Abhiya clarified that only those who owned agricultural land could be farmers in Edanadu. “We didn’t own any land, what farming could we do?” she retorted. Lamma remembered that during her school going years, if she needed a pencil or a book for school, it might be bought after months, if and when cash became available. Money was scarce, food was scant, and homes were dilapidated.

In sharp contrast to the earning capacities of the previous generation, average monthly income amongst the interviewed families in 2014 had increased around 900% to approximately Rs. 20,000. In comparison, senior high school teachers earned around Rs. 50,000 and bank employees around Rs. 75,000 in 2014. It is important to note that though policies of economic liberalization came into place in early 1990s, the most radical economic changes villagers narrate are for the post-2000 years. Eight fathers who worked as drivers, construction workers, electricians, and plumbers in the Persian Gulf earned between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 25,000 per month while others doing similar work in Kerala reported an income of around Rs. 10,000. One mother, Annamma’s daughter, worked as a nurse in Saudi Arabia earning Rs. 80,000.

Table 2.2 Reported monthly income of 22 families in 2014

	Not presently employed	Less than 5000	Around 6000 to 10000	Around 20000 to 40000	More than 75000
Mothers	12	4	4	1	1
		4 Home-based			
Fathers	None	1	6	15	None
		8 in Gulf; 1 in North India 2 “good” jobs; 20 working class jobs			

Nine families had repaired or built new houses, a previously inconceivable expense. Four of these were non-emigrants like Abhiya, who had a new house, just finished, not yet painted. When I visited her at home for the interview, Abhiya offered me cold water from her refrigerator and remarked “things are much better now [*ippam orupadu better aa*].”

Continuity across change

Even though marginalized mothers had migrated into new material worlds, the precarious economic positions of most families had not changed. Even as incomes had risen, costs of essential commodities had also increased and one kilo of mackerel, a local staple, cost around Rs. 200 in 2014 as compared to Rs. 20 in late 1990s. Furthermore, the prices of essential household goods and services rose significantly during my fieldwork period: railway freight rates rose by 6.5% in June 2014 leading to increased prices of all goods that arrived in the local market through railway transport, including rice, vegetables, and fish. By July vegetable prices had doubled. The wholesale rates of *payar* [long beans] went up from Rs. 40 to Rs. 80 per kilo, brinjal from Rs. 20 to Rs. 40 per kilo, and tomatoes from Rs. 20 to Rs. 50 per kilo. The price of coconut oil climbed to an all-time high of Rs. 180 per kilo a few months later. Green chili *kanthari* prices rose to Rs. 50 for 100 grams by August. Likewise, domestic electricity rates went up by 24% in August 2014. But what most worried mothers and teachers was the state's move to gradually de-subsidize cooking gas. During 2014, the mode of payment changed from payment of state-subsidized rate to the reimbursement of state subsidy through bank accounts. Subsidized cooking gas was priced at around Rs. 415 per 14.2 kg cylinder while the unsubsidized rate was around Rs. 750. The number of subsidized cylinders available per year was capped at 12, one for every calendar month. Mothers carefully strategized cooking gas consumption by using firewood for items that required prolonged cooking time, especially the local staple, Kerala rice. Non-elite mothers felt increasingly trapped by the fickle, hostile market. If in their childhood, parents had struggled to make ends

meet without money, mothers now struggled to make ends meet with money. The beginning of the school year was an exceptionally hard time with money having to be raised for tuition fees (about Rs. 5000 for first term), books (approximately Rs. 1500), uniforms (about Rs. 1500), and bus fees (typically around Rs. 500 per month). But mothers prioritized schooling expenses and sometimes even borrowed money from better-off neighbors. This simultaneity of change and continued precarity underscored the import of particular kinds of education, especially, English-medium schooling.

Moralities of comfort

Mothers often evoked memories of deprivation to teach children how to appreciate and utilize the academic opportunities that had become newly available. “Nowadays kids don’t lack for anything [*onninum kuravilla*]. We give them everything they need, but they don’t utilize it. He doesn’t study hard enough, doesn’t do well in school [*padithathille pora*]. He just wants to play.” Lalamma went on to describe her son’s academic performance in Environmental Studies, English, and Hindi as unsatisfactory. This last test, her son had failed in Hindi. Like Lalamma, Sonia too expressed concerns over her daughter’s test scores, and lamented her disinclination to study despite all the comforts parents made available. “These days, kids grow up in such comfort [*sukha saukaryam*]. We grew up in difficult circumstances [*ellam budhimuttayirunnu*]. We had to walk a long way to school. They get dropped off in front of the house in the school bus.” Similarly, Lizzy pointed out that in her childhood they were lucky if they didn’t go hungry but nowadays children are choosy about food: “These days, you give them something to eat and they have likes and dislikes!” Meanwhile, Annamma deplored, “all he has to do is

study, but that is the one thing he will not do”. Offering a more elaborate articulation of the moralities crafted around memories of deprivation and new experiences of comfort,

Anju explained

Our growing up years were times of deprivation and suffering [*kashtathayillula jivitham*]. We grew up in poverty [*daridryam*]. My father was a laborer [*kulipanikkaran*]. These days there is no suffering [*innu kashtatha illa*]. Everything you want is there for the taking [*kaiyille kittum*]. But you shouldn't forget the past, the way you came [*vanna vazhi marakkalle*]. We should tell our children about the old days. We should tell them of how we used to live. We should teach them to not waste food. They don't know any better. They have grown up in a different world.

Anju points out the precarity of aspirational practices tied to temporal migrations: born in a different time and into a radically different material world, her own children have little resources they can mobilize to participate effectively in her dreams. They do not know that other worlds had once existed. Further, as I explain in chapter five, teaching children to embody aspirational performances requires of them servile pedagogic work, the managing of which requires the moralities mothers construct around past deprivation and present comfort.

Even as children were expected to embody appropriate moralities towards commodity consumption and schoolwork, strict codes governed mothers' work too. Mothers were expected to dedicate their newly available time to pedagogic labors. Though fifteen mothers had higher educational certifications than their husbands, only three worked in jobs that corresponded with their educational levels.

Table 2.3 Education levels of 22 families in 2014

Educ. Level	10 th grade or less	Pre-Degree/Voc.	Deg./Dip.	Profess.
Mothers	5	10 Pre-Degree	3 Deg./1 Dip.	3
Fathers	15	2 Pre-Deg./2 Voc.	2 Degree	1

Full time work outside the home was frowned upon since this detracted from their abilities to bring up educated children. Annamma’s daughter, worked as a nurse in Saudi Arabia earning Rs. 80,000 per month but had to return to Kerala during 2014 because her son was failing in tri-monthly school tests. The one full time work that was socially acceptable for young mothers was school teaching, an extension of their familial roles. Three of the interviewed mothers worked as schoolteachers; two were employed at the New English School. Teaching work at such schools paid less than domestic work or female agricultural labor, which as Dalit caste-occupations set the standard for “decent” remuneration. But it was not uncommon for mothers to take up low-paid teaching work in low-fee private schools in order to afford their children’s English-medium education since schools offered tuition discounts to children of staff. To summarize, migrating from deprivation and difficulty to convenience and comfort, mothers at the New English School reconfigured their relationship to new worlds by producing future-oriented moralities and labors. As the next section details, this necessitated the elimination of past humiliations and precipitated the re-imagination of existing social hierarchies.

Aspiring subjects and shifting aspirational horizons

Mobility between dissimilar material worlds precipitates movement between regimes of value (Berdahl, 2005; Pine, 2014; Rofel, 2007), and parents' temporal migrations into new material worlds scaffolded the possibility of migrating to more valued, and valuable, social locations. This entailed the recalibration of aspirational horizons but as Pine (2014) reminds, desired-for futures are built on memories of pasts that have to be eliminated. Present experiences of children's English medium schooling were thus deeply entangled with memories of parents' Malayalam medium schooling and simultaneously oriented towards aspirations for children's professional higher education.

The humiliations and foreclosed futures associated with Malayalam-medium schooling were most eloquently articulated by Raghu, an educational researcher and Dalit activist whose child attended the other low-fee CBSE English-medium school in Edanadu. Rejecting the shaming evoked through slave-caste naming in Kerala (Satyanarayana & Tharu, 2011), Raghu self identified as Dalit. Literally crushed or broken, the term Dalit is an assertion of self-worth and a rejection of the norms of worth sanctified by caste. Like most fathers at the New English School, Raghu had completed schooling in Malayalam-medium, and financial struggles had disallowed higher education. In one of our many discussions, Raghu reminisced his high school years in Edanadu during the late 1990s and said:

I was Malayalam-medium. Most of those who studied with me are still around here. Very few [*valare churukkam*] have government jobs. A few have been to the Gulf. English-medium students, I don't know where they are. We don't know them, do we? That school, my life at that school, was horrifying [*bhikaram ayirunnu*].

Raghu had completed schooling in Malayalam-medium like most of the fathers, and distinctions within his high school, between the two sections and based on the official medium of instruction, had figured his world in horrifying ways, denying his claims of social value and dignity; so much so that he identified himself as that space rather than as belonging to that space. “I was Malayalam medium [*njan Malayalam medium aiyurunnu*]” he said, rather than “I was in Malayalam-medium [*njan Malayalam mediuthil aiyirunnu*].” Raghu also explicitly articulates the very real economic implications that cohered along the English-Malayalam divide. Very few non-English literates get government jobs, and further, government jobs available for non-English literates are stigmatized menial jobs like cleaning work. A few of his Malayalam-medium cohort-mates had been to the Gulf, but working class jobs in the Gulf offer hard labor and precarious lives. On the contrary, the social, economic, and occupational privileges of his English-medium cohort-mates are duly noted as an unbridgeable divide: “We don’t know them, do we?” Raghu asks. He went on to describe his English-medium cohort-mates as “primary citizens [*pradhana pauranmar*]” who believed they “were born for this [*ithinu vendi janichavara*].” For Raghu, citizenship claims, social belonging, and economic security were indexed through medium of instruction, a point Kumar (1996) too notes in great detail. Crucially, Raghu was a fluent English speaker and an incisive educational researcher but did not have higher-educational certifications that adequately legitimized his English or academic research competencies. English-medium education is thus not just about learning a language but also about claiming legitimacies and profits, which are encoded institutionally.

Like with Raghu, my questions to New English School parents (Where did you study? Was your school English or Malayalam-medium?) were most often met with “there were no English-medium schools for people like us [*njangale polullavarkke*],” and only “big people [*valiyavar*]” or “people with money [*kashullavar*]” went to English-medium schools in those times. Of the 44 parents whose educational histories were collected, except for two, all had attended Malayalam-medium schools in Edanadu and in other parts of Pathanamthitta, Allapuzha, and Kottayam districts. Interestingly, only seven women had grown up in Edanadu. Others had moved to their husband’s house in Edanadu after marriage and their memories covered a larger geographical area spread across Pathanamthitta as well as other neighboring districts. However, as I mentioned earlier, though all except one mother had attended vernacular-medium schools, 17 of the 22 mothers had post-10th educational experiences. Post-10th grade, educational systems in Kerala were in English-medium and mothers’ struggles with linguistic transitions and their own increased competencies in English drove their desires for children’s English-medium schooling from the earliest grades. Mothers did not desire to re-produce precarity but hoped for the absence of such difficulties for their children. For instance, when wives of Gulf migrants said, “wherever you go, you’ll need English”, rather than denying the robust trajectories of non-English-literate migration they gesture to the difficulties their husbands face. Gardner (2010) describes the precarious nature of construction labor that migrants from Kerala perform in the Persian Gulf. Unlike in the case of dominant groups for whom assumptions of English proficiency and legitimacy coincide (Ramanathan, 2005), for all interviewed mothers legitimate participation was yet

uncertain and fraught with peril. “It will be difficult [*budhimuttu*] if you don’t have English”, another mother remarked, using the same term *budhimuttu* that several mothers had used to describe their childhood years of privation as well as their contemporary economic precarity. Good futures are thus indexed by desires for absences as much as presences (Appadurai, 2013; Pine, 2014).

Meanwhile, possibilities of capital accumulation through English-literate professional work were also re-cognized as possible, enabling a fuller participation in economies of hope. All interviewed parents expected their children to complete schooling and also perhaps procure some professional certification. Older children of New English School parents I interviewed were enrolled in engineering, nursing, and commerce courses. Other graduated students who returned to meet their old teachers were also enrolled in engineering, pharmacy, nursing, and physiotherapy courses. This normative orientation to professional courses, however, also silenced alternate aspirations as failures. Nevertheless, unlike in the times of parents, the completion of schooling itself now required two additional years of English-medium education. In accordance with the recommendations of the National Policy on Education, pre-degree courses, that is, 11th and 12th grades, were delinked from colleges in Kerala and added to the schooling system; now called 10 +2 or simply plus two, these additional years were now necessary to complete schooling. The process was actualized by 2000-01, but the Kerala state had not produced localized Malayalam textbooks for all plus-two subjects, and state-funded schools also used federally produced English-medium textbooks. Though the temporally

urgent need for English came from this plus-two requirement, as I explain in the next section, mothers “needed” English medium schooling in profoundly deeper ways.

Aspiring as a practice of ethics

“Don’t you need English for everything nowadays? [*ippam ellathinum English vende?*]” a mother counter posed as I asked her why she had enrolled her children at the New English School. I nodded in agreement to this self-evident truth before I stopped to ponder where exactly English was “needed” in the village. Unlike the mother’s assertion, the head-teacher at the non-elite school regularly lamented the *lack* of a need to speak English in the school and Malayalam rather than English was indispensable both in the school and the village. In this case, what was the mother asserting? Some mothers used the appendage of a “good future [*nalla bhavi*]” to qualify this need for English, and one grandmother explained, “times are different, to live in these times you need English”. As Ramanathan (2005) has described so eloquently, an orientation to good futures in India already assumes English literacy and prospective affects like aspiration and hope are always already entangled with English. It was when the possibility of this aspirational practice fell apart, like when it did for parents involved in the “dog-house” controversy, that its criticality emerged in fuller measure.

Thirty-nine year old Rebecca was the only mother I interviewed who had to choose which of her children could attend the New English School. She had four children and the oldest two studied at a state-funded school. Reni was Rebecca’s third child. I taught Reni for two consecutive years at the New English School and knew her as one of

the top scorers in her class. Her mother concurred, “she [Reni] studies so well, she gets full marks for everything”. She continued, “I couldn’t study, but I want my children to reach a respectable level [*nalla nilayilavanam*]”. She knew that as an “uneducated” person, she could hardly claim respectability in Edanadu. However, for Rebecca, the morality and ethics of mothering, of investing in and imagining the good futures of children, was not possible for all her children. Her older children, Rebecca said, joked about the differential schooling arrangements in the family. She had recently enrolled her youngest child at the New English School in first grade even though they could not afford it because Rebecca could not rationalize expenses with such a young child. CBSE English-medium schooling thus opened up the ethical world of being a good mother, for both Rebecca and her children. “But we don’t have that much money (to send two children to a private English-medium school), what will I do?”, Rebecca despaired as tears rolled down furiously. Her husband worked as a fabricator in construction projects, and during 2014, their reported monthly income was around Rs. 5000. The average monthly income at the New English School was around Rs. 20,000. Discriminating between her children broke her heart and the continuous struggle with schooling expenses wore on her spirit. Aspiring as a practice of ethics became most painfully evident when that practice was fractured and the possibility of producing an ethical self became interrupted.

Crossing (caste) borders

Like Rebecca, those who did not fit the “appropriate” profile of new-English medium parents crossed material, symbolic, and social borders every day, and bore the many costs of crossing. As Raghu pointed out, one of the most enduring and unkindest border is that of caste. While Dalits are disproportionately remnant at uneconomic schools, the few who achieved occupational diversity with liberalization patronized English-medium schools. According to state statistics, 5.39% of enrolled students at the New English School were listed as Scheduled Castes (former slave-caste). This did not include Dalit Christians. However, aware of deep-seated dominant caste desires to “know” the caste of the interlocutor (Guru, 2009), I did not inquire about caste affiliations during my interviews. Yet, even without asking, everybody knew who the Dalits were. The only person at the New English School who openly talked about her Dalit caste, to me, was Menakachechi². She was employed as a “non-teaching” staff at the school, a euphemism for cleaning staff. Along with the others, she swept the classrooms, the school grounds, and washed the toilets. We talked often in the library, while I prepared my lessons and she swept the room. Our conversations began out of her interest in one of the students in Class 4, Anand, whose answers I had praised in the staffroom. His mother was Menakachechi’s friend. When Anand’s family had newly moved to chechi’s area about two years ago and began looking for schooling options, chechi had recommended the New English School. Chechi’s son studied here and she promised to keep an eye on Anand as well. Chechi explained to me that she had taken up the job at the school

² Chechi meaning sister. A common form of address.

because it allowed her to send her son to an English-medium school; the school offered tuition discounts to the children of teaching and non-teaching staff. But her movement out of traditional, feudal, caste-occupations had but led her into neoliberal caste-occupations; the labor she performed and the remuneration she received remained similar. Chechi's salary was around Rs. 3000 per month and she often did not have enough to pay the discounted tuition fees. Her everyday life did not bear the comforts or ease narrated by school mothers; she lived in a dilapidated house with no running water and little material comforts. While temporal migrations seemed wide-ranging, it reached its limits at caste borders. As the following sections on uneconomic schooling explain, the "normal" life of Dalits in Edanadu was segregated abjection.

Temporal stasis and segregated poverty: Death, love, and betrayal

A radically rearranged cash economy post-2000 had re-structured material and social life and engendered unprecedented aspirational horizons in Edanadu. However, as other non-elite villagers migrated temporally into profoundly different materials worlds and social practices, Dalit mothers at the uneconomic school found themselves caught in an older time. This exclusiveness and the caste segregation it manifested, for instance becoming remnant at an uneconomic school that had only recently become 100% Dalit, produced an experience of standing still when everybody had moved on.

"I've thought about ending my life many times [*ithellam avasanipichalo ennu palapravashyam vicharichittunde*]. I'm fatigued, teacher [*maduthu, teachere*]. What a hellish life I live [*entho narakicha jivithama*]. Why should I suffer like this? But when I

think of my two children, who will they have if I'm not there? Will anybody else take care of them? You tell me," Jessy confided, watching her pot of water slowly filling up at the roadside water-tap. I had taught Jessy's daughter Jaisy during the 2013-14 school year and Jessy continued to give me updates about Jaisy's progress every time she saw me, both at school and outside. Like most other mothers at St. Thomas, Jessy loved talking about her children Jaisy and Jaisy's younger brother Jesson. Our conversations outside school typically took place at the entrance to Jessy's colony, which I passed on my way to church. But that day, Jessy stopped me at a different place, across from her colony, and next to a nondescript water tap. I had never noticed taps by the roadside in Edanadu before. I didn't need to. I had running water at home. But for Jessy, this tap was her lifeline, from where she collected water in pots and buckets for all the needs of her family of four. Her colony, like most other colonies in Edanadu, did not yet have running water and to live in a colony is to consume the sufferings of structural precarity that Jessy calls "life in hell" [*narakicha jivitham*].

The student community at St. Thomas was exclusively Dalit and lived, like Jessy's family, in segregated spaces. Furthermore, of the seven students I taught over two years, four were from landless families, the single most intelligible criterion for destitution [*daridryam*] in contemporary Kerala and also officially acknowledged as such [*bhu rahithar*]. They too lived near a Dalit colony, renting out half-finished or abandoned single-room houses for minimal rent. Visiting seven-year-old Jisna's house the first time, I was surprised to see her favorite play spot—an unfinished staircase that led into the open sky. The construction of this single-room house had been abandoned half way and

the staircase led to a non-existent roof terrace through a gaping hole. I wondered what happened during the monsoon months but dared not ask. Nearby, little Ajina lived with her family of five in an even smaller room, the single bed in the house stacked close to the wooden fire over which her mother cooked all their meals. The door to their room opened out to a pit that had once been a red-rock [*vettu kallu*] quarry. I had to suspend my middle-classed notions of safety and risk when I visited my students; material impoverishment did not interrupt their fun, laughter, friendship, and play. But the very real struggles of poverty were also simultaneously articulated, especially by mothers. Jessy lived in another colony about a kilometer from St. Thomas; her colony was a strip of land wedged between wetlands and a pool that had over the years become a dumping ground. Land close to wetlands flood easily during the monsoons but the conversion of a major chunk of the wetlands near Jessy's colony into dry land by a local liquor and real estate baron had exacerbated the periodical flooding into an everyday life in slush and mud. After every downpour, which in monsoon drenched Kerala is half the year round, Jessy's colony turned into a mud pool. Visiting Jessy's house through the slushy, smelly, capricious mud that slid and slithered underfoot, I was surprised when Jessy asked me if I had any cream. She pointed to the eczema on her children's feet and cursed the muck that was devouring their bodies and the flood waters that seemed bent on consuming their already dilapidated and bare house. Flooding had become severe with the reclamation of the wetlands and muddy, smelly, floodwaters entered her house regularly.

Meanwhile, moving from a colony house to St. Thomas was but a meandering back into the familiarity of deprivation. Like colony houses, St. Thomas School, too, had

no running water. Teachers, the cook, and I drew water from the church well located across the road for all the needs of the 12 students. Conversely, English-medium schools had indoor plumbing. Likewise, children at English-medium schools rode to school on buses and autos or on their parents' motorbikes while students enrolled in uneconomic schools walked to and from school with their mothers. Mothers at St. Thomas were acutely aware of their exclusive presence in a normative past. Jessy described her walking to school routine as exclusive [*njan mathram*] and fatiguing [*maduthu*]. Others articulated their unease with walking to school in terms of safety. Walking children through the torrential downpour of the monsoons was neither easy nor safe. Younger children often had to be carried. Lightning strikes had become harsher with changing monsoon patterns. Further, when mothers fell sick and could not walk their children to school, students missed school, sometimes for weeks. Beyond the actual safety of the walking, the practice was marked temporally (of the past) and demographically (by Dalits). It was common earlier but (almost) nobody did it any more. Thus, walking to a Malayalam-medium school with children in tow as well as spaces like uneconomic schools, colonies, and roadside water taps produced a stasis in everyday life that was easily but painfully recognized.

Fatigued by the material and affective labors uneconomic schooling demanded, tired of living beyond the margins, Jessy wanted to end her life. Others were already in the future Jessy yet hoped intently for. And, what had once been a "difficult" and "impoverished" past for most other Edanadu residents was Jessy's continuing present. Jessy often voiced the punishing nature of her everyday life saying, "I don't even get to

sit down for a minute [*oru minite kuththi irrikkan neramilla*]”. However, *kuththi irrikan neramilla* [no time to sit down] is the same term non-elite mothers at low-fee English schools in Edanadu used to describe life a decade earlier, a time when they also toiled the whole day just to get routine chores done. In Dalit colonies and uneconomic schools, this feeling of being stuck in the normative past of the village heightened stasis—changelessness suggestive of inaction despite fervent and arduous action—collapsed the past, present, and future into one long saga of labor and precarity. But Jessy felt that her bodily death, the only legitimate form of protest in certain contexts (Girija, 2011; Morrison, 1987), would betray her children to a loveless world. She asks, “Who will they have if I’m not there? Will anybody else take care of them?” Love and nurture prevailed as a form of defiant resistance to corporeal death, and the social death of life beyond the margins.

From colony to colony

Sindhu’s was the only family at St. Thomas that had moved from a low-fee private English medium school to an uneconomic school. Unlike other fathers who worked as daily wage laborers, Sindhu’s husband worked as a chef in the Gulf. Sindhu had first sent her oldest son to the other low-fee private English-medium school in Edanadu, but teachers complained that he wasn’t coping. On their advice, the boy stayed in Upper Kindergarten (UKG) for two years but teachers were still dissatisfied with his progress. A certified teacher herself, Sindhu began to wonder if “something was wrong” with her son; or maybe it was because she “hadn’t paid enough attention at home [*njan shradikkathathano*]”. Sindhu transferred Abhinesh to the uneconomic school St. Thomas

in Class 1. At St. Thomas, Abhinesh blossomed. He was in Class 3 when I started my fieldwork, and he was the undisputed star of St. Thomas, winning district level prizes for elocution, classical singing, and light music. He made his debut on the stage [*arangettam*] as a classical singer in 2013.

Like Abhinesh's transfer from the non-colony space of the English-medium school to the colony-like material space of St. Thomas, Sindhu's transition out of a Dalit colony followed a similar meandering back into caste-segregated spaces. Sindhu's family had till recently lived in the same Dalit colony as Raghu's. Her husband's fifteen years of emigrant work had eventually amassed enough economic resources for them to buy land outside the colony. The plot they bought belonged to a respected high school teacher; it bordered a Dalit colony but was itself not in a colony. Work commenced on a new house and by mid-2013, Sindhu's new house was ready, gleaming white, with traditional wood gables, and all modern conveniences. But by this time, the non-Dalits who lived in the vicinity had sold out their properties to Dalits like Sindhu and moved elsewhere. The border neighborhood had become a Dalit middle-class neighborhood, without the material deprivations of a typical Dalit colony but segregated by caste nevertheless.

Interrupting caste through domesticity

Unlike mothers at the New English School, who had moved from servile domestic labor to domestic pedagogic labors, Dalit mothers had moved out from low-paid, feudal labor to the labors of domesticity. While Dalit women had worked almost without exception in previous generations (Heyer, 2014; Lindberg, 2001; Raj, 2011), mothers at the

uneconomic school shunned paid work and instead opted for domesticity. Raj (2011) and Heyer (2014) point out that Dalit women's desires for domesticity interrupt normalized caste roles and frustrate upper-caste strategies of accumulation that assume the easy availability of Dalit labor. But more profoundly, John (2013) cautions that a "feminist analysis, even of a Marxist, feminist kind" that looks only at women's chances for paid work outside the home overlooks constitutive mechanisms of oppression that disappear at the intersections of caste, class, and gender (p. 182). She writes:

Experience of labor as degradation and not just exploitation has profound implications since stigma cannot be valorized like value producing labor. This is because stigma cannot be abstracted from the body (p. 183).

In the case of young mothers, this intersectionality of oppression was compounded in very real ways by what wage work required of them, beyond the production of their own stigma. The conditions of female Dalit labor and its excruciating effects on mothering are well documented. Mohan (2011) describes ritualized Dalit memories of mothers who were called to work immediately after childbirth:

Within a day or two of giving birth, the landlord comes to the hut of the untouchable laborer and orders the woman to go to the field to transplant paddy or weed the crop—tasks that involve severe physical strain. To do this, the woman must stand bent over for long hours in knee-deep mud and water without proper rest. She bleeds, as she is not allowed to rest after delivering the child. The day's hard labour exhausts her; at a distance, she hears the hungry cry of her newborn child that gradually dims into a faint sobbing. Her breasts are tight with the pain of the milk that should be fed to her baby. The strain on her body and mind become unbearable. Picking up a bunch of paddy saplings, she feeds her breast milk to their tender mossy roots. In the evening when she returns to the child she has left in a cradle hung from a branch of a nearby tree, what is left of her beloved child is only ant-eaten remains. She returns home, disconsolate. The older children are anxiously waiting for the young one and asks her for the child so that they can carry it around and fondle it. The mother breaks down and hands over the dead body of the infant to the siblings. The narrative leads to a complete

emotional breakdown of those who recount the story as well as those who partake in the ritual rendering and those hearing it (pp. 539-540).

Mohan (2015) calls Dalit memories “rememories”: “something which possesses (or haunts) one, rather than something which one possesses (p. 265). Dalit mothers’ more contemporary memories of labor did include experiences of spatial mobility and restricted economic independence, but its underlying caste locations and rememories were not forgotten. Memories of abandoning very young children to go to work surfaced intermittently, cautiously, and in-articulably at a Dalit church I attended as a believer rather than as an ethnographer. “I don’t even want to remember those days [*orkkan polum pattukela*]” said a Dalit grandmother. Though only the grandmothers who congregated at the church continued to do paid domestic or manual labor, and though they valorized their labor and knowledges accumulated through the laboring process (also see Ilaiah, 1996), none of the young mothers even considered the option. Like stigma cannot be abstracted from the body, rememories cannot be abstracted from the soul of the community.

Only one mother, Bindhya, at the uneconomic school had not withdrawn from paid labor. Though I did not teach her son Appu at school, since he was in 4th grade and I taught 2nd grade, Bindhya sought me out when Appu graduated from St. Thomas and enrolled at a state-funded English-medium high school. Subsequently, Appu came to me for help with his 5th grade Science and English. The state patronized English-medium schooling in post-primary grades, and Bindhya and Appu attempted the transition anticipating Appu’s completion of plus-two schooling. During one of our conversations, Bindhya explained that she could not read or write [*ezhuthanum vayikkanum ariyathilla*]

because she had never attended school. She had started working as a child, in the homes of dominant caste villagers, and continued to do paid domestic work. None of the other mothers considered paid domestic work though they all labored within their own households. All the others had studied up till 10th grade; some passing and others failing the matriculation exam. For Bindhya, her status as the exclusive “illiterate” mother at St. Thomas had affordances that allowed her to pursue paid work, which however also marked her out immediately by caste.

Bindhya was the only one at St. Thomas who went to work in a nighty. To clarify, the nighty in India is not a negligee with its amorous connotations or a more domesticated counterpart to be worn within the confines of a house, typically for the night. Desai (2010) describes the Indian nighty as a “smock” that is “designed to make the watcher’s gaze slip off the body without allowing it to come to rest anywhere in particular (p. 196). Doctor’s (2014) equally picturesque portrayal is more specific:

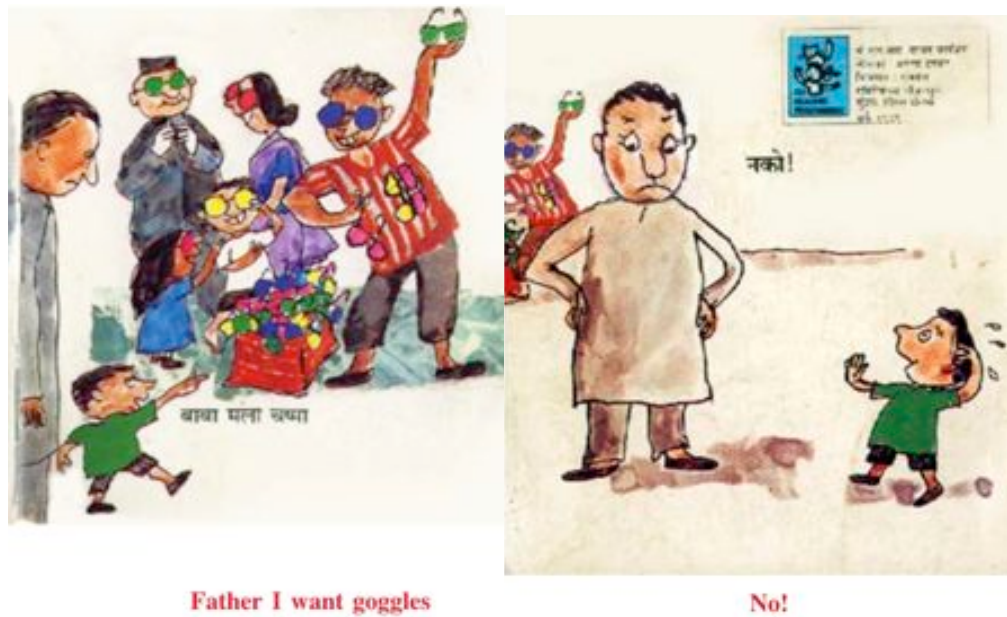
These nighties were majestic garments, made of thick cloth, shapeless and floor sweeping with a big double frill on the breast. ... Indian women aren’t comfortable leaving their chest area exposed. You need a *dupatta*, a *pallu*, a scarf or some substitute. The double frill is serving that function, acting as a dupatta substitute (paras 2, 10).

For both Desai (2010) and Doctor (2014), the nighty is a symbol of modest modernity, “personally liberating and socially legitimate” regardless of class and caste (Desai, 2010, p. 198). But the association of Dalit labor had tainted the nighty into caste apparel. In Edanadu, going to work in a nighty was to experience labor as degradation and therefore to be spurned, except in the case of those with unexpected affordances.

Moralities of precarity

Unlike moralities of comfort at the New English School, which revolved around lessons in responsible consumption, families and students at St. Thomas performed a different configuration of moralities associated with consumption. One of the beginner readers I used at St. Thomas was the UNICEF published *Father, I want* authored by Aruna Thakkar and Rao Bel. The short seven-page picturebook illustrates the middle-class orientation to responsible consumption that seemed prevalent at the New English School.

Figure 2.1 **Father I want** by Aruna Thakkar and Rao Bel, published by UNICEF



In the narrative, a father on an outing with a son indulges the son's demands for ice candy and pinwheels only to find that compliance made the young child even more demanding. The boy initially persuaded the father to purchase ice candy by asking for "only one" but on getting what he asked for, he insisted that the father buy "one more, one more".

Therefore, the father nips the demand in the bud the next time; when they chance upon a pair of goggles, he refuses to buy it in order to teach the son to become more moderate and responsible in his demands and desires. However, readers at St. Thomas did not fit the normative expectations of the book. Jessy's daughter Jaisy read through the book and suggested that the father did not buy the goggle because he had run out of money. In her world, there was no expectation of responsible consumption since consumption itself was uncertain. Rather, the few instances of consumption that they could perform were articulated as experiences of familial bonding.

In October 2014, as I walked up to school in the morning, I noticed that Jessy was busy keying numbers into a brand new phone, encased in a blue phone cover. She had bought a cellphone, or rather, as she explained to everyone, her mother had got one for her for Rs. 1000, and she was keying in everybody's phone numbers. Jessy had been one of the few mothers who had never brought a cellphone to school. Except for Sindhu, none of the families of the children I taught had a land phone. They had cellphones, which were cheaper and easier to maintain. When I called students at home to remind them of any books they had to bring for the class I taught, I typically spoke to fathers who were out at work. Mothers only had the cellphone with them when husbands had not left for work. But, as far as possible, they tried to bring the family cellphone to school during special events like school anniversaries, Christmas celebrations, and so on, to take photographs and videos of their children's performances. Jessy had never been able to participate in this sociality of mothering. She had never shared a video of her children

singing silly songs, or a picture of them doing their many antics. To be able to do so now, afforded her great pleasure and delight.

However, the sanctioned pleasures of consumption had its borders at St. Thomas too, and any suggestion of investment in the self rather than the child invited moral censure. This became clear with barbs directed at Radhika, the only mother who always came to school dressed in formal salwar kameez, *kajal* in eyes, and cellphone in hand. In contrast, mothers who lived closer to school typically walked their children to and from school in their nighties, draping a *thorthu* towel or a *dupatta* for modesty. Jessy, coming from further off, wore salwar kameez since she had to walk the main roads, but Jessy's salwar kameez were worn and torn from her incessant labors. With the exception of Sindhu, who alternated between nighties and expensive salwar kameez depending on her daily schedule, others moved freely between their domestic spaces and the school without any attire changes. Jessy often speculated on where Radhika got the money for her many salwar kameez. Articulations of censure, however, were directed at Radhika's mothering practices rather than her choice of attire, though on rare occasions, they were intertwined. For instance, on hearing that Radhika's son had done poorly in his lessons that day, Jessy remarked: "dressing up is not enough, you also have to teach your children". Mothers' bodies, labors and consumption had to be oriented to the service of children, and when it was not, their sincerity in mothering was called into question.

Obsessive hope, punishing love

Though a terrible discontent and fatigue with living in the normative past of the village was commonly spoken, desires for good futures, whether it be commodities, new residential spaces, or English-medium schooling, were rarely articulated in my presence. On the other hand, mothers obsessed over academic performance—a socially sanctioned and more “appropriate” orientation to good futures. One morning when I reached St. Thomas I saw Jaisy at the door, hugging her mother, weeping. First graders and preschoolers routinely sobbed and wailed as mothers left but Jaisy was in third grade then and I had never seen her cry to see her mother leave. I tried to comfort her, but she refused my offers and clung on to Jessy. I had witnessed enough bickering to know kids can be exceedingly mean to each other and I went in to find out what had happened. The other mothers were sitting in their usual spot chatting and they told that Jessy’s daughter had come to school without doing her homework, and Jessy had slapped her full across the face. When her daughter burst out crying, Jessy immediately hugged her, consoled her, and dried her tears and blew her nose. But when a teacher went to Jessy soon after, Jessy burst out crying. She was broken hearted to have hit her child, but the only way any desirable future could even be imagined as possible was if Jaisy did well in school, which she usually did³. When social norms purport schooling and the academic success of youth as the only way out of material destitution, hoping became obsessive, punishing, and heart breaking.

³ The best academic performances at St. Thomas were still significantly below expected grade level competencies and I describe curricular violence in detail later.

Annu was the soft-spoken mother of three, of whom the oldest Aneena was in my 2nd grade cohort in 2014-15. Annu's husband was a daily wage laborer who also took up plumbing and other jobs, and they lived in a rented shack about a kilometer from school. Annu walked Aneesha to and from school every day, carrying her youngest and walking the others. The one time Annu fell sick during my fieldwork period, there was nobody to walk Aneesha to school and she missed a week of classes. But unlike Jessy, Annu rarely complained about her hardships. During one of the parent-teacher meetings when I commented on how diligent and hard working her daughter was, Annu responded, "She is good at studies, but these days she isn't paying attention (to her studies). You should hit her, teacher, if she doesn't pay attention." Orienting to good futures in a temporality of stasis was characterized by labor and pain for children. If little Aneesha had to have a good future, she had to work harder and harder. Like Jessy, Annu too pushed her child hard. Both mothers solicited the help of more literate cousins or neighbors to monitor their children's reading of the picture books I sent home for reading practice. Any slip up was met with harsh and definitive punishment, the students confided. Mothers were fiercely optimistic about the academic success and possible futures of their children. They had to become hopeful to survive.

Stepping into the future

If considering the possibility of endless abjection, even momentarily, was agonizing for Jessy, stepping into yearned for futures—feeling, smelling, and touching the future—made Jessy confront the inadequacy of hope in producing radical material and social change. In August 2014, Jessy's cousin moved into a new house near St. Thomas, and in

the week that followed Jessy's two children had a sleepover at their aunt's new house. Though Jessy did not accompany them, she gushed about the new house after the sleepover. "It's a wonderful house. You should see the tiles, they sparkle [*entho thelakkama*]." Entering her cousin's new house seemed to be a momentarily stepping into the future, not just in the imagination but also in the corporeal body with all its sensorial consumptions. When I was invited to see the new house, the smooth sparkling tiles, the fresh gleaming white paint, and the fan whirling silently overhead seemed vastly different from Jessy's rough patchy cement floor, unpainted walls, and the whirring table fan that sat clumsily on a roughly hewn wooden table. If the past was rough edged, cement colored, and mud smelling, the future was smooth, white, and without slush. As she took her children back home after the sleepover, Jessy said, "I wish we had a house like that. But she has brothers in the (Persian) Gulf who help her out. I don't have any brothers, let alone brothers in the Gulf". When she saw others leave, like her cousin who had earlier lived next door, her resilient optimism revealed itself as insufficient. Hope was not enough. Emergent English literacies in primary school was hardly adequate to climb out of abjection, buy land, and build a new house. But Jessy persisted. One morning a few weeks before I left, when we were among the earliest to arrive at school, Jessy came to me and said softly, glancing around to make sure nobody heard us, "Didn't you ask me once what I hoped for Jaisy? I want her to become a doctor". Only elite upper castes in Edanadu have become doctors in the past or the present, and to become a doctor in Edanadu is to embody unquestionable social worth. While children of upper caste elites in Edanadu are naturally accorded this respect and worth on the strength of their inherited

material and social capital, Dalits at uneconomic schools find themselves segregated out to perform abjection. And yet, yearnings for a different world are whispered about and carried secretly in the depths of a mother's loving and despairing heart. Hope emerges agonizingly in response to hopelessness.

Conclusion

For families at the New English School who had migrated temporally into new material worlds, aspiring was a practice of ethics that made the deprivations of the past and the precarity of the present profoundly meaningful. Aspiring enabled them to reconfigure their relationships to new material and social worlds in favorable ways. It afforded possibilities of eliminating humiliating pasts. Recording how English is entangled with the “good futures” mothers yearned to bring into being, I suggested that aspiring is becoming a practice of ethics integral to becoming and being a “good mother”. However, aspiring as the practice of ethics became most painfully evident when that practice was fractured and the possibility of producing an ethical self was interrupted. Denied socially sanctioned future making performances, deprived of the material resources necessary to produce desirable futures, and aware of the inadequacy of hope in affecting radical material changes, mothers at the uneconomic school became obsessively hopeful, pushing children to work harder and punishing them when they fell short. Uneconomic schooling was thus not just an issue of medium of instruction but a composite entanglement of sensory consumptions and affective labors produced in certain kinds of material and social spaces by mothers who lived on the margins of society. What accentuated this experience was its temporal exclusivity; stuck with performing the past,

mothers at the uneconomic school were acutely conscious of the changing terms of social membership and their inability to perform them. Uneconomic schooling was therefore a newfangled way of “becoming Dalit”, and to recognize the enormity of social rejection anew that too in the very system purported to disrupt inequality was heartbreaking. Jessy called it “life in hell”; Ambedkar⁴ called it social death. Jessy considered corporeal death a fitting form of protest to “reject the rejections of caste society” (Guru, 2009); but the betrayals it entailed drove her to love and hope. The obsessive hope and the pain it inscribed on her child’s body as well as her own, however, reveals the price of desiring and imagining dignity in a future already betrayed.

⁴ B.R. Ambedkar is one of the most prominent anti-caste activists, the first Law Minister of independent India, and the principal architect of the Indian constitution.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERMINING

While the last chapter traced mothers' narratives and experiences of non-elite English schooling and uneconomic schooling, this chapter describes how public and policy discourses undermine mothers' claims, and make their aspirations defiant and compromised. Drawing on ethnographic material, interview data, and policy analysis, this chapter illuminates unexamined presuppositions and assumptions underpinning education policy, which render non-elite speech unintelligible. With the legitimacy of non-elite aspirational performance eroded (Appadurai, 2013), the possibility of institutional response or responsibility becomes negligible.

To give a brief overview of the chapter, I begin with two accounts about uneconomic schooling, one ethnographic and the other from a semi-official document that was circulated widely during my fieldwork. Sadly, both ignored the abjections that characterized uneconomic schooling; rather, both were nostalgic for the oft-repeated story of Kerala development, wherein state-funded schooling promised and delivered equality and opportunity. However, as Kapur et al. (2010) caution, "the nostalgia of the elites is an unreliable guide to the actual experiences of marginalized social groups" (p. 39). Both Dalit mothers' experiences of present abjection and new English-medium parents accounts of past marginality remain absent in these nostalgic narratives. This allows discourses about uneconomic schooling to describe non-elite exit from state-funded schools as an irrational aberration, which further sanctions the production of such

parents as ill informed, defiant, and even covetous. Accounts about non-elite English schooling in national policy discourses follow a similar and different trajectory. Here, what is referenced discursively yet is substantively absent is the story of national elites' consolidation of privilege through English-medium education. Unlike the Kerala experience, which at least had a robust regional medium schooling system, the national story is a despondent one where the English-vernacular divide is stark and unmistakable (Kumar, 1996; Naik, 1997). However, these histories are completely absented. Rather, what animates national policy is nostalgia for regional-medium education in primary grades, which again allows for non-elite exit to be constructed in ways that denigrate and shame the aspirations of new English-medium parents.

Table 3.1 Narratives about non-elite schooling

Narratives about	What is absent?	What is present?	How are parents portrayed?	What is “appropriate” for parents?
Uneconomic schooling	Dalit crisis	Nostalgia for “development”	Parents not portrayed	Celebration of marginality
Non-elite English schooling (circulating in Kerala)	Non-elite memories of economic and social marginality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nostalgia for “development” • Crisis of “ordinary” • Economic and aspirational transitions 	Ill-informed, covetous, defiant, compromised	Aspirational sacrifices
Non-elite English schooling (circulating nationally)	Consolidation of privilege through English education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nostalgia for mother tongue education in primary grades • Linguistic transitions 	Ill-informed, covetous, defiant, compromised	Aspirational sacrifices

A second point that emerges from the comparative analysis is policy approach to the transitions of liberalization. Celebratory accounts of mother-tongue medium education not only disregard actually existing histories of regional medium schooling and parental memories of marginality and humiliation, but also deny the transitions of liberalization. The imagined ideal is stuck in a timeless moment, with no material past or present. However, it is the examination of national policy that draws attention to the linguistic transitions engendered by liberalization. The absence of such an account in Kerala narratives begs an explanation. Firstly, the starkness of the English-vernacular divide at the federal level affords an easier grasp of elite mobilities and its accompanying linguistic changes. For instance, the CBSE's histories of elite schooling and language proficiencies, and recent shifts, are more readily available at the institutional level. Secondly, linguistic nationalism inflects the shifts at the Kerala level, making elisions easier. The most significant linguistic shift at both the Kerala and the national level is recognition of the insufficiency of "educated Indian English", which had been oriented towards reading and writing skills. In its place, a "natural" English that transcends geography and social location is becoming increasingly indispensable. In practice, this is naturalizing conversational skills as a key requirement for "knowing" English. This shift from academic proficiency to conversational skills is prevalent in Kerala too, most readily noticeable in the increasing number of English speaking Keralite actors in the Malayalam film industry. While earlier super stars like Mammooty, Mohanlal, and Suresh Gopi were English users but not speakers, the younger generation of stars including Dulquer Salmaan, Prithviraj Sukumaran, Nazriya Nazeem, and Aparna Gopinath are fluent English speakers on and off screen. Further, the increasing legitimacy of English speech

is also evident in Malayalam movies, not the comic “broken” English of non-elite emigrants hugely popular in earlier years but the “natural” version unmarked by region, class, or caste. In fact, the 2015 Prithviraj starrer *Ivide* [Here] is predominantly an English language film though it is formally a Malayalam language film. However, regional linguistic pride also requires of Keralite English speakers fluency in literary Malayalam and those who can only manage colloquial Malayalam typically face censure. Education policy ignores and denies these shifts in bilingualism similar to how it elides economic and aspirational shifts.

Theoretically, I draw on Dalit writing, critiques of development in Kerala, and the cultural production of educated persons to examine the “culturally specific definitions” of desirable forms of knowledge and skill, which animate discourses circulating in Kerala and at the federal level. Desirable, moral ways of becoming Keralite and Indian emerge to be deeply embedded in development narratives. Though development projects at the national and at the Kerala level followed different trajectories—the nation pursuing centralized planning and rapid industrialization and Kerala entangled in more politically oriented social reform projects—this diversity as well as present re-calibrations afford a nuanced analytic framework. If in Kerala the cultural production of the “ordinary Keralite [*sadharanakkari*]” is coming into crisis, at the federal level “educated Indian English” has already come into crisis, and disappeared. However, disappearance does not indicate absence, but a re-structuring, which assumes earlier values without making it explicit. Thus the legitimate English of Indians is still “educated”, but requires conversational skills that assume academic proficiencies. Meanwhile, the ordinary Keralite is always

already privileged, land owning, and professionally employed, but selfless and egalitarian. Assembled along similar hierarchies, albeit different in its specificities, both national and Kerala articulations produce moral geographies that undermine non-elite claims and aspirations, and render their experiences unintelligible.

Uneconomic schooling and the blind spots of “development”

On 14th March 2013, St. Thomas School celebrated its 118th anniversary. The distinguished guests in attendance included the parish priest who was also the school manager, the panchayat president who as the elected representative of the panchayat was the manager of all state-owned schools in Edanadu, and Dr. Varghese George, the Chairman of the Plantation Corporation of Kerala. A motely crowd of Dalit mothers sat on the low wooden benches, listening to guests’ reminiscence their school years and the glorious histories of Kerala’s school education. Dr. George lectured on how education had liberated Kerala from the fetters of caste [*jati kettil ninnum mochitamayi*], complete with references to Rani Parvati Bhai’s 1817 Royal Rescript and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen’s concept of education inflected human development. “For Amartya Sen, Kerala is a wonder [*vismayam*]. That happened because we treasured education [*vidyabhaysathilulla nikshepam*]”. Yet, Dr. George could not have been unaware that the “we” who “treasured education” included Dalits, who from the times of Ayyankali in early 1900s had agitated for school entry and educational development. Was it not visible that the caste that had been “destroyed” had yet emerged in full strength, aggregated at an uneconomic school as a depleted assembly of Dalit bodies?

For the parish priest and the head-teacher, on the other hand, this depletion and Dalitness was eminently visible. The priest had begun the program saying:

Your headmaster often speaks from despair [*nirasha*]. It is not difficult to understand, one look is enough to know [*otta nottathil nokkiya ariyam*]. I try to tell him it's okay, that things will be different next year.

One look is enough to know that caste had never been “destroyed”. Rather, development had simultaneously strengthened and concealed caste inequality so successfully that it took the structural changes of liberalization to make it visible, in all its grotesqueness. But the priest, like the headmaster and Mr. George, aspired for a return to the glorious past. For them the school was a grandmother [*muthashi*] who had nourished others selflessly, only to be abandoned in her old age. However, the fragile coherence of a glorious past fell apart before it could even be assembled when the teacher who concluded the events with a “vote of thanks” expressed her “heartfelt gratitude [*hrdayam niranja nandi*]” to the families in attendance for selflessly offering their children to a Malayalam-medium school, a sacrifice nobody else in the vicinity were willing to undertake. Most of the Dalit families present had patronized the school for three generations. It was not the grandmother-school who was being abandoned. Dalit families had always been abandoned by “development”. But the “ordinary” Keralite, who believes so deeply in developmentalism, is blind to the crises facing Dalit mothers pushed into experiences of social death.

While Dr. George's account denies the contradictions of Kerala's development experience even when he confronts the grotesqueness of caste segregated abjection, the second narrative remains blind to the claims and aspirations of Dalits and non-elites even

though it acknowledges that the state has failed its oppressed populations. During September 2013, the then Director of Public Instruction (DPI) for Kerala released a statement titled *Where is Our School Education Headed?* [*nammude school vidyabhyasam engotte?*]. Raghu sent me a copy of the text by email. Other education activists and head-teachers too discussed the article with great interest. What was refreshing about the DPI's article was its acknowledgment of the state's failings. The DPI covered a lot of ground, from recent grade inflations in high school exit exams to the management of uneconomic schooling through the opening of unofficial English-medium sections. Unlike Dr. George's, the DPI's account is not stuck in a timeless development narrative. However, his account too meanders back to nostalgia and critiques non-elite aspirations while the concerns of those remnant at uneconomic schools remain absent:

A few days ago, I had the opportunity to participate in a program organized at a CBSE school as the Chief Guest. There, amongst the people who received and welcomed me [*varavettavaril*] was my peon [*ente peon*], from when I used to work at the Corporation⁵. He gets Rs. 9000 per month in daily wages. Both his children study in the CBSE school. Though the government promises to educate his children for free; though state schools have highly qualified, well trained teachers, who have passed the PSC exam; though state schools are competently resourced with computers, multi-media rooms⁶, free lunches, and everything else; why doesn't an ordinary Keralite [*sadharanakaran*] enroll his children in state-owned or comparable state-funded schools? Why does he pay such hefty fees [*valiya fees*] to send his two children to a school that has none of these facilities [*aparyapthamaya*]? (p. 7)

⁵ Prabhakar was Chief Executive of the Kerala Medical Services Corporation from 2010 to 2013. The Medical Services Corporation is the central procurement agency for the 1200 government hospitals of the State.

⁶ State owned schools, as beneficiaries of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All) program, have benefited infrastructurally. SSA infrastructural funds are not extended to state-funded, community owned schools like St. Thomas. But both state-owned and state-funded Malayalam-medium schools in Edanadu were uneconomic.

He further asserts that a “return [*thirichupokku*]” to the “good lessons and habits” and the “correct values [*shariyaya mulyangal*]” of the “previous years [*oru kalathe*]” is necessary (p. 11). This juxtaposition—of a good, virtuous past and the precarious, immoral present—allows DPI Prabhakar’s recognition of state sanctioned inequality to shift the responsibility of social justice to marginalized groups; here, the peon. Though the social differences could not be greater—one the Director of Public Instruction and the other his former peon who we are told earns Rs. 9000 per month in daily wages—Prabhakar transforms the peon nested in class and caste hierarchies (servant class/caste) into a “universal citizen” by deploying the trope of a “*sadharanakkaran*” or ordinary Keralite. To become the *sadharanakkaran* described by the DPI however, the peon has to sacrifice his aspirations. The notion of a blind spot comes from the anatomy of the eye, where the point of entry of the optic nerve on the retina is insensitive to light. By design and function, the spot cannot sense light. Similarly, narratives about state-funded schooling circulating in Kerala, ranging from Dr. George’s crude blindness to the DPI’s accommodating insensitivity, gestures to deep seated paternalisms that even when well-intentioned, produce the marginalized as “intellectually and morally inferior” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 15).

Producing the ordinary Keralite

Ordinary Keralities who constitute a political public and participate in “public action”—an entitlement orientation that prompts the public to demand social and economic benefits from the state (Dreze & Sen, 1989)—are key to the imaginary of development in Kerala. The trope of public action and development is deployed ubiquitously in

descriptions of public schooling [*pothu vidyabhyasam*] in Kerala, with state investments in schooling held to be central in the production of the political public. For instance, the Human Development Report of Kerala (GoK, 2015) writes:

Kerala's achievements in human development indicators are often considered unparalleled in the whole developing World and is often compared with the development indices of advanced countries. Kerala's particular development experience of high human development achievements against low per capita income level was mainly attributed to the State's public intervention in health and education sectors. Throughout the discussion on the State's achievements in human development, education has occupied a prime place. In fact, education has always had a central role in determining Kerala's performance in social development (p. 161).

Similarly, the website of the General Education Department states:

Kerala's achievements in social development and quality of life are, no doubt, inspiring and encouraging. The state has achieved a human development index comparable to the developed countries of the World. Prof. Amartya Sen has attributed these achievements largely to the priority which the state has accorded to high literacy among all Indian states and education for a long time.

The agential character here is the “state”, which includes both the princely states during the colonial period and the Communist Party led government in independent Kerala.

Further, by referencing Sen, the state is portrayed to be aligned closely with the interests of an undifferentiated public comprised of ordinary Keralites, an alignment that is actively produced by the public: Sen (1991) writes, “public action includes not only what is done for the public by the state, but what is done for the public by itself” (p. 325).

However, even a cursory review of the public school system reveals that 57% of state-funded schools are owned by dominant caste/community organizations (GoK, 2015, p. 164). Furthermore, of the 1,58,842 teachers working in state-funded schools, 66% worked in community owned, state-funded schools where constitutional reservations for Scheduled Castes are not mandated (GoK, 2009, p. 258). Padmanabhan & Komath

(2012) point out that in 2009 only 0.33% of teachers in community owned, state-funded schools were Scheduled Castes. Though public education did not translate into better life options for Dalits and other non-elites, it did result in secure, tenured, government employment with attractive retirement benefits for members of privileged communities, both Christian and Hindu. As Pampirikunnu (2011) argues, the “public” [*pothu samuham*] in Kerala is comprised of “universal citizens”, clearly recognizable as *savarna* [dominant caste] even when they walk “rootless on earth, crossing the boundaries of caste” (p. 566; also see Kapikkad, 2012). The success of the Kerala development story lies in the elisions that transformed the accumulations of relatively privileged groups into universal egalitarian development.

Two of the most frequently discussed “radical” reforms, in accounts of Kerala’s development trajectory, are the education and land reforms. Both featured substantive inter-caste/community participation and aspiration but were led in crucial phases by dominant caste leaders in the expanding Communist Party (Jeffrey, 1992; Lieten, 1977; Nossiter 1982; Radhakrishnan, 1989). Both reforms were aligned against oppressive resource accumulations: against the landlords or *janmis* in the case of peasant struggles and against the equally corrupt and avaricious school managers in the case of teachers’ struggles. In addition, labor struggles in the newly emergent coir and cashew factories also contributed towards eliding the caste and community underpinnings of protests (Lindberg, 2001). Though the struggles were able to garner wide participation from differently positioned oppressed communities, the definitional objectives of the reforms were aligned with the interests of the more privileged from amongst diverse subjugated

populations. In the peasant struggle, the “peasant” was not the landless laborer but the tenant farmer facing eviction threats and unfair rents (Radhakrishnan, 1981). Similarly, education reforms privileged the needs of educated and employed but beleaguered teachers rather than the aspirations of “uneducated” groups for equitable educational development (Lieten, 1977). Meanwhile, the inclusion of “others” in the development experience was negotiated through the distribution of minimum entitlements, which nevertheless had immense symbolic significance, like fragments of unproductive land distributed to landless laborers and schooling access for students from marginalized communities (Steur, 2011). This uneven re-distribution of resources was accompanied by re-arrangements of power and culture that replaced traditional ways of performing caste hierarchies—derogatory treatment of lower castes, inability to eat together, untouchability, or lack of social interaction among different castes—with new cultural performances that Communist leaders purported as radically egalitarian (Devika, 2010; Lindberg, 2001). Thus, only if the “public” profiting from public action is assumed to be a truncated, relatively privileged public, will public action have shifted debates and legislations about wealth equitably.

Becoming ordinary, becoming educated: Aspirational sacrifices

If the notion of an educated person points to “a culturally specific definition of desirable, valued forms of training, skills, and knowledges” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 14), the idea of an egalitarian ordinary citizen gestures to a reversal of social and moral hierarchies. If the former points to the production of privilege, the latter assumes that privilege has been divested. The universal citizen, or the “ordinary” Keralite

[*sadharanakkaran*] that the DPI Biju Prabhakar references, should be without “the benefit of aristocratic wealth or the afflictions of inherited poverty” in order to project a “measure of human equality” (Pandey, 2009, p. 323). However, as argued previously, culturally valued performances in Kerala were predicated on the projection of equality rather than the production of equity. Therefore, for those ordinary Keralites who could assume greater privileges in terms of “better access to modern education, public sphere debates, and public mores” (Devika, 2010, p. 806), the project of becoming educated coincided with that of becoming ordinary. The ordinary Keralite celebrated in accounts of public action was proficient in educated Malayalam, Marxism, and militant struggle, typically had some professional qualification, literary prowess, or artistic brilliance, and was committed to abolishing conspicuous caste barriers but not averse to upholding accrued caste privileges (Devika, 2010; Lindberg, 2001; Nossiter, 1982; Rammohan, 1998). Thus, the cultural production of the progressive Keralite assumed the knowledges accrued from formal schooling, given the early spread of education in the region, but formal schooling by itself was insufficient to becoming “fully knowledgeable” (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996, p. 21). The dominance of the Communist Party and discourses of egalitarian development produced new requirements for “modern”, “secular”, and “radical” moralities that were crucial to becoming educated. In this way, dominant castes converted their “traditional caste capital” into “secular, modern, caste-less capital” (Deshpande, 2013, p. 39) and their explicitly caste-marked identity was “freed of its particularistic burden” by the “fortuitous advent” of the “unmarked universal citizen” (p. 37). As Lindberg (2001) points out, communist dismantling of and opposition to the most conspicuous features of caste became such a dominant discourse that

“hierarchies became more hidden and difficult to criticize” (p. 175). Projects of colonial modernity thus mingled with communist radicalism to submit that annihilation of caste was predicated on becoming a “universal citizen”; there was no need “for the specific contexts or broader environments of caste to change” (Pampirikunnu, 2011, p. 560).

Moreover, Devika (2010) points out that “the setting up of the communist activist as the self sacrificing and disinterested agent of anti-caste struggle in leftist political discourse” was achieved by condemning non-elites aspiring for similar skills and institutional resources as “self-seeking” (p. 805). The selflessness entailed in becoming ordinary thus required that non-elites, who had no accumulated resources, sacrifice their aspirations instead. The DPI’s hopes for his peon as well as Dr. Nirmala’s positioning of Jomon in the doghouse controversy follow similar patterns. The pursuit of love and humanist education that Dr. Nirmala advocates is the legitimate aspirational performance now normalized for middle class parents, with accrued linguistic and educational resources but facing heightened competition. The same, however, requires of Jomon the moral courage to give up his educational aspirations for his son. Likewise, the reconstruction of “public schooling” in Kerala requires aspirational sacrifices of the DPI’s peon, regardless of how the same public schooling may have produced the peon’s own economic and social marginality. The technique of domination, as Ambedkar (1945) points out, “is to make the wrong appear to the very victim as though they were his privileges”. This is the cultural sorcery that erases the crises of Dalit mothering at uneconomic schools to produce a nostalgic crisis of “public” schooling.

Yet, public commentators like Sethu reveal the macabre anti-Dalitness underpinning public education in Kerala. Titled *Kuttikalundo Kuttikal?* [Kids wanted], Sethu's article appeared in the 26th July 2013 issue of the local newspaper Malayalam Manorama. Though the bulk of the article ridicules historical state zeal for family planning as instrumental in producing uneconomic schooling, Sethu's conclusion is illuminating:

But the pertinent question still remains. Where will we find kids? You can snatch passers by from by-roads and enroll them in schools; you can push and shove them from first grade to tenth. You can graduate children who can't add ten and two but will that be enough to regain numbers? Two remedies come to mind. Why not bring kids from those regions that have proven their prosperity in this regard? Let that be Chhattisgarh⁷, Bundelkhand⁸, or Bastar⁹. Is it right to fetter [*thalakkuka*] children, who have to grow up to be global citizens [*vishwa pauranmar*], in cartographic boundaries [*athir varambukalkakathu*]? But what if required numbers still remain elusive? There are a great many African countries that are rich and prosperous with progeny [*santhana samrudhi kondu sambannaraya*]. Shouldn't we first resettle those skins and bones [*ellum tholum*], those scepters of hunger [*pattini kolangal*]?

Freewheeling from academic to economic abjection and eventually to blackness, Sethu lays bare that which cannot be named: caste segregations endemic to uneconomic schooling in particular and to the project of universal citizenship in general. In Sethu's account, the black body of the Dalit is transposed with the poverty of Chattisgarh, Bundelkhand, and Bastar, before it merges with starvation and black Africa. Always alien, never to be fully embraced, black bodies are "passers by [*vazhi pokkar*]", but

⁷ A North Indian state with the lowest Human Development Index in the country. The reference is to a much-reported case where about 456 children from North Indian regions were detained in Palakkad during May 2014, on suspicions of being trafficked.

⁸ A North Indian region that is almost synonymous with poverty, see <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/Backward-Bundelkhand/articleshow/5147082.cms>

⁹ A North Indian region known for its poverty and armed militancy

immensely useful nevertheless as “numbers [*kankkukal*]” in service of the development venture. Sethu further notes the perennial crisis of black bodies as far as education itself is concerned: they “cannot add ten and two” and have to be “pushed and shoved from first to tenth grade”. These are the positions made available to “others”, especially black others, in the very imagining of Kerala (Ayyappan, 2011; Baburaj, 2011; Kapikkad, 2013; Kochu, 2015; Mohan, 2015, Pampirikunnu, 2011).

If Sethu names the unnamable, teachers and educators attached to uneconomic schools had to find ways to disguise that which refused to be concealed. When I first met Appu at St. Thomas School, he was in fourth grade and he had just been dressed up as *Mahabali* for the Onam celebrations. Resplendent in an ivory *mundu* with the customary gold border, his bare chest was part hidden behind fake-gold temple ornaments Anu teacher had borrowed from a dancer neighbor. Shy and restless with his shirtless chest and ready-to-fall *mundu*, he became genial and playful after he got rid of the *mundu* and was back in his shirt and pants. Come December, Appu became Santa Claus. “None of the others look the part, they are so... thin...” explained Anu teacher. It was true; at St. Thomas everybody looked Dalit—disgracefully thin and/or black. Except for Appu. With his fair complexion and un-thin-ness, he could pass for an “ordinary” Keralite, and that’s how Appu became *Mahabali* and Santa Claus and the other beings good Keralite children are called on to become. Like the cultural sorcery that transformed the banishment of the benevolent and just demon king *Mahabali* into a national celebration (Kapikkad, 2012), Appu is transfigured into an ordinary Keralite, as and when required. However, when Appu graduated primary school and moved on to a high school in town, a Dalit-looking

child had to be called on to bear the caste markings of privilege. This crisis image, like black bodies called on to become white angels during Christmas celebrations, is viscerally confrontational, but at St. Thomas, this confrontation is necessary, almost ordinary, and in some ways unavoidable. Appu can pass for a *Mahabali* and a more Dalit looking body can carry that mantle after him, but that may at best be normalized as the abnormal state of affairs at an uneconomic school. Uneconomic schooling is after all not a desirable state of affairs. Rather, the glorious past has to be re-produced.

Aspiration shaming

While uneconomic schooling intermittently forced the ordinary Keralite to confront the hollowness of egalitarian development claims, non-elite aspirations for English-medium schooling denied the development story outright. New English medium parents had after all abandoned a glorious, egalitarian public school system, denying the universal development story. The celebration of public schooling as universal development required the negation of their denial and the shaming of their aspirations. During the early months of my fieldwork, several Edanadu elders advised that I meet a head-teacher who was also a local historian and prolific writer. On meeting me, he immediately assumed that we shared the same disdain for low-fee CBSE parents, with the belief that anybody concerned with uneconomic schools would naturally fault parents who had left most recently. I had not met any English-medium parents yet, but I soon found that state educators and wealthier land-owning residents of Edanadu shared his perspective:

Those who have at least a little money now send their children to English-medium [schools]. It is a spectacle [*kamyamaya sambhavam*] ... It is their blundered notion [*abadha dharana*]. It is a wrong perspective [*tettaya kazchapadu*] on life

and society. They do it for social recognition. It's a misunderstanding [*thetti dharana*].

Drawing on Bartlett's (2007a; 2007b) work on literacy shaming, I use the term "aspiration shaming" to refer to narratives that highlight expanding non-elite aspirational horizons, but to discredit them. Aspiration-shaming narratives discursively located parents as low-income and vernacular-educated, and produced them as dehumanized and deficient. Thus, educators glossed the key economic and aspirational changes of liberalization but in ways that devalued new English-medium parents, discredited their denials of the development story, and undermined their moral imperatives to aspire or re-imagine unequal terms of recognition. For instance, in the earlier quote, the head-teacher marks out his subjects as those with "a little money now", delineating parents historically (now) and economically (little money). Capturing the radical economic changes of liberalization concisely and drawing attention to shifting aspirational terrains, he denigrates parents' aspirations. Another head-teacher, who I will call John, had a Ph.D. in Education and intermittently participated in curricular and policy production. Speaking to my interest in the transitions engendered by liberalization, he offered:

Their economic levels have gone up, that is the main reason, and for status they now send their children to English-medium. They say 'I didn't study, at least let my kids study'. The state syllabus is good, but parents don't understand that, they want Western style education, shoes and socks, tie, and pants.

John too identified low-fee CBSE parents accurately even as they belittled them. But for him, non-elites climbing out of destitution and aspiring for more desirable futures became the "problem". He even ventriloquized parents like Rebecca but unlike her formulations of "I couldn't study [*padikkan pattiyilla*]", for John, parents "didn't study [*padichilla*]", and the fault lay with the parent. "They don't understand" was a common comment, as

was “they don’t know”, and this was often attributed to parents’ lack of education, or more precisely (English-medium) higher education, since all parents were expected to have had some (vernacular) school education. Further, in John’s explanation, objects historically attached to (elite) English-medium schooling—shoes, socks, ties—are divested of social value. New CBSE parents thus emerge as illegitimate aspirants, even comical and stupid, whose claims of worth could hardly be taken seriously.

I met Mary, another head-teacher, multiple times since she was passionate about Freirean pedagogies that had been institutionalized in the state system. Though Freirean pedagogy insists on privileging the knowledge learners bring with them, in Mary’s narratives, new-CBSE parents’ aspirational mobilities were a central concern. According to Mary,

Fathers labor at loading jobs and then give away their hard-earned money to English-medium schools. Ordinary people [*sadharanakkar*] don’t understand the meaning of education. Their desires are for what they do not have—a palatial house, jewelry and gold, a new fridge. They think education is also like that.

Mary notes the father’s occupation as (uneducated) paid manual labor, which in Edanadu is a devalued caste-occupation normalized for Dalits. In addition, slave-castes were once forbidden to wear gold jewelry, and during my fieldwork period Dalit mothers at the Malayalam-medium school who wore gold jewelry invited public censure. Further, they lived in segregated “colonies” in abject housing conditions and a proper house was an intense yearning for all the Dalit mothers I worked with. However, disregarding the precarity of Dalit life, Mary strikingly draws attention to shifting aspirational horizons—vernacular-educated “ordinary” people who work in occupations reserved for Dalits were now aspiring for “palatial houses”, “gold”, and “English schooling”. Mary transitions

seamlessly from low-income and un-educated (loading jobs) to covetous (desiring palatial house); in her cultural world, vernacular-educated “ordinary” people are “intellectually and even morally inferior” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 15). The “extraordinary” aspirations of such “ordinary” people are selfish and crass, unlike the selfless “public action” of distinguished, ordinary Keralites.

Limits of ordinary aspirations

Unsatisfied with the tenuousness of “ordinariness”, Mary eventually fragmented the amorphous *sadharanakkār* [ordinary] into *pavapettavar* [poor] and *sadharanakkār* [ordinary Keralites]. In her clarified terminology, ordinary Keralites patronized English-medium schools and the poorest remained dependent on state-funded Malayalam-medium schools. This representation is curiously consistent with the DPI’s narrative, where the peon patronizing English-medium schooling for his two children is an ordinary Keralite. But of course, for the DPI, Mary’s category of the “poor” remnant at uneconomic schools does not pose questions or concerns. Mary’s account is incisive, for the fundamental basis of the ordinary citizen has been fractured irrevocably in Kerala. Deep-seated developmentalist projections of a “society of equals” unfettered by *janma bheda*m [difference by birth] (Devika, 2002, p. 15) can not be upheld anymore. Interestingly, the head teacher at the New English School offered a similar but different distinction. According to her, the New English School served the “most ordinary of ordinary Keralites [*sadharanakkār*ilum *sadharanakkār*]”. If for Mary all ordinary Keralites now attended English-medium schools, the head-teacher at the New English

School asserted that some were more ordinary than others. Yet the limits of the ordinary, for both Mary and the New English School principal, were encountered at the caste line.

The only student counseled to leave the New English School, from amongst the 150 odd students I taught in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 was Binny. Curiously, in her description of Binny to me, the principal did not index academic performances. Rather the principal recounted how she had to once deny Binny permission to attend the morning assembly since she had not combed and tied up her hair properly. The principal explained that it was not Binny's fault, "she did not know" since her father was an agricultural laborer and her mother also did not know how to "pay attention". Like how the principal fixed social deviance around a Dalit occupation (agricultural labor), the occupation Mary had fixed in her description of moral deviance was loading work, also normalized as a Dalit occupation. Similarly, the historian head-teacher too had singled out a Dalit occupation—paid domestic work—for his tirade on devalued parenting. However, it was a land-owning philanthropist who explicitly stated the limits of ordinariness and aspiring normalized for Dalits in Edanadu. In the 1970s, when even public transportation was limited, this philanthropist was one of the very few Edanadu residents who had traveled by private car to the nearby town to attend an (elite) English-medium school. I met him every other day during my walk to school and he repeatedly said to me, "Even children from [the Dalit colony Raghu lived in] now go to English-medium. How times have changed! [*kalam poya poke*] What else will I have to see in this life time!" His apocalyptic description of the annihilation of old social worlds reveals deep-seated anxieties about the new social relationships that non-elite English-medium schooling

symbolizes. In this context, the only ethical aspiration that the philanthropist, head-teachers at state-funded schools, and the principal of New English School offer Dalits is Malayalam medium schooling. When Dalits begin to aspire like “ordinary” Keralites, ordinariness itself becomes an empty category that has to be re-defined. As the next section details, the rupturing of the ordinary Keralite [*sadharanakkaran*] is repaired by the production of the natural human [*manushyan*].

From ordinary to natural: Critical pedagogy and becoming human

The critical pedagogy institutionalized by the state of Kerala builds on Freire’s contributions to education and urges for pedagogy to be respectful to learners and for learning to be sensitive to the knowledge learners bring with them. “Becoming human” is a key Freirean concept wherein the oppressed, whose humanity has been stolen from them by traditional forms of education, become more fully human through critical, dialogical, education. However, writing about her work with a Freirean literacy program in Brazil, Bartlett (2010) cautions that the Freirean teleology of learners moving from false to true (critical) consciousness can blind educators to the knowledge learners bring with them and produce fervent convictions that some forms of literacy liberate oppressed people (p. 171). Therefore, Bartlett (2010) contends,

No literacy or literacy pedagogy is inherently liberating ... instead, literacies provide certain affordances that people take hold of and use in various and somewhat capricious ways depending on their literacy ideologies, cultural resources, and social networks, as well as the larger social and economic relations in which they are situated. (p. 169)

In Edanadu, English-medium schooling had profound affective and moral affordances for how non-elite mothers made sense of the destitutions of their past and the precarity of

their present (chapter two). Erasing these affordances, educators urged marginalized mothers to “become human”.

Authoritatively explaining the lives and desires of new CBSE parents, a head-teacher at an uneconomic state-funded school advised the Dalit mothers in attendance at a school function thus: “These English-medium schools don’t teach kids anything, education is not about speaking English, it is about becoming human”. He proceeded to describe CBSE students as “vomiting up” what they had memorized. “It is parental ego”, he continued, “they think if I spend money, I can make money”. Contrasting parental English aspirations as well as student (non) proficiencies with what it means to be human [*manusha-twam*], like Dr. Nirmala does during the dog house controversy, the head-teacher assured mothers that state pedagogies in the vernacular taught children to think and to be kind—to become a “good human being” [*nalla manushyan*]. The promise of education lay in the crafting of a “good human” who valued humanism [*manushatwam*] and friendship [*sakhitwam*]. Good schooling was about children “playing together”, not about learning letters from day one, or about mustering up a smattering of English sufficient enough to say “yes or no”. Like the head-teacher, textbook writers and curriculum committee members explicitly differentiate state and CBSE pedagogy along human and non-human lines, referring to CBSE pedagogies in primary grades as “animal training”, “dog house”, “raising broiler chickens” and the like. Vernacular primary schooling and state language policies were contrasted as human. The fragmenting of the ordinary Keralite generated discourses about the natural human, endowed with everything good. Adhering to histories of political activism, “critical thinking” is a key

characteristic of this natural human, but a critical thinking that operates from the perspective of dominant groups and does not target them. From this vantage point, “market forces” and “linguistic imperialisms of English” (also see Anandan, 2010) become the oppressor from whom the “local” must be saved. As Guru (2011) argues, the dominant imagination in India “hesitates to engage with the local but show an extraordinary urgency to confront the imperial” (p. 39). Like the universal citizen who engaged in public action, the natural human would thus be critical, but in ways that consolidated the interests of dominant groups. Emergent conceptualizations of a natural human portrayed aspiring mothers as de-humanized parents since they were “running after” detrimental pedagogies. In effect, by aspiring, mothers longed, hoped, and worked towards failing their own children.

To summarize before shifting scale, I began with two accounts about uneconomic schooling, the first a contested narrative from the anniversary celebrations at St. Thomas and the second from an article written by DPI Prabhakar. Though vastly different in its repertoires of recognition, both narratives had much in common. Both centered the experiences and nostalgias of the privileged and remained insensitive to the lived experiences and claims of Dalits and new English-medium parents. Exploring histories of institutional paternalisms reified in this insensitivity, I describe how the crisis of public schooling becomes pinned on non-elite’s “irrational” exit from state-funded schools, which sanctions the production of such parents as ill informed, defiant, and even covetous. In the next section, I examine accounts about non-elite English schooling in national policy discourses. Unlike the Kerala experience, which at least had a robust

regional medium schooling system, the national story is a despondent one where the English-vernacular divide is stark and unmistakable (Kumar, 1996; Naik, 1997). Yet, national policy too articulates nostalgia for regional-medium education in primary grades, which again allows for non-elite exit to be constructed in ways that denigrate and shame the aspirations of new English-medium parents.

National people: Linguistic transitions and aspiration shaming

Moving from policy and public articulations in Kerala to those at the national level, the similarity across locational differences is striking. Though the development projects at the national and at the Kerala level followed different trajectories—the nation pursuing centralized planning and rapid industrialization and Kerala entangled in more politically oriented social reform projects—the salience of “educated Indian English” in the national story shares much in common with the cultural production of “ordinary” Keralites.

Assembled along similar hierarchies, albeit different in its specificities, both national and Kerala articulations anticipate aspirational sacrifices from non-elites. For this section, I primarily draw on the opening sections of the National Position Paper on Teaching of English (NCERT, 2006), which addresses “people’s aspirations”. The more pedagogic sections of the position paper will feature in the chapters that follow.

The national position paper (NCERT, 2006) begins by tracing out the social and pedagogic contexts of national reforms. The text opens thus:

English is in India today a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. (p. 1)

According to the position paper, “English in India today is a symbol of people’s aspirations” for a “fuller participation in national and international life”. The generic, universal people of India aspire for a fuller participation in not just national life but also in international life. The central board CBSE, interestingly, locates such “participation” in the “development process” (CBSE, 2010, p. 2); national development features predominantly in the pre-liberalization years and an international orientation dominates the post-1990s. To elaborate, in the post-colonial, newly independent nation, “participation in national life” had been predicated on active participation in the development project, which had been synonymous with centralized planning and rapid industrialization (Deshpande, 2003). Moreover, the undisputed language of “national development”—of science and technology, law, administration, commerce, and the professions in general—was English (Faust & Nagar, 2001). English bore the markings of this burden and was termed “educated Indian English” during this period, the legitimacy and legibility of the language having more to do with who used it than how it was used (Davies, 2003; Kachru, 1965; Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998; Sedlatschek, 2009). Though linguists like Kachru (1965) tried to transform social markings into linguistic distinctions, educated Indian English was not a dialect but rather a “modulect” used in specific “modules” or “compartments” primarily to do with professional work (Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998, p. 154). If substantive participation in Kerala’s development trajectory entailed particular performances of modernity, secularism, and radical opposition to overt caste hierarchies, legitimate participation in Nehruvian development required performances of scientific, secular, modernity (Srivastava, 1996a; 1996b) and assumed proficiency in educated English and its allied professions.

However, the contours of legitimate participation are shifting in the post market reform period, and at the national level, this is most evident in the insufficiency of “educated Indian English”. The national position paper (NCERT, 2006) writes:

Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India tailored to higher education (as a “library language”, a “window on the world”), now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena (p. 1).

One of the first articulations of such an “insufficiency”—of educated Indian English and its orientations to higher education—was made by the CBSE English Language Teaching reforms of 1988-1997. The CBSE Project Officer for the reforms, SK Gangal (1995) explains the rationale for the project thus:

The CBSE received over a period of time extensive feedback that the existing class IX-X syllabi and textbooks were heavily biased towards content and did not help much in the development of language skills and communicative competence. It was felt that the existing course should be revised in such a manner that it provides confidence to the child for interaction with his peers and people around him. Study of English language was also seen as an instrument to provide: 1) access to professional literature in English in various fields of life and make contribution to it, and 2) greater social and geographical mobility to people of ordinary means throughout the country (p. 316).

As Gangal points out, the restricted domains of “modullect” educated Indian English did not “help much” in the development of “communicative competence”, which was becoming increasingly necessary for “fuller participation in national life”. This is not to negate the underlying alignment of “educated English” with professional work; rather the reforms worked to align educated English with the transformations emergent in professional work itself. To elaborate, the one domain that educated Indian English had not dominated was social life (Davies, 2003; Kachru, 1965; Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998; Sedlatschek, 2009). Fraser Gupta (1997) goes to the extent of characterizing India

as a “scholastic country” as far as learning English was concerned for English was principally encountered and used in scholastic domains. Likewise, Tickoo (1986) argues that socializing in English was neither a realistic nor a desirable pedagogic objective in India (p. 54). However, the expansion of global capitalism is re-configuring work and expanding professional labor into “intimate” and “affective” terrains (Mankekar & Gupta, 2016). English can no longer be contained in “modules”; it has to be transformed from a module into a full-fledged “language” and an “English user” should now be “capable of doing everything that needs to be done within a single language” (Mitchell, 2009, p. 163). That those who had access to professional work in pre market-reform India could still be described as “people of ordinary means throughout the country”—or as Mazzarella (2005) puts it “short on money and long on institutional perks”—was eventually rectified by market reforms (also see Desai, 2010). However, if the CBSE locates “people’s aspirations” for “fuller participation in national and international life” with Indians who have historically participated, legitimately and profitably, in national development projects, the national position paper imposes this history on those are only now gaining access to English-medium schooling. Yet, the “irrelevance” of English’s “colonial origins” and its “insufficiency” as a “library language” or as the language of higher education is most pertinent for those who were actually privileged enough to access higher education.

After indexing normative dominant aspirations, in a strange dance across incommensurate social locations and aspirational profiles, the national position paper goes on to describe “people” as follows:

The opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s has coincided with an explosion in the demand for English in our schools because English is perceived to open up opportunities (Das 2005). The visible impact of this presence of English is that it is today being demanded by *everyone* at the very *initial* stage of schooling. ... The popular response to systemic failure has been to extend downwards the very system that has failed to deliver. The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of political response to people's aspirations, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction (NCERT, 2006, p. 1).

In a grand sweep, the position paper renders invisible histories and privileges associated with educated Indian English, which it has just indexed by evoking English as a library language tailored to higher education, and fixes “demands” for the “language that opens up possibilities” in post-1990s India. Contrary to the claims of the position paper, the demand for English is over a century old; Sedlatschek (2009) traces the first “explosion in demand for English in our schools” to the post-1857 period, when British responses to the Great Rebellion resulted in an unprecedented expansion of administrative networks, fueling demands for English educated Indians. The position paper does note a greater “variety and range of English teaching environments” later, but it singles out those who have acquired access to English only post-1990s as the “people” who form its pedagogic audience. Though the post-1990s boom is perhaps the most democratic of all the expansions of English schooling, the position paper describes the aspirations of new aspirants as geared towards “extending downwards the very system that has failed to deliver”. Unlike Appadurai (2013), who points to an “ethics of possibility” when aspirations are not confined by past memories of oppression or present experiences of subjugation, the position paper is concerned that the aspirations of people on the margins of society are unlimited by previous systemic failure or present systemic feasibility. The policy paper thus articulates an enduring tolerance for existing inequalities but a sharp

intolerance for non-elite aspirations. Most interestingly, the position paper distinguishes the “academic” from the “political” and as Deshpande (2013) reminds, non-elite pursuits of their interests “requires the mandatory mediation of public politics” since the “unmarked, universal” has been claimed, normalized, and naturalized by “infra-visible” dominant castes (pp. 37-38). The “universal” becomes expressly non-elite only when it is the universal in need of “reform”.

Conclusion

As Gaikwad (2016) argues so eloquently, the ability to define, label, and conflate personal aspirations as national interests is an unmistakable marker of privilege. For such an elision, however, non-elites have to wholeheartedly embrace the opportunity to sacrifice their aspirations for more just and dignified futures. I began this chapter by detailing the production of the ordinary Keralite in narratives of public action and egalitarian development, pointing out the aspirational sacrifices these anticipated from non-elites. The notion of the ordinary Keralite was deployed to obscure histories of differential aspirations normalized for differentially positioned “ordinary” Keralites and to elide the moral imperatives underpinning emergent non-elite aspirations. Those who refused to comply with aspirational sacrifices were shamed and aspiring was transformed from a practice of ethics into a practice of depravity. Next, tracing national-regional variations, and convergences, I drew attention to how the salience of “educated Indian English” in the national story shared much in common with the production of “ordinary” Keralites. Assembled along similar hierarchies, albeit different in its specificities, both national and Kerala articulations anticipated aspirational sacrifices from non-elites as

evident in their analogous scrutiny and de-legitimization of the new non-elite aspirational horizons. Thus, while non-elite parents sought to make their past and present claims on future-making legible and legitimate, dominant discourses made their yearnings defiant and compromised.

CHAPTER 4

NATURALIZING

As an informal activity, language planning is “as old as language itself” and is “integral in the distribution of power and resources in all societies” (Wright, 2004, p. 1 in McCarty & Warhol, 2011, p. 177). Language planning is crucial to maintaining or securing privilege, and as Cooper (1989) reminds, language planning is “not necessarily initiated by persons for whom language is a principal focus” (p. 183); rather, language becomes the principal vehicle through which other kinds of goals may be articulated. As I alluded to in chapter two, language planning is integral to non-elite aspiring but as I explain in chapter three, language planning is equally vital to elite confluences of personal interests as public goals. In this chapter, I argue that diverse national agencies undertook extensive language planning, under the guise of language-in-education reforms, in ways that intentionally or inadvertently naturalized elite agendas as national policy.

I begin with an overview of the institutional structures that govern English language policy and practice, federally and locally, to explain the extent to which diverse and even contesting agencies yet cohered to legitimize the linguistic shifts noted in the previous chapter. Then, I analyze *how* the shifts were legitimized. Federal and Kerala state agencies produced varying artifacts including policy documents, textbooks, and centralized exams to justify reform orientations and to recommend and even mandate particular teaching learning practices. It is important to note that this chapter primarily analyzes policy documents, which forms only one mechanism of governance. The next chapter takes up textbooks, the single most important cultural artifact that governs

teaching and learning in classrooms in India (Kumar, 1988). Therefore, many of the themes discussed in this chapter take material form in the next and what is lost and found in translation also has significant impacts on classroom pedagogic practices.

This chapter focuses on policy narratives. Firstly, I detail the histories recounted by policy documents, which record disciplinary shifts in linguistics, especially the paradigm shift from the Saussurean notion of language as a set of static structures to Chomsky's rejection of structuralism. However, policy documents propose disciplinary theories as the primary producer of linguistic inequalities in classrooms. That is, policy documents argue that the earlier mandate to learn language structures caused linguistic inability in Indian classrooms, and that the present recognition of innate ability and meaning making will correct these. Therefore, reforms variously foreground comprehension and production of "meaningful" language as the objectives of English teaching and learning in beginner grades. Further, all three reforms oppose memorization though the dichotomies they produce are diverse: memorization/comprehension, memorization/innate ability, memorization/communication. These policy objectives and oppositions, however, cohere to oppose "traditional" reading and writing exercises and to promote teacher and student speech as the principal marker of teaching-learning, and of knowing, English. In this way, reforms naturalized the transition from educated Indian English to unmarked conversational English within the school system.

However, paying closer attention to the diversity of reform narratives yet reveals the social and cultural lives of disciplinary theories. Despite the dominance of structuralism, the CBSE system could still boast of academic proficiency in English and

the CBSE acknowledges that material inequalities rather than disciplinary models shaped linguistic inequality in affiliated classrooms. However, reform objectives and oppositions exacerbate existing inequalities; reforms insist on a skewed emphasis on orality even though reading and writing skills rather than orality is the more readily available local resource for non-elites. Furthermore, eliding reading and writing exercises as geared towards memorization, reforms variously limit and prohibit reading-writing activities. This has overwhelming impacts on non-elite classroom practices, and the curricular violence emanating from this naturalization is discussed in later chapters.

Institutional structures: Who formulates academic standards, how?

Language policy in India has horizontal and vertical hierarchies. The apex academic body that formulates the national curricular framework is the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The most recent National Curricular Framework prevailing at the time of the writing of the dissertation was the NCF 2005. However, school education in India is constitutionally designed to be the domain of individual states in the federal union, especially since education policies are focused on providing state-funded regional medium education in linguistically organized states (Naik 1997). The NCERT is therefore principally an advising agency. States are expected to formulate their pedagogic frameworks and materials in consultation with the NCERT. Kerala adapted the National Curricular Framework (2005) at the Kerala state level to produce the Kerala Curricular Framework (2007) and went on to revise textbooks so that pedagogic materials would adhere more closely with the Kerala Curricular Framework. Conceptually, the NCF 2005 and KCF 2007 guide pedagogy in state-funded schools

while private schools operate in an amorphous domain, some affiliated to recognized school boards and others in more tenuous shadow worlds (CABE, 2005). In Kerala, the most patronized private school board is the Central Board of Secondary Education, which curiously enough is tasked with “regulating and maintaining the standard of secondary education” in the country by the Government of India (CBSE, 1962, p. 7). The very existence of, and the significant powers and privileges enjoyed by, the CBSE contradicts constitutional aspirations concerning education and social justice. The CBSE was reconstituted in 1962 to serve the children of transferable central government employees, an elite bloc charged with administering and directing national development. In practice, this elite English-medium federal-state funded school board provided “sponsored mobility” to the children of privileged educated Indians (Kumar, 1985). The CBSE also affiliates private schools, and the post market reform explosion of CBSE schools in Kerala has been discussed in the introductory chapter. Thus, the Indian state undermined its objectives concerning education by disproportionately investing in and supporting an exclusive, federal state funded, English-medium schooling system for privileged Indians.

Coming to language-in-education policy, while the NCERT and SCERTs frame curricular documents for public discussion, the CBSE is exempted from such public scrutiny. At the federal level, the National Focus Group Position Paper on Teaching of English (NCERT, 2006) expands and elaborates the themes of the National Curricular Framework (2005) with particular reference to English Language Teaching. The normative frameworks of the position paper were given a more material form in the English syllabus document and assessment guidelines, also framed by the NCERT. But

the most concrete pedagogic expression of the position paper is the textbook series produced during the same time, which for primary grades was titled the *Marigold* series. Together, the position paper, syllabus, assessment guidelines, and the textbook series comprise the texts constitutive of federal-state NCERT English reforms. Of these, textbooks will be analyzed in chapter five and assessment frameworks in chapter six.

Table 4.1 Producing standards: Agencies and materials

	NCERT	Kerala SCERT	CBSE
Experts	Linguists		
Policy documents	National Curriculum Framework 2005	Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007	--
	Position Paper on English Teaching	Source Books for English Teaching	Syllabus and Curriculum
Pedagogic materials	Syllabus and Assessment Guidelines		
	Textbooks Grades 1-10	Textbooks Grades 1-10	Textbooks Grades 9, 10
Exams	--	Grades 1-10	Grades 9, 10

The Kerala state Second Language Acquisition reforms both pre-date and post-date national reforms (chapter seven), and generally conform to national guidelines. In terms of reified texts, the Kerala Curricular Framework (SCERT, 2007) corresponds with and builds on the National Curricular Framework (NCERT, 2005). Though the Kerala state does not have a position paper on English Language Teaching, similar terrains are covered in English Source Books (SCERT, 2008; 2009), which lay out a more detailed

exposition of English Language pedagogy. The source books form part of the teaching materials produced by the Kerala state reforms and were to be used in conjunction with state-mandated English textbooks.

Lastly, the CBSE English Language Teaching project is not, strictly speaking, national policy. Unlike the NCERT or the Kerala reforms, CBSE reforms were autonomous and did not involve the production of a public statement in the form of a curricular framework. Instead, what is available for analysis are reports produced by project managers affiliated with diverse stakeholders. Mr. SK Gangal (CBSE ELT Project Officer), Mr. Prem Mathur (British Council English Studies Officer), and Dr. Rama Mathew, who headed the Curricular Implementation Study entrusted to the Central Institute of English and Foreign Language, authored reports intended for diverse purposes and with varying emphasis. Further, the CBSE is a secondary school board and though it has no jurisdiction over primary grades it commands considerable influence over pedagogic practices since it officially partners with the NCERT. As I explain in chapter seven, the NCERT textbooks are specifically designed for use in CBSE schools. The implications of this institutional arrangement will be elaborated in later chapters.

Disciplinary histories

In stark contrast to cultural histories of educated Indian English described in the previous chapter, the NCERT and Kerala SCERT recount histories of linguistic theories independent of how they were embedded in the social life of the region. The national position paper locates histories of English Language Teaching pedagogy and practice in

India in disciplinary paradigm shifts. In a section titled English Language Teaching in India, the position paper (NCERT, 2006) explains:

In the late 1950s, structurally graded syllabi were introduced as a major innovation into the state systems for teaching English. The idea was that the teaching of language could be systematized by planning its inputs, just as the teaching of a subject such as arithmetic or physics could be. By the late 1970s, however, the behavioral-psychological and philosophical foundations of the structural method had yielded to the cognitive claims of Chomsky for language as a “mental organ”. There was also dissatisfaction within the English-teaching profession with the structural method, which was seen as not giving the learners language that was “deployable” or usable in real situations, in spite of an ability to make correct sentences in classroom situations. In hindsight, the structural approach as practiced in the classroom led to a fragmentation and trivialization of thought by breaking up language in two ways: into structures and into skills. The form-focused teaching of language aggravated the gap between the learner’s “linguistic age” and “mental age” to the point where the mind could no longer be engaged (pp. 2-3).

Tracing similar histories and raising similar concerns about fragmentation and trivialization, the Kerala Source Book (SCERT, 2009) writes:

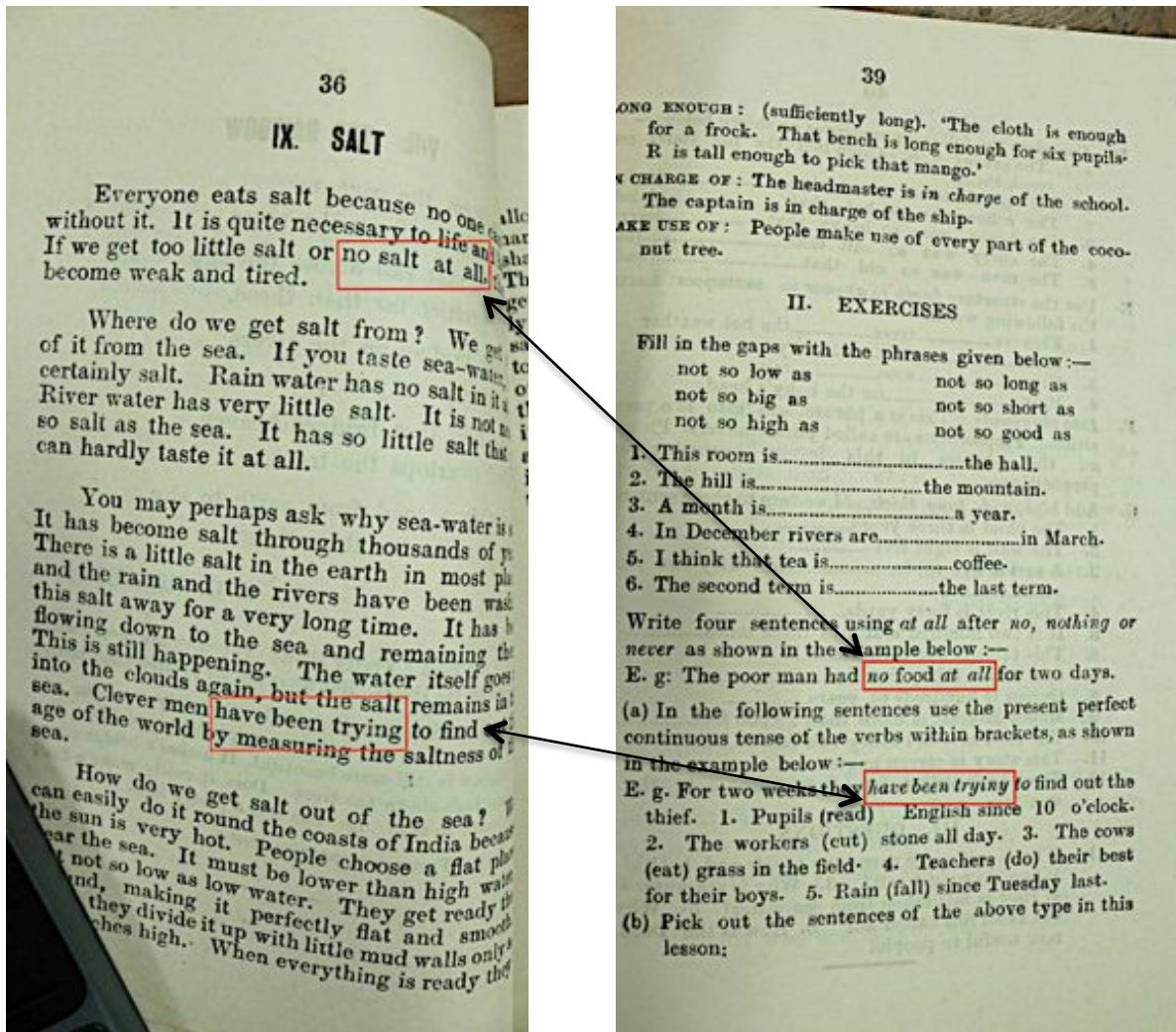
By virtue of the insights we derive from theoretical linguistics, cognitive psychology and experiential pedagogy, we are today in a position to detect a problem inherent to the existing English Language Teaching package. It grossly ignores the innate system of the child, which enables her to acquire a language. ... Another flaw in the conventional model of language teaching is that it grossly ignores discourse level transactions narrowing itself to the transmission of isolated language items. We know that words or even sentences in isolation do not have any independent existence. (p. 8)

Thus, both the NCERT and the Kerala SCERT locate student linguistic inability as well as structural inequality in the disciplinary shortcomings of linguistics. It is important to note that in comparison, the CBSE was not obliged to record the theoretical concerns underpinning its language reforms. Therefore, the conceptual frameworks available at the federal and Kerala state level produced a particular version of pedagogic history that privileged disciplinary perspectives at the expense of socio-cultural experiences.

On the contrary, Tickoo (1990) explains that pedagogic theories exist in cultural worlds and never in pure, unadulterated, natural forms. In fact, the structural method that is now denigrated as the cause of poor English learning had not even found favor with classroom teachers in India. Though the structural method recommended drills of pre-selected grammatical structures, textbooks in India “hid and clothed” these structures in narratives and “exciting story lines” (Tickoo, 1986, p. 47). To make these narratives and stories comprehensible, teachers translated “each lesson and every sentence in it into the regional language” (GoI, 1967, p. 46, in Tickoo, 1990, p. 413). Thus narration and translation dominated rather than fragmentation and trivialization and this “total mismatch” between curricular expectations and classroom practice” has been “widely known for at least 20 or 30 years of its adoption in Indian schools” (Tickoo, 1990, p. 413). To illustrate with the help of an example, the 1965 Kerala English Reader for seventh grade (English was introduced in Class 5 during this time) states that the textbook continues “the sequence of sentence structures begun in earlier books” and together, the three books for Classes 5, 6, and 7 cover “all points which should be met before pupils reach the High School.” Further, the textbook urges teachers, in an introductory *To Teachers* page, to “exert themselves” to introduce the structures to be taught in each lesson “by means of conversation in class” because “language is primarily a spoken thing” and “our approach to foreign language should in the first instance be through its spoken forms” (no page number). Following the framework of the structural syllabus, the textbook locates itself in a series of books covering a sequence of sentence structures, which have to be drilled in class.

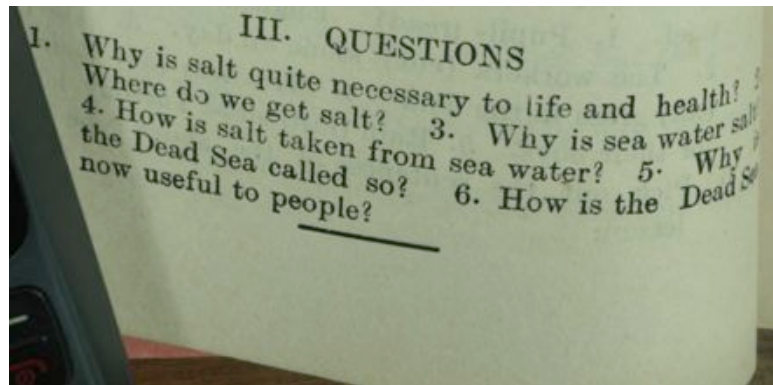
In Lesson 9 of the textbook, titled *Salt*, the grammatical items to be learned are 1) intensifiers/adverbial phrases and 2) present perfect continuous tense. The adverbial phrase/intensifier (no salt at all) and present perfect continuous tense (have been trying) items, however, are “hid and clothed” in a fairly interesting, but un-illustrated and lengthy, narrative about the nature, production, and histories of salt. The linguistic input designed for the classroom thus exceeds theoretical intentions of fragmentation.

Figure 4.1 Kerala English Reader for Class 7, 1965



It is unclear what degrees of comprehension were achieved and teachers' translation can in fact be seen to be indicative of low text comprehensibility and teachers' pre-occupation with learners' comprehension. Further, limiting examinations to question-answers identified and rehearsed in the classroom, and potentially memorized by students, ameliorates the challenges posed by a text that does not attempt to make linguistic input comprehensible to emergent learners.

Figure 4.2 Kerala English Reader: Non-grammar exercise; "comprehension" questions



Therefore, policy assumptions about the earlier mandates of structuralism fall apart in the face of situated pedagogic practice. Further, it seems unlikely that an updated disciplinary posturing is sufficient for the demanding tasks of teaching and learning in actually existing, material-deprived classrooms.

Policy assumptions: Innate language ability and primacy of speech

Building on the disciplinary underpinnings noted in the previous section, both national and Kerala state reforms produce a new set of assumptions concerning language teaching to correct the preconceived shortcomings of the structural method. Compellingly erasing the culturally situated nature of disciplinary theory and pedagogy, the NCERT and Kerala

SCERT manufacture the ideal English language learner to be a natural child, floating in a history-less speech community, unaffected by caste, class, or linguistic inequalities. State pedagogy then mandates that primary school students learn English “naturally”, in face-to-face interactions. Meanwhile, the CBSE naturalized a similar “interactive” classroom as the natural communicative environment essential for secondary school English language learning, without any consideration of its own long standing production of educated Indian English users. These elisions allowed the NCERT and the Kerala SCERT to establish a “meaning focused” natural pedagogy, and the CBSE to propose an equally “meaning focused” communicative language pedagogy.

To elaborate, both the NCERT and the Kerala SCERT reforms assume language learning to be an innate function, and aspire to replicate “naturally” occurring language learning, or speech proficiencies, in language classrooms. The Kerala Curricular Framework (SCERT, 2007) quotes the National Curricular Framework (NCERT, 2005) at length to articulate its “general approach to language learning”:

Children come to school with full-blown communicative competence in their language, or in many cases, languages. They enter the school with not only thousands of words but also with a full control over the rules that govern the complex and rich structure of language at the level of sounds, words, sentences and discourse (NCERT, 2005, p. 37 in SCERT, 2007, p. 39).

Extending this notion of natural first language acquisition manifested as proficiency in speech, the Kerala SCERT (2009) further clarifies:

All that we mean by “innateness” is simply this: The human child is biologically equipped with language system. This gets unfolded as the language system of the speech community in which she lives. This is a natural process, a process that takes place without any conscious attempt from the part of the learner. Nor is there any special effort made by the mother or others to teach her the mother tongue (p. 7).

Here, innateness is clarified as simultaneously biological and social (unfolded in community) in order for second language pedagogy to be reinforced as natural and non-conscious, both on the part of learners (no conscious attempt) and curiously enough, on the part of teachers as well (no special effort). Codifying these more prosaically and formally, the SCERT (2008) lists the “basic principles of learning a language” as:

1. The child has an innate language system. Language learning is a natural growth of this innate language system.
2. Language learning is a non-conscious process. This is radically different from the conscious learning of linguistic facts. (p. 17)

Compared to the Kerala SCERT’s move to institutionalize and mandate non-conscious, natural acquisition of English in all contexts, the NCERT proceeds cautiously, with a sense of wonderment rather than regulation. The position paper (NCERT, 2006) states:

Second language pedagogy, more than the teaching of any other curricular subject, must meet the most stringent criterion of universal success: the spontaneous and appropriate use of language for at least everyday purposes. This is a feat achieved in one’s own language by every pre-school child (Chomsky, 1975). It is this “minimum level of proficiency” that the person on the street aspires to: speak English, as against merely passing examinations in it, or knowing its grammar. Can English language classroom instruction replicate the universal success in the acquisition of basic spoken language proficiency that a child spontaneously achieves outside the classroom, for the languages in the environment? (p. 4)

In the position paper, pedagogic design is subservient to theoretical posturing and even a certain romantic reverence for natural language acquisition. The position paper points out in admiration that the “minimum level” of linguistic proficiency (basic spoken language proficiency) is the “most stringent criterion of universal success”, which is further, a feat achieved by “every pre-school child”. English language pedagogy should thus aspire to “replicate” this remarkable natural accomplishment. In contrast to NCERT documents that present conditional statements with caveats (ideally, ordinarily, one’s own language,

languages in the environment, and so on), the SCERT defines “language” and “language learning” authoritatively and reductively around oral skills, whether it be first or second language and whether the target languages are available in the environment or not.

Table 4.2 Histories and assumptions underpinning reform documents

	NCERT	Kerala SCERT	CBSE <i>Secondary only</i>
Theoretical shifts	Structural to Chomskian		Not available
Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innateness of language ability • Primacy of speech 		Academic Proficiency

Assumptions surrounding innateness and primacy of speech, however, run into trouble if the “minimum level” of proficiency required of language-in-education for “universal (academic) success” is considered: large scale assessments of literacy skills remind that more than half of enrolled primary school students in India cannot read grade level texts in their first language, let alone in English (Pratham, 2014). As Romeo (2000) points out for proponents of natural acquisition, the position paper converts processes that second language acquisition theory attempts to explain—*how* a child achieves spontaneous and appropriate use of language for everyday purposes—into uncontroversial observations that then become a framework for (orality centered) classroom instruction.

Before I proceed, it is important to note some of the biases scholars have recorded for the field of second language acquisition in order to grasp the multiple disconnects, between theory and pedagogy, between acquisition and learning, and between orality and literacy being assembled by policy rhetoric. Larsen-Freeman (1995) notes that even though second language acquisition theory is yet inadequate to *explain* the complex

processes involved in language learning (also see Amritavalli, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2012), theorists have “taken the unwarranted step of proscribing or prescribing pedagogic practices” (p. 136). She cautions that while the objective of second language acquisition *theory* is to identify “what is minimally necessary” for acquisition, the objective of second language *pedagogy* is to make maximum provisions for second language acquisition (p. 136). She writes:

My concern is with the expectation that all of second language acquisition will be explicable by a single process. With language as complicated as it is, why should we expect that a single process will account for all of it? (p. 141)

In fact, attempts to replicate naturally occurring acquisition, Kumaravadivelu (2006) points out, trivialize the complexity of second language acquisition by ignoring both “the crucial role” played by intake factors as well as “the active role played by learners themselves in their own learning effort” (p. 139). Romeo (2000) similarly contends that propagating an “easy way philosophy” in educational policy “demeans” the efforts that go into both learning and teaching.

To recover pedagogic orientations from theoretical posturing, Davies (2013) distinguishes second language acquisition from second language learning, where the former refers to theoretical investigations of informally acquired language competencies and the latter pertains to institutionally structured, organized learning of language(s) geared towards particular expected proficiencies (p. 36). He further clarifies that despite the divergences, both second language acquisition and second language learning operate within assumptions of “standard” or “educated” versions of the target language; the cardinal difference has to do with orientations to speaking and writing (p. 35). Second

language acquisition is primarily concerned about acquisitions of “native” like speaking proficiencies, albeit of the “educated” native, while second language learning tends to focus on reading and writing abilities expected of educated natives.

Lastly, the orality bias of second language acquisition is traced to its disciplinary affiliations with linguistics. Kern & Schultz (2005) and Harklau (2002) explain that linguists in general assume the primacy of orality; while spoken language is considered “natural” and “biological”, writing is conceived of as a derivative of speech. Likewise, Pennycook (1994) explains that linguists propose numerous arguments in favor of the primacy of speech: historical priority (in the course of human development speech developed before writing), structural priority (writing is a visual representation of speech), and biological priority (spoken language emerges before the written in children) (p. 122). This orality bias is so significant as to make literacy “invisible”; Harklau (2002) notes that two of the most influential overviews of second language acquisition by Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991) and Ellis (1994) contain no explicit references to literacy, reading, or writing (p. 335). Therefore, rather than a conspiracy theory, the dominance of linguists in English language teaching in India promoted assumptions of orality as “language”. However, that is poor consolation for learners whose meager linguistic resources were eroded by policies in pursuit of “natural” language learning.

Unmindful of its disciplinary biases, policy frameworks suggest that English language pedagogy should foreground “naturally acquired language ability”. Yet, while the NCERT recommends and advises, the Kerala SCERT declares and asserts. At the national level, the position paper (NCERT, 2006) states:

Language in education would ideally and ordinarily build on such naturally acquired language ability, enriching it through the development of literacy into an instrument for abstract thought and the acquisition of academic knowledge. We can then speak of a “cognitive academic linguistic proficiency” (Cummins, 1979) as language and thinking skills that build on the basis of a child’s spontaneous knowledge of language (p. 4).

The position paper draws on Cummins’ (1979) distinctions between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

Cummins’s work evolved in the Canadian context where linguistic minority students with basic conversational skills in school languages yet experienced academic failure.

Cummins (1979) argues that policy conflations of conversational skills with academic fluency—i.e., assuming those who speak the target language fluently have the requisite academic literacy skills necessary for schooling success—had resulted in linguistic minority students’ early exits from support programs and subsequent academic failure.

However, Cummins’ theorization assumes the ready availability of a speech community and therefore discursively privileges the native speaker context. By transferring his approach uncritically into the Indian context, national policy requires of learners in Indian classrooms to learn English as if they were immigrants in English speaking countries. Pennycook (1994) points out that theorists of natural second language acquisition, like Krashen and Terrell (1983), implicitly assume that the only goal of English language learners is assimilation into monolingual English speaking societies. Only with such an assumption can conversational skill in English become a “basic” skill that is “context-embedded”. But for most learners in India, conversational skills in English are neither basic nor context-embedded; in fact, the “context-embeddedness” of English is a key marker of privilege rather than of universality. However, the position

paper deploys Cummins' work in the Canadian context to construct a field of intelligibility where "knowledge of English" becomes equated with native speakers' knowledge or "spoken language proficiency". Furthermore, literacy—the domain of the "abstract" and the "academic"—"builds on" and "enriches" oral proficiency.

Interestingly, if national and Kerala state reforms valorize the "full blown communicative competences" of pre-school students, CBSE reforms lament the lack of communicative competence despite a rigorous and fairly successful academic program.

SK Gangal (1995) writes:

The CBSE received over a period of time extensive feedback that the existing class IX-X syllabi and textbooks were heavily biased towards content and did not help much in the development of language skills and communicative competence. It was felt that the existing course should be revised in such a manner that it provides confidence to the child for interaction with his peers and people around him (p. 316).

CIEFL (1997) clarifies that the course was designed for students with high entry-level proficiencies (also see Tickoo, 2001) who did not yet have communicative competence, that is, interactional skills. Within the linguistic historic context of India, CBSE students were proficient in the restricted registers of "educated Indian English", which is more easily comparable to Cummins' Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) rather than his Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS). In fact, as the national position paper (NCERT, 2006) observes, "the attempt to achieve communicative competence assumes the availability of a grammatical competence to build on" (p. 3). Within the "unnatural", colonial, bureaucratic linguistic histories of the region (Fraser Gupta, 1997; Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998; Sedlatschek, 2009), conversational skills had to build on and enrich academic proficiency rather than the other way around.

Policy objectives and oppositions

Basing instructional design on assumptions concerning natural acquisition, national reforms recommend an “input-rich” comprehension focused pedagogy while the Kerala State proposes a “(linguistic) discourse-oriented” pedagogy that assumes comprehension and requires students’ discourse production. Meanwhile, assuming grammatical competence, the CBSE pursued a communicative language pedagogy titled “Interact in English”. Though all three frameworks emphasize meaning making as central to their pedagogic enterprise, national policy pays a hesitant attention to literacy instruction while the Kerala state proposes an orality-centered pedagogy. The CBSE on the other hand, assumes grammatical competence and promotes literacy and orality albeit with an amplified emphasis on oral interactions in the form of pair work, group work, and role play (CBSE Self Assess Package, n.d.). Further, reform recommendations go hand in hand with oppositions and all three reforms articulate varying degrees of opposition to memorization, for diverse reasons.

Elaborating the national policy focus on comprehension, the national position paper (NCERT, 2006) states:

Input-rich communicational environments are a pre-requisite for language learning. Languages are learnt implicitly, by comprehending and communicating messages, either through listening or reading for meaning. We suggest a comprehensible input rich curriculum that lays the foundation for spontaneous language growth (p. 5).

The notion of “comprehensible input” that is central in the position paper is drawn from Krashen and Terrell’s (1983) *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*, which postulates: “acquisition can take place only when people understand

messages in the target language” (p. 19). In concurrence, the position paper states that languages are learned “by comprehending messages”, either through listening or reading for meaning. The “aim” of English language pedagogy is therefore “to identify delivery systems for comprehensible inputs” (NCERT, 2006, p. 10).

The position paper recognizes that English is not readily available in the environment for most learners (NCERT, 2006, p. 2, 10) and emphasizes the importance of print-rich linguistic environments. The national position paper (NCERT, 2006) states:

Inputs include textbooks, other print materials such as Big Books, class libraries, parallel materials in more than one language, and media support (learner magazines, newspaper columns, radio/audio cassettes, etc.), and the use of “authentic” or “available” materials (p. 6; also see NCERT, 2005, p. 39).

However, the position paper simultaneously proposes a “pre-literacy curriculum” for the first or first two years of English learning (Class 1-2, 4, 5, or 6) that “will build familiarity with the language through primarily spoken or spoken and written input” (p. 6). The very label of “pre-literacy” is a throwback to “natural” acquisition and this hesitancy with print-rich curricula arises out of experts’ concerns with and opposition to memorization. The National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) points out that “while reading is readily accepted as a focus area for language education, school syllabi are burdened with information absorbing and memorizing tasks (p. 41), and that insistence on “accuracy” and “correctness” makes writing the equivalent of reproducing memorized texts (p. 42). Seeking a more authentic language experience, the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) writes: “We really wish children to read and write with understanding” (NCERT, 2005, p. 40). Further pursuing such a classroom experience, the position paper (NCERT, 2006) strongly urges English educators, in bold,

to “not insist on early production at the expense of exposure to and understanding of language, checked through the mother-tongue, gestures, or single word answers” (p. 6). Therefore, to restrict the cultural obsession with memorization-heavy early literacy activities, national reforms push for a pre-literacy, orality-centered curriculum in beginner grades. However, not insisting on early production does not address the question of resource deprivations synonymous with most English classrooms in India.

Table 4.3 Objectives and oppositions noted in reform documents

	NCERT	Kerala SCERT	CBSE <i>Secondary only</i>
Objectives for beginner grades	Comprehension (Krashen); Production when child is ready	Comprehension assumed; Early production required	Interaction, Communication
Oppositions	Memorization impedes comprehension	Memorization impedes innate language ability	Memorization impedes communication
	Early production of “accurate” spellings and sentences (through literacy exercises)	Production of non-spontaneous language items (through literacy exercises)	Production of rehearsed language items in secondary grades

In comparison to the comprehension focused pre-literacy curriculum of the NCERT, the Kerala state proposes a (linguistic) “discourse oriented pedagogy” at “all levels of learning English”, wherein discourse is a “mode of communicating certain ideas meaningfully in a particular situation” (SCERT, 2009, p. 20). Discourse denotes coherence in an utterance, which is why the elemental discourse constituent unit is

considered to be a clause, since the clause is the smallest grammatical unit that can express a complete proposition (Polanyi, 1988, p. 603). The SCERT (2008) states:

Language doesn't exist as isolated sentences or words. It exists as meaningful discourses. Hence it should be ensured that the linguistic experiences and expression of children should be at the discourse level (p. 18).

The focus on discourse level experience and expression assumes comprehension but stresses speech production as key to performing language learning. For the primary level, SCERT (2008) also proposes a pre-literacy curriculum:

- Learners should construct simple discourses like dialogue, poems, rhymes, description and narrations.
- Writing should start only in class 3 and 4.
- English Language learning can be started from Class 1 onwards. However, there should not be any conscious efforts to teach English letters, words or sentences (p. 18).

Thus, learners in primary classes are expected to acquire proficiency in speech first, though non-conscious learning opportunities, and any activity that does not conform to discourse level interactions should be avoided. As evident from its objectives, discourse oriented pedagogy is a deeply oppositional pedagogy.

Firstly, of the eleven statements listed as the “basic principles” of language learning, seven assert what language and language learning are **not**: language is not a totality of linguistic skills (point 4) and does not exist as isolated sentences or words (point 10); language learning is not a linear development (point 5), doesn't take place from parts to whole (point 6), through static texts (point 7), imitation or mechanical repetition (point 3), or through error correction (point 12). The positive assertions in turn have to do with meaning and communication (points 8, 9, 13). While some of the

statements are descriptive (not a linear development), others are arbitrary and prescriptive (not through *static* texts or *mechanical* repetition).

Secondly, to exactly ensure aural/orality-centered language learning and to foreclose any attempts at conventional (literacy-oriented) teaching learning practices, student textbooks were produced as compilations of “narrative fragments”. The chief consultant for the Kerala English textbooks, Dr. KN Anandan (2014) explains:

A narrative that a teacher is presenting orally, that will not be available in the textbook. If it is given in the textbook, the teacher will teach it. It is meant for listening. Listening has to be ensured.

Therefore, though the overarching framework of Kerala state pedagogy is meaning-focused, non-fragmented language experiences, in its zeal to check memorization, the SCERT intentionally fragmented possibilities of meaning-making in pedagogic materials. Similarly, to emphatically assert what discourse oriented pedagogy is not, the SCERT contradicts its own recognition of the need for recurrence of language items to state, “it is not the quantity of exposure which matters but the kind of exposure that the child gets, which facilitates language acquisition” (p. 8). Going further, the SCERT (2009) prohibits the teaching of the alphabet (A-Z), words (pen, table), spelling drills or dictation, and phrase/sentence level practice (grammar exercises, comprehension questions) since these activities are not at the discourse level and they isolate, fragment, and trivialize language (pp. 9-11). With “no scope for constructing language discourse” (SCERT, 2009, p. 11), these activities are labeled mechanically repetitive “pseudo-literacy” practices that have no place in the revised curriculum (pp. 25-26).

By embodying such an extreme oppositional stance, the Kerala state pedagogy disregards all the cautionary notes put forward by language theorists and pedagogues. Basing institutionally structured, organized learning of language on theoretical investigations of informally acquired language competencies (Davies, 2013, p. 36), discourse oriented pedagogy disregards the inadequacy of second language acquisition theory to *explain* the complex processes involved in language learning, and further, self-confidently takes the unwarranted step of prescribing and prohibiting pedagogic practices (Larsen-Freeman, 1995). It trivializes the complexity of second language acquisition, and by proposing a “non-conscious” “easy way philosophy” of teaching and learning, it “demeans” the efforts that go into both learning and teaching (Romeo, 2000).

When anti-memorization became anti-literacy

As described in the previous section, the cautionary restrictions proposed by the NCERT and the more elaborate and assertive prohibitions listed by the Kerala SCERT target practices that have traditionally elicited memorization. If for the NCERT, memorization impedes comprehension, for Kerala SCERT, memorization is the anti-thesis of linguistic discourse, providing no scope for meaningful experience or expression. That most of the allegedly unsupportive activities are also reading and writing exercises further exacerbate the orality/literacy dichotomy already mobilized by assumptions of innateness and the primacy of speech. In addition, like the NCERT and the Kerala SCERT, the CBSE reforms too articulated existing “memorization of content of set texts and of short compositions” to be detrimental to the development of language skills (CIEFL, 1997, p. 11, 56; also see Gangal, 1995, p. 316).

Furthermore, it is not just the English reforms that oppose memorization as anti-learning. The five guiding principles proposed by the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) for teaching and learning in general, across all subjects and curricula, include “ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods” (p. viii). The Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the NCF 2005 was Prof. Yashpal, who spearheaded the 1993 Report of the National Advisory Committee titled “Learning without Burden”. In his introductory note to the then Minister of Human Resources Development, Prof. Yashpal writes that those who drop out of schools are “potentially superior to those who just memorize and do well in examination, without comprehending very much!” (p. iv). A scientist and respected science educator, Prof. Yashpal’s views on memorization find traction in contemporary education discourses, not just for science education but also for all subjects and levels including English. In fact, ambivalence over criticisms of memorization renders one politically suspect since it is presumed that memorization produces poor and marginalized children as uneducable and subjects them to perennial, meaningless drills.

At the risk of being misconstrued, I have to yet point out that generalizations of memorization across subjects and contexts elide and even perpetuate academic inequality. Firstly, scholars have recorded memorization as a learner-chosen method of approaching reading readiness, and intentionally hindering memorization can negatively impact literacy development. Secondly, memorization is a situated practice that poses diverse affordances, and challenges, for differentially positioned learners. In particular, first generation English language learners in material deprived contexts tend to use it as a

“crutch” to negotiate their resource deprivations. While material enrichment would be a welcome respite, abolishing the crutch self-righteously without ensuring material resources will merely set them up for failure.

Elaborating, Gita Jangid’s (2004) book flood program for first generation English learners in Class 1 is one of the “success stories” described in the national position paper. Despite an explicit pedagogic distancing from rote memorization (pp. 6, 84, 102-103, 228-229), she records that learners’ writings included “verbatim” reproductions of stories (pp. 307-332). To account for this, Jangid (2004) draws on reading research, which suggests that children may have “an auditory version of a photographic memory” (p. 307). Pointing out that young children repeat entire stories to themselves as “they pretend to read” or that children too young to read still call parents out for skipping parts of a story that has been read to them repeatedly, Jangid (2004) offers: “memorization of the stories that children hear repeatedly is a natural phenomenon because this is how children’s memory works for them” (p. 308). The chairperson of the National Position Paper of Teaching English in India, Amritavalli (2007), who was also Jangid’s (2004) dissertation supervisor, offers a geographical metaphor to unpack the affordances of repetition for language learning:

Acquiring language is very much like acquiring spatial familiarity with new territories; the exploration of our neighborhoods is for each of us a matter of personal choice, and our intake of new spaces proceeds at our own pace. In language acquisition as in spatial familiarization, many landmarks emerge from our repeated encounters with them, although a few are “given” to us by those who have gone before. And familiar features in new territories—a chain store in a new city, a known face in a crowd—stand out of the landscape to greet us and urge us on (p. 12).

Amritavalli (2007) emphasizes opportunities for repetition to be significant in language learning, and as Kumaravadivelu (2006) points out, it is learners (usually with more knowledgeable others), who resolve what becomes mechanical and/or meaningful repetition. Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman (2012) argues that memorization has endured as such a central *pedagogic* practice in language learning through the ages including the present that a post-behaviorist *theoretical* explanation is far overdue. Unlike policy denigrations of practice, Larsen-Freeman (2012) looks to practice to generate theory. Drawing on complexity theory, she considers the affordances of repetition for iteration, or the “meaningful revisiting of the same territory again and again (p. 206).

Secondly, for second language learners in a context with no ready access to a speech community, i.e., for those who have to disproportionately rely on literacy activities to learn English, memorization provides crucial affordances. Interestingly, by locating learners in specific rather than in universal contexts, it is the CBSE that provides insights into memorization as a diverse and situated practice. The CBSE distinguishes affiliated schools as “advantaged” and “disadvantaged”, in terms of infrastructural facilities, teacher motivation, and crucially, whether students are first generation English learners and if they have exposure to English outside of school (CIEFL, 1997, p. 198). Though the CBSE promptly labels students attending disadvantaged schools as “weak” and “below average” learners throughout the report, it concedes that memorization is disproportionately useful for disadvantaged students, and perhaps even burdensome for advantaged students. The CIEFL (1997) report writes that memorization of textbook content serves as a “crutch and a means of survival for the disadvantaged learner” (p.

167), while “students whose language is good” may not perform well in exit exams because of an “overemphasis on content/memory rather than language skills/use” (p. 55).

In resource deprived environments, in contexts where comprehensibility and adequacy of linguistic input is hardly guaranteed, memorization becomes an unfortunate “crutch” and “means for survival”. In this context, the position paper’s appreciation of repetitive activities in “English minimal environments” acquires greater clarity. A footnote in the position paper explains that conventional grammar exercises that may seem to promote meaningless repetition akin to rote memorization, could potentially afford meaningful recurrence of linguistic items:

We do not rule out the possibility of encouraging “parsing” skills or strategies (identifying sense groups to see how they fit into sentences, or inserting sense groups to expand a sentence) as a means of making input more comprehensible at earlier stages, especially in English minimal environments (NCERT, 2006, p. 12).

Similarly, Kumar’s (1988) and Vaish’s (2005) descriptions of English minimal environments and learner strategies from diverse time periods are instructive. Describing the abyss like gap between existing and expected proficiency that learners from English minimal environments face, which the CBSE conveniently describes as “weak(ness)”, Kumar (1988) writes about colonial India:

Memorization of the textbooks ... was the only convenient way to avoid failure at the examination. As Annie Besant explained, the students were struggling to follow the language while they should have been grasping the facts. Their only recourse was to utilize their extraordinary power of memorizing by learning textbooks by heart and reproducing them in the examination (p. 462).

Most interestingly, Kumar is describing memorization practices by elites, like the “famous Bengali scientist PC Ray” who can hardly be called a “weak” or “below average learner”. On the other hand, writing close to a century later, Vaish (2005) depicts similar

struggles by first generation English learners in the capital city of Delhi as “poor people’s pedagogies” that often get misread as “poor pedagogies” (p. 196). Thus, privileged first generation English learners deploying memorization in colonial times became resilient, heroic learners with “extraordinary powers” while low-income first generation English learners in contemporary India become weak, below average learners.

Lastly, from accounts in policy texts, it seems that memorization has greater affordances for developing reading and writing skills rather than for conversational skills. Vaish (2005) points out that first generation English learners at the Delhi school, who relied disproportionately on translation and memorization to learn English, were English knowing bilinguals but not English speaking bilinguals. Similarly, the CBSE’s promotion of mastery learning of textbook content in the pre-reform period did produce sophisticated academic fluency amongst “advantaged” learners, but as Gangal (1995) points out, interactional and communicational skills were lacking. The 1972-73 MHRD Annual Report describes the “high standards in academic achievement” of CBSE affiliated Kendriya Vidyalaya students, noting their achievements in the National Science Talent Search Examinations, the Indian Institutes’ of Technology entrance exams, and in the National Defense Academy entrance exams. Yet, as Gangal (1995) explains, the CBSE pedagogy did not help much in the development of “communicative competence” (p. 316). Only by reducing language to face-to-face conversational skills is this simultaneous production of proficiency and lack possible. This is not to suggest that memorization by itself is sufficient for academic proficiency but to draw attention to what learners do with the practice to make it meaningful and useful. In the context of the

New English School, as I describe in the next chapter, memorization was a crucial but arduous practice for both students and mothers. However, it was also deeply indicative of the resource deprivations institutionalized by previous and more contemporary reforms. Meanwhile, policy prohibition of memorization at the Malayalam-medium school had devastating implications since it exacerbated resource deprivations.

Conclusion

This chapter described how diverse agencies yet cohered to legitimize and naturalize “knowing” English as predicated on the ability to speak English. I first detailed how disciplinary histories recounted by policy documents disregarded situated pedagogic practices, allowing policy rhetoric to propose disciplinary shortcomings as the primary producer of linguistic inequalities in classrooms. Writing within this field of legitimacy, reforms variously foregrounded comprehension and production of “meaningful” language as the objectives of English pedagogy in beginner grades. Further, all three reforms opposed memorization though the specific hostilities were diverse. These policy objectives and oppositions cohered to resist “traditional” reading and writing exercises and to promote teacher and student speech as the principal marker of teaching-learning, and of knowing, English.

However, paying closer attention to the diversity of reform narratives yet reveals the social and cultural lives of disciplinary theories. Despite the dominance of structuralism, the CBSE system could still boast of academic proficiency in English and the CBSE acknowledges that material inequalities rather than disciplinary models shape linguistic inequality in affiliated classrooms. Nevertheless, reforms insist on a skewed

emphasis on orality even though reading and writing skills rather than orality is the more readily available material resource for non-elites. Furthermore, eliding reading and writing exercises as geared towards memorization, reforms variously limit and prohibit reading-writing activities. This has devastating implications for non-elite classrooms, and the curricular violence emanating from this naturalization is discussed in later chapters.

CHAPTER 5

MATERIALIZING

Extending the arguments of the last chapter, this chapter describes how textbooks materialize policy assumptions concerning English proficiency as predicated on the ability to speak English. Translating policy rhetoric into pedagogic materials involves more than just instructional design, and to account for institutional variations at the policy and textbook production levels, I first describe how the textbook market in Kerala is structured. More specifically, covering the range of state-funded and private schooling options available between Kerala state-funded and CBSE schools, I explain who serves which schools and what products were potentially available to learners at the New English School and St. Thomas School. Following, I examine five textbooks against a common matrix of comprehensibility and instructional design, according to a set of learner-chosen criteria derived from secondary research.

Of the five, two textbooks are published by the NCERT, one by the Kerala SCERT, and the remaining by two large, national level, private publishers. The comparative analysis belies any easy distinctions along the public-private divide. The most readable and comprehensible textbook for first generation English learners, according to learner-chosen criteria, is the NCERT published *Raindrops* textbook. Meanwhile, the *Marigold* series, also published by the NCERT, faithfully translates the position paper's orality biases and disappoints on most of the criteria that beginner learners in India look for. Though the two private textbooks claim to follow national

guidelines (there are no regulatory agencies), the textbooks actually present a literacy oriented approach. As suggested by the policy analysis in the previous chapter, the textbook that most closely translates policy assumptions of innateness, primacy of speech, and oppositions to “traditional” literacy activities is the Kerala SCERT textbook. Chapter seven gives a description of the historical contexts in which the NCERT and Kerala SCERT textbooks were produced to explain some of the contextual factors that affected textbook production. However, the structural make-up of the textbook market, described in this chapter, is an equally significant factor that shapes what kind of pedagogic materials reach which students.

A second section details the performances and labors of students and mothers as textbooks become learning materials at the two schools. Contrary to policy assumptions, much of the teaching labor is shouldered by mothers and/or paid tuition teachers, who at the New English School are English knowing but not English speaking bilinguals. Teachers at both schools had similar proficiencies, skewed towards reading and writing skills and “lacking” in speaking skills. With their resources undervalued or forbidden by policy and instructional design, mothers and teachers labor to align textbooks with their own knowledges and proficiencies. Drawing on Bartlett’s (2007a; 2007b) notion of “performing” or “doing literacy”, I explore how these pedagogic labors aligned with culturally legitimate performances of literacy. At the New English School, performances and labors aggregated into a “labor-full” pedagogy that sought to mitigate the constraints of “material-less” learning environments. At St. Thomas School, however, textbooks’ hostility to culturally legitimate literacy performances engendered “labor-less”

pedagogies with dire affective and pedagogic costs, both for students and for teachers. I conclude with one student's transitions, on graduating from St. Thomas, from labor-less to labor-full pedagogies to trace the contexts in which cultural performances of literacy consolidate as academic proficiency. The larger narrative, however, is disturbing. Reformed NCERT and Kerala SCERT textbooks systematize deprivations in already deprived classrooms by institutionalizing a skewed emphasis on orality even though reading-writing skills rather than orality is the more readily available local resource.

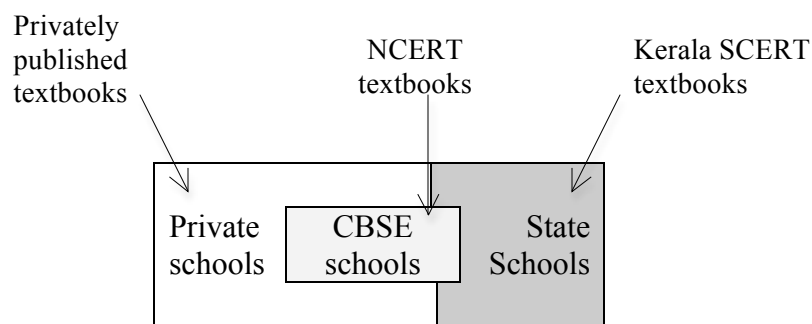
Markets and materials

For English proficiencies to be acquired naturally in input-rich environments, the state is obliged to provide all primary students with "acquisition-rich" environments (Tickoo, 1990) oriented towards adequacy and comprehensibility of linguistic input (NCERT, 2005; 2006). However, the state in India whether at the federal or the regional level is only obliged to provide a textbook. The "textbook culture" that characterizes Indian classrooms (Kumar, 1988), is not only limited to classroom teaching and learning practices but is also emblematic of state provision of pedagogic materials. Kumar (1988) traces the origins of textbook culture to colonial modes of bureaucratic and pedagogic control that strictly regulated the aspirations and practices of "natives" and simultaneously produced rich profits for British publishing houses. In the post-colonial independent state, opportunities for private profit were minimized with the state shouldering responsibilities for textbook production, but centralized control and regulation were retained to build a modern, independent, sovereign nation (CABE, 2005; Chandra, 1991). For both the NCERT and the Kerala SCERT, functioning within an

institutional framework that reduced “input rich communicational environments” (NCERT, 2005, p. 39) into one textbook, the charge was to produce an “acquisition rich textbook”, an oxymoron of sorts.

Meanwhile, it is equally important to trace the locus of influence of state produced textbooks. Kerala state funded schools are mandated to prescribe Kerala SCERT produced textbooks and federal state funded schools, in Kerala and across the country, are mandated to prescribe NCERT produced textbooks. According to GoK (2013), while there were 11,771 Kerala state funded schools operational in 2013, there were only 44 federal state funded schools in Kerala. As for private schools in Kerala, the majority of which are affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) (GoK, 2013), the choice lies between textbooks published by the NCERT and pan-Indian private publishing houses like Oxford University Press, Orient Blackswan, or Ratnasagar (CABE, 2005).

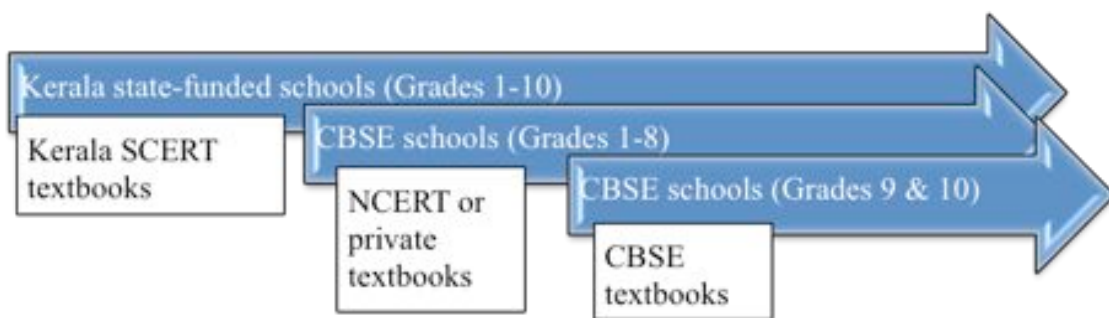
Figure 5.1 Agencies and textbook distribution (from Guichard, 2010, p. 44; not to scale)



The one anomaly in this system is CBSE high school English textbooks, which were produced neither by the NCERT nor private publishers but by the CBSE itself with financial assistance from the UK government routed through the British Council. Academic assistance was provided by the College of St. Mark and St. John, UK.

Thus, students enrolled in Kerala state-funded schools mandatorily encountered reformed textbooks, but private school encounters with reformed textbooks were not as straightforward. Aware of parents' financial constraints and appreciative of the quality of an NCERT textbook, the low-fee charging New English School prescribed NCERT textbooks. Other schools prescribed privately published textbooks, and though all pan-national private publishers claim that their products conform to the National Curricular Framework, in the absence of a regulatory agency, this is difficult to ascertain (CABE, 2005). But when New English School students and their counterparts in high-fee CBSE Schools moved to secondary grades, they switched over to CBSE textbooks.

Figure 5.2 Grade wise distribution of textbook provision



Therefore particular pedagogic domains were monopolized by state agencies (Kerala state schools and secondary grades in CBSE schools); other domains were dominated but not monopolized by established national level private publishers.

Towards a framework for comprehensibility

Though comprehensibility is reader dependent, textbooks in India are widely critiqued for their sheer incomprehensibility. Colonial statesmen like Macaulay who influenced education policy in India had a proclivity for the literary (Kumar, 1988, p. 459), which resulted in the institutionalization of British literary texts in university education.

Normalization of the literary as central to language learning trickled down to school levels and Viswanathan (1992) remarks that the “reading comprehension” of literary texts in schools metamorphosed into “literary analysis” in universities. Likewise, Ramanathan (2005) notes that the training English-medium students gained in confronting the literary during their school years was key to anticipating and acquiring post-secondary privileges in India. The plight of “others” is illustrated in Tickoo (2001):

Students who are scarcely able to read a restricted vocabulary text in modern Standard English are expected to study a Shakespeare play, some of Jane Austen at her subtlest, some of Pickwick Papers at their most colloquial (not to mention dialectical and archaic) and a sporadic selection of poems from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (p. 110).

While British and colonial texts have been replaced with Indian writing in English, the penchant for unrealistically high targets has continued, which has been pointed out as precipitating student failures in reading acquisition, especially in English minimal learning environments (Amritavalli, 2007, p. 8; Bhattacharjea, Wadhwa, & Banerji, 2011, p. ix-x). Therefore, though “comprehensibility” of a text cannot be decided a priori but is

to a large extent dependent on learners' purpose and need for comprehension (Amritavalli, 2007; Prabhu, 1987), it is important to set some basic frameworks for textbook comprehensibility.

For this purpose, I draw on Amritavalli (2007), NCERT (2008), and Jangid (2004) for their discussions on learner chosen frameworks. According to them, beginner learners favor well-illustrated texts with limited words, and with some level of syntactic and/or narrative predictability. Firstly, all three authors emphasize the significance of illustrations, especially for beginner readers. Amritavalli (2007) records that struggling readers carved out for themselves a "hidden picturebook" from the state-prescribed textbook, for every learner chosen text inevitably had at least one picture to go with it (pp. 41-45). Acknowledging the significance of illustrations, Jangid's (2004) program was built around illustrated storybooks. Similarly, NCERT (2008) emphasizes the affordances of pictures, especially for children who cannot yet read the written text with ease. As Krashen & Terrell (1983) clarify, illustrations and visual aids "supply the extra-linguistic context" that helps learners understand the message encoded in alphabetic symbols (p. 55)—similar to the context-embeddedness Cummins describes for face-to-face interactions.

Secondly, Amritavalli (2007) and NCERT (2008) underscore the importance of short texts and limited words for beginner readers. Differentiating learner chosen texts from teacher chosen texts, as well as sections textbooks writers had designated for reading, Amritavalli (2007) describes how learners picked out "short but complete texts" like jokes, anecdotes, and even speaking, vocabulary, and grammar activities as

appropriate and authentic reading materials (pp. 10-11; 22). Explaining that “a satisfactory reading experience” requires “closure in terms of reading a complete and coherent text” (p. 26), she contends: “it is very simple measures such as *text length* and *sentence length*, which constitute an index of language progress in second language reading choices” (p. 11).

Thirdly, NCERT (2008) and Jangid (2004) note learners’ affinities for repetitions and patterns, with NCERT (2008) clarifying that syntax repetition helps with word recognition. Koda (2005) explains “word recognition” as the extraction of both sounds and meanings from graphic symbols (letters) (p. 29). The cumulative exposure afforded by repetitive encounters with visual-sound input engenders “fluency” while the inverse precipitates difficulties in print-information extraction (comprehension) with readers eventually giving up trying to read (Koda, 2005, pp. 30, 58-59). In concurrence, Jangid (2004) describes how patterns, refrains, and predictable sequences help children catch on to meaningful chunks of language, and even “children with very little English” are enabled to “use and practice vocabulary and language patterns in an interesting and meaningful way” (p. 34). In contrast, lexical, syntactic, and plot complexity impedes comprehension (NCERT, 2008). To summarize, research with beginner readers from deprived circumstances indicate that pedagogic materials with illustrations, limited text, and some level of syntactic and plot predictability aid meaning making, comprehension, and language learning.

While the above framework provides a starting point for textbook comprehensibility, these criteria do not address exercises that accompany reading texts in

lessons. Though learners may or may not subvert exercises into reading material, the pedagogic purpose of the exercise/activity/task is different. According to designers and writers of NCERT textbooks and private textbooks, exercises “exploit” the lesson text in order to teach reading, writing, listening, and speaking. To set some preliminary frameworks for the analysis of exercises, I draw on the position paper (NCERT, 2006), which recommend exercises that nurture students’ plausibility of success. The position paper (NCERT, 2006) states:

Learners participate in evaluations [exercises] with more comfort when the experience is not always a failure and the outcomes can be seen as a legitimate and appropriate way toward the next step in learning (p. 16).

Or to put it bluntly, like the lesson text, the exercise too should not set unrealistically high standards that are impossible for students to meet. Therefore, how far the textbook succeeds in scaffolding students’ encounters with exercises will also be considered.

Textbook “choices” and comprehensibility

For the New English School, as I have explained earlier, the “choice” in the textbook market was between NCERT textbooks or textbooks produced by private publishers. Of these, the NCERT *Raindrops* was explicitly and intentionally developed for:

(F)irst-generation school goers as well as children whose only exposure to English is in school (and even within school, usually, with limited time duration and constraints in quality) (NCERT, 2011, About the Book).

Therefore, I first analyze *Raindrops* and detail the ways in which it seeks to meet the linguistic needs of students in “English-minimal” classrooms and then examine other textbooks against the standards set by *Raindrops*. However, the *Raindrops* series was abandoned midway and only books for grades 1 and 2 were completed. This eliminated

whatever “choice” first generation English learners may have had. Meanwhile, private textbooks were priced highly, again eliminating choice. Analyzing textbooks available in the market and comparing it with the only “choice” that actually existed for New English School students, I suggest that choice is a meaningless category within institutions that are always already aligned with the needs and resources of privileged learners.

Table 5.1 Textbooks with price and availability

	Textbook choices	Price	Availability
New English School	NCERT <i>Marigold</i>	Rs. 45	Grades 1-4
Primary Grades (Classes 1 to 4)	NCERT <i>Raindrops</i>	Rs. 30	Grades 1-2
	Ratnasagar <i>Networks</i>	Rs. 119	Grades 1-4
	Oxford <i>Broadway</i>	Rs. 146	Grades 1-4
St. Thomas School	Kerala SCERT	Free	Grades 1-4


Lesson 4 in *Raindrops* for Class 2 is titled “What’s Going On?” The single-page text of the lesson describes two illustrated activities. The events described are culturally familiar (playing carom and preparing dinner). The descriptions are thoroughly illustrated. The syntactical repetitions are set in bold to draw attention to the repeated tense form: present progressive tense, first in plural and then in singular, but grammatical labels are avoided.

Figure 5.3 NCERT Raindrops


Lesson: What's going on?

Lesson Text

4 WHAT'S GOING ON ?

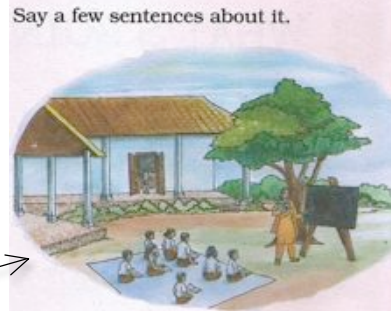


Here is a picture. There are six children in it. Four children **are playing** carom. Two boys **are watching** the game. Two kittens **are playing** with a ball of wool. Two dogs **are chasing** the birds.



Here is another picture. The family **is getting** ready for dinner. Father **is cutting** onions for salad. Mother **is bringing** a dish. The elder girl **is laying** the plates. The younger girl **is washing** her hands.


Activity 1: Picture description



Activity 2: Plural singular

- How many children are there in the first picture? There are _____.
- How many children are standing? _____ are standing.
- How many children are playing carom? _____ are _____ carom.
- How many kittens and dogs are there? There are _____ kittens and _____ dogs.
- What are the kittens doing? The kittens _____ with a ball of wool.
- What are the dogs doing? _____ are _____.
- In the picture of the family, what is the father doing? He is _____.
- What is the mother holding in her hands? She _____ a dish.
- How is the elder girl helping her mother? _____ the plates.
- What is the younger girl doing? _____ washing _____.

Activity 6: Counting/Singular-plural



In the picture.....

(i) there are four

(ii) there are two

(iii) there is a

Moving from the lesson proper to the pedagogic activities designed around the text, the first activity asks students to describe a similar but different picture. The setting is a classroom instead of a play-space or a house, but the actions to be described are the same as those previously encountered (a number of persons sitting and standing). The lesson text therefore provides the lexical (word level) and syntactic (structure level) scaffolding required for students to complete the activity.

The second exercise follows the same logic but is designed as a written activity: question answers that draw attention to “doing words” in the “ing” tense form, in the singular and the plural. For the second time, learners are invited to revisit the lesson text. The third, fourth, and fifth exercises are vocabulary exercises that overlap with but do not entail a return to the lesson text. The last is a counting activity where the actors are new (animals not introduced in lesson text) but the concept remains the same: singular and plural. The repeated revisiting of the lesson text through similar but different activities, detailed illustrations, and coherence across the text and activities are design elements geared towards aiding learner comprehension.

In sharp contrast, the lesson text for *Storm in the Garden* in Unit 4 of the NCERT *Marigold* textbook series, also for Class 2, is largely incomprehensible. *Storm in the Garden* tells the young snail Sunu Sunu’s account of his first big storm. The lesson itself is spread over two pages and alarmingly, the *Marigold* leaves over 70% of the text un-illustrated. The first page has six lines of which three are illustrated. The second page has thirteen lines, of which only two are illustrated.

Figure 5.4 NCERT *Marigold*

Lesson: Storm in the Garden

Outside, the sky grew dark and the crows flew past. *Kaa! Kaa! Kaa! Kaa!*


Oh, but where were the ants? Sunu-sunu stuck out his feelers and looked for them. They were hiding under a flower pot.

Go home Sunu-sunu, the ants cried out. Hurry hurry, your mother will worry. Sunu-sunu went to his mother where she sat under a stone near the well.

Amma, said Sunu-sunu, there's a storm in the garden. I heard the wind blow blow blow. *Ooo! Ooo! Ooo! Ooo!*

I saw trees sway sway sway. *Shay! Shay! Shay! Shay!*

I saw lightning flash flash flash. *Zzzak! Zzzak! Zzzak! Zzzak!*



63

Answer the questions

- Who was Sunu-sunu?
- Who was Sunu-sunu visiting?
- Where were the ants hiding?
- Did Sunu-sunu get wet?

Let's talk

- Do you go for morning walks?
- Have you ever seen ants in the garden?
- Watch and see where they go and what they carry to their holes.

Team time

- Do you know why you see snails and earthworms after it rains? Sit in a group and discuss.

Answer: Because their homes in the ground get filled with water.


Furthermore, the illustrations completely ignore the auditory theme central to the story, clearly evident in the illustrations of the original picture book *Storm in the Garden* published by Tulika Publishers. As for exercises, they are fairly limited and divided into two sets, the former very straightforward, prompting a minimal revisiting of the text, and the latter non-traditional and with little or no scaffolding. In comparison, the *Raindrops*' first exercise too required of learners' a non-traditional response, that could not be directly lifted from the lesson text or memorized. However, unlike the *Marigold*, *Raindrops* provides sufficient scaffolding for students to attempt the exercise.

Storm in the Garden also features in the privately published *Networks* textbook, also for Class 2, and a comparative analysis reveals the more careful attempts made at comprehensibility, through illustrations, breaking the text into smaller chunks that draw attention to syntactic patterns and repetitions, and through activities that allow learners to revisit the text.


Figure 5.5 Ratnasagar Publishers, *Networks*

Lesson: Storm in the Garden


Sunu-sunu stuck out his feelers and looked for them. They were hiding under a flower pot.




“Go home, Sunu-sunu,” the ants cried “Hurry, hurry! Your mother will worry.” Sunu-sunu looked for his mother. She was sitting under a stone near the well.




“Amma,” said Sunu-sunu, “There’s a storm in the garden. I heard the wind blow.”
Ooo! Ooo! Ooo! Ooo!
Who! Who! . . .



“I saw trees sway!”
Shay! Shay! Shay!
“I saw lightning flash.”
Zzzak! Zzzak! Zzzak! Zzzak!



“I heard thunder.”
Gadaam! Gudoom! Gadaam! Gudoom!
“I heard the rain fall.”
Pitter, patter! Pitter, patter!
“I heard raindrops drip.”
Plip! Plip! Plip! Plip!



A. Answer these questions.

1. Who were Sunu-sunu's friends?
2. What did the ants do?
3. What happened while they were playing?
4. What did Sunu-sunu do then?
5. Where did the ants hide?
6. Where was Sunu-sunu's mother?

Write the correct sound words from the box to match word / words below.

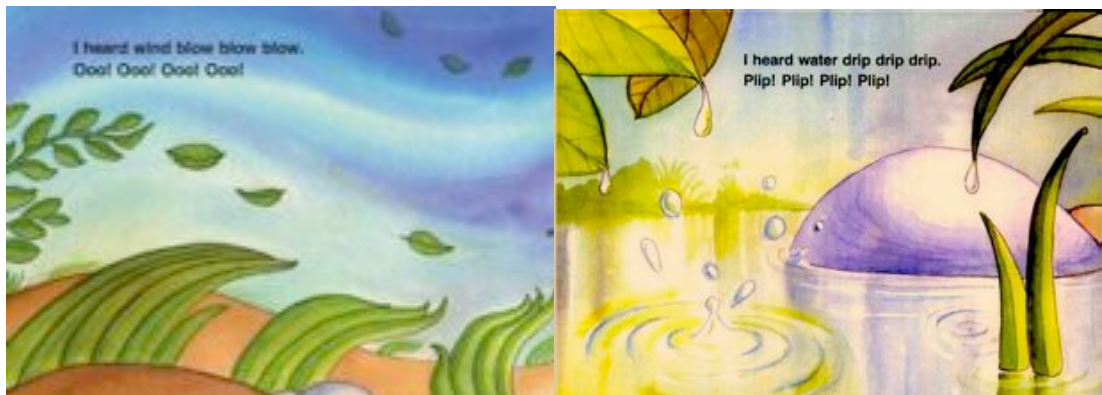
plip! plip!	gadaam! gudoom!	kaa! ka
oo! oo!	shay! shay!	pitter, patter

falling rain _____
 swaying trees _____
 blowing wind _____
 crows _____
 thunder _____
 raindrops _____

The placement of the lesson text (single sentence per line) affords an easier recognition of syntactic repetitions (I saw, I heard) and its associated auditory terrains. There is very little lesson text that is not revisited through activities or illustrated. The main lesson text is followed by 11 activities, of which four prompt learners to revisit the text substantively. Lastly, though the “match the sounds to the events” exercise in the textbook compares poorly with the matching in the original picturebook—where sounds become audible through illustrations—care is taken to draw attention to the auditory landscape that is so central the story.

Figure 5.6 **Tulika Publishers**, *Storm in the Garden*, Rs. 120

Auditory illustrations



Comparing the two treatments of *Storm in the Garden*, the NCERT *Marigold* adheres to the position paper’s (NCERT, 2006) concept of a “pre-literacy curriculum” and is a deliberate attempt at minimizing the literacy activities imposed on young children. As the position paper (NCERT, 2006) suggests, the private textbook can easily be used to promote “mastery learning of limited input” (p. 6) which is inadequate for

language learning. However, as the *Raindrops* illustrates, repeated re-visiting of the lesson text need not promote memorization and can also aid comprehension, especially for learners in deprived classrooms who do not have “regular exposure to a variety of meaningful inputs” (NCERT, 2006, p. 6; also see Jangid, 2004). But, institutionally restricted to producing a single English textbook for each grade, and directed by linguists’ orality biases, the NCERT *Marigold*’s approach to ensuring learner comprehension was “teacher talk”.

The *Marigold* team clarified that the lesson was meant to be transacted through “teacher-talk”, and demonstrations by the team loosely resembled Krashen & Terrell’s (1983) descriptions of the instructor maintaining a constant flow of “simplified talk” (pp. 34-35, 77). Similar to caretaker speech or foreigner talk, where speakers modify speech in order to ensure communication, teachers were expected to maintain an endless barrage of simplified talk to ensure “natural acquisition” of English. Since textbooks for Class 1 and 2 were designed as pre-literacy curricula, literacy activities were not emphasized and lesson text was **not** intended to be read by students.

Such a pedagogic design however ignores histories of “educated Indian English”, which allowed those who passed through the higher education system to acquire some level of scholastic English proficiencies. Both teachers and mothers at the New English School, the former with at least Bachelor’s degrees and the latter with at least plus two certifications, were English users but not English speakers. Mothers with professional qualifications were sophisticated English users in their professional domains but English remained a “modulect” for them (Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998). Ignoring such existent

resources and imposing a-historic, universal, conversational proficiencies, the NCERT *Marigold* text eventually resembled its colonial predecessors in its incomprehensibility. Eliminating the pre-selection, systematization, and drilling of grammatical structures that characterized the structural method was hardly sufficient for text comprehensibility. Further, textbooks that followed the pre-literacy curriculum adhered to the patterns set by the textbooks for Classes 1 and 2 in terms of text placement, illustration, and pedagogic activities resulting in a complete lack of readable lesson texts in primary grades. The natural method became a euphemism for resource deprivation.

Though unaware of the agencies and theoretical disciplines that structured absences into their teaching experience, primary school English teachers' at the New English School were intimately familiar with the privations engendered by the *Marigold*, and they fervently requested additional resources or textbooks published by private companies. One textbook that found favor with teachers was the *Broadway* series published by Oxford University Press. A thoroughly literacy oriented textbook series, the *Broadway* for Class 1 has nine lessons, each of which is organized around seven major sections; of these five seek to promote reading and writing development (Editorial Treatment, p. 5). In term of instructional design, the lesson text is well illustrated. All the main characters and events—the two schoolgirls, the cow eating the plastic bag, the girls confronting the vegetable seller, and his wife making cloth bags (not shown below) are illustrated, and the theme of dirty/clean is carried forward in the exercise illustrations. The pedagogic activities that follow are also thoroughly illustrated. However, unlike the Ratnasagar *Networks* textbook, traditional literacy activities have been more or less abandoned; for

instance, Activity 5 is a poster writing activity that discourages the notion of one correct answer.

Figure 5.7 Oxford University Press: *Broadway*

Class 1, Lesson 9: A Clean Street

Lesson Text

Now read the story.

Neela and Shakeela are classmates.
They are going for a walk after school.

A cow goes past. It is eating a blue plastic bag.

Shakeela says, 'It is not good to eat plastic, is it?'
Neela says, 'No, it isn't.'

They see Kumar. He sells vegetables. He is putting ripe red tomatoes into a plastic bag.

Shakeela tells him, 'People throw away plastic bags, and cows eat them. That's not good, is it? Plastic bags also make the street dirty. Please don't use them.'

Picture accompanying Activity 1

For each sentence.

-
-
-
-
-

Activity 1: Learn to read 1

True or False? Put a or a after each

1. Neela and Shakeela are friends.
2. They go for a walk after school.
3. They see a cow eating a cloth bag.
4. Kumar sells books.
5. Plastic bags make the street dirty.
6. Now Kumar's wife makes plastic bags.

Activity 1: Learn to read 2

Talk about what you read.

1. Do the girls speak angrily to Kumar?
How do they speak to him?

Activity 5: Learn to write

2. Now make your own posters for...

Activity 6: Learn to speak

Saying 'Please'.

When you want to ask someone to do some
'Please don't use plastic bags.'
'Please bring cloth bags.'

Neel wants his friends to do these things
politely.

Shut the door.	Pick up those books.
Give me your pencil.	Sit next to me.
Don't talk.	Tell me a story.

Yet, looking beyond the strictly pedagogical, the text emerges as a lesson in middle class reformist entrepreneurism. Unlike the NCERT *Raindrops* and *Marigold*, which have safe, non-confrontational, a-political lesson content, *A Clean Street* is an instance of middle-class confrontations with the working class. Classmates Neela and Shakeela chance upon a cow eating a plastic bag: a “culturally familiar” and common enough sight on urban streets. The accompanying illustration marks the students as not just classmates but also as middle class. As the story progresses, the girls confront, albeit “politely”, the roadside vegetable seller, Kumar, whose plastic bags are the cause of all the trouble. The vegetable seller is illustrated as unkempt and poor, and his background suggests an urban slum or a dumping yard, which are often geographically proximate to each other. The theme of the story is the girls’ (polite) reformist entrepreneurism, which gets the vegetable seller’s wife to start making cloth bags; the problem of dirty streets is solved by “polite” middle-class schoolgirls who say “please”. As Nair (2015) points out, institutionalized arrangements that underpin “cleaning” in India are so embroiled in the caste order that middle-classed cleaning campaigns find it “safer to take refuge behind a strategy of psychologizing and individualizing such habits and ways of thinking” (p. 2). The social and moral frameworks of *A Clean Street* anticipate not just comprehension but also conformity with urban, middle class values and agendas. Yet as I describe in chapter two with the UNICEF published picturebook *Father I Want*, if linguistic comprehension can be ensured, texts can evoke critique as easily as conformity. But when comprehension itself is impeded, critique is also silenced and that silence can be mistaken for consensus.

Lastly, coming to Kerala SCERT produced English textbooks, which were mandated for use in Kerala state funded schools, instructional design was similar to the NCERT *Marigold*, theoretically, and to the *Broadway*, in terms of content. As explained in the previous chapter, Kerala curricular frameworks also proceed from assumptions of natural language acquisition and are in fact, much more zealous in their oppositions to “unnatural” (non) learnings through “mechanical repetition”. Similar to the class-encounter in Broadway’s *A Clean Street*, Unit 7 in the Kerala state textbook for Class 3 narrates the story of a young middleclass schoolboy, Saji, who encounters a street singer whom we later come to know as Muthu. Unlike in *Broadway*, where societal inequality (middle class schoolgirls and working class vegetable seller) is elided under middle-class aspirations for “clean streets”, *From Street to School* is an explicit recognition of economic and social inequalities. The Kerala Curricular Framework is categorical about crafting an “issue based” curriculum for all subjects including English, rather than a “theme based” curriculum as recommended by national frameworks, in order to build an egalitarian, socialist, democratic society (SCERT, 2007, p. 16). English textbooks for primary grades were thus composed around eight issues. *From Street to School* is written around the theme “issues of the marginalized” (SCERT, 2008, pp. 32-33, 44). The chief consultant for the English textbooks Dr. K. N. Anandan (2014) describes this stance in a public talk:

The Kerala curriculum is an issue-based curriculum – not theme-based. We have identified eight issue domains like marginalization, mismanagement of land and water and so on. And every subject is woven around these social issues. And every child has to take up a social issue. The lessons are designed in this manner. Before this, we had very clean textbooks. An unreal society – a sort of ‘prettified’ society. But it is an ugly society that we are bringing into textbooks.

To briefly clarify textbook design, the Kerala SCERT produced primary school English textbooks in conjunction with “source books”, more popularly known as teachers’ handbooks. Unlike typical teachers’ handbooks—which explain and elaborate on curricular activities designed around textbook content—Kerala-state teachers’ handbooks contained the bulk of the lesson content usually included in textbooks. For instance, *From Street to School* had 16 narrative segments in the handbook and only eight “narrative fragments” in the textbook. Further, narrative fragments in textbooks were part of a more elaborate narrative segment in the handbook and not coherent events in themselves. However, only the textbook was illustrated, which meant that over 60% of all narratives remained un-illustrated. Though Class 1 narratives employed the mother tongue to scaffold the comprehension of un-illustrated oral narratives in a foreign language, by the second lesson in Class 2, handbook narratives were fully monolingual, in English. Teachers were directed to present a faithful rendition of the narratives, without explanation or translation.

The first narrative event in *From Street to School* is in the teacher’s handbook, which informs listeners that Saji has Rs. 50 in his pocket that he has to handover to his teacher on reaching school. In the next event, Saji is on his way to school when he encounters a “street singer”, whose songs are wonderfully melodious but have “a pang of sadness”. The textbook opens with this narrative fragment. After singing, the street singer begs for money, “opening his hands before everyone”. He is hungry, and has two sisters to feed.

Figure 5.8 Kerala SCERT Class 3, Unit 7


Student textbook: Lesson text

Teacher's handbook: Lesson text

7 FROM STREET TO SCHOOL

A Street Singer

'Poor boy! How well he sings!
He plays harmonium too'.
Saji looked at the boy again.



What would Saji's thoughts be?

Narrative

Some people were there at the bus stop. They were listening to the boy's song. His voice was really sweet. The boy's fingers moved like waves, on the harmonium. Saji looked at the boy. He listened to the songs. 'There is a pang of sadness in his songs,' Saji thought. The boy sang three or four songs. Then he moved towards the people slowly. 'Sir please! I am hungry! Give me some money. I've two sisters! sir... please'

The boy opened his hands before everyone. But nobody gave him money. Some of them turned their faces from him. Saji stood watching all these. At that time a bus came and stopped there. People rushed into it. It moved away with them. Saji looked at the boy. The boy's eyes looked tired. His dress was torn. Saji saw tears in his eyes. Saji felt sad. His hand slowly moved towards his pocket. It touched on the rupee note. He took it out. 'No, I can't give it.' He put it back in his pocket. He walked forward. Saji heard the song again. He couldn't take another step forward. The song pulled him back. He walked back to the boy.

Teacher's Version

'Poor boy! Nobody gave him money. He is helpless. He needs money. I must help him. I will give him the money.'

Ask suitable questions like:

- Where is Saji now?
- Will he give the money to the boy?
- Why did he put the money back in his pocket?

Elicit responses.

Ask the learners to write Saji's thoughts

The handbook narrative then paints an evocative picture of Saji's gaze and inner turmoil when none of the listeners oblige; we hear of the street singer's torn dress and tired, tear-filled eyes and are invited to echo Saji's reading of him as a "poor boy" who should be helped. The street singer becomes the "victim" par excellence, who with neither

community nor history has no memory or critique of social institutions that produce homelessness or poverty (CABE, 2005; Sreenivas, 2011).

On the contrary, asking for money was a common political act in Edanadu; former-slave castes and other non-elites frequently asked their former feudal masters and mistresses for money, re-playing historical feudal bonds while gesturing to generations of labor that had never been adequately compensated. Former masters and mistresses were compelled into historical subjectivities of “charity”, which “underlined the status and redemption of the *giver*” rather than more contemporary forms of charity that scrutinize the productivity and discipline of the *recipient* (Devika, 2007c, p. 215). Petitioning for money was thus a common everyday performative claim for reparation rather than an ahistorical act of pathos. But in the story, the street singer is fixed into a personalized suffering narrative that can produce no political commentary of social institutions. Rather, he is primed for the empathetic but reformist gaze of Saji, who can now “help” him. Therefore, though the curricular frameworks claim to radically dismantle “prettified society” in order to bring an “ugly society” into classrooms, the text itself is trapped in hollowed out, empty imaginings of an egalitarian society and community. Embedded within the reformist narratives of development discussed in chapter three, the text attempts to build privileged groups as radical and ethical, and simultaneously works to erase histories and systems of oppression as well as the political lives of non-normative groups.

However, the most damaging work of the textbook has to do with instructional design rather than with textbook content. Like the NCERT *Marigold, From Street to*

School prohibits all the frameworks of comprehensibility that scaffold literacy and language learning within a non-conversational linguistic environment: illustrations, short coherent texts, and semantic and narrative predictability. The fragmentation of the story between the textbook and the handbook, the complicated and protracted plotline and numerous subplots, and the scripted nature of the linguistic input present a formidable challenge for teachers. In contrast, the *Marigold* had self-contained texts, short, coherent texts, and expectations of “simplified talk” that was “roughly tuned” to learners’ existing levels. Caretakers, foreigners, (and second language teachers) work to simplify vocabulary and modify grammatical structures to tune conversation to the linguistic level of the speaker, or simply, to be understood (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, pp. 33-35). The very notion of “comprehensible input” that is central to “natural language acquisition” in the *Marigold*, theoretically, is predicated on people understanding messages in the target language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 19).

In comparison, the Kerala teachers’ handbook directs teachers to not translate or explain narratives, but “to present them “as such with proper feel and voice modulation” (SCERT, 2008, p. 7). The specificities of this directive (feel, voice modulation) are reminiscent of *katha prasangam* traditions, in which solo artists performed highly theatrical monologue-stories to musical accompaniment. Trivedi’s (2015) description of the performative style of V. Sambasivan, one of the most accomplished *katha prasanagam* artists of post-independence Kerala reveals the performative depth integral to *katha prasangam*:

To make the narrative come alive, he also enacted all the roles of the characters, putting on and modulating different voices, tones, pitches and gestures suitable

for various roles. Hence, his act was not just solo stand-up singing or narration but a fuller, more dramatic experience of the whole, where one singer-actor performed the roles of all the characters, harnessing into his show the energy and viscerality of the ‘liveness’ of theater (p. 2).

A similar “extravagantly emotional” performance (Trivedi, 2015, p. 5) is required of teachers, since the Kerala SCERT (2008) asks them to assemble “learning experiences which influence (children’s) emotional orbit” (p. 8). The chief consultant Dr. KN Anandan (2014) explains:

Oral narratives are extremely useful tools for acquiring language. Just present a narrative with emotive aspect. My hypothesis is that language experiences sustain in the human mind as emotional gestalts. Other things just fade out. You must have talked to many people round-the-clock but you can’t recall. But there are certain things that you carry till death – those things that touched you – which emotionally touched you.

The pathos of the street singer with his torn clothes and tear-filled eyes being turned away by passersby who have enjoyed his melodious song is framed as a similar “emotional gestalt”. To convey it, the teacher has to become a *katha prasangak* or a performance artist and enact the roles, put on and modulate different voices, tone, pitches, and gestures as suitable for various roles. The “dramatic emotionalism” that lies at the heart of *katha prasangam* (Trivedi, 2015, p. 5) has to become everyday English language pedagogy. All the information and affective landscape crucial to story comprehension has to be extra-linguistically coded in the performances of the *katha prasangak* teacher. Unlike the constant flow of “simplified talk” expected with the *Marigold* textbook, Kerala state pedagogy expected a constant flow of highly charged, specialized performance. Conventional literacy exercises were defined as falling outside of this framework, and therefore eliminated.

Though teachers dissipated the lofty rhapsodies of the Kerala SCERT into translation and explanation, prevalent during the structural phase too as described earlier, what they considered most cruel [*kruram*] about the reformed textbook was its systematic damaging of students' and teachers' sense of plausibility. The “discourse oriented pedagogy” of the Kerala state, though meaning oriented like the NCERT reforms, was production rather than comprehension focused. Unlike the NCERT *Marigold* or any of the other textbooks discussed earlier, Kerala SCERT textbooks mandated learner construction of “(linguistic) discourses”. For instance, in *From Street to School*, students are asked to write “Saji’s thoughts” and the acceptable version provided in the handbook is a six-sentence grammatically correct, situationally appropriate, and communicatively competent “thoughts”. This obligatory “discourse”, for the practical purposes of teaching and testing was thus defined at the “upper limit of structural organization”—like a coherent stand-alone conversation (Stubbs, 1983, p. 7). Primary school English learning, and most importantly standardized testing, was structured around student production of four specific “genre” discourses (Polanyi, 1988, p. 604): conversations, descriptions, rhymes, and thoughts (SSA evaluation criteria, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014). On the other hand, NCERT (2006) points out that emergent learners’ spontaneous production of language progresses from “a one-word, mostly nouns, stage to the production of multi word sentences with verbs, auxiliaries, determiners, adjectives, prepositions, perhaps through a two-word stage” (p. 16). For the Kerala SCERT primary textbooks, however, there are no stages of learning; students progress from hearing rhapsodic narratives to

discourse production in the written form complete with the formal mechanics of writing, regardless of comprehension.

Prabhu (1987) describes the allure of learner discourse construction for “meaning focused” pedagogies but cautions that insistence on production can be counter productive. Though he had begun his Bangalore Communicational Project (1979-1984) with what he calls “opinion gap tasks”—which involved “identifying and articulating a personal response, feeling or attitude in response to a given situation, for e.g. story completion (p. 47)—he had eventually abandoned them. He writes:

The value of open-ended activity for linguistic development can perhaps be realized better with advanced learners in a second language but in early stages of second language learning, open-ended activity too often leads only to learners’ verbal imitation of one another, or of the teacher, and thus ceases to be genuinely open ended (p. 48).

Interestingly, Prabhu used “reasoning gap” activities that allowed his learners to progress from “a one-word, mostly nouns, stage to the production of multi word sentences through a two-word stage”. He explains:

Opinion gap activity, on the other hand, involves stating meaning which is very much one’s own—and of a kind (for example feeling or attitude) which is neither well defined nor easy to articulate. This leads to a high level of uncertainty, diffidence, or anxiety, though it offers a correspondingly high level of pleasure from success. ... [It] calls for both meaning and language which is one’s own, and for that reason can seem daunting (p. 49).

For Prabhu, learners “sense of security” and perception of potential success is crucial for language learning. Necessarily beyond the linguistic repertoires of students, opinion gap activities cause “uncertainty, diffidence, anxiety” and even frustration to the point of learners disinclination to make the effort (pp. 47, 50, 56).

For Kerala state pedagogy however, opinion gap tasks and learners' construction of genre discourses are mandatory evidence for language learning. Kerala pedagogy is built on principles of constructivism and critical pedagogy (SCERT, 2008, p. 7); for both, learners' active "construction" of their own knowledge is crucial to learning. As the chief consultant Dr. KN Anandan (2014) explains:

Elevate the learner from the level of a recipient to the level of a creator. He is a co-author of the textbook. Every learner is a co-author of the textbook. Understand this. And respect that child.

Thus, instructional design claims to respect and affirm learners and seeks to create opportunities for learners to "co-construct" the story and thus "construct" their own knowledge and language proficiencies. But to do so, teachers had to demand the impossible from learners, or manufacture expected results. It is important to note that reading instruction is painfully absent in the pedagogic designs discussed above, be it rhapsodical narratives or discourse construction. Opportunity for fluency in word recognition (extracting sound and meaning from graphic symbols) is distressingly scarce. This configuration of an orality centered pedagogy that nevertheless demanded literacy proficiencies made teaching English an impossible activity in Kerala state schools.

To summarize, the most readable and teachable textbook for first generation English learners, according to learner-chosen criteria, was the NCERT *Raindrops*. Meanwhile, the *Marigold*, also published by the NCERT, faithfully translates the position paper's orality biases and disappoints on most of the criteria that beginner learners in India look for. As for the two private textbooks, they follow a literacy oriented approach, one fairly traditional and the other more intentional about discouraging memorization.

Lastly, the textbook that most closely translates policy assumptions of innateness, primacy of speech, and oppositions to “traditional” literacy activities is the Kerala SCERT textbook.

Table 5.2 Instructional design and content analysis of five textbooks

	<i>Lesson text design</i>	<i>Lesson content</i>	<i>Exercise design</i>
NCERT <i>Raindrops</i>	What’s going on? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally familiar • Well illustrated • Repetitions drawn out 	Non-elite, gender-sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes revisiting of lesson text • Scaffolded • Reinforces teaching points
NCERT <i>Marigold</i>	Storm in the garden <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally familiar • 70% un-illustrated • Repetitions hidden 	A-political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal revisiting of lesson text • Partly scaffolded • Main themes overlooked
Ratnasagar <i>Networks</i>	Storm in the garden <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally familiar • Practically illustrated • Repetitions drawn out 	A-political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhaustive revisiting • Scaffolded • Main themes addressed
Oxford <i>Broadway</i>	A clean street <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally familiar • Well illustrated • Text well spaced 	Middle-classed, reformist, entrepreneurial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes revisiting but discourages memorization • Scaffolded • Main themes are well addressed
Kerala SCERT	From street to school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally familiar • Fragmented • Extremely lengthy • Extensive sections un-illustrated • No repetitions 	A-historic, individualistic “victim” narratives that disallow social critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion gap tasks • Expectations of monolingual upper-limit discourse production • Not scaffolded

The next section explores how textbooks are adapted, resisted, and negotiated at the two schools, as well as the implications of policy assumptions, market structures, and textbook orientations for student learning.

Performances and labors

Bartlett (2007b) argues that “doing literacy” is not merely about “mastering a code but largely about developing command of literacy practices that are recognized as legitimate” (p. 54). Clarifying literacy practices to be “socially regulated, recurrent patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings” (p. 53), she contends that doing literacy entails cultural performances that may or may not coincide with the learning of linguistic codes. In this section, I point out how culturally legitimate ways of performing literacy in Edanadu were aligned with the cultural production of educated Indian English. Further, drawing attention to the ways in which cultural performances became linguistic proficiency, I describe the centrality of mothers’ pedagogic labors in educational projects. Though the pedagogic frameworks and textbook design I have discussed earlier have no role for mothers, teachers at both the New English School and St. Thomas could not imagine teaching work that was independent of mothers’ labors. “Paying attention at home” or *vittil shraddikanam* was considered integral to student learning, and the moralities of mothering I discussed in chapter two were organized around mothers paying attention at home. Mothers’ work was crucial to producing and sustaining what I call “labor-full pedagogies”, a term I prefer over Vaish’s (2005) “poor people’s pedagogies”, though both gesture to the bodily and affective labors necessitated by material-less linguistic environments. However, the

outcome of labors was substantially influenced by the initial endowments of the family and if mothers at the New English school were able to subvert national pedagogy to produce lexical learning and participation in culturally acceptable literacy performances, students and mothers at St. Thomas found it next to impossible to resist state pedagogy to participate in legitimate literacy performances.

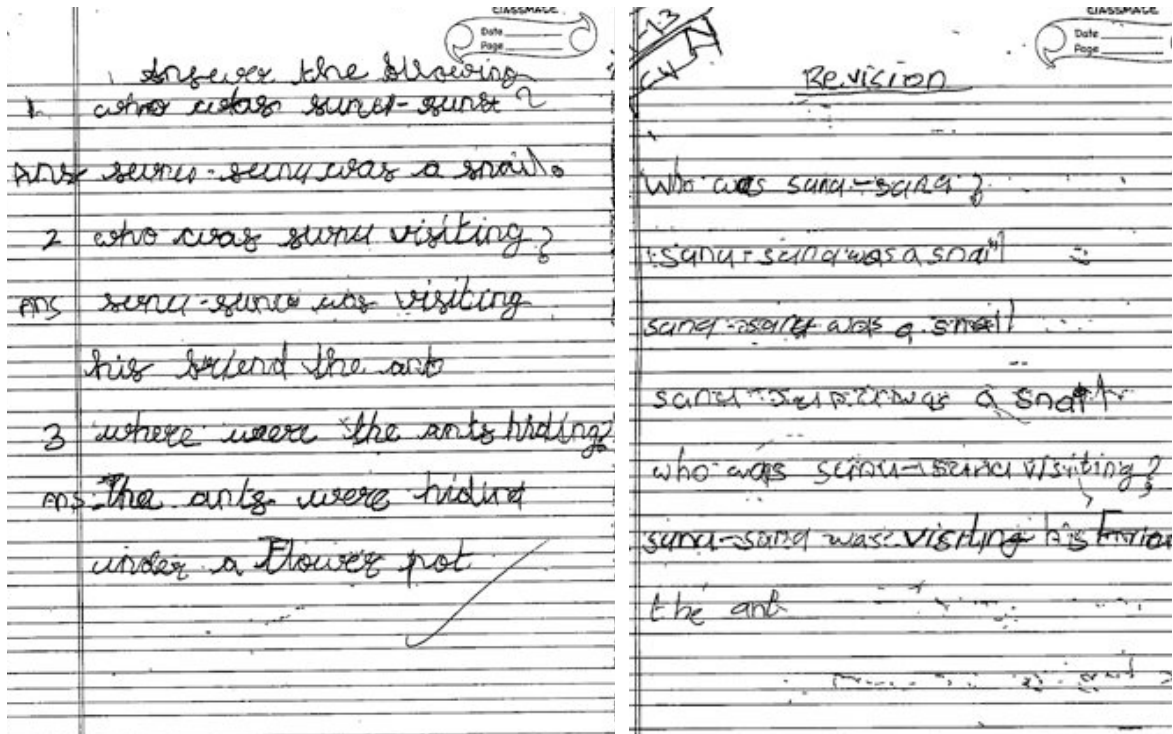
Performing literacy

Every Friday morning, I stepped into the 2nd grade classroom at St. Thomas to a loud, hearty, chorus of “Good morning, teacher”. I wondered how the 2nd graders decided when I had entered their classroom since the room did not have clear borders—it was separated from the neighboring classroom only in part, by a wooden frame. However they arrived at their border-marking decisions, the chorus always rang out loud and true, demanding a response. My response had to wait a few moments since I had to walk up to the teacher’s desk that faced them. They greeted the anticipation of my presence. I liked to greet them face-to-face. Unlike the anticipatory greeting at St. Thomas, at the New English School, I typically walked into classes full of bustle and talk and had to bang on the teacher’s table or shout above the din of thirty odd students before a greeting was belted out: “Good morning/afternoon Miss, nice to see you again, welcome to our class”, offered up in a garble or singsong that mocked the institutionalization of a personal greeting. The salience of the greeting as a performance of classroom English literacy clearly varied across the two schools: if at St. Thomas the greeting was one of the few moments students felt like they were “doing literacy” (Bartlett, 2007a; 2007b), the elaborate greeting at the New English School was clearly superfluous for the students.

The most salient way of doing literacy at the New English School, for the students I taught, was copying off the blackboard. Done in relative silence and with much concentration, students requested, “Miss, please move” if I obstructed their view. Students were more rudely rebuked if their seating positions blocked the view. Sometimes, students would not let me start my lesson till they had finished their copying work from the previous lesson. Though copying was salient, much to my consternation, reading what had been copied was not equally pertinent. The word on the blackboard was sacred only in particular ways and equally discardable in other ways. Only later did I find out that the discarding I witnessed in class indexed a larger system of learning arrangements, which were marked by labor and resistance. In comparison, though second graders at St. Thomas painstakingly cleaned their class blackboard with crushed hibiscus flowers gathered from the tree outside the window, the blackboard was too old for any writing to become legible. What is more, there was little to write on the blackboard given the rhapsodic pedagogy mandated by reformed textbooks. Poignantly, lack of student opposition to, and even an ardent desire for, laborious learning marked classroom ethos at St. Thomas. Denied access to culturally sanctioned literacy performances, they had no way to (im)prove themselves as legitimate learners.

At the New English School, student labors were deeply entangled with mothers’ labors, or to put it bluntly, mothers labored to engender, monitor, distribute, and manage students’ servile bodily labor. To take the example of *Storm in the Garden* from the *Marigold* textbook for Class 2, student classwork at the New English School is revealing.

Figure 5.9 Student notebook from the New English School, Class 2



The questions that follow the lesson text have been answered in the notebook, and learning requires the repeated re-writing of these answers. The student’s derision at this servile labor is clearly visible on the “Revision” page, with “Sunu sunu was a snail” trailing from legible to exasperated writing by the third repetition.

Sixty-two year old Annamma described the labors she had to expend to get her grandson to “sit down” to do this fatiguing, monotonous learning work:

He is very bright [*bahu midukkana*], but he needs attention [*shradhikkamenkil*]. He’ll get marks if someone will “sit down with” him and teach him [*kuthi irruthi padippikamenkil*]. He will not sit on his own [*irikkathilla*]. If I give him some work and go away, he will do everything else but study. Appachan [grandfather] will teach him, but he gets impatient and will hit him. So I don’t ask him to.

Interestingly, Annamma uses the same term “sitting down [*kuthi irikkan*]” that she had earlier used to describe her endless household labors of earlier years (chapter two). If the past was marked by endless labor, the present required an equally fatiguing albeit non-bodily labor. She went on to describe how Bobby had, in the past few days, sat down to study and had broken all the points of his pencils meticulously. She also reveals the gender dynamics of pedagogic labor: men could become impatient and violent; women could and did get impatient and violent, and managing their own affective selves was part of the fatiguing work involved in labor-full pedagogies.

Mothers were in-part appreciative of the fertile and furious imaginative work children produced to inhabit a world sans labor, right in the middle of “sitting to study [*padikkan irikkumbam*]”. Gayatri described her daughter’s tomfoolery during study time sarcastically as “creative pursuits [*kala paripadikal*]” but went on to describe with much laughter and great interest all that had been constitutive of those artistic pursuits. But eventually, she still had to sit down with her daughter to get the pedagogic work done. “Play” [*kali*] was another word that emerged frequently in mothers’ accounts of what children did during their expected study time, particularly in the case of boys. Girls seemed to have a greater acceptance of anticipated servility. Meanwhile mothers who worked full time had to schedule “sitting with” time into their working lives. Bindhu worked six days a week and was too fatigued to do any pedagogic work after she got home. Bindhu’s mother described that “she comes home and first thing she does is she pops a tablet [for body/head ache]”. But when class tests were around the corner, Bindhu made sure to sit with her son to get the required work done. Her teaching sessions were

sharp, no-nonsense sittings, and her son knew not to fool around with his mother [*avade aduthu kali nadakkukela*]. Daisy too worked six days a week but made sure that she sat with her daughter on Sundays to go over the week's work. She also distributed her pedagogic work with others in the family, sending Jinu to cousins on some days. Paid tuition was the most common form of such a distribution of mothers' pedagogic work. Almost all the students attended paid tuition, mothers reported, since that was a legitimate form of "sitting to study [*avide irikkum*]".

It was a series of prolonged interviews with Ponamma teacher, a much sought after "tuition teacher" that provided pedagogic insights into the "sitting work" that mothers did. Ponamma teacher was a Dalit elder with a Bachelor's degree from the years before degree inflation [*pandathe degree kari*], who had never found commensurate employment. It was highly unusual for such highly certified elders to be unemployed all their life, and it is difficult to imagine that caste was not a factor in her many job rejections. Further, as a Dalit Christian she was not eligible for posts constitutionally reserved for the Scheduled Castes. Ponamma teacher was a skilled English user with a proliferous vocabulary and a deeply reflective pedagogue with close to twenty years of experience as a tuition teacher. She explained that "sense making [*senseilekku konduvaranam*]" was the crucial pedagogic work entailed in "sitting with" primary school children. Without adequate exposure to English, learners at the New English School needed help in extracting sound and meaning information from graphic symbols. As Koda (2005) elaborates, first language learners use their prior knowledge of the language to meaningfully decode visual forms, but for second language learners, "oral

language and literacy competencies develop simultaneously” (p. 38). Students often could not extract sound or meaning from what they had copied off the blackboard and sitting with them was vital. Ponnamma teacher gave the example of “stump” a word that had foxed her students recently. By associating it with the stumps used in cricket, she was able to “bring students into the meaning of the word [*sensilekku konduvannu*]”. She repeatedly emphasized the importance of “sense making” in her pedagogic work. In addition, sense making had to be complemented with cumulative exposure, which had to be secured through “mastery learning of limited materials” (NCERT, 2006, p. 6) in the absence of “input rich” environments. Sitting with students and forcefully [*nirbandhichu*] promoting sense making through drudgerous repetitive writing tasks had to suffice when “rich and varied input” was non-existent.

Unlike typical (dominant caste) tuition teachers who “took tuition at home”, Ponnamma teacher travelled to her students’ homes for her tuition sessions. She lived in the normative past of Edanadu village life, in a dilapidated home with little conveniences [*saukaryangal illa*]. She had thought she could become an advocate or a clerk with her certification, and often went into depression over the stasis of her life. She had passed every test she had attempted (for employment in state owned companies like banks and the railways) but nothing had come of it. “I had thought I’d reach a good level [*nalla nilavaram*]. People don’t know I’m an educated person [*padichathokkeya*], I don’t look like an educated person”, she remarked. But the mothers of New English School had given her dignity and honor. She explained that mothers without formal school education sometimes studied with their children during her tuition sessions. “Parents nurtured me

[*enne valarthiyathu*]. In the world's eyes I've not grown, or reached anywhere. But they sustained me, helped me grow, in my mind.”

If pedagogic work at the New English School was material-less and labor-full, learning at St. Thomas was material-less and labor-less. Though mothers like Jessy and Annu worked to engender some student labor, fragmentations in the textbook, the absence of literacy oriented exercises, and the opinion gap format of exams undermined their work. “There is nothing to teach” Jisa’s mother complained to me once, “then how will she learn?” Teachers at state-funded schools tried to compensate with supplementary materials, for instance, phonic exercises that are explicitly prohibited within the state system, but expectations of “discourse production” in the tri-yearly centralized exams left them frantic and bewildered. “Teachers are desperate” [*teachers angu desp akuva*] a teacher educator remarked, during our conversation about English teaching in Kerala state-funded schools. Prohibited from undertaking legitimate literacy practices, some teachers chose to avoid English teaching altogether, which was easy enough within the “class teacher system” followed in state funded schools. Each primary grade class was allotted to one teacher, who taught all subjects including English.

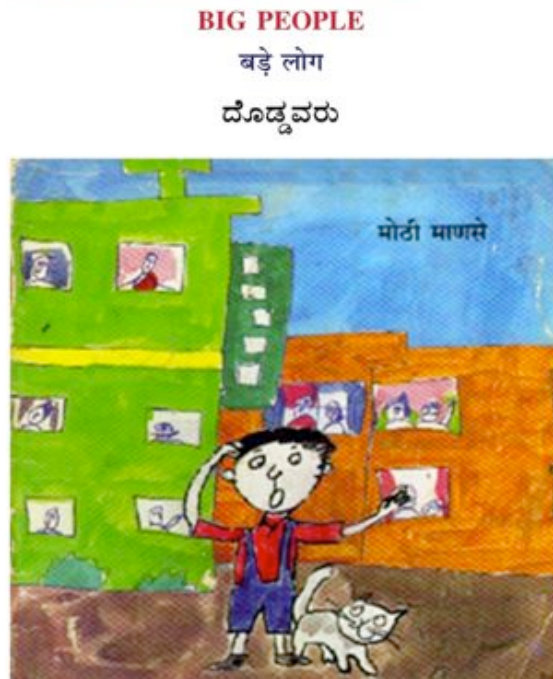
The most significant difference between student English proficiencies at the two schools was at the lexical level. During the first few months of my fieldwork, a Dalit grandmother explained to me the lexical foundations her grandchildren had acquired through low-fee English-medium schooling. She said:

I first encountered English in school in 7th standard. We started a-b-c in 7th. Things are different now. They [the two kids] use many words in English. We use

munvasham, but she always says “front”. She’ll go sit in the “front” of the house, she says. Like that, she uses English words.

Translating her insights about vocabulary acquisition into the languages acceptable by the English teaching profession, first graders at the New English School could read beginner level picture books like *Father I Want* and *Big People* without assistance.

Figure 5.10 **Big People** by Aruna Thakkar and Rao Bel, published by UNICEF

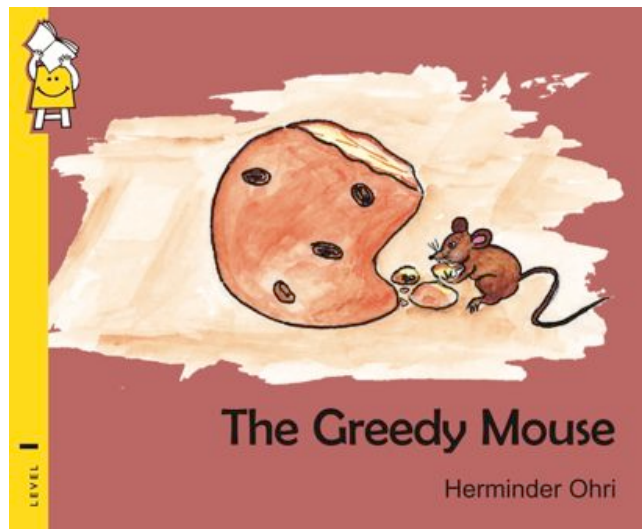


Though new to unassisted reading, students extracted sounds and meaning accurately, saying “*ithu* big people *aa* [this is ‘big people’]” instead of reading out the text as “big people”. On the other hand, second graders at St. Thomas read the same text after several assisted reading sessions.

From labor-less to labor-full pedagogies

Though most of my teaching work at St. Thomas was with second graders, others too dropped by during recess, to look through the reading materials I was slowly accumulating. I describe fourth grader Appu's encounter with [The Greedy Mouse](#) in some detail below. Appu picked out *The Greedy Mouse* from amongst a bunch of new books that had just come in from the Delhi publisher Pratham. *The Greedy Mouse* is the story of a mouse who finds a bun and wants to take it home to eat it all by himself. He pushes the bun from the back, he pulls it from the front, he tries pulling it with a string, but when the bun remains unmovable he finally eats it where he found it. His stomach gets too big from eating the entire bun and he finds himself unable to get into his house.

Figure 5.11 **The Greedy Mouse** by Herminder Ohri, published by Pratham Books



Appu looked at the front cover and tried out the words knew—"rat" and "biscuit" (the illustration of the bun did look like a *Good Day* biscuit). But both "rat" and "biscuit" did not map on to the letters he saw—m-o-u-s-e and g-r-e-e-d-y. Annoyed, he flipped

through the pages but there were too many words he did not know—“front”, “back”, “push”, “take”. The story didn’t make much sense to him without the words. He decided to try another book. But every book he flipped through did not meet his criteria for comprehension and soon enough, Appu left the glossy shiny books to go play outside. It is important to note that Appu later passed the competitive Kerala state Lower Primary School Scholarship Exams, and was a “bright” student. But, he had been betrayed of the proficiencies his counterparts at the New English School acquired, albeit with much labor, by the deprivational logic of state English pedagogy.

When Appu graduated lower primary school, unmindful of systemic failures, he enrolled at a state-funded English-medium school. The state insisted on mother tongue education only in primary grades and all state-funded high schools in and around Edanadu had English-medium sections, and one token Malayalam-medium section. Appu came to me for homework help on Saturdays during his transition phase, and I was amazed at how rapidly his vocabulary had enlarged. He read the story *The Mirror* in his English textbook as well as the section on Photosynthesis in his *Basic Science* textbook with very little assistance. What he had earlier known as “*prakasha samsleshanam*” had now become photosynthesis and he read how plants absorbed water and minerals to produce food. He had trouble with “storage” but otherwise read the text unassisted. He told me that his regular tuition teacher made him write everything five times. Appu had written out the entire text of photosynthesis five times, like students at New English School had done for all their subjects from their earliest years of schooling. Appu had transferred to similar “labor-full” pedagogies but as his mother pointed out, it was still

early to know how much difficulty [*budhimuttu*] was involved in the transition, and if he would have to eventually transfer to the Malayalam-medium section at the high school.

Transition difficulties and educated Indian English

“It was very difficult [*budhimuttu*] for me, I had come from Malayalam-medium; it was very difficult for me to follow what was being said”. Ponamma teacher reminisced of her own linguistic transitions from Malayalam-medium to English-medium instruction several decades ago, at the college level. “English-medium students will ‘grasp’ everything quickly”, she explained. Similar to how first grade students at the New English School could “grasp” the lexicon of *Big People*, and perform accurate phonological and semantic extractions, English-medium students were equipped with the lexical foundations [*adisthanam*] necessary to grasp classroom knowledge. Mothers at the New English School had similar memories of their pre-degree/plus-two education, which was the site of linguistic transition for the vast majority of them. Talking about her transition from Malayalam-medium schooling to English-medium, Anuja said:

Only five or six of us were from Malayalam-medium. The first week, we didn’t understand anything. Everything is in English. And those who have come from English-medium, they were so proud [*jada*]. But our instructor was kind. He encouraged us, told us it will be difficult initially, but then you will pick up. I had calculated [*kanakku kuttal*] to choose to write all my examinations in Malayalam¹⁰ but when I saw how evaluation worked, that option also petered out. Skills became *naipunyam*. All the bank terms (she was enrolled in a Commerce course) that you are familiar with in English—cheque, account opening—all of them had such strange Malayalam terms.

¹⁰ The provision exists to learn in English but be evaluated in the regional language. This was more popularly taken advantage of in non-Science subjects.

The artificiality and unfamiliarity of domain specific terms in Malayalam compounded the difficulties of transitioning from Malayalam-medium to English-medium education. Talking about her teaching certification, B.Ed, Sheena said: “If you look at the terms in Malayalam, you won’t understand anything. But if you look at the terms in English, all the terms are familiar”. The production of domain vocabulary in Malayalam was undertaken after the formation of the United Kerala [*aikya keralam*] state in 1956. Ponamma teacher called this corpus building *Malayaleekaranam* or making something Malayali. Her own schooling had been prior to this corpus building, which had provided her with the crucial affordances of a lexical foundation in English even though she attended a Malayalam-medium school. She said:

The words were not in Malayalam, do you understand? All subjects. So I did not have lexical poverty [*wordsinu daridryam*]. That is how I can teach everything in English. I do not have a paucity of words. Even if I have to teach Math, I know how to say ‘multiplication’ and ‘division’. All the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division¹¹), I know them in English. So I don’t find it difficult [*budhimuttu illa*]. Even today, I don’t know the Malayalam term for multiplication; it is true [laughs]. That was one ‘benefit’ I had.

Children who inherit these lexical foundations from their families, and those who acquire it laboriously in schools, have benefits that the school system rewards as “merit”. Add, subtract, multiply, divide, photo, synthesis, skills; these accrued into foundations and “aptitudes” for “bright” students since the lexical foundations of “educated” life, even in Edanadu, was educated English, not “natural” or survival English.

¹¹ The Malayalam equivalents are *kuttuka*, *kurakkuka*, *gunikkuka*, *harikkuka*

Conclusion

This chapter traced the markets and materials, and performances and labors, which materialized language policy and pedagogy in particular contexts. I first described the textbook market and analyzed the various materials potentially available to students at the two schools. A second section detailed the performances and labors of students and mothers. With their resources undervalued or forbidden by policy and instructional design, mothers and students labored to align textbooks with available resources. At the New English School, “doing literacy” entailed labor-full pedagogies while at St. Thomas School, material-less textbooks precipitated labor-less pedagogies that had dire affective and pedagogic costs, both for students and for teachers. Lastly, I traced Appu’s transitions from labor-less to labor-full pedagogies to explore the lexical foundations of academic proficiency, which emerged when labor was aligned with legitimate performances of literacy and channeled into “sense-making”. Though negotiations and resistances persist, institutionally structured inequalities are stark and disturbing. Reformed NCERT and Kerala SCERT textbooks systematized deprivations in already deprived classrooms by institutionalizing a skewed emphasis on orality even though reading-writing skills rather than orality is the more readily available local resource.

CHAPTER 6

EXAMINING

The Deputy Director of Education was leading an “officers meeting” at the District Institute of Education and Training, in which education officers—faculty at the district teacher education institute, in-service teacher educators from the Block Resource Center, project officers from the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, District Education Officers, and Assistant Education Officers—were discussing upcoming interventions. I was waiting outside the auditorium to schedule interviews with members of the “evaluation tool preparation committee”, i.e., teacher educators and teachers who had set question papers for centralized state exams in primary grades, when clusters of students and teachers began streaming into the Institute campus. They settled down in the shade of trees and on the verandahs of buildings. From the busy talk and enquiries made by a group that settled down next to me, I figured out that these were tenth graders waiting for their “Learning Disability” (LD) test. Nobody knew the testing schedule but word went around that the doctors had come. In a little while, a gregarious teacher came our way with her brood of students who had completed their LD tests. Everyone gathered to ask her how the tests had gone. In the middle of consoling one of her boys and his mother, she clarified details for those of us who had now formed an audience.

Teacher: He wants to become a driver. If I get him certified as MR (Mentally Retarded) he will never get a driver’s license. He won’t even get a decent girl to marry him.

Mother: But it (certification as Mental Retarded/Learning Disabled) will get him forty marks (in the matriculation exams). He won't pass without that teacher [*athillathe avan jayikkathilla teachere*].

Teacher: (to the audience) His problem is that he can't read the questions and write the appropriate answers. He will write whatever he has learned (by heart). Otherwise, there is no problem with him. He has no disability. In fact, he didn't want to come for the test, so his desires have been realized [*avande agraphangal sadhichu*]. He is not LD [*evan LD alla*].
(to student) You study hard.
(to mother) I'll take care of the rest, okay? Don't worry.

Grotesque, persistent, and multi-headed like the mythical hydra, processes of social and academic marginality transform unformed literacy skills into mental retardation, with all its attendant connotations of un-employability, un-marriage-ability, and un-sociability. For the mother, desiring the classification of her child as mentally retarded was the only option the famed public education system of Kerala had offered.

Jahan (2016) describes marginalization as processes “that lead to sidelining of a certain community/individual to the periphery of the social space that eventually constrains their life choices at the political space, social negotiation, and economic bargaining”. The periphery of educational space, which is embedded and enmeshed in social, political, and economic spheres, is actively assembled through the institutional production of “weak” learners, who can easily be trans-morphed into uneducable or even mentally retarded. The production of “weakness” however is not static or singular. At the New English School, the naturalization of modulect educated Indian English worked to deprive learners of comprehensible and adequate linguistic resources. But it was in later encounters with the CBSE in secondary grades that the indigenized assimilative logic of “communicative” language learning defined students as unintelligible English users.

Meanwhile, at St. Thomas, naturalized English language teaching entangled with the moralizations of “child-centered” education thrice every year in centralized exams, from as early as grade one. Students here learned early on, and never forgot, that they did not make the cut. Examination makes marginalization legible, quantifiable, and unquestionable; it defines the normative standard, and authoritatively, scientifically, certifies a laboring, learning student as a weak learner.

Naturalization meets assimilation

In the previous chapter, I described how fragile English literacies were laboriously acquired by students at the New English School and by students who enrolled in state-funded English-medium schools after graduating St. Thomas. To more carefully examine how these students encountered “standards” and became certified as “weak learners”, I draw on my teaching work at both schools. At the New English School, I draw on a series of evaluations I conducted of students’ speaking skills. The evaluation developed out of informal student responses to picturebooks I had been compiling in order to complement labor-full pedagogies with “material-full(er)” learning experiences. For the evaluation, students were invited to more formally present their comments on a picturebook of their choice, as much as possible in English, to the class. Following, students in the audience had a chance to raise questions, clarifications, and comments, either about the presentation or about the picturebook that formed the basis of the presentation. One of the picturebooks students in Class 5 picked for the presentation was *Storm in the Garden* published by Tulika and authored by Sandhya Rao, which as explained earlier, had featured in their 2nd grade English textbook (chapter five). I first recount the initial

presentation, after which a small selection of three audience responses is offered. Then, I evaluate student speech according to two sets of parameters, first, CBSE's aims for the reformed English course and second, CBSE's Assessment of Speaking and Listening Skills. Of the two, the second is the official guideline for speaking assessments. To give a cursory background of the class, in November 2014 when the presentations were underway, Class 5 had 38 students, 16 boys and 22 girls. This is the same class where 22 students' mothers or guardians had been interviewed in the previous academic year.

Student Presentation:

Sunu Sunu

Friends ants

Playing with

The ants climbed Sunu Sunu's back

Suddenly a white light *dehathottu adichu* [struck his body]

Rain come

Rain is come

Snail is covered with shell

The ants

“Sunu Sunu, go to home”

He go to mother

The wind is going ooo, ooo, ooo

The tree is very shay shay

The clouds was gudu gudu

The water drip drip

The water is falling

Idi minnal [thunder lightning]

The sky is very darkness

Sunu Sunu

When the rain go, Sunu Sunu was happy

Response 1

So many ants are draw

Rocket speed go

The snail is very play

The sky is very darkly

The ant was dance

I like

Very beautiful

Response 2

I like the snail shell

Looks like a (garden) hose

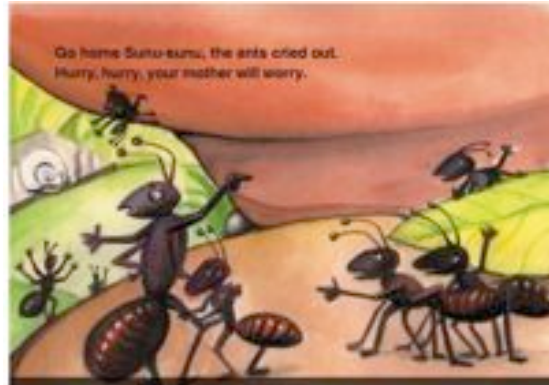
Figure 6.1 Illustration of snail shell



Response 3

Figure 6.2 Illustration of ants

I like the bridge of the ants
They are walking
So cute
I like the ants
Antsinde purakile [behind them]
Like a seat.



Of the aims recorded for the reformed Interact in English course, the most appropriate ones for the exercise in question can be grouped under Literary Analysis, specifically Comprehension and Creative Response. Evaluating New English School students' comprehension and creative response, the primary presentation identifies the main events and themes of the story. Sunu Sunu is playing with his friends the ants when a storm strikes. But Sunu Sunu does not get wet because he is covered in a shell. The ants urge him to go home, and he promptly goes to find his mother. The auditory experience of the storm, a key theme in the story, is noted. Finally, a prediction is ventured as to Sunu Sunu's response to the letting up of the storm, indicated in the illustrations but not specified in the story text. As explained in chapter five, textbook writers of the *Marigold* had missed out on the auditory theme, and had only attended to a few of the main points in the exercises. Therefore, in my evaluation, the student summary of *Storm in the Garden* ranks higher than the textbook writers' responses reified in the *Marigold*.

The three student responses that follow perform a different function; they are more creative engagements with the text that follow the factual summary. After all, there

is little point in repetitive summaries of the same story. Here again, student responses meet the criteria set by the CBSE adequately: “think on their own and express ideas using their experience, knowledge, and imagination, rather than being text dependent or teacher dependent”. The students draw on their interests (rocket speed) and environments (garden hose, seat) to express their personal interactions with the text. The *Marigold* textbook too asks student to talk about ants they have seen, to relate the text to personal experience, which emerges spontaneously in Response 2 (walking as a bridge, abdomen like a “seat”) while others students pick out other details from the text. If “imagination”, personalization, expression, and communication are the key goals, students have performed very well. These are the objectives of the *Marigold* textbook, except that the pedagogic design of the textbook undermines these objectives by eroding comprehensibility.

However, the Assessment of Speaking and Listening (ASL) guidelines have little if any provision for appreciating or evaluating any of these criteria. First of all, ASL is organized as an “interaction” between an examiner and a student-pair (to ensure a “natural” conversation pair), beginning with an introduction, a topic presentation with follow-up questions, and a problem-solving task with follow-up questions. The assessment itself is thus organized in an “interview and group discussion format” that is increasingly prevalent in securing entry to prestigious higher education courses. Speaking has to serve and can only be evaluated according to the urgent needs of privileged Indians, and only in pursuit of “solving problems”. Writing about the interaction biases of Communicative Language Teaching, Pennycook (1994) writes about how ESL courses

restrict the content of language lessons to promote a “survival English” that diminishes both the content and learners (p. 171). He goes on to cite Mukherjee (1986) to write:

In ESL, the puerile structure of content was not and is not about transmission of skills or critical understanding of concepts. It is geared to receiving situational instructions and learning how to assimilate as an object into a structural order, into a value order, into a cultural order, into a linguistic order, and above all, into a racist order (p. 172).

The CBSE ASL is assimilationist, but not the trivialized “survival” English normalized for poor immigrants arriving into wealthy English speaking countries. The problem solving tasks entailed in migrant survival are not the problem solving tasks undertaken by communicative, co-operative, manager entrepreneurs (Resnik, 2010, p. 225). As we saw in the previous chapter with *A Clean Street* “polite” middle-class problem solving is communicative language pedagogy in the *Broadway* textbook. The racisms of ESL are not external to the nation, predicated on new colonialisms and imperialisms, but part of an indigenous assimilation into new inter-national capitalist logic. The insufficiencies of modulect, educated Indian English have to be evened out by polite, entrepreneurial, problem solving, interactive competence.

The primary criterion for evaluating “speaking skills”, for CBSE ASL, is “interactive competence”, defined around initiation, repair, and continuation of conversation as well as the extra-linguistic outcome in terms of “task fulfillment”. To even be evaluated, learners have to insert themselves into the assimilationist desires, and the resources assumed by, “advantaged learners” (CIEFL, 1997). After the insertion, other criteria like “fluency”, “pronunciation”, and “language” become applicable on a scale of one to five. Language is to be evaluated on students’ range and accuracy of

vocabulary and grammatical structures; pronunciation on an arbitrary notion of “clear, natural pronunciation” and “intelligibility”; and fluency on the basis of organization and coherence of the speech content and “speed” of delivery. From a learning standpoint, the “language” in student responses is fairly sophisticated, having moved beyond early single-word, only-noun, kind of response (NCERT, 2006, p. 16) to the deployment of verbs with multiple tense forms (go, playing, climbed), possessive (Sunu Sunu’s), prepositions (with), articles (a, the), adjective (white), modifiers (very, so many, so), and even simile (bridge, hose, seat) and adjective metaphor (rocket speed). But, from the point of view of “task fulfillment” and “interactive competence”, these learnings become irrelevant and invisible. Further, descriptions of fluency around “speed of delivery” and pronunciation around “clear, natural pronunciation”, without evidence of “speech patterns related to recitation” index the “interferences” of regional languages and locate “proficiency” in speech and interactive competence with non-labor-full pedagogies and monolingual speech. However, as student responses indicate, learners at the New English School are very much bilingual. Within this assessment framework, not only do students’ learning become invisible and irrelevant but they also acquire negative connotations. Interestingly, though there is no discussion of bilingual speech in the ASL grading descriptors, there is a footnote about students who might be “unable to respond in English” who should be “marked NM (no marks)”. Furthermore, the CBSE offers a token compromise, in the form of a “topic presentation”, which can be a rehearsed one-minute presentation on a “suitable” topic, which however should be evaluated negatively if it there is “evidence of speech patterns related to recitation”. Despite the sophistication of

their thought and language learning, learners at the New English School can only become “weak” learners within the CBSE ASL framework.

This production of “weakness” is discursively acknowledged by the Curriculum Implementation Study of the earlier 1988-1997 ELT reforms (CIEFL, 1997). Assessment of speaking skills was one of the principal recommendations of the reforms, though they had to wait about fifteen years for ASL to be formally institutionalized (chapter seven). Though the thrust of the first reforms—promotion of “interactive” classrooms, institutionalization of the testing of speaking skills, and skill testing rather than memory testing—was undermined by the CBSE itself (CIEFL, 1997; Mathur, 1995), the reforms did introduce the testing of spontaneous written language use, but limited it to the Main Course Book. Within the reformed course comprising of an interaction oriented Main Course Book as well as a Literature Reader and a Grammar Work Book, “the 3-book package was two-third tradition and one-third reform” (Tickoo, 2001, p. 118). However, in terms of discourses around what language was and how it was learned, the one-third reform was sufficient for the national-level production of “weak learners”. Examining the implementation of the reformed course, CIEFL (1997) writes:

There seems to be a general feeling and this is corroborated by classroom observation data, that the new curriculum has not addressed issues of weak students. This is widespread in remote areas, e.g. Arunachal Pradesh and under-resourced schools. Although in year three teachers appear to be more confident of handling bright and weak students, these seem to be only slightly below-average students and not those who really need help. In order to cope with the problem, parents and teachers seem to be adopting ways that are not useful or effective in the long run – e.g. teaching, revising, and rehearsing question answers for section D (literature), ... The request for more weighting of literature, i.e., questions on seen texts in the exam, supplementary grammar tasks in exam formats, reducing tasks/units in MCB, all seem to reflect a lack of awareness of a skill based approach to teaching/testing of English (p. 12).

The report begins with an acknowledgement of the active production of weakness, for instance, in “remote areas” like Arunachal Pradesh, which has less to do with geographical remoteness than with social marginality. Arunachal Pradesh state-funded secondary schools are affiliated to the CBSE since the state does not have a secondary education board (Begi, 2007). Neither elite private nor equally exclusive federal state funded, students enrolled in CBSE schools in Arunachal Pradesh were naturally accorded the status of “weak” learners, further clarified as not just “slightly below average” but “really needing help”. However, the observations which follow transfer the burden of systemic inequality from the system to students caught in the system. Their labor-full teaching learning practices are “not useful or effective in the long run” and their demands for evaluation of rehearsed language use “reflect a lack of awareness of a skill based approach to teaching/testing of English”. Weak learners are called on to expressly subscribe to norms that diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality, and deepen lack of access to material goods and services (Appadurai, 2004, p. 66).

Remarkably, CIEFL (1997) describes secondary school English teaching at the New English School accurately, over fifteen years prior to the actual event. The tenth grade English teacher explained matter-of-factly that at schools like the New English School (he had experience at a few) he focused on the Literature Reader and the Grammar Work Book, and did not teach the Main Course Book if he could avoid it. As CIEFL (1997) recorded, Prakash too taught, revised, and rehearsed answers for section D and for supplementary grammar tasks in exam format because he was teaching “weak learners”. However, the delays in encountering standards allowed for small mercies and

testing from kindergarten to grade eight were conducted through teacher made tests, that were typically written tests but could also be more unconventional evaluations like the one I described. On the other hand, students at St. Thomas began their encounters with centralized exams and standards from grade one, thrice every academic year.

Naturalization meets moralization

The first Kerala state exam I administered at St. Thomas was during December 2013. It was the English exam for 2nd grade. After the usual morning assembly, the head teacher handed me a sealed brown envelope, ceremoniously, in full view of the three 2nd graders, wrong side up, to display that the envelope was indeed sealed and un-tampered. I was new to the ritual. Turning the envelope right side up, I noticed the several numbers and names that marked it. SSA, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or Education for All was the most prominent name. SSA funded “evaluation tool preparation”. The district and the sub-district that located the school followed. The grade and subject of the examination came next, followed by the name of the school in smaller font. Then, the number of answer scripts (5) and question papers (2) contained inside the envelope were displayed. A serial number and another set number completed the bureaucratic notations.

Ironically, on opening the elaborately annotated envelope I was confronted with an *Instructions to Teachers* sheet that began: “The teacher should create a child friendly environment before starting the evaluation process”. Five more directions followed, more specific to the English test, covering “proper pronunciation”, “code switching”, “scaffolding questions”, and the like, which like the directive on child-friendliness, could

neither fix nor elaborate on what was permitted or desirable. But, these terms lingered, contradicting the numerical and administrative specificities of the envelope. While the sealed envelope evoked discourses of fair and impartial evaluation of individual student ability, the instructions acknowledged the enterprise of evaluation as always potentially unfair and partial.

The exam itself was modeled on the rhapsodic narrative and discourse construction discussed in the previous chapter. The second term evaluation for Grade 2 for 2013-14 was built around Unit 3 *In the Lap of Nature*. Unit 3 tells the story of a “smart boy” Manu who is located in the idyllic life of a Kerala village (SCERT, 2013, p. 30). He loves flowers, butterflies, birds and fish, particularly the red fish that abound in a pond he frequents, but most of all, he loves his Grandma. A story competition at school is introduced mid-way through the narrative to reveal how deeply he cares for his grandma. He wins the prize and wants to open his prize with her, but she has gone to visit Manu’s uncle. The story ends with a despondent Manu at the pond, where he slips and falls, and almost drowns. Compared to the rhapsodic “emotional gestalts” of *From Street to School*, Manu’s story is relatively flat till the drowning sequence, has logical inconsistencies (how could Manu not know how to swim if he spent so much time at the pond), and ends abruptly with his near-drowning incident. Rhapsodies do not always come out as expected, as the textbook writing team explained in interviews.

Extending the story, the question paper narrated Manu’s trip to his uncle’s house where he is re-united with his grandma. Since each question paper had to have all four “genre” discourses, the first test item required students to construct a conversation

between Manu and his uncle when Manu reached his uncle’s home. To insert the other anticipated discourses, Manu is made to play and sing with a friend in a garden—the description of the garden forms the second question and poem completion the third. Manu spends most of the day with his friend, rather than his grandma, but is disconsolate again at having to leave grandma to go back home. His “thoughts” on his bus ride back home forms the final question. Students were asked to write appropriate thoughts to match the given pictures. What I present below are the responses of the three students in Grade 2 at St. Thomas School.

Figure 6.3 Thoughts exercise: Second term evaluation, Class 2

Jaisy: *Muthashshi odi varunnu*

[Grandma is running to me]

Sharat: *Hai, muthashshi odi varunnu*

[Grandma is running to me]

Jaisy: **Come**



Abhi: *Muthashshi vari tharunnu* [Grandma is feeding]

Sharat: *Enikku venda* [I don’t want]

Jaisy: *Njan thane kazhichollam* [I will eat on my own]



Jaisy: **I will washing**

Sharat: **swimming**

Jaisy: *Ammachide kaalu thenni pokum*

[She will slip and fall]



Sharat: *Rupa theruvannenkil manurru medikkam*

[If you'd give some money, I'd buy medicines for you]

(to Jaisy) *Choru ninaku kittathilla*

[You won't get any rice]

Pavam ammumma [Poor grandma]

Ammummakku ottum vaiyyale [Grandma is very unwell?]

Jaisy: *Muthashshi urangu* [Sleep, grandmother]

Ammumma is sleeping



Here, students are still at the early stages of second language learning, with Jaisy offering most of the English utterances. Abhi speaks only once, in Malayalam, while Sharat has much to say, most of which is in Malayalam. As I have described in the previous chapter, for Kerala state pedagogy, “opinion gap” exercises were the only evidence of language learning, which however force students into linguistic situations that are beyond existing linguistic repertoires. Further, bilingual answers are not entertained anywhere in primary school textbooks, implicitly laying out a standard for monolingual discourse production. Moving on to the content of student responses, students describe the picture at face value

rather than by inserting themselves into Manu's "thoughts". They have just previously described the garden and they don't see any reason why the next set of pictures should also not be described similarly. Furthermore, the description and poem completion activities in the textbook, in Grade 2, have all employed an "is/are —ing" format (e.g. birds are singing), which Jaisy brings into the thoughts activity as well. Lastly, Jaisy brings what she has studied from *In the Lap of Nature* into the test, but finds no place for what she has learned. She references the slipping and falling incident, where Manu almost drowned, but the lexical items she had learned were "save me". None of the lexical terms students might have learned from the lesson (pond, red fish, story competition, smart boy) are employable in the test. On the other hand, the test requires of them words they have never before seen or encountered like "feeding" for picture two. Then there is the question of students' transforming phonological symbols into graphic symbols and writing conventions. Designating a question paper "child centered" does not make the process of learning or testing child centered in any substantive way. As Sarangapani (2015) puts it: "the business and complexity of being child centered" is "hollowed out" or "over simplified" and turned into "moralistic maxims to be imposed" (p. 649). Furthermore, these simplifications and moralizations exclusively target the most marginalized groups remnant at state-funded Malayalam medium schools, implying that "such simplified education is meant for the children of the poor, while the better-off ones in society continue to labor at the serious business of rote learning" (p. 649). She cautions that the configuration of simplification, trivialization, and moralization in new seemingly

progressive pedagogies in fact work to revive and confirm old notions of “un-educability” of poor and lower caste children.

Distressingly, true to Sarangapani’s (2015) cautionary note, the outcomes of the reformed English pedagogy are more easily visible in rising discourses about “weak students” than in student English proficiencies. During my initial weeks at St. Thomas, it was stressed upon me that “they don’t know anything [*avarkonnumariyilla*]”. The frequency of centralized tests—thrice a year—from the earliest grades, and the recurring impossibility of reaching the standards expected by these exams drilled into teachers and students that learners did not know anything, and that they would not know anything. The abyss was too deep and too wide to be crossed. As Downey (2007) points out, teachers’ work is discerned by student performance of learning, not just by policymakers and parents but also by teachers themselves. The seeming impossibility of realizing culturally acceptable performances of learning made English teaching work in state-funded schools despairing and fatiguing, more so for some teachers than for others. The first grade teacher at St. Thomas often wondered to me what else should do to help her students. “They are not reaching anywhere [*avarengum ethunnilla*]”, she despaired, “I have no satisfaction [*enikkoru satisfactionum illa*]. Teachers at St. Thomas were ardent critiques of the reformed English pedagogy, with the 4th grade teacher once exclaiming: “putting pictures of squirrels in a textbook does not make it child centered”. Teacher resistances were pervasive, particularly in teacher training courses, especially if male teachers were in attendance. Though female teachers were more demure in their protests, outbursts were

not uncommon. At one teacher professional development program I participated in, a senior teacher hurled the textbook on the floor as others watched stunned.

However, the most trenchant critics of reformed pedagogy were Dalit educators like VV Swamy and Appukuttan and Dalit organizations like PRDS, Janamunnettam, and Rights. PRDS officer Chandrababu pointed out that the pedagogic reforms did not seek to bring Dalits on equal footing with dominant castes [*thulyatha varunna nayamalla*] but had instead, destroyed whatever foundations had been built painstakingly over generations [*thakarthu kalanju*]. The popular term for education reforms, amongst Dalit activists, was “pedagogy”. If reforms had popularized previously unknown terms like pedagogy [*bodhana shastram*], Dalits argued that the reforms were experiments run in state-funded schools at the expense of Dalits disproportionately remnant at such schools. This selective implementation of moralizing concepts like “child centered” pedagogy only ensured that Dalits became confined to the margins of social spaces and economic bargaining. Since the most populous Dalit caste in Kerala is pulaya, colloquially also called pelaya, Dalits disparaged reformed “pedagogy” by re-naming it “pelagogy”.

Equality in indignity

Writing about the differences between Tagore’s and Gandhi’s approaches to caste untouchability, Kaviraj (2013) explains that Tagore “avoids Gandhi’s confident stance” that upper castes can assume “roles that are demeaning and achieve a sense of equality in indignity with the untouchables” (p. 390). Rather, Tagore urges for practices of “counter-sacrality” whereby upper castes will “purify their hearts” of deep-seated casteisms (p.

390). What is required is a radical re-making of the upper caste self along self-ideologies of suspicion rather than of confidence (Bargi, 2014; Ilaiah, 1996). While dominant caste educators, policymakers, and public commentators perform a Gandhian confidence of equality with Dalits, “dedicated” teachers in state-funded schools performed a more cautious, tenuous, and partial equality in indignity with the students they served. Theirs was not an “*intellectual* entry into a radically different *experience*” (Kaviraj, 2013, p. 386), but an experiential entry into the unintelligibility that comes with living on the margins. For them too, speech did not equal communication, rather, their words bore witness against them.

To illustrate, at one of the mandatory teacher development programs conducted by the Kerala state for English teaching, teachers were asked to conduct an “error analysis” of primary students’ written descriptions of a picture. The teachers had been split into groups of four to five and handed sets of “authentic” student responses. Looking over the bunch of answer sheets she had been entrusted with, a demure teacher dressed in a starched yellow cotton sari stated matter-of-factly:

All four are the same. *Ithezhuthipichatha. Kuttiyude* level spelling mistakes-*il ninnu manasilakkanam*. [These are not “authentic” student responses. You can make out differences in student learning levels only from spelling mistakes students made while copying down the teacher-made answer.]

As explained in chapter five, “in early stages of second language learning, open-ended activity too often leads only to learners’ verbal imitation of one another, or of the teacher, and thus ceases to be genuinely open ended (Prabhu, 1987, p. 48).” The teacher in the yellow sari made the same argument, pointing out that the teacher administering the test

had manufactured a “student” answer [*ezhuthipichatha*] to satisfy state demands for students’ (linguistic) discourse production.

However, as Bargi (2014) explains, ideologies of critique and suspicion are hardly met with enthusiasm by self professed proponents of critical theory or pedagogy because “the change of questions also changes the target of questions”. Displaced from originary locations of critique to the object of critique, champions of critical pedagogy and child centered education became unforgiving defenders of reformed pedagogy, blaming parents of greed and inanity (chapter three) and teachers of incompetent language and pedagogic skills. As soon as the group work was over, the teacher in the yellow sari who had dismantled claims of authentic, “natural”, English language learning was called on for her “error analysis”, but what actually transpired was an interrogation:

Q: Why is the sentence meaningful?

A: Structure

Q: Structure *mathrame ollo?*

Is there only structure?

“We are going to a temple festival”
meaningful *anu*

“We are going to a temple festival” is
meaningful.

Enthu kondanathine meaningful *ennu*
parayunnathu?

Why is it meaningful?

“Are-going”; plural-“we”; “to”-a
preposition; “a” village festival- article,
indefinite article; *enthu konde* the

“Are-going”; plural-“we”; “to”-a
preposition; “a” village festival- article,
indefinite article; why didn’t the child use

paranjilla?

“the” (instead of “a”)?

Specific *ayittum* teacher *ariyanam*.

You have to be specific in your answer.

The facilitator of the teacher development program did not, even once, engage with the teacher’s critique that English language pedagogy in primary grades made impossible linguistic demands of students, and that teachers routinely manufactured answers to meet these demands. What we had in front of us was not an accurate indicator of student English abilities. Students in state-funded primary schools rarely, if ever, produced the kind of monolingual, multi-sentence, upper limit “genre” discourses expected of them. Intermediary, bilingual stages were much more common. However, when the change in question changed the target of the question, the response was immediate rejection and de-legitimization. When I filled in my colleague Anitha about what had transpired at the program, Anitha laughed at my accounts and remarked, “This is why I don’t go for courses. I don’t like going for courses [*enikkishtamalla*]. They make teachers speak what is in their minds [*avarude manasillirikunna karyam teachersine konde parayippikum*].”

Another easily thrown about, definitive statement about English teachers in general was that they didn’t know English. All discussions about student English learning I had with teacher educators in various state agencies like the District Institute of Educational Training, Block Resource Centers, District Education Office, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, as well as the Kerala SCERT inevitably began with the assertion: “teachers don’t know English [*English ariyathilla*]. Since English teaching work under the reformed curriculum could not be undertaken by English users who were not English speakers, the de-legitimization of teachers’ English proficiencies delegitimized their

pedagogic skills as well. With the naturalization of English, “knowing” English had become predicated on speaking English; though eleven of the twelve teachers I worked closely with were graduates with domain-restricted literacy proficiencies in educated Indian English, their English proficiencies were no longer visible within newly emergent frameworks of intelligibility, and they became “incompetent” teachers.

Entering into experiences of unintelligibility like their students, dedicated teachers sympathized with their students’ marginality and did not consider students “uneducable”. To clarify, not all teachers were “dedicated”. “Dedicated” was a term teachers used to describe their sincerity to the children they served and to the investments they made in their students’ education. For such teachers, the immorality of the teaching work they were called to do (Downey, 2007) was a burden that was carried heavily. As Anitha, the fourth grade teacher at St. Thomas, put it:

This teaching work will devastate those who are sincere [*athmarthatha undengi*].

But if we don’t labor on, it is a sin [*papama*].

However, it is such dedication and sincerity that sometimes dealt the unkindest cut of all. Teacher fatigue and resistance to discourses of student un-educability became articulated as students’ “lack of desire/aspiration [*argahamilla, avarkku venda*]”. After yet another exasperating attempt at manufacturing student “discourse production” in preparation for yet another centralized exam, I shared my frustrations with Anitha. She replied:

They don’t want to learn [*avarkavashyamilla*]. There is no support at home either.

There is no point in making all this effort.

Like Anitha, the head-teacher routinely instructed the students to “desire” education [*ningalkke agram venam*], transferring the burdens of immoral teaching work on to students’ desires for educational development. If on the one hand, aspiration shaming regimes charged new English-medium parents with too much desire amounting to greed, dedicated teachers at uneconomic schools faulted their students with too little desire.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed how peripheries of educational space were contested and assembled through the institutional production of “weak” learners. At the New English School, the naturalization of modulect educated Indian English entangled with the assimilative logic of “communicative” language learning to define students as unintelligible English users. Meanwhile, at St. Thomas, naturalization merged with the moralizations of “child-centered” education, recurrently, to destroy students and teachers sense of plausibility. Examination made marginalization legible by defining a normative standard, and those who deviated became weak learners.

CHAPTER 7

BECOMING

While the consumers of education reforms—students and teachers in state-funded and non-elite CBSE schools—were pushed to the margins of educational spaces, reform producers who aspired to serve the “public” and the “people” became state and society. In this chapter, I trace the formation of producer communities and examine how this shaped the reformed teaching materials discussed in chapter five. Firstly, the NCERT reform was undertaken to rectify the Hinduization of curricular reforms attempted by the previous BJP-led government (Guichard, 2010). As for the Kerala state reform, it was one element of the Left’s ideological and practical re-orientation to local erosions of socialism (Tharakan, 2000). Thus, if the NCERT reform textbooks were produced by a shifting, hastily-put-together “invented community” (Kumar, Priyam, & Saxena, 2001, p. 564), the Kerala state reform textbooks were fashioned by a long-standing, committed community of Left educators who became the pedagogic state. Unlike these two reforms, the CBSE reforms were mobilized by a community of “advantaged parents” and crafted by privileged teachers with the help of British funds and experts (Mathur, 1995; CIEFL, 1997; Tickoo, 2001). While the converging interests of linguists and proponents of communicative language teaching have been discussed earlier (chapter four), attending to the contexts of reform production help understand some of the key differences between the reforms. The oppositions of the invented community to “traditional” pedagogies were transient while similar oppositions from an ideologically bound community that felt under threat proved formidable. It is important to note that the *only* parental community

substantively represented in the production process is highly privileged, globally mobile Indians. The aspirations of elite Indians thus became reified in reform-produced pedagogic materials, skewing both discourse and pedagogy in their favor. Their “natural” route to English language learning, orality, was extended to the nation but not their “acquisition rich” environments.

Table 7.1 English reform producers, materials, and consumers

Reform Consumers	Private and state CBSE schools (New English School)		Kerala state schools (St. Thomas School)
	Grades 1-8	Grades 9, 10	
Reform Producer	NCERT	CBSE	Kerala State
Producer community	Invented community	Elite community	Cohesive community-state (teachers/experts)
Materials opposed to	Traditional pedagogy		
Pedagogic materials	Inconsistent with oppositional stance	International orientation	Designed to maximize oppositional stance

NCERT reforms: Inventing community to de-saffronize school curricula

The national reforms of 2004-07 were initiated in response to the Hinduization of school curricula attempted by the National Curricular Framework for School Education 2000 (NCFSE 2000). Drafted by the NCERT under the directorship of Prof. J.S. Rajput during the tenure of the BJP-led government, the NCFSE 2000 sought to Indianize, nationalize, and spiritualize school curriculum, especially by re-writing Indian histories in ways that normalized India as a Hindu nation (Akhtar, 2005; CAGE, 2005; Guichard, 2010; Kumar,

2000; Visweswaran, Witzel, Manjrekar, Bhog, & Chakravarti, 2009). Outraged at this blatant “saffronization” of education, or what Krishna Kumar (2000) called “indigenous fascism” (p. 1057), the Left, minorities, and several state governments like Delhi and Kerala opposed the NCFSE 2000 and a public interest litigation was filed in the Supreme Court of India to stall the implementation of NCFSE 2000.

When the BJP-led coalition lost to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) during the general elections of 2004, the UPA government promised to de-saffronize school curriculum and appointed Prof. Krishna Kumar, one of India’s foremost critical educators, as the Director of the NCERT. Under Krishna Kumar’s directorship, the NCERT reviewed the NCFSE 2000, its affiliated textbooks, and began consultations for a revised National Curricular Framework. Though Social Science especially History textbooks were at the center of debate (Guichard, 2010), all subject pedagogies including language pedagogy were re-considered. For English language pedagogy, the National Focus Group chaired by Prof. R. Amritavalli, a noted linguist, drafted the National Position Paper, which laid out pertinent pedagogic concepts and curricular expectations. Simultaneously, work commenced on textbooks that would exemplify the recommendations of the Position Paper.

The chief advisor of the *Marigold* textbook production committee for classes 1-4¹², Prof. Lalitha Eapen, described the textbook writing process as a two-year, episodic,

¹² Lalitha Eapen was the chief consultant for Marigold Books for classes 1-5, which were completed over a three-year period. However, since the Kerala state categorized lower primary grades as classes 1-4, I only consider the production of Marigold Books for classes 1-4, produced over a two-year period.

teacher-training program rather than as a typical materials production activity. Krishna Kumar conceived of textbook production as a practitioner as much as an expert endeavor, and the NCERT was obliged to invite practicing teachers into its textbook production process. Complying with Krishna Kumar's directive, the NCERT sent out requests to educational institutions, particularly to federal-state funded schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas, Army Public Schools, and Demonstration Schools attached to Regional Institutes of Education, all of which are affiliated to the CBSE. The thirteen practitioners who responded for the primary section (Classes 1-4) are listed on the Marigold acknowledgements page: five worked on Books 1 and 3 and all thirteen worked on Books 2 and 4. Of the thirteen, all nine practitioners who worked within formal school systems were affiliated with CBSE schools. National reforms thus became a CBSE affair.

Even though Krishna Kumar envisaged a participatory, practitioner-led, textbook production process, the immediate context of the reform only afforded the formation of an "invented community" (Kumar, Priyam, & Saxena, 2001, p. 564). Thus, a motely group comprising seven teachers, four school leaders, and two children's book writers, assembled to craft the most ambitious English textbooks the NCERT had ever attempted. The position paper had put forth a radically different approach to language pedagogy, one that opposed traditional teaching practices in many ways. For the practitioner members, as well as for the NCERT member coordinator, Dr. Usha Dutta, the learning entailed was significant. During my interview with her, Dutta reminisced that the *Marigold* was an "extreme deviation" from what was then prevalent, and she was uncertain if it had been too "experimental". This hesitation is evident in the textbook, as pointed out by

Bhattacharya, Madan, Sarkar, & Basu (2012), who find the Class 3 *Marigold* textbook “arbitrary and disconnected” (p. 24) and “abrupt and isolated” (p. 25). Further, during classroom observations in Delhi, they did not find the textbook resistant to the traditional practices it had opposed or deviated so radically from (pp. 67-86). The oppositional orientations of the NCERT reforms were thus tempered by the practical constraints of textbook production.

Secondly, the market mitigated the *Marigold*'s oppositional stance to a great extent. As explained earlier, the CBSE school system is closely integrated with the market; most private schools prescribe privately published textbooks, which are not inspected or regulated by any state agency (CABE, 2005). The 2005 CABE report on textbook publishing in India notes that private schools in Kerala typically patronized pan-Indian textbooks. During interviews with textbook writers at two such pan-Indian publishing houses, Oxford and McGraw Hill, writers described the private textbook publishing industry as “conservative” and as “responsive to teacher demands”. As I have detailed in chapter five, private textbooks did not make orality central to the textbook but blended it into a literacy-centered curricula. Only non-elite private schools with the unusual configuration of low-income parents and conscientious school leaders who sought out “quality textbooks” like at the New English School prescribed the *Marigold*. However, even then, the *Marigold* did not foreclose traditional literacy practices completely; teachers and mothers were able to subvert and circumvent reform mandates.

Kerala state reforms: Becoming democratic socialist state

Unlike the NCERT *Marigold*, which was a one-time exercise in experimental pedagogy put together by a group that dispersed soon after, Kerala reform textbooks were the product of a sustained pedagogic engagement undertaken by a long-standing and cohesive community of educators. The 2007-2008 textbooks that were in use during my fieldwork period, as well as the ongoing textbook revision of 2013-14, were conducted by a “core group” who had worked together for about a decade. Thus, though the Kerala state reform concurred with NCERT’s theoretical orientations vis-à-vis second language acquisition, the textbooks produced in Kerala were remarkably different.

The community building unique to Kerala has its roots in the political environment of the state, or more precisely, in the Left’s long-standing interest and work in the pedagogic domain. Though the Communist Party in Kerala is a pedagogic organization, in that it educates party members in communist ideology, it is the growing ascendance of the Parishad within the Communist Party that led to a serious engagement with school curricula. Known in English as the People’s Science Movement, the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (Parishad hereafter) was founded in 1962 by a group of social activists, science writers, and scientists to educate ordinary people in science. Kumar (1984) contends that “people’s science” is a misnomer because the Parishad was committed to taking “the scientist’s science to the people” rather than in codifying the science people practiced (p. 1082). The Parishad’s project or rationale was however not unique. Bhikhu Parekh (1991) reminds that the Nehruvian model of development for newly independent India was “modernization” centered on “industrialization”,

“socialism”, and “scientific temper”. But, offering a corrective to the Nehruvian development project, Parishad activists attempted to re-orient scientific research to benefit “common people” (Kumar, 1984; Parameswaran, 1996). Not surprisingly Parishad’s principal focus remains science education but its expansion into other domains including language education came out of Parishad members taking on leading roles in the Communist Party when socialism was waning globally.

The growing importance of the Parishad in the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI-M or CPM) has its beginnings in the Emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi (1975-77) but acquired significance later, with the decline of socialism. Though many early Parishad members were Communist Party members, it was during the Emergency¹³ proclaimed by Indira Gandhi that the Parishad became radicalized. Williams (2008) clarifies that since the Parishad was a cultural organization, it was not targeted during the Emergency and what had earlier been a community of progressive scientists and teachers became a “safe haven” for Communist Party members in Kerala (p. 123). Similarly, Zachariah (1989) notes that during the Emergency, the Parishad achieved “almost overnight”, a “mass membership” (p. 16). Crucially, Zachariah (1989) also records that in 1987, approximately 60% of Parishad members were teachers in Kerala’s schools and colleges. The Communist Party has a long history of teacher involvement, with prominent leaders like AK Gopalan, Joseph Mundasherry, and PK Chathan Master having worked as educators. Jeffrey (1992) traces another locus of influence citing

¹³ The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency across the country in June 1975, during which time elections were suspended, the press censored, political rivals imprisoned, and civil liberties curbed. The order was withdrawn after 21 months in March 1977.

veteran leader AK Gopalan who is said to have remarked that in the Malabar region “teachers in most of the schools had been my students” (p. 70).

Meanwhile, the mass influx of Communist Party members into the Parishad radicalized the science education organization on the one hand and altered the dynamics of power within the Communist Party on the other hand. In particular, the transitions of the late 1980s—a collapsing economy at home and the decline of socialism worldwide—precipitated a process of “ideological and practical re-orientation” (Williams, 2008, p. xvii). Recognizing that its traditional militant labor unionism was becoming inadequate, the Left was forced look for alternatives. It is in this context that the phenomenal success of the 1988-89 Ernakulum Total Literacy Project decisively shifted Left politics away from trade unionism in favor of reformist developmental projects that “empowered” the “masses” (Devika, 2007b; Tornquist, 1995). The District Collector of Ernakulum district, a former vice president of the Parishad, undertook a mass adult-literacy project with close cooperation and logistical support from the Parishad (Joseph, 1996; Sivadas, 1991). The Parishad’s experience with popularizing science education was harnessed to ensure both pedagogic and administrative support for the project, as well as to generate the mass participation entailed in covering roughly 600,000 households across the district. The project was able to gather unprecedented support and on February 4, 1990, in a meeting attended by the then Chief Minister of Kerala E.K. Nayanar, the Prime Minister of India formally declared Ernakulam to be the first totally literate district in India. Enthused by this success, Parishad leaders pushed Communist Party leaders to adopt participatory democracy, or “democratic socialism”, as the Left’s new development agenda.

Table 7.2 Chronology of Kerala state, CBSE, and NCERT reforms

	Kerala	CBSE	National policies
1987	Left voted to power		
1988	<i>Total Literacy Campaign</i>	ELT reforms	
1991	Left voted out of power		Economic liberalization
1993	World Bank funded DPEP	New Textbooks	World Bank funded DPEP
1995		New Board Exam	
1996	Left voted to power		
	People's campaign for decentralized planning		
1997		Reform Report	
1998	<i>Second Language Acquisition Program (DPEP)</i>		
2000	Education for All Project [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan]		Education for All Project National Curricular Framework for School Education 2000
2001	Left voted out of power		
2002	<i>Acquiring Competence In English;</i>		Gujarat Pogrom
2004	<i>Rapid Acquisition of Competence in English;</i>		UPA voted to power Promises to de-saffronize curriculum
	<i>Promoting Acquisition of Competence in English;</i>		Consultations begin for National Curricular Framework
2005	<i>Rapid English Acquisition Program</i>		National Curricular Framework
2006	Left voted to power		Position Paper on teaching of English
2007	Kerala Curricular Framework		English Textbooks (Primary Grades)
2008	English Textbooks (Primary Grades)		
2010		CBSE <i>i</i>	UPA voted out of power
2011	Left voted out of power		
2012		Formal ASL	
2013	<i>English Textbook Revision</i>		

The success of the Total Literacy Program not only gave Parishad an upper hand within the Left, but also had serious implications for pedagogic practice within the formal school system for soon after, in 1993, the national government launched the national District Primary Education Program (DPEP). With the DPEP, Parishad members were able to systemically and comprehensively engage the formal school system to completely re-work pedagogic materials, teacher training, and evaluation. The DPEP however was a World Bank funded project; it was the “educational component” of structural adjustment policies that came to be called liberalization in India (Kumar, Priyam, & Saxena, 2001). OM Sankaran, a Parishad member who was at that time the Principal of the District Institute of Education and Training (Kasargod district), explained the conflict thus: “we were protesting against World Bank funding at that time. It was a soft loan at 2.5% interest over 40 years, it could be wasted [*nashipichu kalayam*] but the people would still have to repay it [*janangal thirichadakkanam*]”. Sankaran was invited to head the DPEP in Kerala and after much consideration, he joined as the State Project Coordinator of the DPEP in December 1996.

English was not offered in primary grades during this time, and since the DPEP was a primary education program, English became the last subject to be considered for curricular revision. However, parental desires for English schooling were already evident and Sankaran approached KN Anandan, a Chomskyan linguist, to develop English language pedagogic materials for the DPEP. Subsequently, Anandan designed the Second Language Acquisition Program for DPEP schools, with Classes 4 and 5 constituting the beginning level (Nair, 2004). Following the rigorous teacher development model set in

place by Sankaran, Anandan identified and nurtured a team of teachers to become “resource persons” for the Second Language Acquisition Program. Though the Left lost power in 2001, pedagogic reforms progressed with external funding continuing in the form of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for All) project. The continuity offered by federally earmarked funding for individual state education projects thus allowed the formation of a close-knit community of language pedagogues who shared Anandan’s pedagogic vision, passion, and commitment.

This core group assembled more formally and institutionally when the Left was voted to power in 2006. The new government initiated work on the Kerala Curricular Framework, in accordance with the recommendations of the National Curricular Framework (2005) and invited Prof. MA Khader from the NCERT to head the Kerala SCERT during this period. The pedagogic experiences of the DPEP were consolidated in consultation with the National Curricular Framework and like at the national level, work commenced on textbooks that exemplified the new curricular framework. Subject English was extended to primary grades for the first time, and textbooks for Classes 1-4 were prepared with Dr. KN Anandan as chief consultant. Unlike the NCERT’s invented community, Anandan and his core group worked enthusiastically to infuse classroom practices with the new, oppositional pedagogy.

Further, the political context in which the community of teacher-experts assembled became reified in textbooks as a vision for a developmentalist civil society. As explained in chapter four, Kerala state pedagogy pursued an “issue based” pedagogy to nurture citizens who were sensitive to social inequality and committed to egalitarian

socialist development. This entailed eschewing the “prettified versions” of society typically found in textbook content and bringing into the classroom “an ugly society”. *From Street to School* for instance was written to sensitize students to the “issues of marginalized” Keralites like the street singer Muthu, who lived in a shack with his two sisters and begged for a living. In the story, Saji mobilizes local help and resources from his family (father) and his school community (teacher) to rehabilitate Muthu and his sisters, by bringing them into the schooling system. The messier details of where the material resources would come from and for how long are not part of the story; neither is the possibility even considered that Muthu might actually resist the reformist entrepreneurialism of Saji and become “ungrateful”. Rather, the story ends with Muthu singing a song in gratitude, at the school. Sensitized school students were thus expected, like Saji, to solve intractable problems of social inequality by forming a well-intentioned, thoughtful, civil society.

However, the Left’s vision for revitalizing socialism was not this watered down, benevolent, democratic socialism. CPM-Parishad leaders like Thomas Isaac, who spearheaded the People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning, proposed a more rigorous and participatory democratic socialism to rectify the hierarchies that had come to characterize the CPM. Democratic socialism was predicated on empowering local communities to become an oppositional civil society, which would govern both the state and the market. Williams (2008) explains that the Left’s Parishad-inflected pedagogy re-defined socialism as the “dominance of civil society over state and economy” (p. 11) rather than as a negation of capitalism. This oppositional civil society was anticipated to

emerge through a process of “devolution”, which Williams (2008) distinguishes from delegation and decentralization. Unlike decentralization, which entailed the transfer of decision-making authority to regional offices or delegation, which involved the transfer of authority for particular tasks, devolution called for the institutional transfer of authority, resources, and power to plan development projects (p. 49; see Tharakan, 2000).

However, the production processes involved in pedagogic reforms are more closely aligned with the moralistic, reformist, entrepreneurialism seen in *From Street to School* rather than with Isaac’s version of devolution of power and resources. Pedagogic experts took the linguist’s pedagogy to the “people” to reform “conventional” literacy practices and further, mandated these a-historic linguistic impositions out of concern for the “issues of the marginalized”. That there was no institutional transfer of authority, resources, and power is not surprising given the region’s deep seated belief that inequality can be destroyed without altering the material contexts of indignity (Pampirikunnu, 2011). Yet, authority, resources, and power to plan pedagogic projects were devolved, but in favor of privileged, English-educated, educated-English speaking teachers turned experts. One of the preconditions of membership in this expert community was fluency in “educated English” (as well as “educated Malayalam”), both its academic and conversational versions. In fact, when I visited the residential textbook writing workshop in 2014, I was stuck by the assemblage of exceptionalism there: the team included a noted critic, a Fulbright fellow, and an accomplished dancer. All the six writers I interviewed were voracious readers and fluent bilinguals. This framework of participation eliminated even the possibility of parent participation, completely

contradicting the Left's agenda of devolving power to local communities.

But if processes of devolution had transferred material and symbolic resources to the expert community, as I explain in chapter two, it was through the market that both material and symbolic resources had become available to non-elites in liberalizing Edanadu. Thus, experts' insistence that local school communities voluntarily reject the market was a thinly veiled request to non-elites to have the moral courage to voluntarily return to an oppressive status quo. It is important to note how far the Left had altered in its own trajectory, and yet remained consistent. In the first education reforms undertaken by the Left in the 1950s, the state took over the market to safeguard (privileged) citizens from the vagaries of the market. In liberalizing Kerala, the Left shifted the responsibility of market regulation on to the sacrificial voluntarism of (marginalized) citizens.

That the production of this expert community afforded a few practicing teachers, including women, an unparalleled opportunity for professional development and personal belonging also needs to be noted. Though the team members readily acknowledged my critiques of the textbook they diffused blame away from the team to systemic determinants. Leafing through the Swedish book series *Mamma Moo and Crow* that I had brought, a writer noted wryly that the curriculum committee would not appreciate the illustrations: "all they'll have to say (about this wonderful book) is that the rat is not wearing underwear [*eli jatti ittitilla, ithanavaru parayuka*]". All the six writers I met articulated loyalty to their community as well pride in the pedagogic work they undertook: "this kind of special work happens only here (in Kerala) [*evide mathram kandu verunna prathyeka work*]" said a writer from a north Kerala district. But it was

when one of the teacher-writers referred to Dr. Anandan in familial terms (like a father, *achane pole*) that I realized the significance of this community for their personal lives and sense of self.

Further, this community of language teachers-turned-experts *became* the state as far as language pedagogy was concerned. During my fieldwork period, the Left was not in power and it was the Congress government that had undertaken textbook revision. Anandan had resigned his position and moved to work with the neighboring Andhra Pradesh government. A few of his core team members had similarly dispersed from the SCERT to return to classroom teaching or more localized teacher training institutes. Despite this formal dispersion, the core team assembled yet again for the English textbook revision; there was nobody else with the necessary expertise in language pedagogy. The official writing team produced the new materials in consultation with Anandan and the dispersed team. This informal cohesion despite formal dispersal points to a remarkable solidarity that I attempt to capture with the term “community state”. This empowered, resource-enriched community state assumed that their moralistic intentions achieved an egalitarian English language learning practice, and became unresponsive to teacher resistances and student experiences of humiliation and curricular violence.

CBSE reforms: Becoming international

From 1999 to 2011, the number of Indian students studying in foreign universities, predominantly in institutions in the English speaking countries of US, UK, and Australia, increased by over 200% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). Responding to the

needs of this new class of “global citizens”, the CBSE established a new school board in 2010, unambiguously named *CBSE International* or *CBSEi*. In its *FAQs for Parents*, the *CBSEi* states that the new curriculum provides a “globally sensitive curriculum that would help Indian learners either to pursue their higher studies in countries abroad or interact meaningfully with global markets for ensuring active participation in the development process (CBSE, 2010, pp. 1-2). The *CBSEi* claims that this internationalization will prepare India’s “future citizens to become global leaders in the emerging knowledge society” (*CBSEi*, Mission & Vision).

Unlike the politically motivated NCERT and Kerala state reforms, which resulted in the imposition of linguists’ beliefs onto school systems, the CBSE reforms were precipitated by elite aspirations for participation in international communities, and associated aspirations for resource accumulation. According to Resnik (2010), curricular internationalization entails the valorization of cognitive skills (problem solving and innovation), emotional skills (adaptability and cultural empathy), and socio-cultural skills (cooperation, collaboration, and communication). As the CBSE internationalized, it too mandated the teaching and evaluation of problem solving skills¹⁴, values¹⁵, and conversational skills in English in all affiliated schools, whether they prescribed to the national or international version. CBSE’s first academic curricular for the school year 2012-13, circular no Acad-1/2012 dated 28 March 2012, mandated the formal assessment of speaking and listening skills in English (ASL).

¹⁴ In August of 2012, circular no Acad-40/2012 initiated Problem Solving Assessment.

¹⁵ Circular no Acad-21/2012 introduced “value based questions” in all major subjects.

But for CBSE, becoming international entailed much more than curricular internationalization. As the quintessential “national” school board of India, the CBSE had to reflect and embody the nation’s new international orientation. To do so, the CBSE had to re-structure itself from a secondary school examining agency to a K-12 pedagogic body, but only for globally oriented, wealthy Indians. To explain in some detail, the CBSE was set up in 1921 as a local-state board for regions now located in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. It was re-constituted after independence in 1962 to especially serve the children of transferable central government employees¹⁶. But the CBSE was an examining board and in the same year, the Second Pay Commission of the independent nation recommended the establishment of a federal-state funded schooling system called Central Schools Organization for the same student population¹⁷, which would be affiliated to and examined by the re-constituted Central Board of Secondary Education¹⁸. The CBSE was distinct from local-state school boards, like the Kerala Education Board, as well as from other national school boards like the ICSE, the Indian Council for Secondary Education. The ICSE had always been tainted with internationalism since it had replaced the colonial Senior Cambridge examinations in the newly independent nation¹⁹ and had retained the Senior Cambridge exam pattern. State Boards on the other

¹⁶ <http://cbse.nic.in/welcome.htm>

¹⁷ In its initial years, Central Schools were also intended to serve the defense services. But in 1980, the Indian Army established the Army Welfare Education Organization, which took over the administration of Central Schools serving the wards of Army personnel. These schools were called Army Public Schools post-1980. For more details see <http://www.awesindia.com/>

¹⁸ <http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/12/8i/6M/8I6M0201.htm>

¹⁹ <http://www.cisce.org/council.aspx>

hand were too local, parochial even, especially when it came to language of instruction. The CBSE was neither international nor local, but appropriately “national”.

As I mentioned earlier, school boards in India, including the CBSE and the ICSE, were established on the British model as examining bodies. For impartial and fair evaluation, external standardized examinations were considered critical (Kumar, 1985). For further transparency, examining bodies like the CBSE and the ICSE also published the syllabi based on which learners would be assessed. State boards like Kerala have a more comprehensive system, with separate academic bodies (Kerala SCERT), examining bodies (Pareekhsa Bhavan), and administrative bodies (Department of Public Instruction). The CBSE has a similar structure but only for federal state funded Central Schools, now called Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs); KVs are academically supported by the NCERT, administered by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sanghatan (earlier, Central Schools Organization), and examined by the CBSE.

It is with the 1988-1997 English Language Teaching (ELT) reforms that the CBSE expanded its profile from an examining to an academic body²⁰; it usurped the NCERT’s role in the process transforming not just itself but also the fundamental educational structures of the independent nation. Though the CBSE mandated the formal testing of speaking and listening skills in English only much later in 2012, a curricular emphasis on speaking and listening had first been proposed by the CBSE ELT Project.

²⁰ The 1982-83 MHRD Annual report states: “As regards the textbooks the role of CBSE in the area is limited”. The 1982 English textbooks published by the Board were prepared in joint collaboration of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad and the NCERT.

<http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/12/8i/AW/8IAW0301.htm>

Unlike the NCERT and Kerala reforms, which encompassed all subjects and all grades, the CBSE reform was a secondary school reform specific to English language pedagogy. That other subjects did not evoke a comparable reform calls attention to the peculiar linguistic shifts emergent during the time.

As for the CBSE's core constituency, Mathur (1995) explains that the demand for English curricular reform came from teachers, parents, and examiners, and receptive to their concerns, the CBSE chairman matched their desires for international standards with an international community of experts, or more specifically a British community. The British Council was an integral part of the reform project, procuring funding from the British Overseas Development Agency, which later became the Department for International Development. The University of St. Mark and St. John, Plymouth, UK provided academic assistance. Mathur was the British Council English Studies Officer who served as the Project Officer for the ELT reform. But most dramatically, the CBSE ELT Project sent 57 high school teachers to the University of St. Mark and St. John, Plymouth, for three months of training: 17 teachers were trained in textbook production, 15 in test preparation, and another 25 in teacher education (Mathur, 1995, pp. 304-306). No education reform in India has ever attempted or accomplished this level of international mobility for its teachers. While the community-state in Kerala had developed a rich affective bond, the equally small and privileged internationalizing teacher community of the CBSE reform procured unprecedented material benefits and transformed the textbook publishing industry in India. Rama Mathew (2006), the Project Director of the CBSE ELT Curriculum Implementation Study points out that ELT Project

team members moved onto more profitable domains like writing textbooks for private publishers and conducting training programs for a fee (p. 34). R. Meghanathan, English faculty at the NCERT explained that this was in some ways a “democratization” of private textbook publishing. Previously, faculty at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) had dominated the scene; ML Tickoo, J Sasikumar, and Paul Gunashekar, all CIEFL faculty, are three of the most successful editors in the brief history of domestic English textbook publishing in the private sector. Private textbook writing, and the profits associated with it, spread out of CIEFL with the CBSE reforms.

The internationally produced and internationally oriented pedagogic materials, however, ran into trouble. Mathur (1995) explains that the *Interact in English* course was initially conceived of comprising one interaction-oriented Main Course Book. But CBSE appointed committees forced the textbook production committee to retain the traditional approach, leading to the introduction of a Literature Reader. Further, committees insisted on a Grammar Work Book, because of which the integrated grammar sections of the Main Course Book had to be segregated out into a Grammar Work Book. But most devastatingly, the CBSE’s revised Board Exams of 1993 retained a 45% weightage for “seen” components, testing for classroom-rehearsed/ memorized answers; the exams were revised in 2005 into a “more memory-based” exam (Mathew, 2012, p. 200). Mathur (1995) laments that the CBSE exam “undermined” “the very objectives of curriculum renewal” (p. 308).

However, with the initiation of CBSE International over a decade later, the CBSE vigorously renewed its commitment to internationalization. It is not just conversational

English that is demanded of all learners now; problem solving, values, empathy, continuous learning, all of these have to be formally performed, tabulated, and certified. The CBSE*i* goes even further. The CBSE*i* *FAQs for Parents* describes that students will learn research orientations, critical humanities, community service, performing arts, and cross-cultural and communicative skills through active, learner-centered curricular situations. Scoring will shift from numerical/ alphabetical indicators to “descriptive profiles”. Further, CBSE*i* will not prescribe textbooks, in order to circumvent “routine textual learning” (p. 8), but will produce an assemblage of resources that teachers can adopt and adapt for their individual classrooms. But even as the CBSE*i*’s international orientations shape the CBSE curriculum, the CBSE’s focus on science and math education, and now informational technology skills, shapes the CBSE*i* as a thoroughly Indian internationalism.

But the most radical change in the process is the CBSE*i*’s commitment to *primary* schooling. Unlike the CBSE, the CBSE*i* is not only a full-fledged academic agency, producing its own pedagogic materials, but also an academic agency for primary grades. In my brief interview with Ms. Neelima Sharma, Senior Academic Consultant (English) for the CBSE, she noted that as a secondary school board, the CBSE did not have a mandate for primary education. But, she clarified that the CBSE can offer instructional scaffolding for primary grades in CBSE*i* schools, because the CBSE has always had a mandate for international education. The first question in the CBSE*i* *FAQs for Parents* is “Does CBSE have the mandate to run an International Curriculum?” The answer quotes the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the CBSE drafted in 1962, which states that “the

services of the Board may be availed of by any educational institution in India or outside India, which wishes to prepare candidates conducted by the Board” (CBSE, 1962, p. 2²¹). The CBSE uses this portion of its ordinary rules to legitimize its re-formations.

The CBSEi’s pedagogic services for primary grades are of course, not available to all; certainly not for the students I taught at the New English School. CBSEi affiliation fees are set at Rs. 250,000, over three times more than the Rs. 75,000²² charged for a CBSE affiliation. CBSEi schools similarly have to guarantee a mandatory reserve fund that is five²³ times more than what is required for CBSE schools²⁴. Reports suggest that the CBSE’s newfangled commitment to internationalization, a decade after the initial steps were taken, was triggered by changing education markets. A materials producer for CBSEi described the CBSEi as “India’s answer to International Baccalaureate”. The Times of India reports the unprecedented growth of international programs like the International Baccalaureate program, the Cambridge International Exam, and Edexcel UK in metro cities in India (May 20, 2015²⁵). Facing attrition from its core elite community, the CBSE had to do what it could not during the 1988-97 reforms and

²¹ http://www.cbse.nic.in/pr_rti/manuals/Rules_and_Regulation/scan03.pdf

²² Another Rs. 50,000 is charged for up-gradation to a senior secondary school. See pp. 72-73 of

http://cbseaff.nic.in/cbse_aff/attachment/onlineservices/affiliationbyelaws_14112012.pdf for CBSE affiliation fees and pp. 62-63 of http://cbse-international.com/upload/documents/static-doc/Affiliation_Byelaws.pdf for CBSEi affiliation fees.

²³ CBSE schools have to maintain a reserve fund of about Rs. 100 per student (depending on number of enrolled students) while CBSEi school have to maintain it at Rs. 500 per person.

²⁴ But Kendriya Vidyalayas retain their Rs. 10,000 fee for both CBSE and CBSEi.

²⁵ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/International-Baccalaureate-schools-in-India-post-10-fold-growth-in-10-years/articleshow/47349322.cms>

become international. While the CBSE has always been a part of the disaggregated pedagogic state, it had portrayed itself as a “national” school board committed to national development. With the CBSE segregating its commitments to a national constituency and another, separate, international constituency, even the notional idea of equity seems to be no longer significant. What matters are the assimilationist aspirations of foreign-bound global citizens and their agendas can be extended to the nation effortlessly, as seen in the case of Assessment of Speaking and Listening Skills. The alignments between state and society, at the national level, have been closest, strongest, and most porous within the CBSE and its core community, and it is hard to distinguish where society becomes state and state becomes community.

Conclusion

This chapter traced the formation of producer communities and examined how this shaped the reform-produced teaching materials discussed earlier. Firstly, the NCERT reform was undertaken to rectify the Hinduization of curricular reforms but the production context only engendered a hastily-put-together “invented community”. In comparison, the Kerala state pedagogic materials were fashioned by a long-standing, committed community of Left educators who became the pedagogic state. Unlike these two reforms, the CBSE reforms were mobilized by a community of “advantaged parents” and crafted by privileged teachers with the help of British funds and experts (Mathur, 1995; CIEFL, 1997; Tickoo, 2001). However, becoming international entailed major restructuring within the CBSE, which had to re-fashion itself as an internationally oriented, pedagogic agency that was nevertheless fully Indian. In the process, the nation’s

emergent international positioning was extended to the entire nation with disastrous effects on domestic pedagogic discourses. Thus, while non-normative consumers of education reforms—students and teachers in state-funded and non-elite CBSE schools—were pushed to the margins of educational spaces, reform producers who aspired to serve the “public” and the “people” became the new state and society. The multiplicity of locations of power as well as coherences across these multiple locations assembled formidable challenges for non-elite educational development projects.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Soon after the results of the CBSE 12th grade exit exams were announced in May 2014, the *Left, Right & Center* news show on NDTV, a popular English language news commentary, put together a special episode with toppers, parents, and teachers. Three toppers from the national capital region were in attendance along with an “expert” panel comprising a psychiatrist, two career counselors, and two prominent educators. As the show unfolded, parents in the audience identified themselves as fluent English speakers, mostly professionals, and alumni of premier institutions in the national capital while students who contributed to the discussion had scored over 90% in the exit exams. However, tag lines scrolling across the screen were somber rather than celebratory: “Pressure to get good grades worth it?”, “Are we pushing students too much?”, “Are students victims of parental and peer pressure?”, and finally, “Does government need to reform the education system?”

The “problem” was that 90% was not enough, in 2014, to gain admission to elite Delhi colleges. One of the panelists Richa, a radio jockey who counseled teenagers who called in to her radio show explained:

‘Ma’am you know I’ve done so badly’, that’s the first sentence, and okay, I ask, ‘what is it?’ expecting 60s and 70s, and its 92%. That’s what makes me really feel angry at the system that allows a brilliant child that got 92% or even anything above 80% to feel they’ve done badly ... I mean, if you are an 80% student you should have access to the top institutions in the country as they are anywhere else in the world, why do we not have many more LSRs, St. Stephen’s, Miranda, whatever it is?

Richa's concerns are sincere. News articles published around the same time²⁶ record that the number of students scoring over 95% in the CBSE 12th grade exams has skyrocketed 2000% in the past six years, from 384 in 2008 to 8971 in 2014. Subsequently, cut-off percentages for incoming students in elite Delhi colleges have been rising steadily, hitting over 95% and even a controversial 100% for undergraduate Computer Science courses. Reports of mental breakdowns, stress, and even suicide amongst students are becoming more and more commonplace. The cost of social reproduction, if computed by test scores, has never been higher in India.

Although a celebration of “toppers” from the national level English-medium school board, the episode thus also produced a compelling narrative about parental aspirations as a social pathology, and further, speculated on the need for education reforms to address this pathology. The principal of a prestigious school in the national capital commented thus:

Getting into a college is one thing but living a life with integrity, with empathy to the other, [in this] acquisitive culture that is so prominent today, moving ahead, stamping over on someone to move ahead, we don't want that – I think this fight for marks actually brings that to the fore.

Principal Annie Koshy's comments about “character”, “integrity”, and “empathy” as ideals mangled by unprecedented competition also reveal how disruptions of privilege acquire a particular moral geography. Desires for humanistic, less stressful forms of education and evaluation intermingle with elite nostalgia for an earlier era of “sponsored mobility” (Kumar, 1985). The host of the show, Nidhi Razdan, is herself is an alumnus of

²⁶ Articles dated May 30th 2014 in The Hindu, Daily News Analysis, and Hindustan Times

the premier Lady Shri Ram College for Women, or LSR as Richa had earlier referred to it, and Razdan reminisces:

[I]n my time, and I can now comfortably say that there was a ‘my time’ once upon a time, we used to get, you know, 75 – 80% and that was, you know, good enough to get into a really good college.

To manage the aspirational bottleneck, parents on the show were advised to consider elite colleges out side of Delhi as well as the emergent private sector. One of the panelists, Usha Albuquerque, had in fact built her reputation by championing non-traditional college options, i.e., courses other than engineering, medicine, law, economics, management, and computer science, and the cover page description of her *Penguin India Career Guide* also promises a “wealth of information on studying abroad”. The concerns and resources of privileged Indians diversifying their educational options and geographic locations, both domestic and international, set the norms for “appropriate” aspirations.

Elite anxieties about uncertain futures animate contemporary discussions of educational aspirations and frames aspiration as a social pathology. Tracing similar terrains of aspiration and uncertainty amongst elites in the capital city of Kerala, Chua (2014) points out that suggested solutions do not include a “brute austerity” (p. 176); rather, efforts to “bolster children’s anti-suicidal immunities” converge with efforts to endow children with cultural capital—confidence, resilience, adjustment, and even spoken English skills—that will gain them the competitive edge (p. 177). Further, desires for “new programming in classrooms” mobilize legitimacy for more play, meditation, and yoga in the curriculum while memorization and bookish learning stand out as despicable learning activities. The aspirational performances of privileged Indians shape

what count as legitimate and ethical literacy performances, and structure the justificatory contours and directions pursued by education reforms. In effect, by transmuting elite interests into universal national ideologies, the production of aspiration as a site of pathology translates “relations of domination into the language of legitimation” (Deshpande, 2003, p. 139). After all, as Baviskar and Ray (2011) remind, the power of the ruling class resides in their ability to conjure up claims of universality that summon legitimacy for projects that favor elites.

On the other hand, *bahu-jan samaj*, or an excluded majority, refers to an aggregation of politically conscious oppressed groups who re-cognize entrenched social practices as domination (Ilaiah, 1996; Tharu et al., 2007; Waghmore, 2013). What I have attempted to trace in my dissertation, is this less familiar form of politics, an affective and aspirational politics deeply rooted in the material transitions engendered by economic liberalization. The ascendance of consumption regimes have by default produced aspirational performances and this is most easily discernible in the case of English education, perched as it is between old privilege and new marginality. Since non-elite English schooling is already an interruption of prevailing terms of domination and an anticipation of more just and desirable futures, I suggest that it is an expression of affective politics peculiar to the contexts of liberalization.

That much of the dissertation is yet caught up in explaining the legitimization of new forms of domination reveals how trenchantly contested the aspirations of the *bahujan samaj* are. Dominant groups expend an inordinate amount of work to reassert social hierarchies, albeit in new garbs. The transformation of Dalit mothers’ new

experiences of social death into a crisis of “public” schooling, as well as the pervasive shaming of new English medium parents reveal how dominant groups assemble new moral geographies to reclaim old social hierarchies. That national policy rhetoric mobilizes similar moralities in a different developmental context illuminates how easily dominant groups gravitate towards shaming regimes. As Guru (2009) argues, beliefs of unequal worth are hidden deep down in the ontological makeup of dominant-caste groups. Thus, while the radical transitions of liberalization offered inexcusable opportunities for counter-sacrality, educated Indians found ways to re-inscribe distinction. Manufacturing a-historic, non-social, chronicles of educated Indian English, the “English teaching profession” (NCERT, 2006, p. 1) produced a “natural” pedagogy, aiding the CBSE in its pursuits towards divesting educated Indian English of insufficiencies and explicit markers. The radical Left became collaborators with globally mobile national elites, pushing marginalized students into spaces of brutal, recurrent humiliation. While the consumers of education reforms were thus pushed to the margins of educational spaces, reform producers who aspired to serve the “public” and the “people” became state and society.

The protracted politics of aspiration I have traced in some detail in the dissertation suggests that aspiring has indeed become the key cultural practice through which differentially positioned citizens are reconfiguring their relationship to liberalization. But aspirational locations, and aspirations, vary. From desires for a democratic socialist civil society to those for an internationally oriented national community, those with accumulated material, symbolic, and linguistic privileges define what ethical and

appropriate aspirations should be. Non-elite aspirations are much more modest, and yet, much more ambitious. Mothers aspire for “good futures” for their children, but these good futures have to be assembled painstakingly by trans-forming and re-building society. Yet it is these aspirations for a *prabuddha bharat* (enlightened India) that become grotesque since they emanate from a *bharat* that is *bahushkrut* (ostracized) (Guru, 2011). But when a *bahujan samaj* undertakes the imagination and production of desirable futures it dismantles unequal structures, like the Kerala state education system, even as it produces new ones. What becomes “legitimate” in this process reveals processes of domination emergent in liberalizing India.

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