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'The year that can break or make you': The politics of secondary schooling, youth and class in urban Kerala, South India

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Summary

Education harbours some of the most pervasive contradictions in contemporary India. While it produces world famous human capital enhancing the country's rising competitiveness as a global 'knowledge economy', millions of children still lack access to basic education. In Kerala, a state famous for the success of its educational achievements, the benefits of education that can be gained by those in the lower strata of society continue to be marginal regardless of policies of positive discrimination. Focusing on youth at the higher secondary school level (grades 11-12), 'the primary bottleneck in the education system today' (World Bank 2012), this thesis seeks to understand the social processes that go into making education a key resource to the (re)production of inequalities.

Based upon a year's ethnographic fieldwork in and around two schools in Ernakulam, South India, this thesis examines the ways in which two distinct groups of youth – one attending a top end private English medium school at the heart of a city and the other educated in an institution at the bottom of the schooling ladder – inhabit their final year of schooling and generate future projects and aspirations. I located their experiences at the intersection of the two educational sites par excellence: the school and the house. In the city, middle-class schooling and parental regimes attempt to orient youth's lives towards the acquisition of multiple competences aimed at enhancing their individual prospects towards becoming competitive professionals, depicted as garnering maximum amounts of wealth and prestige in today's globalised economy of paid employment and migration. At the fringes of middle-class urban life and the quest for professionalism, youth are becoming subject of an increasing ghettoisation: only the educationally, financially and socially poor are left to attend their school.

In that stark scenario, education emerged as central to both youth performances of class, status and gender. They constructed and embodied identities based on education and more generally with ideas of competence. This creative work revealed an overtly hierarchical field formed of distinctive peer groups engaged in overt practices of exclusion and inclusion according to imagine futures: mostly elusive fantasies that reveal the youth marked by uncertainties in a time shaped by rising expectations and increasingly intricate and unequal paths leading to them.

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Map 1: India[1]

Map 2: Kerala[2]

Map 3: Ernakulam District[3]

[3] http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/kerala/districts/ernakulam.htm

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Srijith[4] and I first met in June 2009 at 'Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir'[5] (BVM), one of the schools where I conducted the core of the field research upon which this thesis is based. Srijith, a slim and carefully groomed plus one[6] (+1), came to greet me personally after I had given a speech to a group of eighty students introducing myself and my project. But it was not until October of the same year that we had the first of many meaningful encounters. That day I accompanied him as he walked from school to the bus stop where he caught the bus that took him home. He spoke demurely about finally talking to me after many months of work in the school. 'Before you, I never met a foreigner. I wanted to talk to you from the beginning, give you my opinion, but I was scared of you', Srijith said. Over the next months, Srijith became a friend and an insightful informant. After that first encounter we shared countless walks away from school through the streets of the urban middle-class neighbourhood that surrounded it.

Unlike most BVM students, Srijith did not live in that neighbourhood, nor did he live in the city. He, his elder brother and parents, a Hindu Ezhava[7] family, resided in a village to the north of the city, among the residents of which they stood out as one of the wealthier families. Srijith's father, Biju, was a semi-skilled Gulf migrant. For the last 25 years he has worked as an operator at an oxygen plant near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. After receiving his Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) Biju completed a machinist technical diploma at a private industrial training institute (ITI) in Ernakulam. After working in a factory in Mumbai for some time he managed to migrate to the Gulf in the early eighties, at the height of Gulf migration. On one of his visits to his home village Biju married Jenisha, Srijith's mother. He now exemplifies the figure of the India householder: a mature married man, head of a household, and father of two children (Osella & Osella 2000). In the Gulf, Srijith explained, he has a very 'simple' life, without amenities. The bulk of his salary, sent to his wife and sons in Kerala in the form of remittances, allowed him to purchase some land, build their house, and pay for his sons' education. Sarath, Srijith's elder brother, was

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[4] Pseudonym.
[5] Pseudonym.
[6] This is the first year (of two) of higher secondary school, the final two years of schooling. This thesis is based on ethnographic research on the lives of +1 and +2 students in two Ernakulam schools.
[7] Previously an untouchable caste, Ezhavas, as individual families and as a group, have attained considerable class mobility throughout the twentieth century through the accumulation of wealth and prestige (Osella & Osella 2000).

sent to a private engineering college while Srijith attended the expensive, urban English medium school where I met him.

Up until his tenth STD Srijith had attended a private English-medium school in a town neighbouring his village, just five kilometres away from his house. Infant Jesus Public School (Infant) was highly reputed among local well-off families, which increasingly sought to opt out of government or private aided schools[8]. Infant was in many ways similar to BVM: both were private, English-medium school affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education[9] (CBSE). Both had similar transportation facilities and their infrastructures were to a large extent comparable. The eye-catching aesthetics of Infant's uniforms, with ties and shiny belt buckles with the school insignia cast on them, resembled that of city schools like BVM. The claims Infant made about their educational mission resonated with BVM professed approach to schooling. Both institutions claimed to inculcate pupils a set of social, moral and aesthetic values based on India's 'culture' and to produce confident, responsible and competent citizens.

There were important ways in which Infant differed from top urban schools like BVM though. Infant's reputation was much more localised. It was a symbol of higher status among many families in and around Srijith's home village, while BVM held a reputation that went far beyond its local context. In Infant almost all students were first generation learners of English, while a large section of students in BVM spoke English at home with their parents. The majority of Infant's intake belonged to low status Latin Catholic families; Hindu (many of them belonging to the ex-untouchable Ezhava community) and Muslim pupils completed the student population. The bulk of BVM's intake belonged to high status Hindu and Christians. Infant was a Christian-ran school while BVM was managed by a secular trust with deep Hindu undertones. In addition, Infant charged lower fees than BVM: at around Rs. 15,000 per annum, with 'donations'[10] near Rs. 10,000 for admission to the Plus Two level (between 2009-2010), while BVM charged nearly twice as much.

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[8] In Kerala, schools are divide in government schools, owned and run by the government; private aided or aided schools, owned by private organisations or individuals that are recognized by and receive aid from the government; and (private) unaided schools, school that are completely owned and run by a private organisation or individual, while their curricula of studies are affiliated to either the central or the state government.
[9] This is increasingly perceived to be superior to the Kerala state board. This syllabus is widely believed to provide better English training than the state syllabus.
[10] This is what admission fees are usually referred to.

After completing his tenth STD, Srijith's parents placed Srijith in BVM for his final two years of schooling[11]. This calculated move was only possible because they possessed the financial backing and because Srijith had obtained outstanding marks (91%) in the CBSE class ten board exams, granting him a seat in a highly coveted school. Srijith said that it was his aunt from the neighbouring city of Thrissur, whom he described as having a 'modern outlook', who conveyed to his parents the value of getting an education in a school like BVM. When he was in tenth standard his 'big dream was to come to the city'.

Srijith felt drawn to study in BVM for a number of reasons. First and foremost, he felt drawn towards BVM's remarkable academic record with one hundred percent pass mark in the CBSE board exams. Second, he sought to posses the prestige associated with this sort of school. He explained:

> BVM has a name, it is reputed. BVM's is known all over India. If you say that you study in BVM, the next question is: which BVM? But if you say that you study in Infant, the next question is: is that a CBSE school?

Understanding Srijith's quest to better educate himself as only the search for a better school would be misleading. For Srijith being exposed to and transformed by the city itself was as important an element of a 'better' education as attending a reputed city school. Srijith saw coming to urban Ernakulam as a strategy to transform himself into an urban 'modern' young man, and to distance himself from his rural background. In our conversations he talked about his decisions to change school and to come to the city to learn interchangeably. He treasured getting exposure to what he described as the 'sophistication' lifestyle and mindset of the city. He described youth in his local village as being 'self-content', while depicting his city peers as 'ambitious' and 'sophisticated'. Most of them belonged to high caste Hindu or Syrian Christian communities, and many of them lived in high-rise buildings in the city. Throughout his years at BVM Srijith strove to embody many of the demeanours and styles of his new peers and distance himself from his ex-classmates.

Throughout his +1 and +2 years, dubbed by BVM respondents as 'the year[s] that can break or make you', Srijith travelled daily from his village, situated on the narrow Vypeen Island, to the heart of Ernakulam city to attend school. No one else travelled 27 Kilometres to attend school like him. On a 'normal' weekday, Srijith got up before 6 am to begin the

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[11] In total, they applied to three of the city's most reputed private English medium schools.

long journey. He rode the bus from his home village through the main road that cut across the slim island along the western coast of the Ernakulam District. The bus then crossed the Gosri Bridge and lands onto the district's main land. Once in the city centre, Srijith got on a different bus that took him south. An hour and twenty minutes later, he got off the bus and walked another twenty minutes to reach the school. The way back home usually takes much longer than the morning ride, and he sometimes had to stand on the bus for they were too crowded in the evenings.

Although extraordinary, Srijith's story is reflective of the major themes covered in this thesis: schooling, youth and the Indian middle class. It speaks of the ways in which education and in particular schooling rather than being spaces of equality, in fact act as a layered, hierarchical, and often contradictory resource to (re)produce inequalities. Srijith's account reveal the ways in which contemporary youth in Kerala, and India in general, are increasingly not just subordinate to certain educational aims but also to the desire to become and being seen as competent in a variety of fields deemed modern and urban. Finally, his story speaks of the extent to which the culture and lifestyles of a dominant middle class fraction are increasingly becoming aspirational models for all.

This thesis is based upon ethnographic fieldwork carried out in and around two schools in Ernakulam between April 2009 and April 2010. It explores and compares the lives of two groups of students in the twilight of their schooling days, one which according to socio-economic definitions may strictly be classified as 'middle class' and another located at the geographical, educational and social fringes of Kerala's economic capital. It is an enquiry into the ways they envisage their lives and futures projects as these interlock with broader visions of the city, the nation, and the globe.

In this introductory chapter I give a brief but critical look at the theories and debates within the three themes central to the thesis: education and schooling, youth, and recent yet key literature on the Indian middle class. Following that overview of the literature I outline the argument of the thesis. Subsequently I describe the various methods of data collection I used during fieldwork. Towards the end, I provide a summary of the different empirical chapters that constitute the thesis.

* * *

Theorising Education and Schooled Youth

Critical educational or schooling studies have long been characterised by a concern with social difference and inequality (Levinson et al. 1996). From its beginnings in the 1970s until today, the durability of class power has remained a central concern as class continues to structure young people's experiences of school, as well as post-school education, and the search for work (Jeffrey & McDowell 2004). In the first wave of critical studies of schooling which emerged in the 1970s, scholars like Althusser (1971), Apple (1979) and Young (1971) moved away from accounts that assumed schools to be 'meritocratic springboards for upward mobility' of the previous decades (Levinson & Holland 1996). Instead, their accounts documented the ways in which schools served to reproduce rather than undermine existing structural class inequalities in capitalist economies by responding to the requirements of discipline and conformity demanded by capitalism and the nation-state (Levinson & Holland 1996: 5).

Significantly adding to early theories of social reproduction, subsequent studies, mainly drawing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his associates, turned their attention to the cultural basis of class privilege. For this Bourdieu developed the concept of 'cultural capital' – the symbolic credit which one acquires through embodying and enacting signs of social standing. This social resource, analogous to and complexly intertwined with economic and social capital, derives from three sources: certain material possessions, institutional recognition (e.g. in the form of education credentials), and certain styles of behaviour and competences, such as 'intelligence' and 'taste', or the mastery of a language (Bourdieu 1986). He stressed that these types of capital must be understood according to his concept of 'fields' of play. Bourdieu viewed society as an ensemble of relatively autonomous fields (e.g. class or school education) of social competition where agents' positions vary according to their possession of a combination of varying amount and weight of cultural, social, and economic capital (Bourdieu 1984). Agents then compete to gain control over the species of capital that are most effective and hold a high value in the particular field of play, which in turn provides each field's own internal logic and regulatory principles that govern the game on the field. Therefore, people with the right combination and volume of capital resources

and with a *habitus*[12] – 'internalised orientations to action inscribed in people's demeanour reflexes and tastes that both reflect people's histories and shape their futures' (Jeffrey 2010: 19) – that match a particular field will outmanoeuvre people who lack the resources and attuned habitus. In his analysis of French schools (as a particular field of play), Bourdieu suggested that educational institutions only recognised as signs of 'intelligence' the particular tastes, bodily comportment and skills possessed by elite classes, and thus automatically gave greater currency and legitimacy to their actions (Levinson & Holland 1996). In turn, 'imbued with the cultural capital recognised, examined and rewarded within schools, and drawing also on their wealth and social contacts, the upper and middle class are typically able to manipulate the education system so as to reproduce their advantage in the next generation' (Jeffrey & McDowell 2004). Thus, for the elites and the middle classes cultural capital was more easily convertible to economic capital through advanced academic credentials, or by helping them face interviews or secure loans.

Consequently, while they may be able to acquire some of the legitimised styles and competences, those of lower social standing, according to Bourdieu, inevitably become targets of a kind of 'symbolic violence'. As their cultural-linguistic resources fail to match those valued, legitimised and rewarded in school, people of lower social standing develop a sense of their social position, and of the relatively debased value of their own cultural resources. As a consequence, non-elite youth also tend to develop 'a sense of their own social limits' (Levinson & Holland 1996). As these limits become habitus, they will also learn to self-censor and self-silence in the company of and in institutional settings that give value and legitimacy to the cultural resources of those with greater social standing (Levinson & Holland 1996: 6). On the contrary, people with a habitus attuned to the educational field will know by intuition and navigate the field instantaneously with ease and with the confidence that comes with being able to succeed routinely within it and other spheres of social competition (Jeffrey 2010: 20). That internalised sense of self-confidence, which in India is inevitably caste-informed, has been shown to be of high importance when it comes to accessing sought after salaried jobs (e.g. in IT companies), even greater than the educational qualifications themselves (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006). As Jeffrey (2010: 20) notes, Bourdieu also wrote of how a sense of timing is also woven into people's ability, or

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[12] For Bourdieu, a person's habitus does not straightforwardly determine his or her actions and thoughts. Operating as 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions, which integrat[e] past experiences,' habitus 'functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions' (Bourdieu 1977: 82), thus giving people a 'practical sense' of how to act, which itself embodies a social or class habitus.

lack of, to navigate fields of power on an everyday basis. The field of education requires the ability to micro-manage in order to act in a timely way according to daily routines, studying schedules, deadlines, application procedures, examinations, and so on.

By the end of the 1970s, ethnographic research began to open up some of the premises of reproduction theory and its views on schooling. Although Bourdieuian reproduction theories constitute the foundation of most anthropological research on education carried out today, including this thesis, these have been complemented with accounts that give more room for human creativity or change, and of the role of schools as an instruments of control (Jeffrey 2010; Levinson et al. 1996). Paul Willis'[13] (1977) *Learning to Labour* became the most widely read and perhaps most influential critical schooling study and was the first to open up reproduction theories. While still highlighting the durability of class power, Willis' work among working class boys in Britain opened up 'reproductivist' notions of habitus and field to the agency of young people and the contradictions characteristic of educational institutions (and any other field of play for that matter). Willis (1977) describes how a group of working-class boys, the 'lads', perpetuate their class position in the work arena by taking up an anti-school youth culture. Through cultivating masculine identities that resisted and rejected the distinctively 'middle class' project of the school, the lads in effect ended up sealing their own fate (Levinson & Holland 1996: 9). However, the eventual reproduction of their working class position was the result of the lad's everyday practices, participating in school life (basically disrupting its smooth functioning) and their creative forging of their own subjectivities. In this way Willis highlighted the boy's 'cultural production' – 'the active and creative use of available symbolic resources in ways shaped by people's structural position' (Jeffrey 2010: 22) – rather than assuming them to be agencyless, malleable students, as implicit in reproduction theories (Levinson & Holland 1996: 9). Likewise, his work showed schools not to be monolithic socialising institutions, but sites within which young people create cultural forms that may contest or accelerate reproduction.

In short, while Bourdieu focused on habitus as internalised structures – an individual's social and cultural location embodied in her disposition – starting with Willis many subsequent accounts of schooling and schooled youth have tended not to forget the

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[13] He is perhaps the most prominent figure produced by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies or 'Birmingham School', the birth place of youth culture studies.

different modalities through which the body comes to inhabit or live the regulative power of structures (Bourdieu 1977). These have not only been attentive to the ways in which the body serves to subvert social structures, but also, as with Willis' lads, of other 'modalities that cannot be captured within the dualistic logic of resistance and constraint' (Mahmood 2004: 27).

Since the 1980s approaches to schooling have sought to grasp the complex relation between processes of social and cultural reproduction and young people's cultural production. Specifically, the focus has shifted towards a concern for the everyday practices through which young people creatively occupy the space of education and schooling, and hence confront the larger societal forces and structures instantiated in them. As with youth cultures studies, with the influence of feminism and race studies scholars have also moved away from an emphasis on class relations as a privilege lens in the critical analysis of schools nor as the main/sole social division that structures young people's experiences of school. Instead, they consider the complex intersections of class, gender, caste, and age structures (Gilroy 2002). Likewise since the 1980s, there has been a rapid increase in the number of scholars applying the notions of reproduction and cultural production in postcolonial contexts to the study of schooling and inequalities (Levinson 1999; Oni 1988).

In South Asia, and more specifically in India, the notion of cultural production has only marginally been picked up in contemporary literature on education and schooled youth. While studies of youth outside school or within post-school worlds have opened their reproductivist frameworks to the creativity of young people, explorations of youth within school environments have remained focused to a large extent on how educational institutions shape young mind and bodies. Whether at a macro-level study exploring the nature of a particular educational system or at a micro-level approach that looks at the everyday operation of a particular institution, these have tended to centre on how schools interject students, most of the time leaving out school youth's experience and perspectives (with a few exceptions such as Froerer 2007). This thesis precisely looks at youth's experience and perspectives and show that while some reveal the reproduction of caste and class inequalities, others show that schools are indeed spaces where youth get access to and actively appropriate new resources.

Recent macro-level explorations of educational in post-liberalisation India demonstrate how the long displayed diversity of educational institutions in India has been further fragmented in a liberalisation context, characterised by declining state funding, simultaneous flourishing of educational entrepreneurship and the resulting *de facto* privatisation of the education sector (Jeffery 2005: 27; Jeffery et al. 2005; Jeffery et al. 2007). The schooling field, which was already divided according to language, caste, community, or curriculum, has become even more fragmented as private institutions catering to different financial capabilities have entered the education scene. While apparently providing a wide scope of parental choice, scholars suggest that 'choice' is markedly skewed against the poor and the lower caste/class. Diversity of choice implies inequality of access and outcomes (Jeffery 2005: 27). Their children, they show, have become isolated in the increasingly residual public sector schooling, entrenching inequalities even further (Jeffery 2005). Likewise, Subrahmanian (2005) describes how despite increasing literacy rates among Dalits (Schedule Caste) and Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe), their long-standing educational exclusion in the states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have been reproduced as a result of the ethos of schooling, which fails to enhance these children's experience of schooling. Finally, while taking a grounded ethnographic approach, the work of Sarah Balagopalan (2005) explores the larger implications of an educational programme for out-of-school children. This aimed at transforming the futures of street children and child labourers by drawing into the ambit of the schooling system. In effect, the programme endorsed the opening of pseudo-schools called 'club-schools', legally institutionalising a two-tier schooling system that did little to reduce the exclusion of the children it intended to help.

In Kerala recent accounts on the education system have tended to concentrate on macro-level analysis of the spread of education (Tharakan 2004), inequalities according to caste/community (George and Domi 2002), and more recently on the cost and privatisation of the sector (Kumar and George 2009; Salim 2004). At large, work on Kerala education has been underpinned by the mainstream literature on social development in Kerala, commonly called the 'Kerala Model' literature. These tend to draw on the cliché of Kerala as the state with the highest literacy in India, and reproduce Kerala's self-proclaimed progressive identity. These celebratory narratives have served as the basis to critique the upsurge of a wide array of private unaided educational institutions in the last couple

decades. There is, therefore, a general lack of detailed ethnographic enquiry into specific educational project and even less so into Malayalee youth experience of school education.

Scholars analysing schools and various other institutions at a micro-level elsewhere in South Asia have tended to concentrate on the disciplinary dimension in the daily operation of institutions. They have looked at the both visible (and at times violent) and more subtle practices by which students' verbal and bodily languages are transformed to comply with the norms of institutions and with particular lifestyles and modes of behaviour seen as more desirable and as garnering greater prestige and opportunity (Caddell 2005: 77). This disciplining entails not just the imbibing of knowledge but also the embodying of social and moral values. McDougall (2005) for example, shows how the school space and the practices within it attune elite boys in Dehra Doon to the school's ethos of egalitarianism, secularism, rationality, self-discipline, while teaching them to conform to the age hierarchy that enables older boys to exert power over their juniors. By the end of the 1990s, the production of particular types of citizenships/national identities have become the main paradigm for the study of schools and the young people/children within (Srivastava 1998). A large strand of anthropological research has thus focused on the relationship between education and nationalism, specifically on the role played by schools in nationalist projects as sites for the manufacturing of the 'ideal' citizen for the modern post-colonial state (Bénéï 2005; Kumar and Oesterheld 2007; Srivastava 1998). They have endeavoured to show how schools, more than 'innocent' sites of cultural transmission, are sites geared toward the reproduction of discipline and conformity demanded by the nation-state (Froerer 2007: 1038). Reproduction theory here has been put to work with reference to the nationalist projects wherein schools were thought as serving to 'inculcate the skills, subjectivities and disciplines that underpin the modern nation-state' (from Levinson *et al*. 1996: 1). For example, Caddell's work demonstrates how 'national education' in Nepal has endorsed particular visions of the nation state and the 'Nepali citizen' that have benefited a particular group within Nepal, whose culture and lifestyles have become aspirational models for all (Caddell 2005, 2007). Srivastava (1998) has focused on the Indian public school as a central site for the construction of urban post-colonial identity. Specifically he shows how the Doon School has produced generations of post-independence middle-class boys, who embodied the modernist, all-conquering national character the school transmitted.

However, as Levinson & Holland (1996) noted, educational institutions cannot simply be assumed to straightforwardly shape and discipline youth into particular models of the 'ideal' person. This is not to deny that schools are powerful institutions which hegemonic groups (or the state) often utilise to form and promote certain kinds of subjectivities (Levinson & Holland 1996: 24). Indeed "the historically specific models of the 'educated person' encouraged in schools often represent the subjectivities which dominant groups endorse", which then must seem appealing to broader demands (Levinson & Holland 1996: 24). Following Levinson & Holland's framework, schools and other institutions should be understood as 'contradictory resources' (1996: 1) and sites of cultural production in which the practices of various actors may accommodate, undermine or otherwise partially adapt to the dominant school project. Schools should be understood as sites not just of reproduction but also of creativity. In them young people and their families may seek to assert influence over other, enhance their status and gain access to new resources (Caddell 2005). Schools are also important sites where important social connections/alliances for young people's efforts at navigating youth and transitions to adulthood are developed (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004: 139). Last but not least, one must not lose sight of how young people's perception of the school projects they inhabit may render these same projects useless. Peggy Froerer's article '*Disciplining the Saffron Way*', explores the disciplinary apparatus, *Sadachar*, at a RSS school devoted to a moral education geared towards drawing pupils into the project of Hindu nationalism. Froerer's exploration of its primary school children demonstrates how student's views 'hail[ed] the disciplinary enterprise more as an effective vehicle for inculcating success in educational terms than for inculcating a sense of superiority over and hatred of minority communities' (Froerer 2007: 1037).

Accounts more attuned to educational spaces as sites of cultural production recognise that education takes place in multiple, competing arenas (Jeffery 2005; Levinson et al. 1996). These offer valuation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes alternative to those given in schools, which then work as cultural resources creatively used by young people in any given educational site. The peer group and the home are two of such arenas where education takes place (Jeffery 2005). In other words, rather than being shaped by one monolithic educational institutions young people navigate a variety of educational sites that both shape and are shaped in response by youth's creative practices and discourses. Sometimes educational sites support each other's priorities and values; sometimes they run counter to

them. Within these, youth's creative agency work both within and against institutional projects.

Theorising Youth

In her review of anthropological research on youth cultures, Bucholtz (2002: 529) argues that early anthropological research on young people, informed by physiological and psychological models of adolescence, theorised youth as 'not-yet-finished human beings'. Adolescence was thought as fragile and a time of potential crisis brought on by the uncertainties of the physical and social transition between life stages (from adolescence to adulthood). By focusing on rites of passage, anthropologists constructed youth primarily *in relation to* adulthood (Nisbett 2007), and emphasised adults' role in guiding young people into full cultural membership (Bucholtz 2002: 529). Building on this early research subsequent work considered the disruption of traditional socialisation process as a result of globalisation and economic restructuring. The difficulties believed to be endemic to this stage of life, the argument went, became exacerbated in societies undergoing rapid cultural change as fragile young people also faced the tension between tradition and modernity. Though these accounts tend to challenge the notion that globalisation is about the westernisation of the world by documenting the differences and deviations of youth practices from a homogenised understanding of globalisation, they did so only in terms of 'a notion of a resistant "local", in opposition to the "global", in ways that produce overly dichotomous and somewhat caricatured notions of both what globalization entails and the complexity of what might constitute "the local"' (Lukose 2005: 915). Thus they echoed simplistic understandings of the link between globalisation, consumption and youth, that carried with it an implicit theory of globalisation and youth by which an undifferentiated youth consumerism was thought to be the index of the presence and reach of globalisation.

While retaining the concern for examining the lives of young people in contexts of rapid social and economic change both in Euro-America and postcolonial settings, recent anthropological work has moved away from narrow studies of 'how bodies and minds are shaped for adult futures' and towards a serious exploration of youth cultures and the social and cultural practices through which young people shape their worlds (Hebdige 1979; Gilroy 1991; Bucholtz 2002; Froerer 2007; Nisbett 2007; Rogers 2008). By seriously engaging youth's experience, ambitions, views and insecurities as an object of

anthropological enquiry, recent studies demonstrate that rapid social change need not be experienced as dramatic, unsettling or as a rupture by young people, who are as often the agents as the experiencers of cultural change (Bucholtz 2002; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004).

Within South Asia recent research on youth cultures has sought to examine how neoliberal economic and social reforms have affected young people's experiences. Two important strands of research can be identified: one that focuses on youth and the realm of consumption, and another that concentrates in the realm of production and young people's transitions to adulthood. In the former, authors such as Mark Liechty (2003) and Ritty Lukose (2009) suggest that the realm of consumption has become the foundation of youth cultures. As recent work on Mumbai advertising agencies illustrate, with the advent of liberalisation, popular representations and media images have placed youth at the heart of 'India's consumerist turn' (Mazzarella 2003). Like idealised images of the Indian middle-class, images of Indian youth as global consumers have been brought to prominence. They are thought to straightforwardly embody the desire for the globally-inflected middle-class consumerist lifestyles and the new forms of labour that enable this consumption (Nisbett 2007: 936). Beyond consumption youth are also portrayed as embodying undeferential attitudes (Lukose 2009). Exploring actual youth cultures within this context, anthropologists' analysis have been seduced by and echo these tropes. Liechty, for example, has gone as far as describing his young informants in Kathmandu as 'a vanguard of an emerging middle-class consumer culture' (Liechty 2003: 37 in Nisbett 2007: 936).

On the contrary, others like Lukose (2009; 2005a) have avoided easy associations among youth, consumption, and globalisation, and look more closely at the far more unpredictable and nuanced ways in which youth apprehend globally-inflected consumption practices and discourses. In her article *Consuming Globalisation*, Lukose (2005a) shows the different relationships that young Kerala men and women have to new globally-inflected consumer spaces. She demonstrates how lower-caste/class young men engage with the consumption of new commodities (i.e. motorbikes and jeans) as a site of agency, desire and self-fashioning according to the idea of '*chethu*' – understood as a masculine, fun-loving, consumer identity. Unlike idealised images of the new Indian youth bursting with ambitions about the future, chetu identity is located in the here-and-now and is marked by the explicit rejection of the future, unburdened by a sense of the past (Lukose 2005: 931). In the same token, she outlines the way in which a new middle-class female, consumer

identity that is aggressively sexual, confident and public, and interested in fashion shows, modelling and beauty pageants, sits in tension with the demands on young women to navigate consumption respectably and modestly (Lukose 2005: 931). In other words, she argues that the variety of new consumer identities youth are producing can only be understood in conjunction with long-standing preoccupations/orientations (e.g. ideas of modesty) and through a close look at intersecting categories of distinction (such as caste and class). How low class/caste men re-fashion themselves through the desire for globally-inflected commodities is not simply an index of globalisation but the reflection of a novel consumer identity that reveals the specificity of the location out of which this desire emerges (Lukose 2005: 926).

The contribution of this sort of research that documents the ways in which consumption allows youth to forge new identities is crucial for situating globalisation within long-standing histories of the production of notions of modernity[14] around the world, which is in turn crucial to interrogating claims about new-ness, homogenization, and cultural force that the discourse of globalization itself produces. However, as with the 'new' Indian middle-class, in privileging consumption in the analysis of youth cultures these works have failed to give enough importance to other crucial dimensions of young people's identities. Their concern for highly visible styles and with symbolic representations of identity, manifested in their emphasis on media images, inevitably enforce the view of youth cultures as heavily dependent on consumption. Current debates within the anthropology of the middle class have began to question the key role accorded to practices of consumption within the self-definition of the middle class and, 'by implication, the idea of a youth vanguard leading the way in defining middle-class identity via their practices of consumption' (Nisbett 2007). These accounts highlight, for example, the deployment of moral narratives as a central practice generative of middle class youth subjectivities (Nisbett 2007; van Wessel 2004).

The second strand of ethnographic research on youth suggests that rather than the concern for consumption, a much more salient feature of young people's lives in many postcolonial

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[14] Here I refer to modernity not as corresponding to the meta-category of analysis of classical theories, (taking off from Marx, Weber, Durkheim) which are embedded in 'a teleology that sets the premises and promises of [a single] modernity as a yardstick for envisaging possible futures and for hierarchically ordering the somewhat "lacking" present of others'. Instead, I refer to historically and ethnographically specific concepts, ideas, and practices of something called 'modernity' central to our lives and to the lives of those with whom we work (Ferguson 1999).

countries is the progressively uncertain nature of youth transitions into adult life[15]. This uncertainty can be partly traced to the colonial and postcolonial periods, when western notions of maturation, which mapped distinctive chronological phases of life, were introduced and institutionalised, undermining pre-existing lifecycle models or lending new force to indigenous models of how people mature (Osella & Osella 2006). In India western ideas of youth transitions based on the notion of school trajectories and adult working careers have increasingly become cemented. In the context of neoliberal economic and social reforms in many parts of the world, youth and their families are being put under increasing pressures, making the fulfilment of maturation increasingly problematic and illusory. Nations are implicated in this increasing pressure via the decline in state support in welfare measures, the concomitant rising cost of social reproduction, high rates of unemployment, restructuring of job markets and economic recession (Jeffrey & McDowell 2004: 131). These phenomena have coincided with the increasing circulation of images of youth gaining rapid social mobility and wealth through formal education and entry into new forms of white-collar work, increasing young people's sense of frustration and powerlessness (Jeffrey & McDowell 2004; Ruddick 2003). Today, ideas of full-fledge adulthood strongly linked to economic wealth, consumption, education and white-collar employment have gained in prominence in the projects and aspirations of young people and their parents (Osella & Osella 1999). Youth and their families are increasingly drawn towards a strategic investment in formal schooling, post-school education and new parallel education credentials as means of creating human capital and combating entrenched privileges. For many young people, this has in turn led to the lengthening of the processes of youth transitions, what many parents understand as a form of 'waiting' (Côté 2002; Jeffrey & McDowell 2004; Jeffrey 2010). Among the increasingly wide Indian middle class, for example, young people often devote an entire year after finishing school attending full-time one or more entrance coaching centres hoping to secure a place (almost always unsuccessfully of course) in a top engineering or medical college, considered to be the best passport to a lucrative career as an IT professional (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006). However, research from a wide variety of postcolonial settings demonstrate that rising participation in formal education has coincided with a rapid decline and/or deterioration of opportunities for salaried work across social groups and classes (Jeffrey et al. 2004). Youth's experiences of educated unemployment – the majority who fails to live up to the aspirations they have

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[15] See Jeffrey & McDowell (2004) for a comparative overview of this field not just in postcolonial settings but also in Euro-American context.

been led to take on – have thus become the focus of a rapidly expanding strand of research on young people's lives (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006; Jeffrey 2010). In Kerala, with a particularly long history of widespread education across religious and caste communities and high levels of unemployment, uncertainty in transitions to adulthood is a prominent feature in young people's lives[16] (Mathew 1995).

Youth caught in uncertain transitions to adult lives, durably unable to realise their goals or prolonging their education in order to try to attain those goals across postcolonial settings, have been found to often imagine themselves as engaged in 'waiting' (Jeffrey 2010). The theme of waiting is emerging strongly in recent research on youth in India. Unemployed young men in India engaged in cultures of waiting have been described as being caught in multiple postcolonial crises as they bare the anxieties not only of being excluded from secured salaried employment, but also of not being able to conform to dominant notions of maturation, often being unable to marry or achieve locally important norms of masculine successful adulthood such as becoming a 'householder' (Jeffrey 2010; Osella & Osella 1999). Beyond the implication of being in a limbo-like stage of waiting, recent work on youth highlights the ways in which young people respond to situations of uncertainty. Jeffrey & McDowell (2004) draw out three important strategies by which youth navigate uncertainty: the cultivation of distinctive (educated or traditional) identities, forming new social connections, and engaging in political parties and organisations. In what follows I briefly illustrate the first and third strategies, while I will discuss the second response with reference to schooling in the next section.

Anthropological research on youth transitions to adult futures has thus focused on the various ways in which youth navigate and manage these terrains of uncertainty via the cultivation of distinctive identities. Within the Indian context, research has demonstrated how in the face of poor occupational outcomes educated un/underemployed young men embrace education and construct educated identities 'that provide young people and their families the political purchase in ongoing struggles to critique entrenched social prejudices' (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004: 138). Jeffrey et al. (2004), show how Muslim and Dalit young

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[16] Unemployment in Kerala bears most pressingly on educated (unmarried) youth (Zachariah & Rajan 2005). In 2003 the highest unemployment rate was among persons with the secondary level of education, almost 40 percent. The rate among the degree holders was not far lower, 36 percent. There was hardly any unemployment among those with below-primary-level education in 2003 (Zacharaiah & Rajan 2005). Ernakulam, the district in which this research was conducted is one of the top districts when it comes to educated unemployment, with an estimated (in 2003) twenty four percent (Zacharaiah & Rajan 2005).

men have reacted to their exclusion from secure white-collar occupations by embracing education as a form of embodied cultural distinction. This cultural production of educated identities is dependent on their capacity to find work (often precarious and temporary) within the informal economy, allowing them to craft and maintain an identity of 'educated people in transition'[17]. Even though education fails to provide opportunities for secure employment, youth and their families' engagement with the cultural production of the educated person in western U.P. has become a type of discursive 'scaffold' upon which Dalit and Muslim young men and many of their parents display their ideas about knowledge, comportment, morality, and respect (Jeffrey et al. 2004).

Apart from the cultivation of distinctive identities, other works look at how young men negotiate and manage the uncertainty of transitions from education to work through actively participating in politics (Hansen 1996; Jeffrey 2010). In his recent monograph title *Timepass*, Jeffrey (2010) examines the practices and experiences of unemployed young men engaged in forms of waiting, which despite characterising themselves as being lost in time and their activities as simply aimless 'timepass', offered opportunities to acquire skills, fashion, new cultural styles, and mobilise politically. He describes how waiting enable educated unemployed young men to become involved in a variety of informal political practices (i.e. mainly outside mainstream party and election politics). Whether they had become social reformers or 'fixers' within local networks of corruption (channelling contracts to favour businessmen and selling places in private universities, for example), youth advanced their goals and maintained their identity of people in transition.

Globalisation and education

By the end of the twentieth century, most social scientists, including anthropologists identified globalisation as an important topic of enquiry. However, there is still intense debate as to how it might be best understood. The definition of Held and McGrew is often used as a starting point for discussion. They argue that the concept of globalisation

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[17] Contrary to these accounts, much recent evidence suggests that un/underemployed young people in postcolonial contexts are particularly likely to embrace identities construed as 'traditional' or 'indigenous' in their attempts to maintain their status (e.g. Oni 1988; Levinson 1996).
Similarly, Levinson (1996) demonstrates that many educated young people in the Mexican city of San Pablo had begun to distance themselves from educated identities. Against a background of pervasive economic insecurity, young people in Levinson's study frequently sought out work perceived as traditional while also criticizing ideas of education as progress.

suggests 'a growing magnitude of intensity of global flows such that states and societies become increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interaction' (2000: 3). Most of the globalisation literature, however, covers large-scale economic, political and cultural processes, almost always characterising globalisation processes in terms of rapid transformation in local places as a result of global forces (Assayag & Fuller 2005; Deshpande 2004), often failing to account for 'folk understandings of the global, and the practices with which they are intertwined' (Tsing 2000: 344). This is certainly the case in India where grand pronouncements about globalisation in general are far more abundant than detailed accounts about the different meanings and consequences that [it] may have for various social groups as well as the actual processes and entanglements between the global and local in the economic, agricultural, linguistic, cultural, religious and educational domains (Assayag & Fuller 2005; Deshpande 2004).

The domain of education has become an ostensible manifestation of globalisation in a number of ways. International schools have grown in size and influence (Hayden 2011), expanding beyond their historical niche of elite expatriates to include striving, postcolonial middle class families (Qureshi & Osella 2013). International schools can be viewed as examples of the transnational spaces created by the globalisation processes described by Beck, through which 'sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors' (Beck 2000:11 in Vertovec 2001: 575). In addition, and to a large extent under the influence of international schools, national education systems are becoming more obviously internationalised, increasingly promoting an international agenda and concepts such as global citizenship (Hayden 2011). Although there are vast differences as to what exactly is meant by international education, what is certain is that national curricula increasingly seek to prepare youth for futures that are NOT (Hayden's emphasis) constrained by national boundaries and national issues (ibid.: 212). In response to these developments there have been recent calls to develop methodological frameworks to re-focus educational research on the cross-border production and circulation of new educational regimes and away from the centrality of nation-states (Robertson & Dale 2008).

In India, it is generally agreed that globalisation became significant in the 1990s when the Congress government of Narasimha Rao (1991-96) embraced a policy of liberalisation and dismantlement of state control that translated among other things in the rolling back of state financing of social sectors such as education. These reforms opened up education to

foreign and private investment, with implications for educational provision as well as educational projects (Jeffery 2005). The expansion of private schooling has of course been most notable in wealthier states such as Punjab (Qureshi and Osella 2013) and Kerala, which have seen a tremendous rise in the number and influence of private schools. These changes have been accompanied by the rise of a consumerist understanding of education not only among the established, urban 'great Indian middle class', as Varma (2003) calls it, but also across other social groups aspiring to become middle class. To capture this growing market, schools' curricula and pedagogies are being reformed to offer 'international' education (often in combination with 'Indian' culture and tradition), and to provide 'exposure' to global culture (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006). Simultaneously the expanding vision of state schools as inadequate and of the private market as the only reliable provider of the skills and knowledge imagined as needed for the global labour market reifies the idea of neoliberalism as a market-triumphalist regime taking hold of Indian society. As a consequence, critics denounce the fact that globalisation and neoliberalism have created educational 'choices' that are heavily skewed against the poor and marginalised (Jeffery 2005), so that the growing diversity and number of private schools may serve to exclude large sections of the population (Kumar & George 2009).

As with neoliberalism, Assayag and Fuller (2005: 1) warn us that in discussing the local and global one should avoid several pitfalls. First, one should remain most critical of those developments (e.g. the increasing internationalisation of education) that are ostensibly manifestations of globalisation and explore the ways in which they 'are actually driven endogenously by local, regional or national forces, which have often been in place since the colonial period or even earlier'. In other words, one must examine the continuities that render globalisation (or neoliberalism) unspectacular and in many ways 'unexceptional' (Cross 2010). This aspect is one in which anthropologists can particularly contribute, especially through an ethnographic approach to the study of globalisation. Rather than seeing it as a ready-made 'global force' affecting 'local places', Tsing (2011) propose an analysis of what she calls 'scale-making' to uncover the particular web of human negotiations, interests and practices that create the apparently agent-less forces of globalisation. This thesis examines precisely the messy processes that lead to the making of the internationalisation of education in Ernakulam. That is, it examines the social and material connections and the highly particular cultural interests through which a particular school emerges as a provider of international education.

Second one must not take globalist fantasies for reality, and remember that global interconnectedness is actually extremely uneven. Global links are not experienced by all people or communities to the same extent or even in the same way. This thesis demonstrates how marginalised and poor youth may become even more disconnected from locally existing networks of people and resources as a result of wider policies and developments that are part of economic globalisation (Assayag & Fuller 2005: 2). Simultaneously, privileged young people may become more and more globally linked as a result of an increasing global interconnectedness through media and migration links, leading to the formation of specially dislocated imagined worlds and selves (Appadurai 1996)g. Finally, one must 'interrupt' the inertia of the globalisation literature and counter-balance its large-scale generalisations through accounts that shed light on the experiences of globalisation of ordinary people. A first objective of this thesis is to document the different meanings and consequences globalisation entails for young people in urban Kerala.

Becoming and Being Middle-class: A Layered Experience

The remarkable rate of economic growth of the Indian economy since Economic liberalisation[18] in the 1990s, later captured by the BJP as 'India Shining' (Pinney 2005), is said to have been driven by the middle class' capacity to consume. Current debates about the middle class, essentially driven by the corporate sector and economists, focus on the size of the middle class, that is of the market for consumer goods and thus for the growth potential of the Indian economy. Simultaneously, since the onset of liberalisation, advertising and popular media images of this 'new' class have centred on rapid social mobility, consumption practices and wealth (Mazzarella 2004). Portrayals of prosperous urban Indians driving cars and occupying expensive suburban homes or flats, equipped with all the modern gadgets, have become prominent (Fernandes 2004; Jeffrey 2010).

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[18] In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi's government took a series of measures to liberalise the Indian economy by removing some controls, restrictions and high taxes that had long been part of the Nehruvian planned economy (Assayag & Fuller 2005: 4). But it was in 1991 that the then Prime Misniter Manmohan Singh, the finance minister in Narasimha Rao's government, initiated a series of more determined reforms collectively known as liberalization. These included the loosening on restrictions on monopolies; opening the public sector institutions in banking, airlines, electric power, petroleum, cellular phones, education to the private sector and foreign investment; cutting taxes on businesses and corporations; reduce excise duties; and allow Indian companies to borrow and invest in foreign money markets. For better or for worst, these reforms increasingly integrated the Indian economy into the global economy.

Beside its consumption capacity, idealised images of the middle class are also linked to the emergence of India's Information Technology (IT) Industry, hence producing idealised imagery of what the middle class consumes and produces (Baviskar & Ray 2011; Donner 2011). The vaunted IT industry is currently seen as the quintessential reflection of the 'rise' of India as an international superpower. In turn, the IT industry is seen as the primordial employment niche for India's 'new' middle classes (Baviskar & Ray 2011; Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; Jeffrey 2010; Upadhya 2011). While depicted as images of this 'middle' class as a whole or as a feasible aspiration for others outside, these idealised representations of the 'new' middle class draw on what are in fact the upper sections of the middle class (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; van Wessel 2004).

The media and corporate sector's celebratory accounts have recently been countered by sociological writing on the middle class which built up a critique of representations of the middle class as in the congratulatory accounts described above, that emphasised the new-ness of this social fraction (Baviskar & Ray 2011). While they signal that middle-class cultural dominance resulted in the (re)production of inequalities, their analysis was seduced by tropes that emphasised the emergence of this 'new' middle class as a result of India's consumerist turn and the dynamics of commodity consumption, narrowly equating being middle class with consumer identities. Many of these accounts disputed the progressive role of the middle class and denounced (and disproportionately emphasise) an alleged middle class turn towards selfish materialism and the concomitant 'abandonment' of values such as social cohesion attributed to the 'older' middle class (Varma 2003: 89). In Kerala this is exemplified by Kumar and George's *Kerala's Education System: from Inclusion to Exclusion*, which condemns this class, based on macro-level data, for 'quit[ting] the government system of education' (2009: 15). Without the physical proximity provided by government and government aided schools, they argue, 'the middle class in Kerala can never again hope to vocalize the genuine aspirations of the less privileged. They no more are effective participants of public action' (Kumar & George 2009: 15).

Anthropology's Look at the Indian Middle Class

But what does becoming or being middle-class in contemporary India mean? To what extent do idealised images of middle-class subjects resonate with actual experiences across India? That is, what are the actual practices and values that constitute a social field and the agency that is derived from it (Donner & De Neve 2011: 7)? Seduced by the seeming

omnipresence of 'new' consumerism in liberalised India, many empirical accounts have focused on notions of consumer citizenship. For example, Liechty's (2003) and Lukose's (2009) work document the ways in which consumption allows urban Keralite and Nepali youth to forge new consumer identities. Irrespective of the approach, as Donner and De Neve (2011: 9) rightly note, as values, identities, aspirations, and youth cultures seem to involve consumption, many scholars have been led to over-emphasise 'new' consumerist practices as the trope through which all other relationships, including those of the middle class with the state, with the poor, and globalisation, are discussed and understood (2011: 9). Subsequent fine-grained ethnographic studies, focusing on the actual sites and practices of becoming and being middle-class, demonstrate how the consumption of commodities is not indeed the sole interpretative and experiential lens of India's middle-class subjects (Baviskar & Ray 2011; Donner 2011).

These accounts show that a simple look at contemporary India reveals communities and individuals described as middle-class differ widely not just in term of economic position and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values (Donner 2011: 3). Moreover, they show that under conditions of liberalisation there has been both a substantial growth in size[19] and a widening[20] of the sort of individuals, families, and communities of a moderately prosperous stratum who have gained access to the material lifestyles, the 'objective conditions' (Joshi 2010: xix) that make 'middle classness' possible (Donner & De Neve 2011). Perhaps the most general story to begin to understand the diversity of social realities deemed today as 'middle class' concerns the transformation of the middle class in India, in the 1970s and 1980s, from an older relatively coherent understanding of what 'middle class' connoted – classically, a Nehruvian civil service-oriented salariat – to a bewildering array of new, often markedly entrepreneurial pretenders to the title (Mazzarella 2004). A nationalist-modernizing vision and upper-caste Hindu or (high-born) Muslim cultural traits and middle classness were closely associated (Joshi 2010). Values such as material austerity are said to be important to earlier urban middle class (Donner 2011; van Wessel 2004). Today, affirmative action, remittances from Indian migrant labourers in the Gulf, and, more broadly, the complex of reforms collectively

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[19] Jeffrey (2010) on the contrary shows how under condition of liberalisation, the reduced supplies of government jobs and undermined state services such as educational and health facilities have threatened the strategies of the lower middle classes.
[20] Others, like Fernandes (2006), argue that there is not a widening on the number of people joining the ranks of the middle class but only a reconstruction of the political and social identity of the previously existing middle classes, now rearticulated as a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalisation.

known as liberalisation and its accompanying rhetoric of the 'new' consumerist Indian have provided ground for a broadening of the notion of middleclassness, allowing upwardly mobile communities, new practices and values to enter the middle class social field (Donner 2011). In Kerala migration to work in Persian Gulf countries after the seventies oil boom has been the central factor families of various communities to access middle class lifestyles, while escaping local unemployment (Osella & Osella 2000). These works have shown how the political arena has also become a place to forge claims for status and political power among sections earlier under-represented. In particular, many of these accounts have looked at youth involvement in Hindu nationalism, politicking in and out of formal political organisations as a means of preventing downward mobility, leveraging status and dealing with the social anxiety associated with their class position (Fernandes & Heller 2006; Jeffrey 2010). The result is a picture of multiple meanings of the middle class experience in a variety of sites across time and space, dealing with different dimensions of everyday life. The result is that what makes middle-classness and who can claim it has become a broader and strongly contested field.

This approach takes account of multiple and often contradictory class positions and the middle class as a social formation drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his analysis of class reproduction (Bourdieu 1984). He showed how everyday practice and the 'ordinary choices of everyday existence' that made class fractions possible and reproduced inequality depend on a combination of the varying degrees of cultural, social, and economic capital (Bourdieu 1984; Donner & De Neve 2011). Bourdieu, though, maintained the primacy of social origin and cultural capital – learned from early childhood – over social and economic capital, accumulated through time. It was his emphasis on the former, which for Bourdieu accounted primarily for the internalised, deeply-rooted and long-standing sets of dispositions of one's class position, in myriad combinations with other forms of capital (educational and economic) that have made possible the study of class as contradictory positions vis-à-vis other classes (Donner & De Neve 2011). The complex relationship between cultural, social, and economic capital has proven to be a useful approach when examining various ways of being and aspiring to become middle class.

An important strand of anthropological work has thus sought to trace the experiences, practices and discourses of various caste and communities who have forged or reworked their middle class positions, building up the *widening* argument by highlighting the particular

ways in which particular communities participate in middle-class practices and discourses. They show that the particular ways in which communities or individuals are or become middle-class are marked by both continuity and ongoing transformations. That is, middle classness is produced at the multiple articulations of earlier affiliations and values (e.g. caste, gender ideas, religion) and new practices and sites (e.g. consumption and IT employment) (Donner & De Neve 2011: 11). Moving beyond the narrow emphasis on consumerism and new-ness discussed above, these works uncover that apart from consumption practices, other concerns, like educational and occupational strategies, respectability, caste identities, religion, region, language skills and demeanour, the family and gender relations play a central role in the experience of middle-classness (Fernandes 2006; Fuller & Narasimhan 2006; Jeffrey et al. 2008; De Neve 2011). For example, De Neve (2011) shows how a previously rural business community of now affluent entrepreneurs in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, articulate gender-specific education, employment, and marriage strategies that inspire both practices and projects that are commonly seen as typically middle-class, and simultaneously values (e.g. respectability) and moralities that are caste-based and more rural in origin. Similarly, the account of Jeffery et al. (2011) traces the strategies deployed by rich (dominant-caste) *Jats* to overcome the tension between being a rural community trying to inhabit an urban, middle-class world (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 13). Within this context, Jeffery et al. (2011) examines the anxieties experienced by young Jat men as they wait to find the employment that will catapult them into middle-class status as for young Jat men (as for many other young men across the country) middleclassness is inextricably linked to ideas of being modern, urban, and employed in particular types of jobs.

The Question of Commonalities

The multiple meanings of becoming and being middle-class revealed by this body of literature makes us pose the question of commonalities afresh. While commonalities can be drawn among ethnographic accounts that emphasise multiplicity, there is another (less developed) strand of empirical research that looks more closely at the question dealing with the sort of social characteristics, orientations, practices, attitudes, values, and aspirations common among disparate middle-class positions (Nisbett 2007), a question to which this thesis speaks. These accounts focus on key sites (schools, multiplexes, gated communities, IT employment, and cybercafés) but also on particular practices in these sites where

particularities are coalesced into a more hegemonic middle classness around common interests. In other words, they examine the sites and practices where individuals of disparate middle-class positions – with different family histories, community backgrounds, and financial capabilities – converge driven by shared interests. Among these sites the education system is one of the most central arenas where families and individuals regardless of regional differences pursue middle-class status (Baviskar & Ray 2011; Donner 2011). This thesis endeavours to examine the experiences of youth and families of different middle-class backgrounds as they converge in particular educational practices and discourses.

The history of this link goes back the nineteenth century. In fact, the emergence and history of both western-style education and the middle class cannot be separated. In Kerala, education has been central to the making of a Malayalee middle class, initially among upper-caste Hindus – Nairs and Tamil Brahmins. These groups not only gained early access and familiarity to the first education institutions, but were also soon to dominate the public sphere through which they articulated modern sets of (middle-class) values (e.g. the orientation away from lineage, subcaste and caste, to school, occupation and income as the bases of privilege) (Béteille 1992; Devika 2007). In contemporary India, and especially Kerala, education spread far beyond the traditional elites and has certainly become a central value shared throughout the more widely defined middle classes and across the lower strata. In Kerala the universalisation of literacy and the value of education – resulting from a variety of factors such as the work of Christian missionaries, social reform movements, caste/community organisations and the state – have been accompanied by a broader nationalist celebratory literature, commonly called the 'Kerala Model' literature, which uses the spread of education in order to sustain the narrative of progressive Kerala (Devika 2007: 11). For many decades this rhetoric has clouded the ways in which through education inequalities from the earlier socio-cultural order survive into the present. In present day Kerala, with the recent expansion of the private unaided sector and the visible inequalities that accompany it, supporters of the model have quickly criticised the middle classes for undermining the supposedly egalitarian and inclusive nature of Kerala education (see for instance Kumar & George 2009).

The rise of private, English-medium, central curriculum schooling and other forms of formal, self-financed coaching both in urban and rural areas in the last 20 years is tied to

the educational demands of families across Kerala and India's swelling middle classes (Donner 2006; Vasavi 2006). As Vasavi rightly notes, within these middle class forms of education there is an increasing variety of schools and coaching centres that cater to particular affiliations (caste or religious communities) and economic capabilities (Vasavi 2006: 105). In Ernakulam and its periphery, there is a growing range of private, English-medium, central curriculum schools, which may be run by Christians, upper caste Hindus, or Muslims. Some are moderately expensive, while others are out of reach for the majority. However, while plurality in the private educational field replicates the multiplicity of middle class positions, reflecting the economic capabilities and the social and cultural affiliation of families, the commonalities within the sector signals middle class convergence at specific educational aspirations. Regardless of the religious/caste orientation of the school, few would dispute that if there is a marker of middle-classness in India it is sending children to costly private, English-medium school (which also involves buying special textbooks and paying for autos or the use of the universally recognised school bus) and entrance coaching (Kumar 2011: 238; Osella & Osella 2000: 141), that are thought to provide the most valued forms of capital and other skills perceived as central to enhancing children's possibilities to social mobility in today's context (Advani 2009: 17).

The home, and more specifically parenting, is another key site where middle classness is somewhat homogeneously practiced. Examining the definitions of good mothering among middle-class families in Calcutta, Donner (2006: 378) shows that in the wake of globalisation and the integration of employment markets into worldwide discourses of skills and mobility, middle-class mothering has been reoriented towards supporting children throughout their educational career and towards producing future white-collared workers for a global economy. Through practices like sending children from a very early age to English-medium nurseries, speaking English at home – what she called the 'pedagogising' of the home – mothers attempt to enhance marketable skills acquired in educational institutions (Donner 2006). Similarly, Kumar (2011) argues that while the family and school educated the middle-class child, today the family has been eclipsed by the school and other educational sites and sees its role purely as ensuring the success of the child in school. Middle class parents today, many of whom feel inadequate to ensure their children's success, increasingly rely on filling their children's agendas with coaching and extra-school tuitions to improve their prospect in the face of competitive entrance examinations that are in turn seen as the quintessential markers of success (Kumar 2011).

In the context of Kerala, Devika (2007: 57) shows that this idea of productivity, 'of obedient, useful, productive subjects', as 'the norm by which the quality of domestic life [read of mothering] was evaluated' is not new. This understanding of modern domesticity is indeed linked to the making of a Malayalee middle class since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by which the labour of women in the domestic domain was tied to the production of modern subjects. This notion used as a model the lives of large sections of upper-caste women and also of 'women in the dominant strata of lower castes being mobilised into communities' (like Ezhavas), who were exposed earlier to such ideas, and were thus more readily able to produce the sort of successful children expected of them (Devika 2007: 22).

In short, the cultural meaning of being middle class is inextricably linked to the quest to embody success defined by a particular orientation towards modernity, being urban, professional, wealthy, and the imagined relationship of these to the global economy (Upadhya 2011:177); and it is education that stands as the essential path leading to that success. In short, being middle class in India is primarily about competence: demonstrating one's ability to operate in the globalised world.

The Power of the Middle Class as Social Construct

Finally, the exploration of education and domesticity as values requires us to complement the review of accounts that concentrate on what it means to be middle class to particular peoples with an analysis of the middle class as a social construct, a move that many scholars consider compulsory in a society so vastly marked by inequalities (Deshpande 2006). The work of analysts like Deshpande (2006) show that the category 'middle class' performs the cultural task of concealing and hence helping to reproduce marked inequalities among sections of the middle class; that is, it conceals the ways in which one or more groups within the middle classes exercise a cultural dominance over the rest, and indeed, the state. 'The category 'middle class' conjures up a universal, unifying identity that summons legitimacy for projects that favours elites in the nation'[21] (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 7). The sorts of educational/occupational and economic success to which the middle

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[21] This politics of exclusion and inclusion performed by the 'middle class' as a social construct is not new. Historical accounts of the middle class have shown how the elites re-fashioned themselves as the embodiment of a colonial and later post-colonial middle class, while rallying among various other social groups ideas of social mobility with them as representations of what could be attained through education and employment in the public sector (Joshi 2010: xxi; Lemercinier & Rendel 1983).

classes orient themselves often turn out to be an illusory quest for the vast majority. To a large extent it is only the elites, the upper tier (Fernandes & Heller 2006), who are actually benefiting from the new employment opportunities and high salaries made available after liberalisation (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; van Wessel 2004) and whose lives mirror the idealised images of prosperous urban Indians occupying expensive suburban homes equipped with all modern conveniences increasingly in circulation in Indian media (Jeffrey 2010: 8). While many in the middle classes are not all able to fulfil the lives prescribed by these increasingly hegemonic vision of the middle class – centred on (IT) education, employment, income and consumption – they are certainly aware of them, thanks to the visual media which increasingly hypes ideal middle class lifestyles and the link between the middle classes, globalisation and India's role as a world economy.

The dominant fractions of the urban middle classes are in effect reimagining the Indian nation through what Joshi (2010) calls 'cultural entrepreneurship': by constructing a 'middle class' where they are producers and product of a new cultural politics which allows them to articulate believes and values that seem appealing to all middle classes. The middle class values of merit and hard work in education are central to middle class cultural domination. It is through the language, of merit for example, that inequalities are concealed. These cultural politics thus perform the dual task of distinguishing what is 'middle class' from those above and below, and concealing the fact that such cultural politics work in their favour and not so much in the favour of others in more precarious middle class positions.

In a context where a widening number and type of individuals, families and communities increasingly define themselves as middle-class, failure to attain 'merit', achieve success, and the disjuncture between images of idealised middle-class lives and reality generates often intense feelings of anxiety across large sections of the middle class (not of course among the upper tiers). This has been shown to be a shared phenomenon across lower middle class groups, who converge in a feeling of being in 'waiting' (Fernandes 2006; Jeffrey 2010).

Local Communities

Before I move on to the argument, a description of the general outline of the caste system in Kerala is needed, as long as the reader remains aware of debates that have shown how caste is neither an unchanged survival of ancient Indian nor a single homogeneous system

that reflects a core cultural value, but a product of a concrete historical encounter between India and British colonial rule (Dirks 2003). The population of Kerala includes a variety of Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities. Unlike how caste has evolved in other parts of India, generally modelled according to the four-fold division of society into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras, in Kerala Hindu communities are generally grouped in three clusters: (1) high caste Hindus or *savarnas*[22] including Nambudiri and Tamil Brahmin as well as Nair[23]; (2) non-caste Hindus consisting mostly of *avarna*[24] groups, such as Ezhavas classified as 'Other Backward Class' (OBC); and (3) Scheduled Castes of Kerala, like Hindu Pulaya or Parayas (Aiyappan 1965: 5). In other words, Nambudiri Brahmins occupy the summit of the hierarchy, while Nairs are generally ranked below Brahmins, and Ezhavas below Nairs, the last two being the most numerous Hindu communities in Kerala (Fuller 1976). In Kerala, Brahmins have traditionally treated and considered the numerous groups in the Nair sub-cluster as Shudras, as a result of which Ezhavas and other groups in the second cluster fall outside the four-fold division of Hindu castes. However, throughout the twentieth century, Ezhavas have pursued mobility in many social arenas, both as a newly united caste and as individual families. Through a strong imperative in education, respectable employment, the accumulation of wealth and entry into the mainstream Hindu fold, Ezhavas have to a large extent succeeded in re-defining themselves as non-untouchables (Osella & Osella 2000).

Although technically outside the caste hierarchy, Kerala Christians and Muslims are in practice ranked with respect to each other and surrounding Hindu castes (Fuller 1976; Mathew 1989). As Fuller explains, Christians are generally divided into Syrian, Latin and New Christians groupings – distinguished according to two criteria: the caste to which the original converts from whom the members of each grouping claim descent belong, and the date of the original conversions (Fuller 1976: 54). Syrian Christians most commonly claim to be descendants of Nambudiri Brahmins said to have been converted by St. Thomas the Apostle after his alleged arrival in India in A.D. 52. Other Syrian Christian groups, though, trace their origin to the descendants of a merchant of Syria, Thomas of Cana between the fourth and sixth century. While some Syrian Christians claim Nambudiri rank, it is generally accepted that their ranking is somewhat equal to that of Nairs. They are classified by the

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[22] Belonging to higher Hindu castes.
[23] Nairs were the sudras in the caste hierarchy (George Mathew 1989). They constituted the warriors, landed gentry and yeomen of pre-British Kerala (Robin Jeffrey 1976).
[24] Not belonging to the *varna* division.

modern state as a 'forward' caste. Latin Christians (or Latin Catholics) are the second major group of Christians. They are the descendants of various waves of conversion to Christianity speared by the missionary endeavours of St Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century. Most of his converts came from Scheduled fisher Castes (Mukkuvans and Arayas), while there is also a small minority of Latin Catholics who are descendants of high caste Hindus (Klausen 1968). Although they are officially classified as OBC, they are generally seen by other as ranked either as Scheduled Caste (those who descend from Hindu fishing caste converts) or as Forward caste (those who claim to be descendants of high caste Hindus). The third group are the descendant of those converted in the missionary wave of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Fuller 1976: 55). New Christians are also classified as OBC by the state government; however they are most commonly perceived to be ranked with Scheduled Castes. Finally, Muslims are also classified as OBC. Like Hindu castes, these groups are strictly endogamous.

The Argument: The Multiple Dimensions of a Contradictory Resource

This thesis analyses how the shifting educational field has transformed the way in which social difference is constructed and reproduced in Kerala society. The argument I develop throughout the thesis is located within the dual anthropological debate concerning first the growth and increasing diversity and fragmentation of the Indian middle classes, heightened under the impetus of globalisation (Baviskar and Ray 2011; Donner 2011; Fernandes & Heller 2006), and second attempts to elucidate the common ground that binds them together. More specifically I follow accounts that show how such diversity/fragmentation derives at large from the many middle–class 'newcomers': communities, families, and individuals from various regions who have gained access to the amenities of middle-class life in the post-liberalisation period and who now come elbow to elbow with the older, more established middle class minority (Donner & De Neve 2011: 3). However, my main aim is not in seeking to trace the ways in which middleclassness is realised by specific communities within one or another 'tier' within the Indian middle classes, as most accounts have endeavoured to do recently. My thesis explores how the complexity of middle-class fragmentation actually operates in everyday life, exploring the various experiences of and the ways by which people who occupy particular middle-class positions converge around common practices, values, and aspirations.

I do so by grounding my research in what this thesis argues has been and continues to be the primordial basis of the middle class project: education. Being middle class in India almost ubiquitously has centred on the self conscious self-fashioning through education. This self-fashioning involves education as both the objective circumstances of specific practices and institutions geared towards the attainment of specific careers or professions that constitute middleclassness, and as a guiding value that shapes people's aspirations for an ever more prosperous future, recasting ideas of respectability and social hierarchy, and serving to posit moral superiority over both upper and lower strata. Therefore, in this thesis I focus on *specific* educational sites (centrally around private English-medium schooling and entrance coaching) that bring together families of divergent middle-class backgrounds united by similar orientations and in the quest for enabling their children's self-fashioning. Taking on a similar approach to Srivasta's (1998) engagement with the Doon School, my interest lays then in education as a post-liberalisation cultural terrain in which private schools and other educational institutions are important nodes. The exploration of groups of +1 and +2 students and their families rallied within these institutions offers a window into the diversity of urban middle classes: their concerns, strategies, aspirations, contradictions, and anxieties.

Three decades ago only a tiny English-speaking urban middle classes attended private English-medium schools while the vast majority went to Malayalam-medium aided or government schools. Today a much more diverse and fragmented middle-class can afford access to private English-medium schools and coaching centres that mirrors (and is a response to) its growth and diversity of claims. Private English-medium education as a key marker of middle-classness, but also as a site of cultural capital, where cash is spent to expose children to the culture of the dominant, changing their very habitus (Bourdieu 1984; Jeffrey et al. 2004; Osella & Osella 2000), has become more widely available to a growing number of middle-class newcomers. My ethnography shows that the families compounded within a single private English medium school, are reflective of how the communities and individuals who define themselves as middle-class and collide in similar practices and values (of education for example) today[25] differ widely in terms of other values, orientations, social and cultural roots, economic position, consumption practices and so on (Donner &

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[25] The middle-class label remained confined to urban government servants and professionals until well after independence, closely associated with upper-caste Hindus and Muslim elite cultures (Donner & Geert De Neve 2011: 3).

De Neve 2011: 3). As such, education has become a central terrain in which the new middle class are increasingly 'contesting the middle ground, the centre of Indian life' (Dwyer 2000).

I locate this argument within the long historical processes by which the middle-class idea that education is an undisputed key to achieving economic success (especially private English medium education) and to undermining caste a basis for social hierarchy in Kerala came to be sealed in the minds of all in Malayalee society. In the thesis I show how this idea of education spread among all social groups and was incorporated and reproduced by caste/religious organisations and the state, resulting in the pervasive passion for education for which the state has been known and which in turn led to a highly developed educational sector and achievements such as total literacy[26]. However, and going against the grain of the dominant discourse on Kerala education, my thesis reinforces accounts that show that in spite of laudable achievements education and the benefits gained from it are (and have been so since its beginning in the mid-nineteenth-century) subject to extreme stratification (Osella & Osella 2000: 141). This stratification has made education a key site for the reworking, and to a lesser extent undermining of long-standing inequalities (for instance of caste) with a shift from direct to 'mediated' reproduction (Jeffery et al. 2007: 444). My thesis traces and further demonstrates how the expansion of private English medium education and other forms of private education (e.g. entrance coaching) in the last generation have further complicated and exacerbated the stratification of the sector.

My interest in education lays not only in it as a shifting cultural terrain, but also as a site for the production of particular forms of citizenship through practices aimed at attuning students to specific forms of behaviour and aspirations depicted as more desirable and as garnering greater opportunity, respect, and prestige. More specifically, my thesis looks at the sort of 'ideal' person for the global era being produced in these sites, where they are inculcated the skills, subjectivities and disciplines the school perceives as underpinning globalised India. Concretely I show how schools that cater to the middle classes increasingly emphasise a mixture of academic excellence, personality traits, and communication skills all oriented towards producing globally competitive professionals. All these elements, combined with one or another degree of a sense of duty and love for the

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[26] In Ernakulam, the first district to claim total literacy in Kerala and India. In Kerala more than ninety per cent literacy is considered total literacy (Tharakan 2004: 48).

nation and veneration for its 'traditions', are depicted as producing a generation of global professionals who are as competent as, yet morally superior to its western counterparts in job markets in India and across the world. As such schools portray themselves as nurturing India's new professional/entrepreneurs oriented towards individual success, while at the same time helping to enrich and empower the nation. By endorsing these visions, schools, I argue, are largely responsible for the construction of now dominant idea of the urban middle class as a social construct.

Although it has become a more open cultural terrain, by endorsing an idea of ideal educated person that resonates with the subjectivities, lifestyles, and cultural capital of the dominant fractions of the middle classes, private schools, entrance coaching, and by implication parents' efforts to have their children succeed in these arenas favour and reinforce elite privilege. However it does so in ways that attract broader interest and hopes: by depicting youth as involved in an equal *sacrifice* to demonstrate *merit* and thus attain the social goods and economic rewards promised[27]. Today a disproportionate number of families and youth imbibe the middle-class dream that in India, through sacrifice and merit in education, 'the sky is the limit'. In the final year of schooling students actively unite and orient themselves towards a common struggle to improve their prospects in the face of competitive entrance examinations, without which larger dreams would be rendered unachievable. While their prospects to succeed in these examinations and in the professional lives that follow are heavily shaped by their structural position, as my thesis shows, their efforts made no reference to such differences and actively hailed their equality in the face of their quests ahead. Thus 'the year that can break you or make you' was indeed a power discourse in the Foucauldian sense, providing a language to talk and think about the final year, as well as defining acceptable (and unacceptable) practices within and beyond institutions for dealing with it. Sacrifice and merit conjured up a unifying experience, trajectory and outcome that concealed differences and inequalities, and thus rallying legitimacy for projects that favour upper middle class/upper caste projects and lifestyles.

Students' imbibing the dominant project prescribed in the year that can break or can make you, I argue is not the sole result of schools' disciplining regimes nor of parental

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[27] This pervasive concern for merit provides further evidence towards the argument that a sense of self and of individuality are absolutely key to how Indians explain how they are understand others and conceive of their. The thesis thus stands in contrast to the view of Dumont (1970) and others who posited that in India individuality play no role in people's conceptions of themselves (Mines 1994: 10).

inspirational regimes, but also the result of final year students' cultural production. Students, both those of privileged and less privileged backgrounds, actively attempted to embody the school's ethos of internationalism, righteousness, and academic excellence as the main strategy to navigate the high level of (un)certainty and expectations placed upon them at this cross-road year. By actively appropriating the language and conduct of 'the year that can break or make you' they in effect concealed their disadvantageous position vis-à-vis others with better economic, social and cultural resources.

A look at youth experiences outside educational sites and in the 'zone of the informal' (Amit-Talai 1995: 153) reveals a hierarchically structured field formed of distinctive peer groups and individuals engaged in different social practices and defining themselves as mutually distinctive (Winkler Reid 2011). Contrary to arguments about youth friendship in south India as a period marked by an egalitarian ethos (Jeffrey 2010; Nisbett 2007; Osella & Osella 2000), I argue that the informal realm, where youth subjectivities are formed and evaluated, is increasingly stratified with regard to emergent hierarchies of distinction which do not draw primarily from caste or community (at least rhetorically). Instead, the informal is structured according to new hierarchies that form part of a wider project of distinction, of which private schools form a part, that is driven by the middle classes' desire to be seen as participant in global cultures (Donner & De Neve 2011: 15). According to these, youth draw distinctions with regard to particular kinds of embodied (inscribed in the body) and objectified (derived from physical objects owned) cultural capital that are perceived to stand for an individual's or group of peers' cosmopolitan character. In Kerala, where almost every family has international links via relatives working or studying abroad, this hierarchy is highly stratified and contested. These hierarchies, which of course lash onto the hype surrounding this moment of Indian history, mediate and bring to the fore earlier categories of distinction (centrally caste, gender, and class), undermining the egalitarian spirit previously attributed to friendship relations in Kerala. This thesis shows that while youth from established middle class backgrounds were in a privileged position to reify their status in the informal arena, youth of less dominant positions actively sought to undermine or adapt to their cultural dominance by cultivating antagonistic identities or by cultivating connections to dominant individuals and groups, while never rejecting the desire to be seen as cosmopolitan/modern.

By implication I am also concerned with the identities, experiences, practices and perceptions consigned to the fringes of the realm of urban middle-class life: those cast from elite aided and private schooling and the pursuit of professionalism and cosmopolitanism. Even though Kerala has achieved total literacy the benefits the lower strata can gain from it continue to be marginal. As urban and rising semi-urban middle classes increasingly use their incomes to put their children in the exploding private educational sector (as well as on the older elite aided sector), the poor and marginalised increasingly become subject to ghettoisation in higher secondary aided and government schools (Jeffery et al. 2005: 59). That is certainly the case in Kothad's school, where the higher secondary population now consists of the poorer section of the locality and of students discarded by more reputed city aided schools, on the basis of their low SSLC grades and lack of economic resources to pay capitation fees required to re-enrol for the +1 and +2 years. As these students are mainly low-status Latin Catholics (OBC), my thesis further demonstrates how regardless of policies of positive discrimination in higher education, their chances to access and benefit from higher learning will continue to be marginal, especially as a consequence of the marginalising effect of higher secondary school (Osella & Osella 2000: 142).

Regardless of the grim scenario, my thesis shows how many students embraced education and sought to differentiate themselves from others by cultivating an educated identity of people 'with aims' [in life]. This centred on looking beyond their current educational predicament and envisaging alternative, job-oriented educational strategies based on up-to-the-minute and germane, but idealised readings of the changing Indian economy and emerging job markets. Finally, the identity of people with aims, the outcomes of which will most probably be elusive, substantiates arguments that suggest that in contemporary India middle-class culture – at least its values, aspirations and its characteristic desire to be seen as global – have captured the minds and hearts of a widening range of social groups (De Neve 2011).

In conclusion, this thesis argues that within the context of social changes resulting from India's integration into the global economy, and the rise of the idea of the middle class as an aspirational model, education has become more than ever a contradictory resource: offering, on the one hand a widening site for cultural capital and contestation of older and

more established middle-class power, and on the other a pervasive apparatus of power and domination that reproduces old inequalities.

Research Methods

A recent paper on the state of education in Kerala suggested that in the last two decades the education system has shifted from an inclusive system to an exclusive one, primarily as a result of the growth of the private schooling sector. The paper described the changes in the schooling landscape as almost tectonic in scale, depicting on the one extreme the (righteous) state sponsored system, and on the other, the (immoral) private sector. The authors conclude that this gap would inevitably produce two distinct kinds of youth, which would inevitably lead to the collapse of Kerala's social fabric and values. They argued:

> At the school level, *a new generation of students* who have little knowledge of the local language, literature, culture, history and even geography is emerging in the state. They are *a socially disengaged* lot insulated from the Kerala society. The concept of neighbourhood schools is now at a discount as students are transported over long distances. These students are disconnected from their neighbourhood and lack local community identity and feelings. Two classes of students seem to be emerging in the state and in each locality with very little opportunities for interaction with each other. Most of the students in the unaided schools come from more or less similar socio-economic backgrounds. Without the physical proximity of and social interaction with the under privileged, which were provided by public institutions like government and government aided schools, the middle class in Kerala can never again hope to vocalize the genuine aspirations of the less privileged. They no more are effective participants of public action. Long-term consequences of the recent developments in education on Kerala society have not yet been understood and therefore are not yet part of the political discourse in the state.
>
> (Kumar and George 2009: 15)

This prompted my decision to carry out fieldwork across this 'gap', and that would attempt to interrogate these alleged transformations. Thus I decided to conduct fieldwork that focused on the lives of two groups of schooled youth: one in an aided school and another in an unaided school.

The study was anchored in Ernakulam, the capital of the first district in India to achieve total literacy. It was carried out in two locations. The main location, where my wife and I lived in a two bedroom flat throughout fieldwork, was a middle class neighbourhood in the heart of Ernakulam city. The secondary location was in the northern outskirts of urban Kochi. Within each location, I concentrated on the students of two different schools. In urban Ernakulam, I focused on the everyday lives of a group of higher secondary students schooled at 'Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir' (BVM) 'Kumar Nagar', a (private) unaided school, while in the semi-urban location I focused on a group of higher secondary pupils

schooled at Higher Secondary School of Jesus, Kothad (HSS of Jesus), an aided school. As frequently happens in fieldwork I came to this particular site by a mixture of luck and chance, rather than through any rigorous process of selection. I had in fact originally planned to anchor the research on two adjacent schools, but ended up travelling by bus on a weekly basis to the aided school to which I managed to get access to. These groups of youth offered me the opportunity to glimpse the experience of youth separated by a wider socio-economic (and spatial) gap than I had planned.

My fieldwork was not limited to schools: the sheer complexity of youth's everyday experiences – sometimes attending school, entrance coaching, school tuition classes, hanging out with friends, and spending leisure and studying time at home in a single day – has made it quintessential not to limit the project to an 'in-school' ethnography. Thus I sought to explore a comprehensive collection of research sites that more or less captured the intricacy of youth experiences, with special emphasis on those around education. My work in schools could in fact be thought as a launch pad, which facilitated my entry into a number of key research locations, and most importantly enabled me to build lasting relationships and friendship with a number of youths.

Conducting ethnographic research in and around educational institutions, particularly schools, is a delicate task an anthropologist, or any other social researcher, can undertake. Managements, families, communities, the state, and society at large have so much at stake in the unperturbed running of educational institutions that for an outsider these may seem more like fortresses. I started a round of meetings with various school managements, to present myself, the study, and my proposed methodology. Prior to these encounters I also found myself concerned with the ethical dimension of my role within schools: i.e. how to conduct research while remaining loyal to the needs of pupils within specific institutional settings and times[28]. Trusting my judgement, conscience, and the phronesis (Colnerud 2006: 371) derived from my previous experience in the field of education in South India[29], I proposed as my core in-school role to conduct a series of weekly discussion sessions and workshops which would provide a learning experience for pupils – in the form of weekly meaningful and exciting debates – and an insightful research tool.

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[28] See Colnerud (2006) for a thorough discussion of the ethical dimension of the teaching profession.
[29] As a volunteer project officer in a Spanish NGO.

As I had foreseen, my participation in the schools' everyday activity and interaction with students, especially twelfth STDs, became the main issue of concern when I first introduced the project to school officials[30]. However, both BVM and HHS of Jesus were welcoming. The sessions were conducted over the first four months of fieldwork each lasting from forty-five minutes to one and a half hours. At HSS of Jesus the sessions took place in regular classrooms with the assistance of one teacher who helped me communicate in Malayalam when it was necessary. In BVM the sessions started being conducted entirely in English, in a small auditorium that the school used for special events, but were then relocated to regular classrooms. One or two teachers audited the first few sessions, but after that they were held without teachers present. Some of the discussion sessions focused on topics such as preparing for board examinations, career choices, overseas studies, and English communication were of general interest to students and schools. The discussion sessions also served as an arena in which students brought forward a series of topics of their own interest in order to be discussed. Finally, apart from providing a space for voicing/developing opinions, these sessions turned into a complex research tool which allowed me to explore peer group dynamics. In both schools, I also audited a few classes and participated in all sorts of festive days, special events and competitions.

As weeks began to pass, relationships with a number of youth started to crystallise. This enabled the research to move out of the school and into other spaces of further enquiry. Method-wise, the single biggest challenge of this project was to access and work 'within' a variety of educational institutions and subsequently households and at the same time work 'around' these spaces and among youth as something more similar to a 'friend', entailing a delicate balancing of inevitably ambiguous roles. Among these groups of youth I was most successful in bridging the ambiguity of my role in school, where I led formal sessions but actively dissociating myself from teachers by, for example, asking students to avoid calling me 'sir' and systematically limiting my interaction with teachers.

As rapport grew with a number of youth they granted me access to out-of-school practices and spaces shared by different groups of peers. The walks home at the end of each school day became quite literally a central practice that enabled this access and contributed hugely to bridging the gap between youth and me in the early stage of fieldwork. While from BVM

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[30] In fact I failed to get access to another school because of this issue.

the walk actually took me home, in Kothad the walk led to a bus stand, from which some students and I rode the bus into the city. The walks opened up the door to other spaces such as the local *chaat* centre, tea shops, the cyber cafe, the regional sports centre or simply the streets surrounding the school where my friends and informants spent their limited spare time. In those places, we spoke casually about all sorts of issues, such as school politics, groups in schools, football, bikes, and *lines* (love relationships). Finally, contact with students opened up 'non-physical' spaces of enquiry, such as social networking websites (i.e. *orkut* and *facebook*) and mobile text messaging. Interweaving enquiry in these multiple location has allow me to collect the necessary data to draw a more coherent and comprehensive picture of the lives of the youth participating in the study.

Despite the success in connecting with informants on a more equal ground, the ambiguity of my role never fully dissipated. Several months into the research, as I walked out of BVM accompanied by a key informant, Jacob, who gave me an insightful look into the work I had done so far in trying to be like a peer outside institutions and a researcher/teacher inside them. Jacob said:

> You should like, get more interaction with the teachers... they barely know you... and to be completely honest with you, to them you are more of an annoyance than a blessing. You should start strengthening those ties. You should start with the English teachers, and then the subject teachers that are not as good in English... You are not a student, and yet you are more of a student than a teacher [pointing with his finger at us, a group of students and me]. "But officially you're officially a teacher. I mean, you are part of the staff now.
> "Yeah, but you know that since the beginning I did not want to be thought as a teacher", I say. "Yes definitely, and you have done so well, Jacob says... otherwise you wouldn't feel so close to us, well" (he pauses) "you would feel close to us, but we wouldn't feel so close to you... But you should not miss on that, you should strengthen those bonds with the teachers.

The contradictions teeming in Jacob's advice point to the challenges and limitations of studies of this kind. They also signal one of the pitfalls of this particular project: the lack of depth as far as the teachers' point of view is concerned.

As my relationship with a group of students grew stronger, invitations to visit their homes to meet their families rapidly grew in number. Throughout the last six months of field research I visited over twenty houses of informants both in Ernakulam and Kothad. Through these visits I was able to extensively converse with participants' parents, sisters, brothers, and sometimes grandparents. In Kothad I was always accompanied by a research assistant who helped me translate and take notes. Through semi-structured interviews, these encounters helped me collect families' educational and occupational stories as well as

parents' opinions on a number of issues that emerged during the conversations, such as campus politics, entrance coaching institutions, the importance of English communication skills, marriage and dowry practices. Rapport with students and the backing of schools and parents also facilitated the opening of other off-school spaces for further enquiry, such as entrance coaching centres and school tuition centres, where I interviewed coaching instructors and managers.

Household visits also allowed me to correct to some degree the marked gender imbalance of the data being gathered. While my work within schools involved equally boys and girls, the information gathered from spending time among students outside educational institutions was turning the project into an ethnographic study of male youth as I was spending time almost always with boys alone. During household visits I was able to converse with female informant unchecked by the institutional setting and peers' presence (although in the presence of parents). Conversations with female informants at the household space did render a different register to that gathered in schools.

Finally, in order to give a broader background to the information elicited from particular participants, I conducted two small sociological surveys of the area/neighbourhood in which they live. In each location, I surveyed 60 households. For the survey, I elaborated a questionnaire designed to collect quantitative and qualitative information on four major topics: (1) family/community, (2) education, (3) employment/assets/income, and (4) migration. Surveys have helped me locate my informants within a wider socio-cultural context. In the family/community section I was particularly interested in tracing changes in family size and composition. The education section of the questionnaire was designed so as to collect the educational backgrounds of families across three generations. This has been the key in tracing changes and continuities of practices and ideas of education through time. This section also gathered data on school choices across gender. The employment/assets/income section of the survey gathered information about families' occupational backgrounds in the last three generations. It collected data on various socio-economic indicators such as reported monthly income, consumer assets, house ownership, and ownership of other properties. Similarly, the survey gathered information on household expenditure on education in the form of school/college fees, school/college 'donations', entrance coaching fees, and school tuition charges. Finally, in the migration

section of the questionnaire I collected data on periods of migration of household members.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter two explores the historical development of Ernakulam as a space of modernity from its colonial roots, to the post-independence era, and into its reimagining in the global era. I focus on the port as a way to illustrate the continuities and changes of the connection between Ernakulam and ideas of progress. The second part of this Chapter traces the development of schooling from the nineteenth century until present. It examines the social processes that went into making Kerala the most literate state in the Indian Union. Thus the chapter interrogates the dominant discourse on Kerala development, which depicts Kerala education as inclusive, and attributes the wide spread of schooling to the supposed progressive character of Malayali society. This chapter shows that rather than displacing caste hierarchies, education has complicated the ways in which caste and class continue to be entwined in contemporary Kerala.

Following the historical overview of education, Chapter three offers an in-depth account of the educational project of BVM, a highly reputed private higher secondary school in urban Kerala. This chapter looks at the particular kinds of ideal persons these schools aim to produce. In it I consider the skills, demeanours, subjectivities and aspirations that define this ideal person. By doing so, I fill the general lack of a detailed ethnographic enquiry into specific educational projects in Kerala.

Leaving the school environment and locating the enquiry of education from the perspective of the parents whose children attend BVM, Chapter four examines the educational strategies of families of disparate middle class backgrounds. In it I explore the relationship between parents as educators and schools and other formal institutions. What are parents' views on schooling? What do parents themselves 'teach', and through what practices? How are parents' 'teachings' in consonance or disaccord with the priorities or values of formal institutions? The chapter shows the ways in which parents converge in certain educational practices and discourses, and yet diverge in the level of uncertainties and anxieties experienced across class groups.

In the face of shared parenting practices and discourses, Chapter five explores the everyday experiences of a group of youth who attend BVM. It considers how difference of social and economic background gets translated into youth everyday peer-to-peer interactions inside and outside school. The chapter reveals that far from sharing a somewhat homogeneous experience, peer group interaction is a hierarchically structure field formed of distinctive peer groups and individuals engaged in exclusionary and inclusionary practices. This chapter demonstrate that interactions among peers are increasingly stratified according to particular kinds of cultural capital that are perceived to stand for an individual's or group of peers' 'global' competence.

Moving away from the city, the middle-class school and the families and youth brought together by it, Chapter six locates the enquiry of education on the perspectives of families from lower social strata. In particular, it explores the educational experiences and strategies of Latin Catholic families in an islet at the northern fringes of the city of Ernakulam. The main concern of this chapter is the rapid and very significant changes the construction of the bridge between the backwater area and the city has had on education. What I endeavour to document is how since the construction of the bridge schooling has become a means for the production of difference among the inhabitants of a backwater islet.

Having documented the educational scene at the fringes of the realm of urban middle-class life and the pursuit of professionalism and globalised competence, Chapter seven consists of a comparison between the projects and aspirations of a group of +1 and +2 youth in Kothad's HSS of Jesus and the final year students at BVM. It locates the enquiry of education in the analysis of youth's future projects and aspirations. To go about this, I looked at the ways in which they articulated idealised fantasies of the future as a projective method in the exploration of youth's lives.

Chapter 2: The Port-City, Education, and the Middle Class Idea

Introduction

As exemplified in a manuscript produced by the Centre for Studies in Culture and Heritage of Cochin, the twin cities of Cochin and Ernakulam[31] are being touted as 'truly today's symbol of Kerala's progress and promise of prosperity.' Aspirations to transform Ernakulam[32], the main site of this study, into a hub of global trade and tourism, and a rival to established South Indian *metros* are running high. Many of these dreams find anchor in a project aimed at turning the city's port into India's first transhipment container terminal. As I will show below, these linkages between notions of prosperity/modernity, Ernakulam and its port are not new. This chapter, which highlights how Ernakulam has long being characterised by an 'outward' orientation, explores the historical development of Ernakulam as a space of modernity from its colonial roots and its markedly Christian character, to the post-independence era, and into its reimagining in the global era. I focus on the port as a narrative thread as I explore the continuities and changes of the connection between Ernakulam and ideas of progress.

An exploration of ideas of progress and Ernakulam would never be complete without examining the actual sites where these ideas (of progress, modesty, and a strong critical appraisal of society's entrenched hierarchies) reached the people of present day Kerala: schools. The second part of this chapter traces the development of schooling from the nineteenth century until the present day. It examines the social processes that went into making Kerala the most literate state in the Indian Union. Central to this development this chapter shows that with education Kerala saw the emergence of the idea of the middle class, which (in principle) entailed the shift from traditional values and the ascribed basis of social hierarchy (Joshi 2010: xix) towards the privileging of achieved criteria: primarily education and employment as markers of power and status. By uncovering the uneven experiences and outcomes of education and middle classness along the axes of caste and

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[31] In this chapter I use the name Cochin in the first section to refer to the city-port at the centre of the kingdom of Cochin, one of the three major political units that constitute present-day Kerala together with the state of Travancore to the south and British Malabar to the north. In the rest of the thesis I refer to Ernakulam.

[32] As per the 2001 Census the urban agglomeration of Ernakulam/Cochin has a population of 1,355,972 people. It is the largest urban agglomeration in Kerala and the capital of the district (Ernakulam District) with the highest urban population in Kerala: 68 % (Government of Kerala 2010). Its literacy rate falls at around 95 %. As per the 2001 Census in the district Hindus are the largest religious group (1,444,994 people) followed by Christians (1,204,471 people) and Muslims (451,764).

religion, this chapter shows that rather than displacing caste hierarchies, education and the middle class idea have complicated and yet allow for the continuation of differences among social groups. In short, caste and class continue to be intertwined in contemporary Kerala. By uncovering this long and uneven history of education and its link to the middle class, this chapter builds a case against discontinuity represented by local critics of privatisation who argue that with liberalisation (from the 1990s onwards) there has been a new clean break in the provisioning of education from an inclusive state-sponsored education to an exclusive system. Going against the grain of the dominant rhetoric on Kerala, the chapter portrays schooling as site of continuous struggle, fragmentation, and hierarchy.

Ernakulam and its Port

The story of Ernakulam is best understood as the story of a port-city. With its port as its *raison d'être* and its main organising force Ernakulam, like most port-cities, possessed specific social, economic and physical characteristics and a distinct ethos derived from its maritime functions of exchange, enterprise and transport (Malekandathil 2001: 19). First, and perhaps the most important feature of a port-city is its specific economic relations with two marketing systems: the hinterland and the foreland. The relationship with the hinterland was of an extractive nature: the land of Cochin did not produce much of a significant commercial value (apart from coconuts), so its functioning as a commercial hub relied on carving out a link to large spice-producing territories in central Kerala (Malekandathil 2001: 42). The foreland (i.e. the overseas world) on the other hand was the city's horizon, towards which it oriented itself. Ernakulam looked and looks out through its shipping and trade links, as well as through the traffic of passengers (see *Map 4*). As such it is highly dependent on the stability of distant overseas worlds/markets. The flow of people, commodities, and technologies give the city its characteristic cosmopolitan ethos. Ernakulam has also agglutinated political power driven by the desire to gain from trade through taxes. For the colonists, the city became a 'cultural artifact' through which the extraction of wealth, territories and people overseas was made possible. One final feature is that of its particular social arrangement. Unlike the hinterland, the city's social stratification was not dominated by local Brahmins, who considered the endeavours of trade and commerce as impure.

The emergence of Cochin is attributed to the great floods of the river Periyar in 1341, forming a wide harbour that by the beginning of the fifteenth century began to be

frequented by merchant ships. Through the fifteenth century commercial activities were vibrant, especially between Cochin and China. In 1409 Chinese merchant Ma Huan wrote of ships from Arabia and Persia frequently casting anchor off Cochin port (Malekandathil 2001: 32). By the mid-fifteenth century, the port had been incorporated into the exchange systems of South East Asia as well as established trade activities with the Persian Gulf and the ports of the Red Sea. Christian and later Jewish merchants also shifted to Cochin. Around the port of Cochin developed an urban centre, which though it raised a serious challenge to the port of Calicut to the north, could not rise up to the level of the Zamorin's port all through the pre-Portuguese phase (Malekandathil 2001: 33). Overseas trade in the entire Indian Ocean region by the end of the fifteenth century

With the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, Cochin acquired a prime position as the economic and political centre of the Malabar Coast, not without continuous clashes with Calicut. This period of Portuguese domination was perhaps the most influential in Ernakulam's history, shaping to a large extent the character of the port-city. Cochin, it must be remembered, was never a territory conquered by the Portuguese, who built a seaborne empire based on inter-dependency with the hinterland and the king of Cochin. At sea two important features were introduced by the Portuguese. First, the Portuguese introduced the new Euro-Asian trade relations, different from the Asian trade routes dominated by Muslim merchants. The new trade route to Europe required a much larger investment and risk, but procured spectacular profit, which was ruthlessly protected at sea. Second, they introduced a system of permits that controlled the movement of native ships and merchants (Das Gupta 2001: 424). As the system gradually unfolded, trade declined in Calicut (Das Gupta 2001: 426). The Portuguese established control over the pepper trade inland and off the Malabar coast (Das Gupta 2001; Malekandathil 2001; Osella & Osella 2007).

In the hinterland, this was achieved through an expanding access to an increasing number of cultivators, mainly St. Thomas Christians. The Portuguese never actually controlled the hinterlands; these were integrated into the city of Cochin only insofar as they enjoyed some advantages, and had their interests protected (Malekandathil 2001: 286). In spite of some clashes between hinterlands and the Portuguese – mainly as a result of the price fixation by the Portuguese who under-priced commodities – it must be said that Christians often efficiently worked together in the extraction of produce. There was an equal synergy and

reciprocity between the king of Cochin and the Portuguese, as the former had a sense of indebtedness to the Portuguese for freeing them of the Zamorin. In the city, the rising Christian population (as a result of conversions, immigration, and the marriages between Portuguese and local women) and the great influence of the various church institutions gave Cochin/Ernakulam a distinctively Christian character, with these institutions acting as cohesive and integrating forces in the city. In the urban society of Cochin, the clergy took the top-most position in the social hierarchy, with the European clergy at the top followed by the local clergy. Among the 'common' people the social hierarchy was differentiated on the basis of religion (with Christians at the top), profession and the ownership of wealth. Ernakulam's Christian loyalties and its functioning as an international commercial port (Christian's mercantile and commercial spirit), gave the city its particular orientation to the outside world, very much alive today.

Subsequently, the Dutch East India Company began dispatching ships to compete with the mercantile economy of Portugal. Portuguese Cochin was conquered by the Dutch in 1663. Thus the synergic relationship between Cochin's locals and Portuguese disappeared. After winning their fight, the Dutch tried to keep alive the system of tariffs and the compulsory and exclusive delivery of pepper introduced by the Portuguese. However, their lack of naval policing and the increasing non-compliance of native merchants resulted in the breaking down of the trade system established by the Portuguese in the middle of the eighteenth century. With the effective establishment of the Dutch, Calicut experienced a revival, only as an export centre for local products and an entry point for goods from West Asia and North India (Das Gupta 2001; Osella & Osella 2007). By the end of the eighteenth century the Dutch abandoned Malabar, leaving the field to the British East India Company.

Map 4: Showing the relative position of Cochin to the Indian Ocean[33]

Although not in direct rule as in Malabar, the British Resident extended his tutelage over the kingdom of Cochin and the city's port by the turn of the nineteenth century. However, never before nor afterwards under the control of European powers, could the city of Cochin re-gain the commercial importance which it had acquired under the Portuguese (Malekandathil 2001: 283). During the British period Cochin was reduced to a rather insignificant satellite port-city, as the main British interest rested in Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta (Lemercinier & Rendel 1983; Malekandathil 2001). It was not until well into the twentieth century that the British saw the need to expand the port. In the 1920s Sir Robert Bristow led the transformation of the port into a modern port with a safe inner harbour. In 1928, the new port was completed, augmenting the value of the city to colonial rule and the value of port and the economic activities associated with it as one of the major economic pillars of the region. These developments also allowed Cochin to become an important military base. Since the 1930s the Southern Naval Command, a major unit of the Royal Indian Navy, has been based in Ernakulam's Wellington Island, where most of the Indian Navy's training programmes are carried out (Mani C.M. n.d.).

After Independence the port was taken over by the Government of India. At the heart of post-independence plans for state-owned and state-controlled economic growth laid

[33] Source: http://www.old-map-blog.com/2010/07/old-map-of-the-indian-ocean-19th-century/

stringent policies of import substitution pursued up until the mid-1980s. These entailed an elaborate system of tariffs, licenses and other regulations that kept most imports out, hence undermining the already peripheral trade in Cochin. After independence the shipbuilding industry received important incentives. In line with Nehru's socialist vision, development and progress was to come via large state-owned industrial complexes: dams, power plants, steel plants, and the large, modern cities to accompany them. In 1976 (quite late after independence though), the central government launched one of India's major public-sector undertakings[34] in the shipbuilding sector: the Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL). CSL, a landmark in the city, was one of the largest employers in the city and continues to act as a reference point in terms of employment and social mobility among various social groups.

The full-blown embrace of liberalisation reforms in the 1990s translated in a complete rethinking of post-independence Ernakulam/Kochi within the economic aspirations of India in the global era. Instead of large public sector industries, transport infrastructure – especially that directly affecting Indian exporters' competitiveness in the global market – became understood as the backbone of the nation's economy and the most critical elements of economic liberalization strategies of countries throughout the world (Government of Kerala 2010). Thus the Indian Government began to accord high priority to investment in sectors such as railways, power, ports and airports. Within this context, there has been an attempt to awaken Cochin from the commercial lethargy of the pre-liberalisation era, and to revive and re-imagine the port of Cochin and Ernakulam as a key player (before Bombay) in the terrain of international trade. Specifically, the 1990 saw the gradual development of a project to turn Cochin Port into a major hub in the Indian Ocean region. The new terminal – the Vallarpadam International Container Transhipment Terminal (ICTT) – was built to reduce India's dependence on neighbouring hub ports[35] to

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[34] The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 gave the government the right to start new enterprises in key sectors. Along with the CSL, other major public sector industries, such as Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Limited and Cochin Refineries Limited, developed around the border townships of Ernakulam/Kochi city. Other major industries established in and around Ernakulam/Kochi in the post-independence era were the Travancore Cochin Chemicals, Indian Aluminium Co., Hindustan Organics Ltd., Appollo Tyres, Binani Zinc Limited, Hindustan Machine Tools, and Indian Rare Earths Ltd. While centred in Ernakulam above all other cities in Kerala, industrialisation in the state has still been slow when compared to other states in the country. In spite of this, these public sector industries have played a major role in the city's development and an important source for employment. In addition to being the industrial centre of the state, Ernakualm/Kochi has also been an important military hub.

[35] So far India has relied on the hub port in Colombo, Sri Lanka. India's exporters and importers incur extra costs of at least Rs.1,000 crore a year on trans-shipment of containers via ports outside the country, according to the shipping ministry. In fact, India's traders pay an additional Rs.600 crore every year to ship their

haul container cargo. This time though, in line with the new neo-liberal vision, the state was no longer to take sole responsibility for this transformation. Government was now set to facilitate the work of a multinational company (Dubai Port World or DP World) signed to execute the project in what is known as a private-public partnership (PPP).

The huge ICTT project itself has had a tortuous and much slower than expected development, with bids from international companies discharged and new proposals written and rejected all through the 1990s. It was only in 2004 that the Cochin Port Trust announced an agreement with DP World[36] to operate the Rajiv Gandhi Container Terminal and to develop the International Container Transhipment Terminal at Vallarpadam Island. As per the PPP between the central government and DP World, the former was to invest nearly Rs 1,000 crore to develop the shipping channel, and both railway and road links connecting the terminal to the hinterland. The latter, now known as International Container Terminal (ICT) Road[37], is the 17.2 Km long link between the ship terminal and India's National Highway network connecting some of the most important cities of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

In spite of delays[38], by 2011 the ICTT became India's first hub port, raising great expectations about the development of the city. In addition, the last decade saw the emergence of Cochin as an important tourist destination for international luxury cruises. The port, in all of its dimensions, has become the axis of the post-liberalisation Kerala dream: achieving what is locally referred to as 'international standard'. In 2004, the government's magazine *Kerala Calling* wrote 'the possibilities are mind boggling and it suffices to point out the example of Singapore[39], which thrived to the status of a developed nation thanks mainly to its port'. This desire to 'become like Singapore', has already been used as a sort of aspirational reference in South Indian cities like Bangalore (Nisbett 2009).

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containers via Colombo alone (http://www.livemint.com/2011/05/23215132/Restrictive-law-inadequate-de.html).

[36] DP World is one of the world's leading operators of marine ports. It currently operates 49 terminals and a further 9 are under development across 31 countries. In India alone DP World operates 5 ports (Cochin, Mundra, Nhava Sheva, Chennai, Visakhapatnam), while one other, Kulpi, is under development.

[37] It is also known as NH 966A or the Vallarpadam-Kallamassery Road.

[38] There were important delays in the deepening of the channel as well as a result of the government's failure to dismiss some restrictive laws, remnants of post-independence India, that continue to limit foreign flag vessels to operate freely.

[39] The attempt to re-imagine Cochin/Ernakulam with reference to Singapore, and not Dubai for example, is an important element to consider. Even though Christians are not the majority, Cochin/Ernakulam is considered to be the Christian capital of Kerala. There has been an attempt to down play its historical link to native Muslims as well as it connections with Muslims merchant from overseas.

Like in Bangalore, middle-class and non-resident Indians[40] (NRI) are particularly keen in this desire to transform the city and to 'lift' it to 'international standards'. Among them, civic action initiatives to achieve this goal, mainly through campaigns aimed quite literally at cleaning the streets, and taking up 'proper' waste management (for the eyes of the globally connected middle-class and foreign visitors). During fieldwork there was a campaign dubbed 'Green Cochin' aimed at making city dwellers aware of the need to rid the city of rubbish. Even the neighbours of the middle-class residential area where I was staying formed a cooperative to teach residents how to separate home waste so as to recycle it, despite the lack of recycling facilities.

Simultaneously, the state government and the city's development authorities have been very keen in trying to keep up with developments in other areas of the economy, especially the IT industry. Since its inception in 2004, Ernakulam's IT park – Infopark Kerala – has been rapidly growing and has attracted investments from IT companies like Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, Affiliated Computer Services, OPI Global, IBS Software Services and US Technology. As Nisbett (2009) rightly noted, contemporary images of Ernakulam portray it as a serious rival to Bangalore as a place for ITES/BPO services, thanks to its large number of unemployed and highly educated English speaking graduates. Here too, expectations are flying high. A state government manuscript about the city reads: 'Cochin is poised for a big leap forward in all the sunrise industries such as Information Technology, Bio-Technology and Tourism, and also in areas like Multi Model Transport Linkages, IT Connectivity and Bandwidth Commercial Track Record' (Mani C.M. n.d.) This demonstrates the extent to which the IT industry dominates Indian ideas of progress, in which not just the phenomenal success of Indian software companies like Infosys Technologies, but also the everyday lives of the 'new-rich' middle class in urban India, i.e. the 'knowledge professionals' are envisaged as 'the engine that can drive India's takeoff and transform our country' (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007: 123). Many youth aspirations in Ernakulam are increasingly oriented towards gaining employment in the local IT park, but still creeping under the shadow of reputed 'metros' like Bangalore, Ernakulam's 'metro' status is still very much a matter of debate.

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[40] In legal terms NRI refers only to the tax status of an Indian citizen who, as per section 6 of the Income-tax Act of 1961, has not resided in India for a specified period for the purposes of the Income Tax Act. In everyday practices, as in this chapter, NRI refers to a citizen of India who has temporarily emigrated to another country generally for work and who stays abroad under circumstances indicating an intention for an uncertain duration of stay abroad.

There is a broader and more mundane dimension to the re-imagining of Cochin as Kerala's emergent metro. But if there is footing that grounds local images of Ernakulam as an emerging 'metro' of 'international standard', it is the growing choice of cafes, restaurants, bars, cinemas, shopping malls, supermarkets, and high-rise luxury apartment buildings. As I will show in the following section, private schools also attempt to project international standard. One of the areas that most clearly symbolises this new reputation, as well as the broader changes from post-independence to post-liberalisation Ernakulam, is the neighbourhood where I conducted the core of my research, the residential area known as Kumar Nagar (see *Map 5*). The now-crowded area of Kumar Nagar was once barren and muddy land where the first colonies in Ernakulam were built. In the mid-1970s, some of the earliest residents of the area remember taking their children to school through what they described as a swamp dotted with a few houses. In the late 1970s, Kumar Nagar was a purely residential area consisting of the 'lower income group' (LIG) colony and the Central Government Quarters (Cochin Shipyard Ltd., BSNL, and Navy quarters among a few). These were meant to house the military and the labour force of the city's public sector offices and industries. Soon the area gave way to 'middle' and 'high income' group housing colonies (MIG and HIG respectively), meant to accommodate professionals such as doctors, advocates and businessmen. As the city developed, the cost of land and housing rose sharply. Today, an LIG house costs around Rs. 22 lakh[41]. Most of them are no longer occupied by their original owners, and are now owned by high-income professionals. Kumar Nagar is now one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in the city. No longer a residential area alone, the neighbourhood now houses the offices of various private companies, banks, doctors, advocates, consultants, beauty salons, expensive cafes, as well as the regional passport office. In addition the neighbourhood houses a rapidly increasing number of gated apartment complexes. Many of these are constructed by Kerala's number one building company, Skyline, whose slogan 'the address says it all' appeals to many of the area's growing middle class population. BVM, the school where I conducted a large portion of the research, is located in the heart of this neighbourhood.

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[41] A lakh is a unit in the South Asian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand. In 2012, a lakh is approximately 1,150 GBP.

Map 5: Aerial view of Kumar Nagar

Kothad

Mulavukad, Kadamakkudi, Cheranellur, Kumbalangi, Edakochi, and Vallarpadam are some of the islands that dot the backwaters surrounding Ernakulam city (see *Map 6*). These low and swampy islands, formed by the deposit of alluvium brought down by the rivers during the monsoons, have favoured the growth of coconut palms and pokily rice. In the last decades the local economy has benefited from the emergence of prawn fishing as a lucrative business. Kothad, the second site of this study, is the main village of the Kadamakkudi *grama panchayat*[42], concentrating the majority of its 21,000 inhabitants. The population in Kothad belongs mostly to the Latin Catholic (inland) fishing community, with the exception of a few low-caste Hindu fishing families. A number of studies have shown how fishing communities have remained separate from the mainstream population socially and geographically, reproducing inequality and marginalisation of the fisherfolk over time[43] (George & Domi 2002: 16; Hoeppe 2007; Klausen 1968; Ram 1991). In the realm of education, a field that has been the hallmark of dominant accounts of Kerala's social advancement, fishing communities also lag behind as a result of a number of

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[42] This is a local self-government unit at the village or small town level. Kadamakkudi *panchayath* is in itself divided into three residential villages or *karas*, which are also three different islets: Moolampalli, Pizhala, and Kothad (Klausen 1968: 69). Grama panchayats constitute larger bloc panchayats. Multiple bloc panchayats in turn form district panchayats. The Kadamakkudi, Cheranalloor, and the Trikkakara grama panchayats constitute the Edappalli bloc panchayat.

[43] In *Learning to Leave: the irony of schooling in a costal community*, Michel Corbett (2007) observes how similar marginalisation patterns affect a fishing community in Nova Scotia, in Atlantic Canada.

constraints such as family background, income, and inadequacy of political mobilisation. Government reports also show how the percentage of population below poverty is higher in the coastal areas, where fisherfolk constitute a major share of the population (Government of Kerala 2010). Kothad, laying so close to the state's main economic node, is no exception to these trends. However, as I will show in Chapter 6, these exclusionary trends have been transformed as a result of the construction of the ICT Road. Instead of undermining a long history of marginalisation, the opening of Kothad to Ernakulam city via the ICT Road has entailed for the majority in Kothad a more entrenched feeling of alienation as the disparities between the globally focused middle classes and elites and their impoverished neighbours at the margins become in fact the norm (Nisbett 2009). The second school where I conducted field research is located in the islet of Kothad.

Map 6: Showing the relative position of Kothad to Ernakulam city[44]

Education and the Middle Classes in Kerala

The kingdom of Cochin saw the first 'western' style educational institutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At that time importance was only given to the improvement of seminary education with a view to producing better priests (Malekandathil 2001: 87). In 1558, the city of Cochin's first college, Madre de Deu College, had 300 seminarists aspiring for priesthood (Malekandathil 2001: 87). The expansion of modern school education as it is

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[44] Source: Google maps.

known in Kerala today though began only in the nineteenth century, when present day Kerala was constituted by three major political units: the District of Malabar of British India, and the states of Cochin and Travancore (Tiruvitamkoor). What follows, traces the development of education firstly in the states of Cochin and Travancore[45], and after independence and the absorption of Travancore-Cochin and British Malabar into the Indian Union, in Kerala as a whole.

In Travancore-Cochin the emergence of schooling was speared by Protestant missionaries, and latter Latin Catholics who first built schools attached to their missions. In early nineteenth century Travancore the first English schools were opened by Reverend Tobias Ringeltaube, a London Mission Society (LMS) missionary in Nagercoil. In 1816, the Church Mission Society (CMS) of London opened a college in Kottayam, the first of its kind (Mathew 1989: 35). In Kunumkulumcurray, a large town near Cochin, there were an English school, five vernacular schools for boys, and one for girls attached to a Protestant mission in 1856 (Day 1863). From the part of the government of Travancore (and later Cochin), then under the heavy tutelage of the British Residents, the year of 1817 saw the first steps towards the opening of government schools as means to make 'better subjects and public servants, and to advance the reputation of the state' (excerpt from the 1817 decree in Tharakan 1984: 1917). This entailed a departure from earlier educational policy by which royal or governmental support for education was primarily for centres of higher learning education and not for primary schools (Tharakan 1984: 1918). However, while the 1817 decree (in Travancore) ordered the creation of primary schools in all villages, and the obligation of attendance of all children from five to ten years of age (Lemercinier & Rendel 1983: 172), government schools, which were few at first, were strictly for children of the upper castes (Mathew 1989: 35). Missionary schools welcomed children of the lower castes but many faced problems recruiting children from lower castes as a result of ideas of pollution, which forbade any sort of contact between them and upper-caste pupils (Lemercinier & Rendel 1983). By 1860 there were many English and Malayalam schools throughout Travancore and Cochin. In the administrative report of Travancore (1863-1864) though, no Ezhava student figures (Mathew 1989: 35).

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[45] It must be noted here than in matters of education Cochin always followed the lead of the larger state of Travancore. Educational policies in the latter were almost always followed by similar moves in Cochin.

With education, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of an important modernising project that would transform the social landscape of Travancore-Cochin: the middle class project. This is not to say that before the nineteenth century there were no middle classes. There were indeed. But nineteenth century Kerala saw the emergence of the middle class idea as a self conscious crafting of the self (Joshi 2010). Here the middle class idea is better understood as 'the product of a group of people sharing a social and economic background who became the producers and products of a new cultural politics'[46] (Joshi 2010: xviii). This entailed the move away from ascribed criteria of power and status to the privileging of achieved criteria, primarily education and employment as markers of power and status. In practice this was only to an limited extent for these new criteria were deployed to ensure equality among upper castes and exclude lower castes (Jeffrey 1976). But for the first time, the belief in social mobility via the newly introduced idea of competence (largely the product of one's education), and no longer on social group membership, began to be circulated. This was to a large extent the result of the spread of education itself, through which the value of education, new notions of modesty, and a strong critical appraisal of local society and its entrenched hierarchies reached and were then reproduced by those privileged sections of the population[47] who already had accessed to English education (Devika 2007). Influenced by the progressive role attributed to the middle class in British history, Tamil Brahmins[48] in Kerala were the first group who accessed the English education and employment that allowed them to consciously re-articulate themselves as middle class, effectively transforming the basis for social hierarchy (Joshi 2010: xxi; Lemercinier & Rendel 1983: 172). This idea though, took longer to reach the bulk of the population, who were still marginal to the quest for English education.

In the second half of the nineteenth century land was the main factor of production and a primary determinant of social status and political power. Trade and business were also significant economic activities, primarily in port-cities like Cochin, which saw the sharp rise

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[46] This cultural politics allows them to articulate of a new set of values, beliefs, practices, and modes of politics that distinguished them from the upper and lower order of society and to put forward a moral superiority above both (Joshi 2010).

[47] As Joshi rightly notes, the middle class in colonial India was not a social group that could be classified as occupying a median position in terms of standard of sociological indicators like occupation, income or status (xviii). There is no doubt that they were from the upper echelons of society. Most of them were male, upper caste Hindus, or other such high-status group, and many, like Nayars, came from so-called 'service communities', that is, from families and social groups who had traditionally served in the courts of indigenous rulers and large landlords. In Kerala, Tamil Brahmins quickly entered the new roles being opened up and became part of the middle class project.

[48] In nineteenth century Travancore they held most posts in government service (Mathew 1989: 24).

in the price of cash crops paving the expansion of trade and commerce towards the close of the century (Mathew 1989: 33). Yet government jobs (to which unlike the other two access depended on education) had an increasing attraction as a source of power and status. The ever-increasing functions of the colonial administration in the latter part of the nineteenth century saw an increase in the number of government jobs available. The expansion of the judiciary, revenue, police, and public works required the recruitment of local personnel to take up posts in various state offices[49] (Lemercinier & Rendel 1983; Tharakan 1984). There was what seemed like a rising glamour about government jobs in urban areas, but even a lower post like that of *pravarthikar* (village revenue office) was coveted (Mathew 1989: 40). The value of education gradually gained momentum among the population aspiring for civil service. Access to education and government offices then, seen as modern instruments to achieve status and power, became the focal point of struggle for educated young men of privileged religious and caste communities. In 1891 Travancore saw a political agitation on the question of sharing government jobs. As Mathew (1989) notes, the central theme in the final decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was one of competing demands for education and larger representation in government office (as well as control over land).

However, demands for a larger share of the resources and power of the state were mobilised as competing communal claims between the Syrian Christian, Nair, and Ezhava communities[50] (the most numerous groups in Kerala), all articulated in terms of religious/caste struggles (Mathew 1989). As a result, the struggle for English education was far from a shared experience. Indeed the struggle for education and employment in the early twentieth century had various points of departure with access to different resources, and dissimilar impacts on those communities and the people within them. Access to education, and especially to English education, and the concomitant capacity to turn those qualifications into real outcomes, that is access to 'educational freedoms' (Jeffrey et al. 2008) have thus varied widely across communities[51] despite the extraordinary breadth of

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[49] In 1818 in Cochin, the government established 33 vernacular schools, at the instance of the British Resident, with the 'avowed' object of training young men for state service as writers and accountants (Tharakan 1984: 1918).

[50] Other religious or caste communities (e.g. the Latin Catholic) were at first marginal to this struggle. Muslims became participants in this contest for power and status after Kerala was formed in 1956 (Mathew 1989: 22). These are the so called social reform movements of early twentieth century Kerala.

[51] For example, for Ezhavas jobs in the colonial administration were an illusory objective for these were reserved to caste Hindus. Lemercinier & Rendel note that even in 1920, 3,800 out of 4,000 officials of the revenue department of Travancore were Caste Hindus (1983: 195).

schooling achieved in the state. In other words, while education has been seen as a modernising tool able to displace social difference according to caste/religion, it has in many ways acted as a key site for the maintenance of social difference with a shift from direct to 'mediated' reproduction (Jeffery et al. 2007: 444). This aspect of education, largely overlooked by local analysts, is what this thesis aims to explore. Let us briefly consider the educational claims of Nairs, Syrian Christians and Ezhavas.

Near the end of nineteenth century Kerala, Syrian Christians occupied a high social position roughly at par with the Nairs (Mathew 1989: 29). They owned land and were active in trade and commerce. Christians, by reason of religious allegiance, had early access to missionary schools and had become successful at finding employment and doing business with British companies (Osella & Osella 2000: 140). Christian schools became so popular that opening a school became a profitable economic niche for Christians. Up until the nineteenth century, Nairs had always had a high social position, just below Brahmins in the ritual rank. Their status and honour was linked to the fact that they belonged to the militia of Travancore attached to feudal nobles (Mathew 1989). The second half of the nineteenth century though, saw the decline of the matrilineal joint-families of Nairs as a result of drastic economic, legal and educational changes (Jeffrey 1976). The increasing trading monopoly of the East India Company (EIC), and the rigid legal interpretation of previously flexible land custom meant that Nairs began to lose hold on the land, which began to pass to the hand of increasingly prosperous Syrian Christians[52] (Jeffrey 1976). Simultaneously, the link between educational qualifications and employment in the government service propelled Nairs into schools and led them to challenge the control of Tamil Brahmin officials. Yet by the mid nineteenth century there were numerous Nair government officials and petty officials. Their power and status as relative to that of Tamil Brahmins, who at the turn of the twentieth century held most key posts in government, seemed to have eroded (Jeffrey 1976; Mathew 1989). They attempted to overcome this lost ground by boosting their class status and following Christians into English-medium, and other 'Christianised' practices, such as entering technical and professional occupations, migration and high consumption (Osella & Osella 2000: 244).

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[52] Syrian Christians involved themselves in large scale agricultural and commercial projects through which they acquired more power than the Nairs and their small-landholding joint families (Jeffrey 1976; Lemercinier & Rendel 1983).

Ezhavas were in a less privileged position. Most of them were engaged in agriculture and some were specialist in Ayurvedic medicine, Sanskrit and weaving. By the end of the nineteenth century, Ezhavas were virtually excluded from government jobs and admission to village and district schools was difficult. Some individuals, among them the community leaders, had achieved good economic standing as a result of early access to English education and their engagement in trade, but this was not commensurable with their social status, as they remained the object of caste-based discrimination. While access to English education and employment were the central concerns of the leaders, their first goal was the removal of disabilities arising from untouchability (Mathew 1989; Osella & Osella 2000). This removal, it was assumed, follow from the suppression of pollution codes and symbols of social inferiority[53]. At the turn of the twentieth century, both Nairs and Ezhavas had the construction of schools and colleges at the top of their priorities (Osella & Osella 2000; Tharakan 1984).

Within the twenty-first century economy of paid employment and migration, most graduates and professionals are Nair or Christian, as are most of those who can speak English, the prestige language, confidently (Osella & Osella 2000). Their transition to the new kinds of social, economic and political roles that emerged in colonial Kerala has been to a large extent smooth. With independence and the absorption of Travancore-Cochin and British Malabar into the Indian Union, Christians and Nairs have found good employment opportunities outside the state and later outside India, sealing in these communities' collective imagination the middle class idea of power and status through education and economic success (Osella & Osella 2000). At present, Nairs and Christians are perceived as unequivocally middle class and in possession of prestige and wealth.

For less privileged communities the outcomes have been different. Recent work has shown that communities like Ezhavas or Latin Catholics in recent decades have sought to improve their position via education, employment, politics, migration, and marriage. At the same time, they have remained weighed by material disadvantage and overwhelmingly negative caste stereotypes, coded as 'qualities' and 'natures' characteristic of the various independent and tendentially equal 'communities' competing for power and wealth within society (Osella & Osella 2000: 235). Scheduled Castes, such as Pulayas and Parayans also sought to

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[53] For example, being able to enter temples.

improve their position via education and conversion to Christianity especially during the period 1891-1911. For Pulayas, while education appeared to have helped the intensification of a distinctive caste-based communal identity, they continued to suffer severe economic and cultural disadvantage and discrimination (Oomen 2007). Without a doubt, at present many upwardly mobile individuals or families of lower status groups (Ezhavas, Latin Catholics or Muslims) who had received a systematic education may be joining the 'new' India middle class, gaining access to the amenities of middle-class life and coming elbow to elbow with their high status Christians and Nair neighbours. Yet as groups, they continue to be trapped as a result of their overall material situation, the resource available to them, and the 'inadequate' qualities attributed to them. Thus for them the promises of the middle class ideal (e.g. that education leads to employment, which in turn leads to economic success) continue to yield contradictory material outcomes.

For Latin Catholics in Ernakulam there has been a marked difference between those in the mainland and the Latin Catholic fishing communities in the backwaters along the city's northern edge. In the mainland, many have managed to improve their position via education and employment, entering the rising middle classes. By late nineteenth century Ernakulam, the Latin Catholic Archdiocese that catered to this community opened two major schools: St. Teresa's (girls) School (est. 1887) and St. Albert's (boys) school (est. 1892). These institutions developed into reputed colleges. In the meantime, the Latin Catholic fishing community at the city's fringes continued to be excluded. As I will show in Chapter 6, the schools that catered to these peripheral communities were poorly served by the archdiocese and developed at a very slow pace compared to their urban counterparts. The Catholic Church failed to provide the fishing community room for its members to emerge as socio political leaders (George & Domi 2002: 12).

Schooling in Twentieth Century Kerala

Amidst the competing demand for education between communities a schooling landscape emerged, bearing the different communal identities and inequalities characteristic of disparate struggles. At the same time, the extent of the spread of education in the twentieth century speaks of how, through the expansion of education the middle-class norm (or dream) came to be universalised, reaching all sections of society. The spread of education became a central part to the states' self-attributed progressive character, which is

reproduced through the dominant nationalist rhetoric of Kerala: the so-called Kerala model (Baby & Pillai 2008; Chakraborty 2005; Kumar & George 2009).

Christian missionary involvement in education as well as the struggles and rising demand for education of the various social groups have made Kerala the most literate state in India. By the start of the twentieth century Christian schools dominated the field of education. Together with schools opened by the Nair Service Society and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) schools, the schooling offered in Kerala was dominated by private schools (Tharakan 1984: 1913). As the demand for education increased dramatically and the lower castes began to flock towards primary schools, missionary schools increased their control on the system at the start of the century. The government too contributed to the expansion of education as it took a series of steps trying to curb Christian domination of the system for over half a century. In 1904 the state of Travancore established free primary education (Aiya 1906: 495), and in 1909 it granted admission to lower castes into government schools (Oomen 2007). In Cochin fees were abolished for backward class students in 1909 (Jeffrey 1992: 61). Spurred by the overwhelming demand for education both the Travancore and Cochin governments turned to vernacular (Malayalam) primary schooling as the primary means for the 'instruction of the masses'[54] (Aiya 1906: 478). Travancore-Cochin also intervened in the private sector through the introduction of its grant-in-aid[55] system to already existing and new vernacular private schools as a mechanism to encourage the formation of and a way to gain control over the work of private schools. Many private schools became aided schools[56], through which vernacular education rapidly penetrated the bulk of the population. Male and female literacy in Cochin went from 18 percent in 1891 to 45.8 per cent in 1951 (Jeffrey 1992: 57). By the 1940s most families had at least one child at school and the number of schools continued to grow. By 1951, as demand and democratic pressures increased, more money was invested in schools. The educational landscape of the twentieth century was one marked by the competition of the state and private sector. The latter in turn housed all the different community identities, dominated by schools of the various Christian denominations. Education became

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[54] The Travancore government recognised though a de facto dual education system constituted by higher and English education for a minority and vernacular primary and 'a system of technical or industrial education for the masses, for whom 'it is desirable that at least the elements of education should be made familiar to them' (Aiya 1906: 478).
[55] This was a system by which private schools would receive financial aid if they met the state criteria on teachers' qualifications, curriculum, and books used. It sought to standardise schooling in the state.
[56] These are government-funded schools with private managements.

instrumental to the use of ethnic identity in organisations and politics, and to people's tendency to see themselves as members of ethnic blocs (Jeffrey 1992: 63).

The expansion of literacy, schooling, and the rise in demand for education in Kerala continued after independence. By 1981 literacy in Ernakulam district had reached 76.8%, higher than the Kerala average at around seventy per cent, which in turn nearly doubled the national average. Efforts towards augmenting literacy continued after the 1980s. The National Literacy Mission launched a project in 1981 that sought to tackle the residual illiterate population in the district. The pilot project became a 'model' for the Total Literacy Campaign in many districts in Kerala and across India (Tharakan 2004: 48). The successes that came out of this campaign made Kerala's reputation as an educational model even larger. And Ernakulam became the model within a model when, on February 1990, it was touted the first district in the state and the nation to claim total literacy[57] (Tharakan 2004). Literacy in present day Ernakulam is estimated at 95.68 percent (Government of Kerala 2010). However, for the majority, education increasingly failed to translate in the promised reward as unemployment grew in the state[58]. While (primary) education had reached every corner of the state, there were still entrenched inequalities within the system (between, for example English and Malayalam education, or between a Christian and an SNDP school), which continue to make education an overwhelmingly positive resource for privileged groups and a contradictory resource for less privileged ones.

The dominant accounts of Kerala development –the mainstream literature known as the 'Kerala Model' literature– has tended to glorify education in Kerala as 'inclusive' and 'liberating'. Accounts of the glorious achievement of an inclusive, highly subsidized, state-led education system are deployed to explain the broad scenario of total literacy, marginal rural-urban and gender difference in literacy, low drop-out rates, and easy access to educational institutions in a somewhat poor state (Kumar & George 2009). These accounts that hype the 'decisive' role of an 'enlightened' princely or state government[59] (Baby &

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[57] See explanation of 'total literacy' on page 29.

[58] Kerala's ever growing unemployment is the highest in the country. 'It is not only about educational unemployment of the general category but it is also unemployment of skilled, professional, semi skilled, and unskilled workers. One important feature of the Kerala economy is the out-migration of labour force particularly to Gulf region and inflow of huge remittances into the State (Government of Kerala 2010).

[59] The education sector in Kerala has to a large extent been a state-financed system, either through government schools or through liberal grants-in-aid to private agencies. This phenomenon, however, must be located within a context in which the state apparatus (with the exception of industries like the coir industry) was the main source of resources and driver of the state economy. Thus it was in the interest of religious and

Pillai 2008), gloss over the fact that high educational achievements have failed to deliver equal outcomes across social groups and that high levels of education among Malayalees is largely a response to rampant unemployment. Yet, the 'Model' discourse continues to animate much of what it is written and thought about Kerala (Devika 2007: 11). This thesis will demonstrate this point by examining the lives of youth in two different schools.

There have been a number of local studies that show the ways in which less privileged groups have been largely left out of the economic and social development in Kerala. For example, shattering the image of Kerala as a development model, a local study by George and Domi (2002) shows how state achievements in social sectors, particularly education, have failed to benefit three sections of Malayali society: the tribesfolk, the fisherfolk, and the floating Tamil population. This is manifest in the high dropout levels and low achievement levels among children in the fishing communities. In Poovar, the village where their study was undertaken, dropout rates were 41.44 and 36.95 percent for girls and boys respectively, while the state figures approached the one per cent (Government of Kerala 2010). In conclusion, the development of education in the state has not entailed a clean break from the social order of 'old' Kerala nor a relatively recent achievement in the field of 'human development'. Rather than being an all inclusive system and the pillar for a new modern, class-based society, education in Kerala has been a primordial site for the (re)production of caste/religious hierarchies and its entanglement with class (Béteille 1991; Osella & Osella 2000).

Resurgence of Self-financed Schools

The 1980s, the decade in which Ernakulam began to experience an impulse as a result of the launching of large public industries, saw the establishment of new private English-medium schools[60]. These schools, referred to as (private) unaided schools, did not seek to corner resources from the state, but from students themselves. They catered to the demands (and the diverse economic capabilities) of an expanding sector of the population, now formed not just of public sector functionaries and business people, but also of the

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community organisation, the main driver of educational demand and supply in the state, to secure funding from the state in order to attend to the educational demands of their communities.

[60] Chinmaya Vydiala, Brahmacharya Vydia Mandir.

professional, skilled, and semi-skilled personnel at the embryonic public sector industries[61] in and around Ernakulam, as well as migrant workers in Gulf countries. These families, almost entirely from high status groups, were willing to quit *state* funded education, and embraced private (English language) schooling as a route to create social difference and to further enhance their status.

This willingness is not an entirely new practice. Before the grant-in-aid system was rolled out, fees and resources to maintain and start schools and colleges were mobilised from families and within communities (Kumar & George 2009: 13). In Travancore there is a long history of families' willingness to pay for their children's education. In 1904, the British Resident did not seem fully convinced by the free primary education policy being introduced in Travancore when he wrote that 'judging from its past history, Travancoreans are willing to pay for the education of their children, at least of their sons, and I do not see why primary education should now be given free' (Aiya 1906: 444). As education became widespread across social groups, the opening of these schools allowed the resurgence of this practice, which became in turn instrumental to the desire of privileged families and communities to maintain a distance from lower status groups.

Schooling in the Era of Liberalisation

While the vast majority of people in Kerala continue to attend either aided or government schools, from the 1990s onward there has been a sharp increase in the number of unaided schools opened and, of course, in the number of families who opted out of the state-funded sector. In Ernakulam even Christian establishments who have been running some of the city's first aided schools have started new unaided schools in campuses side-by-side to their old institutions. The number of annual entrants in unaided schools has been increasing steadily since the early 1980s while there is a steady decrease in the number of overall entrants as a result of a decrease in the number of children due to low birth rates[62] (Nambuthiri 2004). *Table 1* indicates the growth in the number of recognised unaided schools vis-à-vis government and aided schools in Kerala during the period of 1991 to 2009-10.

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[61] Gulf migration, land reform, and the growth of commercial agriculture have also contributed to the growth of the middle classes (Kumar & George 2009).

[62] In 2008-09, 45.46 lakh students were enrolled in schools in the state. In 2010-11 this was reduced to 43.51 lakh students (Government of Kerala 2010).

Table 1: Government and Private aided schools in Kerala in 1990-91 and 2009-10

Category	1990-91			2009-10		
	Government	Private Aided	Recognised unaided	Government	Private Aided	Recognised unaided
High School	961	1380	111	1006	1429	379
Upper primary school	960	1883	72	953	1870	217
Lower Primary School	2565	4068	134	2542	3979	267
Total	4486	7331	317	4501	7278	863

Source: *Recognised Unaided Schools in Kerala Report 2010*

In addition to the number of recognised unaided schools, which rose from 1.6 per cent of the total number of schools in 1980-81 to 6.83 per cent in 2009-2010, there are schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Council of Secondary Education (ICSE), as well as schools that are not recognised by any central or state agency. Thus the share of the unaided sector in the state's school education system is more than what is shown in *Table 1*, and accounts for more than a quarter of the total number of schools in the state (Kumar & George 2009: 6). As in other Indian states, this phenomenon is linked to the middle classes who are increasingly withdrawing their children from aided and government schools and using their rising incomes to pay for their children's schooling (Jeffery et al. 2005: 59). This substantial growth of unaided schools is a reflection of their capacity to meet the private cost of education. This capacity has been growing rapidly in Kerala since the end of the 1980s. The state is no longer a relatively poor state; it has been experiencing more than fairly good growth due to the expansion of job markets both within the country and abroad, and the increasing inflow of remittances (Chakraborty 2005; Kumar & George 2009). *Figure* 1 compares the growth of per capita

state domestic product with reference to the growth of national per capita income[63]. Increasing private expenditure has, complemented a decreasing share of public expenditure on education[64].

Fig. 1: Per Capita Income at Constant (2004-2005) Prices
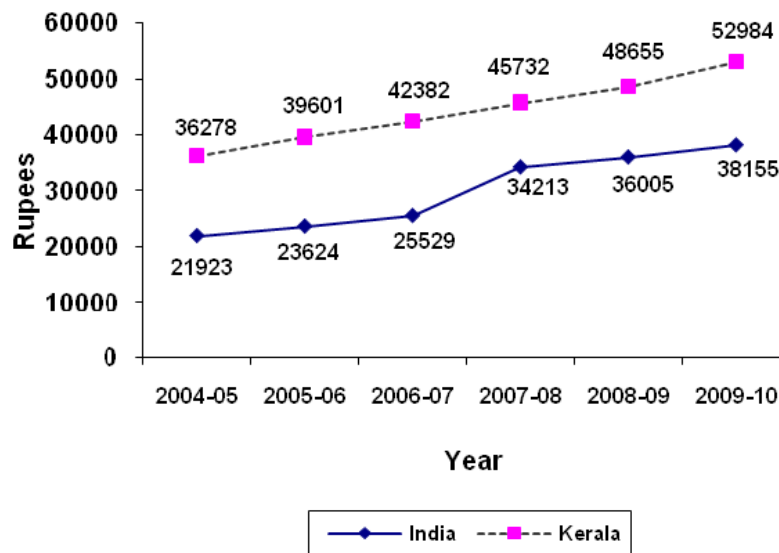
Source: *Recognised Unaided Schools in Kerala Report 2010*

In the context of economic recovery, accompanied by the state's gradual rollback from education, and an increasing middle-class purchasing power, the value of education as a precious economic resource grew too. Private managements from religious groups, community organisations, and other educational trusts no longer had the need to resort to the state as a source of funding. This could be sought after in the wallets of middle class families eager to offer their children an education other than that funded by the state.

Apart from the cost of unaided schools, there is a much broader increase in the private cost[65] of education since the 1990s. Local studies have demonstrated how even within the aided and government sector, where students do not have to pay fees, students have to incur cost of various types like 'special fees', examination fees, cost of reading and writing

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[63] These changes can also be seen in the large proportion of households owning luxury commodity items, the proportion of which is larger in Kerala than in the country as a whole (Kumar & George 2009: 11). It is important to note that in 1990, Kerala per capita state income was lower than the national income.

[64] Government expenditure in education experience a substantial reduction from 27.4% during the Fifth Plan period to 18.6% during the five-year period ended in 2006-07 (Kumar & George 2009).

[65] This is the part of the investment in education which is made either by the student or the parent or both (Nambuthiri 2004).

material, clothing travelling, study tours, donations to PTS (Nambuthiri 2004). Moreover, the proportion of household spending in extra coaching and private tuitions has been on the rise. In addition, there has been a rapid growth of self-financing colleges, institutions in the higher education and the technical education sector. Most of the highly sought after job oriented courses like engineering, medicine, nursing and management are now in the self-financing sector (Kumar & George 2009).

Educational Landscape at Present: against break narratives

The growth of the unaided sector has quickly been read by supporters of the 'Model' view, as a drastic shift in Kerala's education system from an inclusive and state-led one to an exclusive and commercialised one (Kumar & George 2009). They argue that 'at present the education sector as a whole in the State is characterised by the existence of a dual system: one segment comprising high-quality institutions catering to the affluent five percent of the population and the second consisting of low quality institutions meant for the masses' (Salim 2004: 15). Moreover, they argue that the rise of the unaided sector can be traced partly to the emergence of a *new* middle class in the state (Kumar & George 2009) as if the Indian middle class became significant only about two decades ago. But, as Devika warns, these dominant accounts tend to emphasise discontinuity, as though a more or less 'clean break' was made with the glorious past (Devika 2007: 20). As a result, they fail to grasp the ways in which the current face of the education system, in particular schooling, is a reflection of a long history that has involved the continuation and the emergence of new sets of ideas, institutions, possibilities, agencies, constraints and hierarchies. Specifically, these accounts overlook the large continuities that shape the education system and the role of the middle classes (and the middle class idea) by emphasising a simplistic account of change.

In present day Ernakulam and Kerala, each school is affiliated to the Kerala State Education Board, the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE), or the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE). English is the language of instruction in most private schools, while government run schools offer English or Malayalam as the medium of instruction. School education has a 10 + 2 structure. The first ten years of basic education are divided into four years of lower primary (Standards I-IV), three years of upper primary (V-VII), three years of secondary school (VIII-X). Secondary school is followed by two years of Higher Secondary School (HSS), the focus of this doctoral thesis.

Schools are classified into three management categories: government, private aided[66] and (private) unaided. The latter have sprung up all over the city. They are very visible with school buses travelling through the city.

More than a shift from inclusive to exclusive (as local analysts suggest) the growth of the unaided sector has entailed a further stratification and fragmentation of education, which has long been unproblematic for some and highly contradictory for other sectors of society[67]. For economically and culturally disadvantaged families, the mushrooming of private schools may result in a more entrenched sense of exclusion as families in a better economic standing around them flock to coveted private schools, now seen as garnering greater prestige and opportunity Their dreams of social and economic mobility via education become more elusive. For other families the unaided system may entail a chance to transform economic capital into more durable cultural capital and to expose their children to the values and behaviours of the dominant, potentially transforming their very habitus while providing social connections which they can later mobilise (Baviskar & Ray 2011; Bourdieu 1984). At the very least, private English medium education may serve as a means to produce new forms of social distinction and status in the local context. For the elites the expansion of the private sector has entailed the fortressing of education as a site to defend and advance their privilege by buying the most expensive/exclusive variety of unaided education. In short, the rise of the unaided sector has entailed new constraints, possibilities, agencies and hierarchies. In other words, privatisation has entailed an intensification of education's role as a mediator of social difference.

One has to concede that the recent rise of the unaided sector is undeniably linked to the post-liberalisation expansion of the middle classes. Yet by emphasising the 'new-ness' of the middle class and the 'sharp-ness' of the supposed 'shift' dominant accounts fail to observe the long history of the link between education and the middle class project, and that the rise of the unaided sector has been nothing but a gradual resurgence, a process in which the state is implicated. The state is implicated in the growth of the unaided sector at least in two ways. First, the gradual reduction of government expenditure has, like in other Indian states, created the space in which the private sector has expanded (Jeffery et al.

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[66] See footnote on page 3 for explanation of school division according to administration.

[67] Recent work in Uttar Pradesh has also shown how the gradual privatisation of the educational sector after liberalisation has accelerated patters of exclusion among less privileged social groups (Jeffery et al. 2007: 446)

2007: 444). Second, the state is partly responsible for the gradual growth of a more affluent sector of the population via, for example, career opportunities in public sector industries in the decades preceding liberalisation. Salaried jobs in government undertakings like the Cochin Shipyard enable families to spend money in education for the first time. Liberalisation has without a doubt accelerated the expansion and diversification of the number of families who have acquired levels of income and consumption that are typically thought as middle class (De Neve 2011). However, as a large number of studies on the middle classes in liberalised India indicate, there has been a gradual shift from the state apparatus/industry to the private sector (IT, garment industry) as paths to social mobility. In short, the present state of the unaided sector is nothing more than a reflection of the fact that a more robust, politically influential and vocal sector of the population have managed to become producers and products of the beliefs, values, lifestyles and practices central to the middle class and neoliberal projects (Donner & De Neve 2011).

Another misleading effect of local critics towards the rise of the unaided sector is that it is portrayed as a more or less monolithic system, in quality and cost, pitted against the aided/government system. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the unaided sector is not homogeneous. On the contrary, it is highly fragmented and stratified, complicating even further the long displayed diversity among educational institutions in the state. In terms of cost, for example, many schools in the unaided sector charge fees affordable to a large section of the population, at around Rs. 15,000 per year (at the HSS level). Others (a minority) on the other hand, charge fees many times that amount, affordable only to the upper social strata. This wide spectrum of cost reflects the wide range of financial capabilities characteristic of the so called middle class. As I will further elaborate throughout the thesis, the reputation of schools in the unaided sector also varies widely. Some schools' reputation is limited to the immediate vicinity localised, being known and sought after by people in the areas surrounding the school. Others have built a roaring reputation that is heard across the city and perhaps beyond. Ernakulam has become known as a city that houses some of the most prestigious (and more expensive) private schools in the state. Like their aided counterparts, the ideological orientation of these schools is varied. The names of the schools and the religious or caste membership of the managements or educational trusts to which they are affiliated speak of each school's orientation.

As with the aided education sector of the twentieth century[68], the private sector which grew after liberalisation is markedly shaped by religious affiliation. The sector also features a strong Christian presence. Some of these Christian schools have been established directly by churches which already run established schools in the public sector (aided), who seek to capture the growing private market. That is the case, for example, of Sacred Heart Public School, which opened next to the campus of the more than a hundred year old Sacred Heart School. This shift, which had only being carried out by well established Syrian Christian schools and not by Latin Catholic schools, often entailed incorporating the word 'Public' in the name of schools as a way to appeals to a 'modern' constituency (Jeffery et al. 2005: 54). In addition, there are also a number of schools that have not been established directly by churches but by Christian entrepreneurs, which despite having distinctively Christian management teams usually project a more secular image, as illustrated by the names of two of these: Global Public School (GPS) or The Choice School. The latter tend to cater to the upper echelons of society.

But unlike the aided sector, the private sector has seen a more robust non-Christian educational offer, able to undermine the Christian domination of the sector. This includes schools that are openly Hindu and others that are less explicitly about their high caste, Hindu orientation. In addition, Ernakulam saw the opening of its first Muslim private school in the early 2000s. During most of the twentieth century Christian schools catered to families across religious affiliation: Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. Ernakulam families valued Christian schools for their English education and 'discipline', and perceived as the standard-bearers of social mobility and achieved status. Since the late 1990s the link between Christian schools and ideas of progress has been challenged by broader economic and political changes – India' increasing integration into the world economy, the rise of Hindu nationalism and ideas of modernity in India that are secular but have a Hindu flavour. In the private educational landscape these have translated in a generalised reformation of curricula and pedagogies to embrace not just skills and knowledge that are said to be 'international' but also 'Indian' culture and values, mainly as a result of fears of India swamped by modernising 'western' ideas and values. This has in turn led to the objectification of Indian 'culture' and 'values' in a way that disguised very particular

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[68] In Ernakulam, both Syrian Christian and Latin Catholics have a long history of acting as educational pioneers, opening private (which later became government-aided) schools and colleges, most of which continue to function today.

practices and interests. Hindu oriented schools have been effective at legitimising their projects in this context in which 'Indian' and 'Hindu' culture are often used interchangeably. The traditional Kerala association between Christians and values like 'westernisation', underpinned Hindu nationalist view of Christian's origins and allegiances as fundamentally alien to the (Hindu) Indian nation, have in turn allowed them to fruitfully critic and de-legitimise Christian schools.

In schools like GPS or The Choice School I cannot ascertain whether their vision of Indian tradition is also slanted towards conveying a Hinduised version of Indian culture, or on the contrary, are infused with an alternative Christian or 'neutral' take on Indian tradition. But what I can confirm is that Christian entrepreneurs avoided being conspicuously Christian and deployed the same rhetoric of needing to imprint youth with India's cultural values and traditions in order to produce truly modern and global people, similar to the discourses of modern gurus described by Assayag and Fuller (2005: 11).

These changes have in turn led to a slightly more pronounced tendency among Hindu students to attend Hindu oriented private schools and Christian students preferring Christian private schools. Muslim students (those who do not attend the recently opened Al-Ameen Public School), continue to attend Christian or central government schools. Hindu oriented schools are more often than not avoided by Muslim parents. In BVM, the banally Hindu school where I conducted most of my research there were very few Muslim students. The Muslim community's endeavours in the educational field in central Kerala have tended to lag behind other religious groups throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir (BVM), the unaided school where I conducted the core of my in-school fieldwork, is reflective of many of these points. It was the creation of the 'Brahmacharya'[69], an educational trust founded in Mumbai in 1939. Contrary to what the 'Model' literature would have us believe, some early unaided schools, like BVM, were opened as a result of the collaboration between private agents and public sector industries (that is, with direct involvement of the state). BVM was established in 1977 in the neighbourhood known as 'Kumar Nagar', as a result of the collaboration of two major

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[69] Pseudonym.

public sector industries: the Fertilisers & Chemicals Travancore and the Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL). The latter provided the land for the construction of the school – 1.72 acres on a 30 year lease – in exchange for a reduction of admission fees to the children of Shipyard employees. Shipyard workers of all levels and social groups thus became more attracted to sending their children to the English-medium school, which grew rapidly into the popular school it is today.

Like any other private school it has always been an institution that catered to families with some economic standing, but its fees have until recently been relatively low when compared to more recently open private schools. In addition, the privileges offered to CSL children have resulted in a student population of diverse social and economic background. However, the school has recently implemented a marked increase in fees in an effort to stay in tune with the exigencies of the increasingly better-off families to which the school aspires to cater. This is to a large extent linked to the transformation of the area of Kumar Nagar where many of these families now live. This has noticeably impinged upon less privileged CSL workers' capacity to school their children at BVM. Over the school's three decades of existence, BVM parents have shifted from being government and public sector employees at large, to being professionals, business people and private sector entrepreneurs. Now, with a strength of 1738 students and 101 staff members, BVM is one of the most highly reputed schools in Ernakulam.

Education for the Global Era

While the rise of the unaided sector reflects the broadening of the middle classes, its pervasiveness within public and academic debates and the media signals the way in which contemporary private, English medium schooling has come to dominate the local imaginary of education. Reading a newspaper or the electronic media today one immediately realises that the idea of going to school is dominated by a distinctively idealised middle class experience of sending one's children to the private school of one's choice. One newspaper article about the return to class narrates the story of two parents who were in shock after realising their son did not make it home in the school bus. The parents then got into their family car and rushed to school where their son was awaiting them.

Although some critical voices denounce the commercial motive and the alleged neglect of the local culture of the rising unaided sector, contestations are to a large extent out-sounded by a distinctively middle-class discourse that dismisses the state's competence in the field. The market, on the other hand, has increasingly come to be seen as the most efficient means through which education is delivered (Jeffery 2005: 20). Discourses of education today cry for an (self-financed) education of what is frequently referred to as 'global' or 'international standards' (*The Times of India*, March 16th, 2010). In this context images of the aided and government schooling system as unfit for fulfilling the educational needs of today abound in the print media as well as in people's everyday discourse. On the contrary, some of the city's most prestigious unaided schools, like BVM, appear frequently in the printed media, where notorious events[70] held at their premises are publicised. The dismissal of the state in favour of the private sector is part of a larger neoliberal project, the same that envisages India's new middle class as no longer interested in public sector employment in favour of careers in global, private enterprises. Within this context, many middle class families no longer see the state machinery as the primary provider of education.

The discourse of 'international standard' draws heavily from an understanding of the English language taught in unaided schools is of superior quality. In present-day Kerala the importance of English is being hyped more than ever. As argued in a newspaper article, 'in our social set up, English is not just a language; it is also a statement of one's breeding, abilities and smartness.' (*The Hindu*, August 16th, 2009). The English/vernacular divide, which is often understood as synonymous of the government or government aided/unaided divide, is central to these accounts. This is in turn linked to the growth of the service sector in Ernakulam and broader re-visioning of India's role in global economy, mainly as a knowledge economy.

Public arguments around the educational 'need of the day' (i.e. education of global standard) go beyond the mere emphasis on English medium education. These talk about the need to transform schools into 'great institutions' that focus on enriching the character

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[70] One of such major events was the Kerala meeting for the CBSE school principals. It was held in a prestigious private school in Ernakulam. In the summit the principals of some of the most reputed unaided schools discussed the present and future of education in the Kerala. The meeting received extensive media coverage.

and empowering the intellectual curiosity of students. They call for a shift in the education system from one that relies on learning to one that depends on thinking. Former president A P J Abdul Kalam, in a function organised by the Kerala state CBSE School Management's Association in Kochi, argued along the same lines that 'a school should generate creativity among all the students, irrespective of whether they belong to the arts or the science stream' (*Indian Express*, January 29th, 2009). The need to generate thinking, creativity, character, and intellectual curiosity – 'a new knowledge paradigm' – is depicted as 'indispensable to the country's ambitions in the global knowledge economy' (*The Hindu*, April 8th, 2009). In short, the 'need of the day' is an education that makes youth fit to serve towards the advancement of India's aspirations in the global economy. As I will show in the next chapter, some of the most popular unaided schools successfully reorient their educational projects to appeal to this idea of 'international standard'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the history of Ernakulam city and its development as a place that agglutinates local aspirations of modernity. I demonstrated how the city of Ernakulam has since long been oriented outwards. Ernakulam's political and religious loyalties as well as its functioning and development as an international commercial port, have placed the city's gaze onto the outside world. In the present context of globalisation, this outside orientation has found special currency, leading to what it seems like a revival of Cochin's dreams of grandeur from the hand of the city's middle class.

This chapter showed that modern education has both driven processes of social change and mediated the (re)production of previously existing inequalities. I conclude that today's wide array of government, aided, and private schools is reflective of a long affair between the middle class project, caste/religious communities, and the state, through colonial, post-independence and global times. BVM is particularly reflective of change in the last few decades in which education has been reframed through the middle class discourse of 'international standard'. Increasingly, private schools, the middle classes, and the need for globally-oriented schooling, dominate debates and imaginings of education. Offering globally-oriented education has come to be the focus of a reduced yet very influential group of private schools, seeking to appeal to (and at the same time shaping) the aspirations of the city's middle classes wanting to offer their children in the best possible

education. As if zooming into the historical overview of education I have here presented, the next chapter offers an in-depth account of the educational project of BVM, one of the most highly reputed private higher secondary school in urban Kerala.

Chapter 3: 'Schooling with a Difference'?

Introduction

In the last three decades, Ernakulam has witnessed a marked growth of the private, unaided schooling system. Within it, a group of schools have grown and consolidated the boundaries of what today stands for many as a network of highly reputed urban, middle class institutions. Drawing mainly from my schooling ethnography at Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir, Kumar Nagar, one of these top schools, this chapter asks the question of what are the particular kinds of ideal citizens these schools aim to produce. What skills, demeanours, subjectivities and aspirations define this ideal person and are depicted as more desirable and as garnering greater opportunity, respect, and prestige? And through what means are these schools aiming to inculcate these qualities and behaviours? By doing so I will fill the general lack of detailed ethnographic enquiry into specific educational projects in Kerala, where studies of education have been limited to macro-level analysis of the spread of education (Tharakan 2004), of inequalities according to caste/community (George & Domi 2002), or of the effects of privatisation (Kumar & George 2009; Salim 2004). By focusing on the sort of 'ideal' person for the global era being produced in these sites, I do not intend, however, to imply that these schools straightforwardly imprint on youth's minds and bodies particular models of the 'ideal' person. The messages imparted in BVM were indeed interpreted, incorporated, and contested in a variety of ways by individual students. This will however be dealt with in a subsequent chapter. Here, my aim is to describe the commonalities and differences among the city's most reputed private English medium schools. In order to refer to this conglomerate of highly reputed private institutions catering to middle class families I will use the label one of them used to define itself: 'a school with a difference.' Hence, my aim is to describe this difference.

My use of a single label to examine the *what* and *why* of these schools may connote a sense of homogeneity, but nothing can be further from the truth. As it was shown in Chapter 2, these schools are a highly heterogeneous group. I will however draw from my experience of BVM and other top private schools to sketch similarities and differences. In what follows I show that they are increasingly oriented towards producing globally competitive (professional) Indians, by emphasising a mixture of academic excellence (always oriented towards the attainment of certain professional degrees); personality traits, like assertiveness, leadership, ambition, entrepreneurship, and sacrifice; and communication skills. All these elements, combined with one or other degree of a sense of duty and love for the nation

and veneration for its 'traditions', is depicted as producing a generation of global professionals who are equally competent as and yet morally superior to its western counterparts. Academic excellence, gauged in the 12th STD board exams and entrance exams to various professional degrees, is primordial to their status and reputation among parents and students and other schools.

High academic achievement is without a doubt a fundamental reason why these schools, despite marked differences among them, are locally perceived as belonging to the same league. Their shared status, and rivalry, is also manifested in various interschool art and literary competitions. Access to these is only via invitations, which these schools formally send out to similar private schools, thus crystallising an elite network of institutions while excluding others. These contests in turn receive their due attention in the local media, which give thorough accounts of the events, the attending guests, as well as the year's winner and runner-ups, helping cement these schools' visibility and status.

In what follows, I examine BVM's self-representational rhetoric and practices. I draw from a multiplicity of sources: the school's magazine, accounts from school staff, everyday academic practices, school events, and the school founding trust's webpage. Special emphasis is given to the school's Annual Day celebration as a special instance in which the school gives concrete expression to its vision of the relationship between the school's educational project, the nation and the broader world. Through the event the school explicitly defined the world via prescribing the educational 'needs of the hour', and in turn posited itself as a privileged provider of the skills and qualities necessary to fulfil those needs. The Annual Day celebration is also a crucial moment in which the school displays its achievements, and aims to become accountable to the aspirations and exigencies of its stakeholder (parents and society at large) who watch across the auditorium. I draw links between BVM and other schools' self-representation projects. Amidst their heterogeneity, I show that these projects largely interconnected with the contemporary idea of the urban middle class, which schools aim to both reproduce and appeal to, an idea that is fundamentally about competence in a globalised India.

All-rounders and Noble Indian Leaders

Within Ernakulam, Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir, like the other six schools run by the same trust, is one of the most famous private schools. BVM is also one of the oldest private schools in the city. Its management proudly attributes its fame to their particular emphasis on exposing students to a wide array of non-scholastic activities, events, and competitions, downplaying the role of its excellent academic performance for which families across the city seek to gain access to the institution. Since the appearance of its first batch to the CBSE board exam in 1987, BVM students have almost always obtained 100 cent pass, often securing honorary distinction, first class, and subject toppers. Yet, the school management strove to be known for developing 'wholesome personalities' – by providing its pupils with a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and value education. Before engaging with this tension, let us first deal with the school's vision of its own project.

Their commitment to produce wholesome personalities is not just rhetorical. Starting from the early classes, the school gives a prominent place to the arts – dance, music, yoga, *kalari*[71], among others, for which the school has equipped special classrooms in the top most floor of the school building. Sports, games, and physical training also receive considerable attention. School clubs, such as the literary club, the music club or the social service club, aim to provide an arena in which students develop skills other than academic ones. The school also provides spaces to showcase their students' talents by hosting various sports events, youth festivals, exhibitions and competitions. Since 1995, the school has hosted Magnum Opus: an interschool art and literary competition wholly organised, managed and presented by the students of 11th STD. The event has been attended by important public figures such as famous business personalities, ministers, commissioners of police, religious leaders, famous artists and poets. Students' non-academic skills are also exhibited in they early school magazine, for I which I had the chance to volunteer as an editor in 2009. In it, the 'budding writers and artists at the school' showcase essays, stories, poems, painting and drawings (*Brahmacharya Magazine* 1983). Like the students at Srivastava's (1998) Doon School at Dehra Dun, the students at BVM were expected to become 'all-rounders' – able to embody a variety of skills and knowledge apart from scholastics. This is concisely expressed in the 1985 editorial of the school magazine:

> We know that today's student leads a hectic life. He is expected to be in the forefront everywhere –
> good in academics, good at sports, proficient in co-curricular activities and always in the midst of

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[71] This is a local form of martial art.

> action. He has to protect the schools image by acquiring various skills – be an excellent debater, have staggering knowledge of current affairs, paint excellent pictures, play games with skill and above all, be a well balanced well behaved person.

This emphasis on producing multifaceted or 'wholesome' personalities, endowed with particular knowledge, communication skills, artistic disposition, and physical talents is common to the rhetoric and practices among the top private schools in the city.

Apart from extra-curricular knowledge and skills, BVM also prides itself as a school that imparts the 'All-Indian' culture and values necessary to, as the school director stated, 'nurture and build noble [Indian] citizens who can take over the reins of this country in the years to come'. Teaching a syllabus is one thing, he acknowledged. 'Any school has a syllabus; any school can teach a syllabus. If we fail to provide the students with this set of values, apart from the academics, we fail.' In other words, the school saw itself as striving to produce a generation of noble citizen-leaders committed to the nation, an idea which derived its rationale the trust's founder, Dr. Munshi, who believed that the 'vitality of a culture lasts only so long as the best men in the dominant minority of each generation find self-fulfilment by living up to its fundamental values afresh' (K.M. Munshi's message *Our Culture* posted on the trust's website).

Two fundamental questions emerge here. First, what is the nature of this imagined nation their students will be moulded to lead? Second, how is the value of duty to the nation imparted? Let us consider the former first. Fundamental to creating noble leader-citizens, was to imprint students with a value of love and duty towards India and its 'tradition', understood as I will now show, as essentially Hindu.

The school trust's founder[72], who had been active in Hindu religious and cultural affairs, envisaged Indian culture not as a 'bundle of different ways' or as a homogeneous unit, but as 'a synthesis' of cultures in equilibrium under the unifying influence of certain 'fundamental values'[73]. The school (as well as the trust) in turn assumed as their objective

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[72] BVM's founder argued that this synthesis has grown through what he calls 'radiating centres of cultural homogeneity', among which schools play an important role. These centres have evolved, he claimed, an 'All-Indian consciousness', transcending and making terms with regional or local differences (Brahmacharya Trust webpage).

[73] This reverberates with the 'positive secularism' endorsed by proponents of 'Hindutva' by which Hinduism is projected as a secular and tolerant philosophy embracing all castes and religious communities bound by a uniform code of conduct, rights and responsibilities. 'It is lapped up by the Hindu middle class liberals at its face value as an ideal democratic solution to communal conflicts' (Banerjee 1991: 99).

and responsibility to emphasise this 'unifying influence', the substance that unites all Indians, via what they called value education[74]. Many of these schools' commitment towards imbuing a sense of duty and love for what is truly 'Indian' stems historically from a colonial moment marked by a concern for the denationalising heritage that would be left behind by British institutions, like public schools (Froerer 2007: 1034). In early twentieth century Kerala, this colonial concern led to a certain kind of 'Indianisation' among reformists, who concentrated on defining institutions, practices, ideas that appeared to be truly 'Indian' – extending from an Aryan past (Devika 2007: 26). That colonial concern also inspired the most visible proponents of *Hindutva,* the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), which became officially interested in education in 1952 with the launch of the first RSS-run primary school, and has since then aimed to redress this problem through an openly Hindu nationalist value education. BVM's founding trust also stemmed from those early concerns, but unlike the RSS coded itself, and the values imparted in its schools, as secular and 'Indian'.

As Bénéï (2000) argues, the production of 'Indian' culture and the Indian nation as essentially Hindu is not restricted to RSS schools, but has become integrated into the everyday life of many self-defined secular institutions. In BVM, for instance, the value of 'love for Indian culture' is often inculcated as love for Hindu culture. This derives from both a general understanding that Indians are predominantly Hindu, in terms of population, and from the ambiguity of Hinduism as not merely the dominant religion of India, but rather, as a Christian senior student put it, a 'way of life', the basis for the 'fundamental values' share by Indians at large. Teachers and staff professed appreciation for India's religious diversity[75]. Muslim and Christian holydays, like Eid, Bakrid, Easter or Christmas, are observed in school. Conversing with the school librarian about the importance of incorporating religious diversity in school she remarked: 'it gives exposure to the students. In Christmas we always have some innovation. One year Santa Claus comes in by car, the next year it comes on bike, and like that... they have fun. It is not good to be always thinking about academics... so here we give them exposure to these things. We follow secularism**,** you know.'

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[74] As has been noted in earlier anthropological accounts, many non-state institutions in India today pay greater attention to moral or value education (Jeffery 2005: 27).

[75] See a similar example in Jeffery et al. (2006)

In contrast to this almost playful character accorded to religious holidays like Christmas, Hindu holidays were accorded a much more transcendental significance. The Hindu epic of Ramayana, for example, was solemnly celebrated throughout the seven day week. The entire school schedule was compressed to accommodate for a daily lighting of the lamp, re-enactments of the epic, Hindu hymns, dances, storytelling contests and speeches by notable guests. On the closing ceremony, the chief guest, a Malayalam writer, delivered a speech in which she explained the contemporary flourishing of India, in spite of the many 'tragedies' and 'invasions' to which it has been subjected, as a product of its Vedic culture. Apart from the punctual importance attributed to Hindu celebrations, routinised Hindu practices disguised as Indian culture, were integrated into the everyday life of the school, giving the school the distinctively 'Hindu flavour' or 'banally' Hindu character that people from across the city attributed to it (Bénéï 2000; Osella & Osella 2000). From the daily repetition of the school motto, 'let noble thoughts come to us from every side', a verse taken from the Rigveda; to the practices of yoga and vegetarianism; performance of pujas; chanting of Sanskrit slokas, and display of Sarawati images, together with pledges to the nation, the 'news of the day', the '[English] word of the day', the always evoking 'thought of the day', the national anthem, and the celebration of Independence Day, the school inculcated a banally Hindu way of being Indian.

It is also important to note the symbolic importance of the city of Ernakulam to the educational project of schools like BVM. Considered to be the Christian capital of Kerala, Ernakulam is also the educational centre of the state, a centre which has been dominated by Christian schools since colonial times. BVM trust's special effort to challenge that monopoly by opening seven schools in Ernakulam speaks also of an interest to offer non-Christian oriented education, underpinned by a Hindu nationalist view of Christian's origins and allegiances as fundamentally alien to the (Hindu) Indian nation.

Apart from the reverence and appreciation of Hindu practices, the school also strove to have students imbibe values such as solidarity, respectability and material austerity[76], values

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[76] Austerity was often talked about with reference to the Gandhian principles of trusteeship can also be understood as self-restraint/discipline of the 'human animal's' inclination to overdo the use of her or his senses for personal pleasure (Brahmacharya Trust's website). C. Rajagopalachari, one of the founders of BVM, argued that 'Civilization in the true sense of the word is the development of restraint.' Through culture, a silent civilising instrument, which acts through family training, tradition, religious belief, literature and education, people internalise this sense of self-restraint for the interest of society, inhibiting over-indulgence, until it become a structuring principle of the mind and spirit, *habitus*.

which have been central to old urban middle-middle class identity (Donner & De Neve 2011: 5; van Wessel 2004).

> My message to you is to uphold Brahmacharya's ideals wherever you are and in whatever you do. It is easy to be unmindful of the miseries and sorrows that surround your less fortunate brothers and sisters. As a true BVM student, your aim should be to have deep concern for the poor and needy and to develop a balanced mind towards both joy and sorrows in life (*Brahmacharya Magazine* 1988).

The emphasis in 'value-oriented' activities is always placed on *acting*, so that the students, as the Director of BVM Schools, Kochi explained, 'feel and think' about certain things and values. 'We create occasions in which the students think about this or that value'. For example, the Director continued, the simple Farewell ceremony, in which the twelfth STD students gather at school for the last time to celebrate and say goodbye to the school and staff, create such symbolic moment during the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. In this ritualised act, teachers light and bestow an oil lamp upon each student, symbolising the knowledge, skills, and values passed on to them through twelve years of education. Similarly, students are exposed to a programme, by which the school's founding trust 'adopted' a slum in the urban neighbourhood of Gandhi Nagar, providing their neighbours with a notebook manufacturing unit, an embroidery centre, a day nursery, a tailoring unit, and a clinic. 'Children should have compassion for the poor'. The school also imparts Veda classes as part of their effort to shape noble citizens. Moreover, as part of value education, the school eagerly brings eminent speaker to talk about values as part of every special event. The Director reminded me in our last interview that value education is not a 'one event off thing; it has to be a recurrent effort, so that these things become a way of life for them.'

Bestowed with an appreciation towards what is truly 'Indian', a sense of responsibility towards the nation, and the adequate values, the school saw and posited itself as an institution moulding the harbingers of (a 'saffronised') national unity. In 1990 that unity seemed to shake as a consequence of the implementation of the Mandal recommendations, which increased the scale of affirmative action (in higher education and state employment) to include Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This stirred up tensions among Hindu castes, some of which (upper castes) rioted in the streets. In this context the Honorary Secretary of the school's trust stated that:

> We learn from history that we learn nothing from history… internecine quarrels and petty squabbles had once resulted in our country becoming slave to alien rulers. After centuries of subjection and subjugation we at last learnt the lesson. The national movement saw the warring factions burying their hatches, sinking their differences and fostering an unprecedented unity… We emancipated ourselves

from the foreign yoke. But today, history again seems to be taking its toll. We are again dividing ourselves into groups and clans. One is either a Malayalee or Punjabi or a Bengali… In this context, education has a positive role to play. Students have to be taught the fundamentals of nationhood. The class room should become the citadels of citizenship (*Brahmacharya Magazine* 1990).

In what follows, I describe and examine the school's 2010 Annual Day celebration, as an event through which the institution praised its achievements and projected its educational project to its middle class audiences. In a stylised way that was difficult to undermine, the speakers, plays and dances of the Annual Day, like a ritual, established a vision of contemporary Indian society, which conflated the whole of Indian History to a Hindu story of struggle and success. This traced a sort of evolutionary tale from an Aryan past, through the independence struggle, and ending in the global takeover of India and its culture, all at the hands of the noble, now global, leaders produced at BVM.

Annual Day Celebration

Towards the end of my school fieldwork, I attended BVM's 33rd Annual Day Celebration, which in 2010 was made to coincide with the celebration of India's Martyr's Day as it took place on a 30th of January, the day in which, in 1948, Gandhi was assassinated. Like in many other schools' annual day celebrations, the acts included songs, dances, drama skits, prize-giving, and speeches by the school's staff, students, as wells as notable guests. The event was held in the large auditorium shared by all BVM schools in Ernakulam. On the far right of the scenario, a small altar with an image of Gandhi was set up. In the sitting area, parents and guests (me included) waited for acts to start, while students were either giving the final touches to their costumes or anxiously hanging out, running around the staircase or at the back of the auditorium. Two cameramen filmed the entire event, while parents and a school staff took photographs. The lights dimmed, and the acts started with an emotive song by the school choir that paid homage to Gandhi. The choir stood at both ends of the stage, dressed in white with a ribbon displaying the colours of the Indian national flag across their chests. In the middle, a large screen showed images of Gandhi. Following the song in Hindi, the school staff secretary delivered an introductory speech in English, which set the context of this year's acts and extolled the significance of the event, as a celebration for the many 'successes' achieved by the school this academic year. The secretary centred on two of these achievements, ranking the best BVM school in Kerala and bagging the 'prestigious' International School Award (ISA), conferred by the British

Council, to assure the audience of the institution's dominance. Her speech was followed by a series of acts, on which I now comment.

First, the school principal delivered the annual report to the audience. The report summarised the achievement of the year in academic and non-academic matters, in teachers training courses, and in cultural and sports competitions. It also reviewed events and functions held by the school, improvements to the school's facilities, and school's publications. Substantial part of the report though focused on the academic achievements of students, which were celebrated as the school's own. The principal started from the general success of the entire batch, to individual achievements secured by particular students. She praised students, proudly calling their full names and corresponding percentages, for having achieved the highest overall mark in the CBSE standard X and XII board exams or for securing the highest subject-wise ranks. Likewise, she individually recognised students who had participated and won all sort of national level or international exams, science olympiads, spelling bee contests, or elocution and drawing competitions. This year, the school principal paid special homage to one particular student: 16 year old Sathya. He ranked first in the All India Secondary School Examination (AISSE) South Region last year, and second in the overall CBSE class X exam. As she read Sathya's record the audience spontaneously burst into an effusive round of applause. The principal smiled proudly.

Second, the prominent guest of the event, C.J. Mathew, the Development Commissioner for the Cochin Special Economic Zone, delivered a speech. It resounded with an address by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the eighth of that month that called upon the active involvement of the overseas Indian communities in accelerating the pace of the country's economic and social development. Mathew started his speech by making reference to the "leader of leaders" – Gandhi – after which he directed his commentary to the graduating seniors, who were, as he said, in the mists of 'stepping out into the real world'. He cautioned the youth that in this world, of which they are now part, there is competition, and there is no institution that will protect them. As girls and boys listened carefully, he continued to portray the world as an interconnected place as a result of the 'forces of globalisation'. 'You now form part of the global economic system. You are now world citizens.' As such, he continued,

Some of you will end up staying in this city. Some will remain within the state. Some of you will even venture outside your state. And many of you will go to other parts of the world. And when you go there, I want you to take three ideas with you. First, it's that of *civil respect*. You must, when you go to other parts of the world, *respect your fellow citizens*. Secondly, you must respect the local laws and cultural traditions of the place that is taking you. The ways they do their things, you must follow them. You have to in order to integrate into that society. You must integrate into that society that is taking you in. And finally, you must *never forget your motherland*. This is the land of your ancestors and as such you must keep a place in your heart for it. You must come back and bring the fortunes you have made in other lands with you so that your land grows too.

After the speech, the senior head-girl and head-boy addressed the audience. Both offered nostalgic speeches, which began by recalling their memories as young BVM student, and traced their 12 years of schooling in BVM. Jacob, the head-boy, remembered the feeling of admiration aroused in him by previous head-boys as they exclaimed 'school attention!' at the start of each morning assembly. He dedicated his speech to the teachers, who have 'shaped him into the independent person he now is'.

Fourth, students enacted a play that sought to represent the 'evolution of India' – dubbed 'the mother of all languages, of all civilizations, of all philosophies' – from the pre-colonial era to the 'global era of interculturalism'. The play was structured in various scenes, depicting the phases of the nation's history. Various choreographies in between scenes brightened the performance. As a way to give expression to these evolutional understanding of society, the scenes were performed in Sanskrit, 'the ancient language'; then Malayalam, 'the vernacular language'; followed by Hindi, 'the national language'; and finally, English, 'the language that unites us all'. The last scenes (entirely in English) subtly weaved together India's present ('global' and 'intercultural') stage to the emergence of BVM; thus, presenting the school as the embodiment of India's most evolved state. Now, I turn to the various scenes that constituted the various phases represented in the play.

The first linguistic phase, entirely in Sanskrit, depicted ancient India, as is commonly done in school skits, as a time of heightened spirituality and philosophical undertaking. A group of *sanyasi*, wearing orange robes, meditate and chant at the back of the stage making a *namaste* stand (see *image 1*). While they stood still, a character dressed in royal attire came on stage and joined the prayer. Subsequently, he dialogued with the sanyasi, seeking for guidance. In the next scene, the monks engaged in a discussion until a character playing Adi Shankara entered the stage. Finally, he silenced their argument and gave them a sermon, while they listened attentively.

Image 1: A group of *sanyasi.*

Following this highly Aryan, and high caste portrayal of India's past, the second scene, in Malayalam, highlighted issues of cultural diversity, South Indian folklore, and the local struggle and resistance to colonial domination. At the back of the stage, a group of token characters– including a king, a Muslim man, a low caste man, and a tribal man – each one holding a weapon, set the scene of what is to come. In the background played a song from the 2009 Malayalam film *Pazhassi Raja*, in which local film star Mammootty depicts the legendary king, *Pazhassi Raja*, from Kerala's royal dynasty Pazhassi Kottayam. This was followed by two scenes that depicted non-Sanskritic art forms. First, a group of characters performed a *pooja* to a goddess at the back of the stage while others danced to the beat of drums. Second, a group of boys performed a few *Kalarippayattu*[77] moves. Next, two students, playing a king and a colonial officer, come on stage, while two girls wearing Kerala style saris at the back of the stage symbolise the ordinary people and colonial subjects. The colonial officer, who is followed by two of his men, tells the king that he has come to collect taxes. The king tells the officer that this is the people's soil and that he has no authority over it. The tyrannical foreigner threatens to send his men to harm the common people in response to his disobedience. The good king then complies and pays

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[77] This is a form of martial art from Kerala.

him in gold. The officer scoffs at the king being so easy to control through the love he holds for his people. Then, in a sudden way the token characters who introduced this skit jumped on stage and jointly made the colonial ruler kneel to their swords.

Leaving the vernacular language behind, the next scene depicted the independence struggle and the birth of independent India entirely in Hindi. It started with another set of token characters at the back of the stage: Gandhi, Nehru, and other freedom fighters who shouted '*Vande Mataram*[78]'. Following this introduction, a scene portrayed a group of wounded freedom fighters returning home after rioting. A severely injured fighter was taken under the care of a female character dressed in a colourful red sari. At last, the woman helped the injured man to stand. He was handed an Indian national flag, which he painfully wove as he walked across the stage helped by the woman.

Finally, representing the present of India, the students performed skits and dances that depicted a conflated portrayal of the emergence and growth of BVM schools and India's development into a modern, transnational, and culturally superior (to the 'west') nation. This part of the play, entirely in English, worked to reaffirm the school's dominance in Ernakulam's educational market place and to (re)produce ideas of India as an emergent cosmopolitan superpower. Unlike the previous scenes, this was succinctly introduced, narrated and explained by a commentator. Signifying the birth of modern/global India, three students, dressed as the then president of India A P J Abdul Kalam, Dr. Manmohan Singh, and K.M. Munshi stood at the back of the stage, while the commentator spoke of both 'Dr. Munshi's dream to impart the youth with the values and cultural inheritance unique to India', but also of the trust's desire to 'keep up with the time'. As a result, the commentator continued, the trust has sought to create schools 'in the true spirit of globalisation and internationalism.' This commitment is best reflected, as the unseen narrator suggested, in the school's PEACE programme[79] – a cultural and educational

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[78] This song, recognised by many as India's 'national song', was often used as a cry for freedom from [British rule] during the freedom movement. It was rejected as a national anthem on the grounds that Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs, Arya Samajis and others who opposed idol worship felt offended by its depiction of the nation as 'Mother Durga', a Hindu goddess.

[79] Since 1995, BVM and Tunbridge Wells Girls and Boys' Grammar Schools in Kent, UK, have run a students exchange programme. Every other year, a group of approximately 25 BVM students, along with 8 teachers, travel to Kent to attend school for a period of three weeks. In the gap year, a similar group of students from Kent comes to BVM. In both cases, students stay with host families. BVM's principal defined the aims of the programme as: 'to impart students with the best academic practices, to study and observe the patterns of the English community, to provide exposure to the lifestyles of the English families, and to allow a free exchange of ideas and clarify pre-conceived notions.'

student exchange programme between BVM and Tunbridge Wells Girls and Boys' Grammar Schools in Kent, UK, initiated in 1995. Following the introduction, a group of students re-enacted a dialogue between a group of BVM students and a visiting student from Kent; Sam.

Before Sam came on stage, a group of 11th STD girls, who constituted a music band, talked about the song they were preparing to play at the welcoming event for the Kent students at BVM. One of the girls suggested they played a Malayalam song, but she was immediately turned down by the lead singer who argued that it would be better to surprise them by playing one of *their* songs. 'We can sing *their* songs with ease, but can they even dream of singing one of *our* songs?' As if shifting from fiction to reality, the girls' band actually performed the English pop song live, whereas everything we had been watching thus far was pre-recorded. After the song, Sam came on stage, wearing Bermudas, a polo shirt with the neck undone, and spiky hair. Ironically, Sam was played by Kartik, whose English skills were not nearly as fluent as the voice that dubbed him. He was chosen perhaps for his fair skin tone. In a friendly way, one of the girls mocked Sam for his incapability of saying 'Malayalam' properly. Sam tried pronouncing the word again with a heavy accent, which resulted in him making a mockery of himself. Subsequently, a girl asked Sam what he thought of India after having been here for a few days. He effusively praised Indian culture, hospitality, food, and the habit of eating with the hand on a plantain leaf. A student playing one of the girl's grandmother came on stage, while the boy who was accompanying Sam ran to help her sit, enacting the value of caring for the elders. Next, Sam says that he would like them to visit him in England in order to teach them about his culture too. One of the girls replies: 'western culture? Maybe we could learn something from it, but there's no question of practicing it here'. The boy turned to Sam and attenuated his peer's remarks: 'we appreciate *your* commitment to keep public places clean and *your* willingness to follow rules'. Sam added: 'and our language, you all love English, don't you?' 'Your language?' the girl said slightly offended. She concluded that if North Americans and Australians claim English as their language, she did not see why Indians could not claim English as theirs too. Finally, the next scene portrayed Sam getting his suitcase ready to fly back to the UK. Before departing, he revered the girl's grandmother by touching her feet: Sam had absorbed some 'Indian-ness.'

The commentator once more spoke in order to present the final skit, one which symbolised the most contemporary present and the future of the school. I had been informed by my closest participants of the nature of this final act, in which a student was to play a character inspired in my persona, hence weaving my research project into the school's own tale of modernity. 'The international links continues', the narrator said, 'we have advanced in so many ways, to the extent of playing host to many eminent research scholars, scientists, professors, etc. The latest to visit our school is Mr. David Sancho, anthropologist from Spain'. Students clapped. At the back of the stage, a cardboard building with a student standing at the top represented the school building crowned by Dr. K.M Munshi's statue. Two students came on stage: one, representing 'Ram', a member of school staff, and the other playing me (see *image 2*). The latter wore a blue jacket, a pony tail and a goatee. In addition, of course, he held a notepad and a pen. Ram wore a long white kurta. What follows is the script of their conversation:

David: I am indeed happy I reached the perfect place to pursue my research. Ram, how long have you been associated to the Brahmacharya organisation?

Ram: Nearly a decade. David, this is our founder, Dr. Kulapati Munshi. Like Swami Vivekananda, K.M. Munshi has also aimed at the revival of Indian Culture. In a world falling to pieces under the impact of a technological avalanche, Brahmacharya schools try to hold fast to the fundamental values for which our culture stands.

David: Salutations to you, great soul [bowing to the statue of K.M. Munshi]

Ram: Dr. Munshi aimed not only at cultural revival, but also to the all round development of a personality that is physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual.

David: I hear that the central government of India is also moving along the same line to bring about a paradigm shift in education.

Ram: Exactly, the newly introduced continuous and comprehensive evaluation system aimed at testing the multiple intelligences of a child, as introduced by Dr. Munshi.

Image 2: 'David' (left) and Ram (right) talking while the Zoozoo hold the ISA banner.

Ram and David's conversation is suddenly interrupted by a student dressed as one of Vodafone's Zoozoos[80], the characters that appear in the company's latest ads. The character, holding a trophy ran to the front of the stage reproducing Zoozoo's characteristic hysterical laughter. A second Zoozoo comes out holding two trophies, and ridicules the first one laughing even louder. Next, two other Zoozoos come on stage holding a banner, which they open once they reach the front of the stage, physically displacing and over-laughing the previous two characters. The banner read: ISA. At this stage, David and Ram continue talking:

> *David*: Who are they?
> *Ram*: They are symbols of excellence, representing different schools.
> *David*: The ISA?
> *Ram:* It is the International School Award, accredited by the British Council. Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir is the only school among all BVM schools to win this highly acclaimed award
> [The audience starts a round of applause]
> *David*: Why exactly was the award given?
> *Ram*: The ISA is a global platform that gives an exposure to every child to experience global culture so as to understand and appreciate the difference between varied cultures. It is a scheme that adds an international dimension to the school curriculum.
> *David*: Indeed, your country proved that you are still retaining the Indian-ness along with absorbing the international culture.
> *Ram*: Let's have a last dance to international integration.

As recent literature has pointed out, national education systems are becoming more obviously internationalised, increasingly promoting an international agenda and concepts such as global citizenship and seeking to prepare youth for futures that are *not* constrained by national boundaries and national issues. Top end private schools in Ernakulam certainly gave evidence to this trend: their curricula, pedagogies and facades were being reformed to offer 'international' education. But far from being a manifestation of 'globalisation' – the product of 'global forces over 'local places' – this orientation was the result of a context in which private schools compete to capture a growing local market of parents seeking to provide global 'exposure' to their children (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006). In this final act of the annual day, the school was keen to mobilise my rather fortuitous presence in the school as evidence of their professed international standing, as proof of their 'advancement'.

The play finally ended with a collage of consecutive choreographies, each one symbolising elements of this 'integration'. The first dance mimicked a 'prom' dance - the formal ball

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[80] The Zoozoo ads started airing during the Indian Premier League (IPL) matches in 2009. The Zoozoo concept was created by the Ogilvy & Mather (India), one of the world's largest advertising networks. This human-like character has become extraordinarily famous in India.

dance held for a school class toward the end of the academic year – as represented in Hollywood films and North American sitcoms. Four couples of boys and girls from class eleven came on stage holding hands (see *image 3*). The girls wore long colourful dresses, while the boys wore classic prom attire – i.e. white buttoned shirts, dark trousers, jackets, and ties. They danced to a ballad by Nickelback, a popular North American new-metal band whose songs would typically be used for Hollywood representations of proms. The choreography involved various turns, handholds, and waltz-like steps, for which boys and girls' bodies and gazes came in close contact. Throughout the dance, I appreciated the excitement in their faces. Swathy, one of the girls who performed the ball dance and one of my closest female participants, told me about the stern resistance the school principal had put to this choreography in general and to specific steps, in which boys and girls' bodies would touch, in particular. In the end, they managed to persuade the principal to let them perform the dance. Following the ball dance, two couples of boy and girl danced to a cinematic Tamil song: 'Banaras Pattu' from the movie 'Ninaithale Inikkum' (Sweet Memories). This film tells the story of a group of former college mates that get together after eight years to recall their memories as college students. Afterwards, three female students from class eleven danced to yet another cinematic, pop song, this time with a marked Arabic motif. Finally, the play and the event ended with the national anthem, giving closure to this particular representation of India's history.

Image3: Prom dance.

Making Noble Global Citizens

Reputed, private, middle-class schools in Ernakulam are very keen in framing their educational vision within a particular picture of the contemporary moment. Images of the present, as the 'global era', are central to the work, rhetoric, and status of this group of institutions for they posit themselves as providing the education most appropriate to this particular context. The speech of C.J. Mathew succinctly exposed the nature of the imagined global moment, as one which is, above all, knit together by the 'global economic system', where India's development as a world power is waged by individual Indians working at home and, especially, abroad. As in the Annual Day, the present is often portrayed as fast-changing, mainly as a result of the forces of 'globalisation', implying essentially the intensified flow of global (mainly western) commodities, ideas and practices through spaces of commerce and the new media. Underpinning this vision lay a broader fear of being flooded by 'modernising' western ideas and values, which most schools today try to address in one form or another (Jeffery 2005: 22). Thus, (ideal) youth were depicted as the pioneers of this culturally shifting present, whose bodies and minds are proficient in the knowledge and skills necessary to be globally marketable, and at the same time capable of 'retaining Indian-ness': in short, experts of local-global fusion. For example, the girl in one of the final sketches, was proficient in and practiced a variety of cultural forms deemed as global (e.g. music), and yet knew exactly what other global cultural forms were locally impracticable. Therefore, because the world is interconnected by the economy and characterised by global flows, the ideal citizen is one who is able to fuse global and local, becoming worldly competent while never forgetting his origins and abiding by national traditions and responsibilities.

The rhetoric of more recently founded schools in direct competition with BVM, such as the Global Public School or the Choice School, both ran by Christians, similarly emphasised the ideas of global competence and responsibility towards India, i.e. the idea of (ideal) global leader-citizens who give back to and never 'forget the motherland'. Their language also glorified the global economy as a terrain where competitive (ideal) Indians become successful. They speak of their institutions in the language of 'global standards'[81], while education is talked about as 'the empowerment of world citizen'. In the webpage of

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[81] Both The Choice School and GPS speak of aiming to 'match the ambience of some of the best schools in the world' (www.choiceschool.com, last accessed on the 24th of October, 2010).

the Choice School, its founder is celebrated as a successful businessman: responsible for creating 'one of the largest and most diversified business conglomerates' in the city, said to have branches in the USA and in Europe. Echoing the notion of responsibility present in C.J. Mathew's speech, the school's online profile talks about the school as the 'dream project' and 'humble attempt' of its patron, Mr. Jose Thomas, 'to give back to the community and pay his tribute to this wonderful city he grew up in.' Consequently, the profitable character of an educational enterprise such as the Choice School is effectively masked, and its importance as a 'civil' endeavour is emphasised.

Christian-run schools had less of a need to emphasise the need to mediate 'modernity' and 'tradition', and by implication to produce these categories. Since its beginnings as missionary schools in colonial India, Christian schools, especially private English-medium institutions, in fact have been key sites for the advancement of new ideas of culture, morality and the economy (Devika 2007). Today, while they play into the rhetoric of fusion, as the slogan of Global Public School 'global vision, traditional values' indicates, they continue to be perceived as highly modernising institutions. This, in turn, serves as the basis for schools like BVM to criticise schools like Global Public. In a historical moment characterised both by the scramble to define India's globally projected image and domestic uncertainties about the chance of being swamped by western practices and values, schools like BVM have found an opportunity to market their saffronised projects. In the present context of the rising use of popular Hinduism among the middle classes, and its connection to national pride and dreams of becoming a superpower, these projects have become quite successful.

For institutions with a Hindu orientation and a history that goes back to the decolonisation struggle, like BVM or Chinmaya Vidyalaya, modernity has posed more complicated questions. These have been marked by what Srivastava (1998) terms 'the challenge of the self': the subjective struggle to define an Indian modernity distinctive of that of the colonial power. After independence, this field of struggle was, he argued, where the 'native' was confronted with the question of how to 'improve', how to become modern, vis-à-vis the ex-colonial ruler, 'so as to 'rightfully' claim his (*sic*) position as a free person, the citizen of a free nation' (1998:9). As Chatterjee has argued, because the quest to become modern was mainly envisaged through the English language, foreign science, technology and statecraft, it became the object of profound anxiety about cultural annihilation among these very

middle-class families (Chatterjee 1993: 126). Anxieties led to a rhetorical splitting of the self into two correlated domains: the material/modern outside and the spiritual/traditional inside (Chatterjee 1993 in Advani 2009: 29). By keeping the traditional core nourished, so the story goes, an Indian modernity becomes possible even in the face of a highly modernised outer domain.

In Kerala, this 'splitting' of the self has a much longer history. In late nineteenth century Kerala, the emergent educated middle classes began to uphold a vision of citizenship as improvement and of an ideal society in which individual human beings would be valued for their internal qualities, what Devika (2007) calls 'internality'. Internality, expressed in early Malayalam novels, referred both to the supposed inner space and the preoccupation with this space. Internalities were to be developed and made strong by individuals, filling that space with qualities such as kindness, patience, and intelligence. By virtue of their strong (attained) internalities, the idea went, individuals would attain 'true' success and a stable state of well-being. This idea of self-improvement and self-fashioning, the fundamental idea of the middle-class project, of course built itself against the then established social order (of *jati*) structured according to inherited status and wealth, which were by implication thought to be 'external', lying beyond the individual (Devika 2007: 39). Nineteenth century Malayalam novels were populated with characters who displayed both the hollowness of inherited status and the righteous qualities of strong internalities, developed through suitable training (Devika 2007: 49). As education is all about developing pupils' internalities, it is no wonder education has been so central to the middle-class project and key to aspirations of social mobility.

Since its inception, BVM's project has been built upon developing multifaceted internalities. 'What the world today needs are harmoniously blended men of spirituality and science, simultaneous development of the outer man and the inner man' (*Brahmacharya Magazine* 90-91). This is reflected in BVM trust's description of the variety of courses they offer:

> Brahmacharya has its roots firmly embedded in the Indian soil but its spreading branches reach out to encompass the best of the modern world in the fields of science, technology, economics and management. Brahmacharya is a unique institution where Sanskrit classes are found side-by-side with engineering colleges; Gita classes function along with the institute of management; traditional teaching of fine arts as well as the teaching of modern science, arts and commerce is found in its schools and colleges (Brahmacharya's webpage).

However, for institutions like BVM that claim to uphold 'Indian' culture and values, the intensification of global phenomena after the implementation of more pronounced liberalisation policies in the 1990s, and the concomitant social transformations, has brought important challenges to the old idea of internality, questions that have played out much less in Christian-run schools. In the wake of the social and economic transformations, and resulting domestic anxieties about westernisation, schools like BVM became important sites for the reworking of local imaginaries of what it means to be a modern Indian vis-à-vis a 'global' citizen. Because the quest to become a global citizen is mainly conceived through exposure to world culture, proficiency in global knowledge, skills, foreign cultural practices and tastes, anxieties have intensified about how to become a global person in the face of other global actors (western ex-colonial rulers) while at the same time seeking to remain essentially Indian.

Such anxieties, have in turn led Schools like BVM to resort to a similar rhetorical splitting of the self into two correlated domains, in which the inner domain, which defines the 'truly' Indian, is set to uphold values and qualities that resist, control, or overcome the pitfalls of the globalised outer domain. This is the terrain of the so-called value-based education. One important difference with the internality of nineteenth century Kerala emerges. Now the 'external', the globalised outside, is depicted not as inherited but as newly required in a globalised world and needing its own forms of nurturing and development. As a result, there are tensions and contradictions in the privileging of internal qualities over external ones manifested in the bodies and minds of individuals. In any case, the supposed existence of this internality is used to posit the Indian global self's superiority over others, who like Sam in the schools play are depicted as hollow.

Thus the ideal global (and noble) citizen endorsed in school is one whose inner core links back to an Aryan past, and is occupied by certain qualities, traditions and values, and whose outer domain accommodates and develops a wide repertoire of global competences. The 'outside' is the domain of global competences, practices and tastes, of the English language, of competition and assertiveness, while the 'inside', what is truly Indian, is the arena of spirituality, of submissiveness to traditions and values (e.g. deference to elders), of vernacular languages, and morality. The resulting formula for the school's vision of the ideal citizen was succinctly articulated by a teacher in the 1991-92 edition of the school magazine:

> Confidence and courage must become a part and parcel of your personality. They must spur your actions, invigorate your spirit and dare you to experiment. This inclination to experience new fields however must not make you a bold but blind imitator. A veil of delusion prevails everywhere. The pursuit of a deceptive goal can render you weak, desolate and dejected. Your skills of discrimination of the right from the wrong must be developed with this sense of confidence and you must build strength of character which is deep as the ocean and broad as the skies.

This passage speaks of the paradoxical nature of the ideal global citizen being endorsed in BVM, who on the one hand is called to 'experiment' (in the outer domain), and at the same time must possess the (inner) strength to resist the temptation into 'new fields' or at least discriminate between right and wrong in a globalised world. In the same breath the teacher sends out a discouraging message about 'daring to experiment', while encouraging it. The metaphor of a deep as the ocean (inner domain) and a broad as the skies (outer domain) captures the essence of the sort of ideal person the school claims to produce in Annual Day. This agenda is the result of the intersection of middle class educational demands and their particular banally Hindu nationalist project. The result is that the outer and inner domains are positioned in a paradoxical relation, in which the inner domain keeps the outer in constant check, preventing global practices from actually being practiced, while at the same time the need to have a globalised existence and outlook is ever more central to being a modern Indian in the global era. The questions of citizenship posited by the challenge of the self of the post-colonial moment have thus become complicated and more paradoxical in the post-liberalisation moment.

The BVM students in the Annual Day play represent the ideal Indian endorsed in school. Their self-conscious ability to switch easily in and out of '*our*' music into '*their*' music (and dance); their ease at shifting back and forth from an extraordinarily fluent use of the English language to the eloquent articulation of Malayalam sayings; their modern dress code; their demure behaviour towards elders; their assertiveness; their knowledge of other cultures; and finally, the domestication of the English language are representative of both their globalised competences and a nurtured 'traditional' core. Their mastery of two cultural repertoires, one that was 'truly' Indian and another 'global', allowed them to easily reach out across cultural difference through dialogue, aesthetic enjoyment, hospitality and respect, making them cosmopolitan (Werbner 2009: 2).

Class, Gender, English and the Quest for Marks

In practice, BVM's concern for nurturing globalised personalities was not just rhetorical. Like almost all schools of its kind in Ernakulam, they incorporated various activities around what they called 'universal' concerns, such as creating environmental awareness, or promoting international cultural events like the Russian film festival, or celebrating Hiroshima day and so on. The PEACE (Programme for Educational and Cultural Exchange) programme was also said to be the school's manifestation of their commitment towards giving students exposure to world culture. The rhetoric of global (noble) citizens projected in Annual Day provided a sense of a shared experience encompassing all students and staff. In practice, however, there were important disjunctures, of which four are discussed below.

First, let us consider the PEACE programme. The scope of the programme with regards to the student population was rather limited. Only few students, those from the wealthiest families could become part of the exchange programme, although it was often depicted as the shared experienced of all. A school secretary explained the selection process succinctly: 'the rich ones go [to Kent], then there is discipline and behaviour.' Of course, only the well-to-do families could afford the Rs. 1.5 lakh it cost. In an interview with the Principal, she valued the programme positively for offering students the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of an English home, 'sharing their meals together' and 'mingling with all the members of the family for a period of three weeks'. 'Even if you go abroad with your family, you'd never get this type of chance, they learn a lot.' Asked about what she thought the effects of the PEACE experience on students were, she replied:

> Initially, we Indians have the feeling that everything over there is very simple, and they are very rich and influential people, [that] their homes are very rich, [that] they have everything, and that it's not necessary that they should do work to earn money. You know all these ideas you get from fairytales, from books, from movies. So by going over there and living with a family, *they find that their lives over there are not really different from life over here*. [They learn] that in an English family, family relations are very strong, family ties are very significant for them also, they do go to school over there, and they study the same type of lessons. Maybe the coaching there is slightly different, that depends upon the country. Apart from that everything is the same. So I'm actually very happy that they experience that. It's not something coming out of a book or you telling them; they have seen it happening in front of their eyes. So that changes their outlook to a very large extent. So they share it with the others [here]. People over there have to earn their living, people don't live in palaces, and they don't have Rolls Royce and such cars. So, they actually come to terms with it.

From the Principal's viewpoint, the programme had a demystifying effect, by which students who participate in the programme learnt that their standard of living was in fact comparable to that of fellow students in the UK school. Similarly, she equated the values of

family, education and work of the UK to their local counterparts. This helped to project onto students the increasingly globalised middle-class idea that now the conditions of life and work in (urban) India are improving so rapidly that the relative attraction of foreign countries is declining (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007: 147). The global exposure, for which the school management praised itself was far from a shared educational experience, and was the preserve of students whose families could afford the expensive programme and whose lives became a referent, an aspiration for the rest. In the same breath, the school could praise the value of frugality, while encouraging parents to invest in the costly programme that created sharp distinctions among students.

A second disjuncture was that of gender. Let me call your attention to the Ball dance performed at the end of the play as part of the grand celebration to 'international integration'. Unlike, a Ball or Prom dance, in which high school seniors commemorate the end of their school days in a party where final year students dance, BVM's students mimicked a Ball on the school stage while parents and guests watched. Unlike a Ball's spontaneous nature, in the sense that everyone dances as they wish, the re-enactment of it consisted of a series of rehearsed and synchronised moves, which ended with all four couples bowing to the audience. While the representation of the Ball made it to the Annual Day play, and became incorporated into the school's rhetoric as a proof their 'truly' international character, the process by which it became part of the end-of-year celebration was not as smooth as it seemed.

The idea to enact a Ball dance came from the students. However, the school initially opposed it on the grounds that it was immoral, essentially because boys and girls had to hold hands and could potentially rub against each other. The school then agreed to consider the performance on the condition that some moves, wherein boy and girls bodies would come too close were replaced by others. The students persevered and with great deal of surveillance on the part of teachers managed to convince the school to let them perform the choreography. This represented a break from everyday life in school, where boy-girl segregation is observed quite rigorously in the school premises. On a daily basis, boys and girls were to sit separately in classrooms, and girls were scolded if they were seen mingling with boys. In short, on a daily basis the school reproduced accepted gender codes and norms of respectability.

A third disjuncture was that of the English language. In Annual Day, the English language was portrayed as central to modern Indian society, and to being a modern, global Indian. It was the language with which India's global present was narrated. It was the language that the BVM students represented in the play dominated to perfection, and claimed as truly Indian. Moreover, the school owed a great deal of its reputation to the good English that people across the city attributed to it. In reality, the level of proficiency among the student population varied widely: from fully proficient speakers to students with basic speaking skills and low levels of confidence in English. And while the school enjoyed a reputation of teaching good English, the fact was that, except from the actual English periods, lessons were conducted to a large extent in Malayalam. Indeed, teachers, whose level of English was often lower to that of some students, resorted to the vernacular language to deliver the core of their explanations. The school relied on students who were proficient in English to spread its image of good English in interschool competitions. Although this will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, I could advance that there was a marked correlation between level of English and students' class and caste/community background. The level of competence in English which the school publicly praised itself in Annual Day was far from a shared experience. That high level of competence was the exclusive domain of a minority of students whose families already spoke the language proficiently. Once more, this helped project onto students and families the dominant idea of the Indian middle class as flawlessly confident in English. In reality, however, relative class positions shaped students' proficiency in English rather than the school imbuing its pupils with a standardised and shared level of proficiency in the language.

Finally, perhaps the most pervasive disjuncture experienced in BVM was that between the school's rhetorical effort to de-emphasise academic performance, here implying the result in the 10th and 12th STD board and entrance examinations, and its systematic commitment to achieving the best results possible. BVM's management seldom hesitated in distancing itself from other schools via articulating a critique of other institutions' alleged narrow understanding of education only in terms of academic results. They dismissed such approaches for being 'utilitarian' and 'nothing but an information transmission process' (*Brahmacharya Magazine*, 2007-08). This is manifested in the following excerpt in which the school's Honorary Secretary claimed, in 1987, that:

> A school should not be an isolated academic institution. It cannot be immune from and impervious to the ambitions and aspirations, the hopes and heart beats of the society. It should not be a puerile machine churning out soulless automatons. We have a plethora of schools which derive salvation from

academic results alone. Let us not deny them their grand delusion. We at the Brahmacharya trust, however, should aim at something bigger and greater (Message from the Honorary Secretary, *Brahmacharya Magazine*, 1987).

BVM claimed to stand for the 'higher' aims described in the above sections, using buzz phrases like 'total personality development', 'global exposure', or 'value-based' education, while branding their imaginary opposite as immoral for imprinting students with nothing but 'unhealthy competition'. In the Annual Day play, Ram, the idealised school staff, summarised this as a commitment to produce citizens that are physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually fit, according to a set of fundamental Indian values. Paradoxically, having a perfect academic record was a primordial condition for having the sort of reputation and prestige the school possessed.

In Kerala, as in may part of India (and the world), education has always been understood in very practical and utilitarian terms. Families have since long sought to capture specific professional or technical credentials that will serve them in later life, and will become a measure of an individual's worth (Jeffery 2005: 28). Kerala universities, colleges, and technical institutes have always reacted swiftly to the job market, rapidly offering courses according to the new needs in the market. Obtaining marks in secondary school, allowing access to one or another course has always been a fundamental step in this chain, and hence a primary concern for parents and students alike. As a consequence, schools' reputations have since long come down to their ability to successfully put their pupil through examination hoops. In Kerala, specially in Ernakulam, Christians schools have always enjoy a good reputation in achieving this objective via what people usually refer to 'discipline'. The above statement can thus be read as BVM's attempt to de-legitimise ('immoral') Christian schools, and carve out a niche in the educational scenario of the 1980s, so heavily dominated by Christian aided schools. But it was also a voice within what at the time was an emerging concern against 'teacher-oriented' and 'exam-oriented' approaches to education, and a growing popularity of 'child-centric' perspectives. It also echoes the argument for 'value-based' education, strongly harnessed by the school today.

In the 1990s this concern gathered momentum among private, middle-class schools as in national educational bodies. In BVM, an article published in the school magazine titled *Education in the Proper Perspective*, the guest writer called for reforming education towards an approach that looks after the intellectual growth of every child; takes into account 'his

particular aptitudes, virtues, and temperaments'; is enjoyable; and inculcates good character both as an individual and as a potential citizen (*Brahmacharya Magazine*, 1990-91). The National Curriculum Framework[82] of 2005 (NCF 2005), for example, emphasized the need to incorporate teaching methods that consider students' individual virtues and learning abilities, and emphasized the notions of character building, multiple intelligences, independent thinking and creativity. Furthermore, the CBSE's decision to scrap the class ten boards and introduce the Continuous and Compressive Examination scheme resonates with the now dominant rhetoric against competition and cramming for examinations. This rhetoric, which emphasises individual attributes that distinguish persons as unique agents (Mines 1994: 10), has been actively picked up and reproduced by middle-class private schools as a marker of difference. This contemporary concern, as well as the older concern for individual internality, turns this account of a particular schooling project into further evidence towards the argument that a sense of self and of individuality are absolutely key to how Indians explain how they are understand others and conceive of their society[83] (Mines 1994: 10).

In BVM the rejection of 'unhealthy' competition was also part of a larger wariness towards 'globalisation', here implying the free movement of global (read Western) ideas and practices. 'Unhealthy competition for achievements' here is the immoral quality of the contemporary world, of which we are unavoidably a part. Competition, like almost anything coming from the so called West (except from the commitment to keep public places clean and the willingness to follow rules) implies a void of ('Indian') values. In the 2007-2008 edition of the magazine, an article titled *Value-based Education: The Need of the Hour* critiqued present day education for emphasising 'unhealthy competition for achievements', and neglecting the 'cultivation of character and the development of noble virtues' (*Brahmacharya Magazine*, 2007-08). Rhetorically, the impetus on the formation of individual character, as opposed to the achievement of collective results in the boards, has become stronger and today stands as the professed cornerstone of schools like BVM. With the advent of the post-liberalisation era this impetus has strengthened, and turned towards the need to encourage creativity, active learning, and independent and critical thinking.

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[82] This is the latest National Curriculum Framework (NCF) published by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The NCF is a document that provides the framework for making syllabus, textbooks and teaching practices within the school education programmes in India.

[83] The thesis thus stands in contrast to the view of Dumont (1970) and others who posited that in India individuality play no role in people's conceptions of themselves or others.

Ironically, the growing reputation of the school through the last decades has, as Annual Day illustrates, been linked to their batches' collective and individual academic achievements in public examinations. In Annual Day, the school glorified as its own the achievements of a student in the tenth standard boards. Sathya's rank in the 2008 CBSE class 10th board exam, second in the entire country, was deployed as a legitimising proof of the school's efficacy at producing academic excellence in the presence of its main stakeholders: parents. In Ernakulam, and in the rest of India, schools' academic performance vis-à-vis board and entrance exams is so important that even a few weeks after the start of fieldwork in 2009, the news of Sathya and his rank in the boards cropped up in various informal conversations I held with youths from different schools in various parts of the city. In spite of its rhetoric, BVM and schools of its kind cannot be impervious to the bulk of middle-class families' demands for academic results. In addition, the institution itself has proven to be quite competitive as the Zoozoo representing the school childishly celebrated having achieved the ISA award after having entered a long and competitive process. The effort to rhetorically deemphasise academic performance/competition, stands in sharp contrast to the fact that most of those schools that I here examine as 'schools with a difference' have outstanding records, many times 100 per cent pass, in public examinations.

So, as the students progressed towards the final years of school their emphasis on attempting to mould wholesome global personalities was undermined by the imperative to produce excellent results in board examinations. In practice, schools like BVM actively tried to maximise the result of their tenth and twelfth STD boards and competitive entrance exams by turning the entire academic year into an exam-oriented training regime. Teachers were pressured to impart the curriculum faster in order to cover it entirely by November (the academic year starts in June). Their performance, and hence their job, depended upon their ability to produce 'toppers'. Thus their emphasis centred on training students towards specific exam-like questions. Concomitantly, the majority of students complained that teachers only cared about results, and hence only taught them how to cram for exams[84]. All this meant that students often had to attend extra hours on top of

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[84] During fieldwork, this view was only challenged by the school headboy (the school's representative among students), who strongly believed that teachers were ultimately concerned about shaping them into good citizens. One afternoon, the headboy and other students argued about the work of teachers. 'They basically

their regular schedule or that 'vocational' periods were turned into *ad hoc* physics or chemistry lessons. From November onwards students 'mugged up' the course material in preparation for two rounds of mock examinations, in addition to one mock practical exam for subjects entailing a lab practice. During this intense period, students attended revision sessions held in school with teachers of the various subjects. For students, this was a time of heightened pressure. The majority of them experienced education as a struggle to get marks, or to 'break' the boards and subsequent entrance exams[85]. In school, academic achievement in board and entrance exams was talked about as central to both individual students' success and as students' responsibility to maintain the school's reputation. The walls of hallways were adorned with posters with messages that inspired competition, discipline and hard work. 'Application in youth makes old age comfortable', 'nothing venture, nothing have', 'work is worship', 'no pains, no gains', 'strive like a race horse, govern your attitude towards work and never slacken your efforts'. These practices contributed to the experience of the final years of school as a crucial year, as the 'year that can break or make you', in sum a time that required great deal of competition and hard work.

Practices aimed at maximising academic results were not exclusive to this type of school, but, having carried out research across different forms of schooling, I do suggest that the intensity with which these are implemented in 'schools with a difference', i.e. middle-class urban schools, is much stronger. More importantly, a look at BVM rhetoric, values and practices demonstrate once more how the middle classes deploy their cultural capital in contradictory ways (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 6).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the educational project of a highly reputed private higher secondary school in urban Kerala. Its project, rhetorically centred on producing a particular kind of Indian noble, global citizen, is teaming with contradictions which play out primordially at the intersection of the school's rhetoric and practice. In one breath the school upholds values like frugality and at the same time invites parents to spend their

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want us not to be rowdies and hold high positions', the headboy said. But soon as he left the other students insisted that teachers' 'ultimate goal is to make us score mark', which after all is, as one of them said, the basis for the schools reputation and teachers' accountability to the school.

[85] This resonates with Froerer's exploration of an RSS primary school, in which children experienced the disciplinary enterprise enforced in school more as an effective vehicle for inculcating success in educational terms than for inculcating a sense of superiority over and hatred of minority communities (2007: 1037).

money on an expensive exchange programme. In one breath the school voices the need for radical change, the need of students to become world citizens while simultaneously urging for the need to live by India's 'fundamental' values.

Contradictions are largely the result of the interaction between educational demands, the school's ideological orientation, and broader social concerns, all deeply inflected by the current historical moment of globalisation. The specific model of the 'educated person' encouraged in BVM and other schools of its kind – a highly globalised Indian citizen – represented the subjectivities which dominant groups within the city's middle classes endorse (Levinson & Holland 1996: 24). Echoing the idea of the ideal middle class explored by Fernandes (2006), schools with a difference construct an ideal, middle-class Indian youth as a social group that is able to culturally mediate India's new relationship with the world. The Annual Day play and endeavours like the PEACE programme are attempts to line up schools' missions with the growing demand among privileged families for an education that provides global competences and exposure, as well as an attempt to resonate with the broader hype surrounding this moment of Indian history. In this way, schools like BVM are responsible for the construction of the contemporary idea of the urban middle class person as an exemplary cosmopolitan citizen whose living standards are comparable to people living in the so called west.

However, this very same moment has been accompanied by broader anxieties about cultural annihilation, or at least about the question of what it means to be a global Indian without being swamped by non-Indian ideas and practices. A pervasive response to this question given by schools of all shades has been 'value-based' education. Schools of all community/religious affiliations have adopted this path, which has offered in turn a terrain on which exclusionary nationalist projects have found fertile ground. The result is that in the decades following liberalisation the schooling sector has become more complex. On the one hand there is a move in the direction of the liberal emphasis on the individual and at the same time a move in the direction of entrenched religious/communal identities. BVM's reputed educational project, for example, has given rise to the increasingly dominant popular Hinduism that characterises liberalised India. It creates a sense of a shared civilisation that dates back to an Aryan past for which the need to mediate between 'modernity' and 'tradition' it has become more pressing than ever. In doing so, elitist, high

caste Hindu traits, morality, and concerns are concealed inside a seemingly all Indian 'ageless' tradition, undifferentiated by caste, class or gender.

However, the contradictions running through the school's everyday life reminds us that, as Levinson & Holland (1996) noted, educational institutions cannot simply be assumed to straightforwardly shape and discipline youth into particular models of the 'ideal' person. In particular the contradiction between the school's rhetorical emphasis on non-academic dimensions and its practical commitment to maximise academic competition reveals that families and students not simply imbibe the particular models and aspirations imparted in school. This demonstrates in turn how middle class status is being fought at very different levels and in various different ways: through accumulating global exposure and character or via cramming for examinations, all offered under the same roof. In the following chapter, I engage precisely with that difference or lack thereof. Leaving the school environment and locating the enquiry of education from the perspective of the parents whose children attend BVM, the next chapter examines the educational strategies of families of different middle-class backgrounds.

Chapter 4: Aspirational Regimes: Parental Discourses and Practices

Introduction

Formal educational institutions do not operate in isolation from other sites where 'education' takes place. This chapter looks at the home as a more informal field where 'education' – understood broadly as the complex social processes oriented around integrating children into society – also takes place (Jeffery 2005). In particular this chapter locates the enquiry of education from the perspective of the families whose children attend BVM. In it I examine the socio-economic backgrounds of the families who converge in this school, and explore the relationship between parents as educators, and schools and other formal institutions. What are parents' views on schooling? What do parents themselves 'teach' and through what practices? How are parents' 'teachings' in consonance or disaccord with the priorities or values of formal institutions?

In this chapter I show how the families that converge in BVM come from a wide range of backgrounds but share similar interests in education, which as I argue is illustrative of both the disparities and commonalities of India's widening middle classes. Despite their socio-economic differences there were remarkable similarities in their educational narratives and practices. At the level of practices, this chapter explores three points of convergence: the choice of school, investment in entrance coaching, and preferred career options. Few would dispute that if there is a marker of middleclassness in present-day India it is sending children to costly private, English-medium school (which also involves buying special textbooks and paying for autos or the school bus) and entrance coaching centres (Kumar 2011: 238; Osella & Osella 2000: 141); Kumar 2011:238). It is no wonder that the rise of private, English-medium schooling and other forms of formal, self-financed coaching in the last few decades are tied to the educational demands of families across not just Kerala but also the rest of India. Apart from constituting a marker of social status in itself, these are thought to provide the most valued forms of capital and other skills perceived as central to enhancing children's possibilities in today's job markets (Advani 2009: 17). In terms of career options, all BVM parents tried to guide their children towards occupations garnering significant amounts of wealth and prestige. As in other societies, professionals are considered maximal achievers (Osella & Osella 2000: 40). There seems to be an obsession among parents to have their children attaining professional degrees, especially IT related engineering degrees, as not just the most desirable outcome of formal education but as the basic qualification expected of them.

At the level of narrative, I examine how parents deploy shared discourses that (re)produce stereotypes of youth as overly ambitious and competitive. Through these discourses they aim to instil in youth a drive to succeed and high doses of self-discipline, ambition and competitiveness while disguising their role in carving such subjectivities. Individual youth are depicted as responsible for acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to attain educational merit, employment, economic wealth, and social standing in globalised India. Parenting emerges as an authoritarian and intensive craft-like activity by which parents aim to shape their children, the 'raw material' (Devika 2002: 11), in order to enhance their individual future prospects, as well as the family's overall social status by having a son or daughter who is a successful professional. The combination of these practices and discourses is what I would call 'inspirational regimes.'

In what follows, I draw ethnographic sketches of a number of families so as to illustrate the variety of backgrounds of the school's intake. Subsequently I elaborate on parents' educational narratives and practices with regards to schooling, entrance coaching and career preferences. I draw primarily from two sources: first, a number of in-depth interviews conducted with BVM parents; and second from a survey I conducted in the neighbourhoods surrounding the school.

Ethnographic Sketches

Balraj, a 17 year old Hindu Nair, was a diehard fan of Manchester United. He and his closest friends played football inside and outside school whenever the hectic routine of the final year allowed it. Regularly they conversed about football players from the various European leagues, and often assigned each other the names of some of the most famous players. Balraj friends dubbed him as David Villa, after the famous Spanish striker. Balraj dreamed of being able to play football professionally. But knowing the virtual impossibility of it, Balraj was keen on the idea of pursuing a degree in hotel management. He could picture himself becoming a chef in an international hotel. Up until the middle of his twelfth STD, his parents allowed him to nurture that interest by not 'going deep into it' (i.e. by avoiding the matter). Balraj's father, BSc in Physics, worked at a medical equipment manufacturing company in Ernakulam for fifteen years, after which he started his own medical equipment business. Balraj's parents claimed to have entered a 'confused stage' as far as Balraj's future after school was concerned. Their 'problem', Balraj's father said, was that Balraj's marks were not very high; 'they are not that encouraging'. As the crucial

moment at the end of class twelfth approached, Balraj's parents became more anxious about Balraj's future as decisions at this stage are seen as 'life-deciding', as his parents put it: 'there will be no return, it will be a one way path.' Thus they were having second thoughts, for a career in hotel management is seen as limiting the 'opportunities of growth' through a lifetime they wished to pass on to him. 'We are putting pressure on him to improve his performance in the exams', hoping that Balraj will get the marks for medicine or engineering. While Balraj's future seemed puzzling for his parents, his older sister's trajectory fell more in line with their business and aspirations. She was at the time doing a BSc in Medical Technology at a private college in Pune. In the end, Balraj joined a hotel management degree programme in Mumbai, while his sister graduated and returned to Ernakulam to work in her father's business.

Priti, at the time 16 and in class eleven, has studied at BVM since LKG. She was enrolled in one of the two computer/mathematics batches available in school[86]. This was the most sought after, and hence competitive higher secondary division for it was understood to be closely linked to the most coveted professional degrees, mainly IT-related engineering courses. Priti aspired to get admission to an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), and was without a doubt one of the most hardworking students in class eleven. During weekends Priti attended one of the main providers of coaching for entrance examinations in the city, the TIME[87] institute. At school and even during some of the discussion groups I led, Priti used up every spare moment to study the lessons and keep up with the demanding assignments from TIME. Priti acknowledged the advantage of being exposed to entrance coaching and valued wholeheartedly the financial effort that her parents made to pay the Rs. 35,000 for the two-year course. 'Through entrance coaching you get the advantage of knowing the kinds of questions they give at the IIT entrance exam'. She found the institute's methods to be harsh at times, making students 'feel inferior' or loose their confidence after attending a session. 'They should be more like school in the way of teaching, in the way they cover the portions' and 'pay attention to students individually'. An only child, Priti was born when her parents were in their forties. With all her cousins

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[86] There were two computer/mathematic groups, one biology/mathematics group – seen as linked to the medical profession – and one commerce group. The latter carried negative connotations. Commerce students were seen as failures, as the majority of students in this batch had failed to get a seat in a science batch.

[87] Triumphant Institute of Management Education Pvt. Ltd. (TIME), established in 1992, is said to be one of India's leading test-preparation institutes. With headquarteres at Hyderabad, it operates out of 200 offices located in 104 towns and cities across India. The core of TIME's staff is said to be constituted by over 50 IIT/IIM graduates. It offers programmes not only for national and state-level entrance exams like the CAT, MAT, IIT-JEE, AIEEE, and KEEE but also for international exams like GMAT, GRE, IELTS and TOEFL.

graduated from college and married, Priti knew her parents would want to marry her soon after college.

Priti belonged to a Tamil Brahmin family. They lived in a small two-storey house near the school. Priti's father and mother went to a government and a convent school, respectively. Priti's mother, a mathematics and education graduate, was a housewife. Her father, BCom, retired from Godrej as a finance manager. His story of getting secure salaried employment was quite eventful. After completing his pre-university course in Madurai, his parents pressured him to quit studying and work in the family's small business. With eleven siblings, most of them younger than him, he was expected to contribute to the family's income. Yet Priti's father opted to acquire further educational qualifications in an attempt to find permanent salaried employment, while helping in the family's business. He took shorthand and typewriting courses, as well as wireless operation/Morse code course aiming to find clerical employment or a job on board a merchant ship. His parents never allowed him to pursue the latter option. He did however hold different clerical posts, doing the accounts of small businesses. Then Priti's father landed a clerical job in a medical firm with the help of his father. Priti's father finally returned to college, completed a degree in commerce and got a job in Godrej. He always dreamt of being able to say he was a graduate.

Neelanjan was a fresher at BVM. He grew up in a Bengali family settled in Mysore, in the Southern Indian state of Karnataka. Neelanjan, his parents and younger sister were relocated to Ernakulam in May 2009 because of his father's job – a planner for Hindustani Unilever – which involved rather frequent changes of residence across Indian cities. Upon arrival, Neelenjan's parents have relied on the advice of local acquaintances to shortlist the best possible schools, based on their academic records, facilities, as well as the children's backgrounds. Similarly, they placed Neelanjan in the TIME institute for entrance coaching as they heard of its professed high success rates in helping students prepare for competitive entrance examinations. His father cautioned me, echoing what the principal at BVM had told him in their interview:

In today's scenario whatever he requires, he has to pick it up himself… parent's are far behind the present generation's knowledge; we are not in touch with the day to day knowledge; we are always busy with our existence in the office. So, what we are doing? We are only spending money and trying to put him in the right place, and it is up to him how far he can grow… they are on their own.

Throughout the academic year Neelanjan struggled to pass term exams in all subjects (except for English), let alone secure high marks. Not knowing Malayalam[88] and not having enough time and energy to study after attending entrance coaching, his academic performance was seriously undermined. Towards the end of the academic year, Neelanjan's parents pulled him off of the entrance institution, which he considered 'a waste of time,' in an attempt to help him pass the eleventh STD. But few weeks later, Neelanjan was once again attending entrance coaching. He seemed disillusioned, yet resigned to his parent's decision, and acknowledged that otherwise it would entail a waste of money. Neelanjan failed class eleventh, and was subsequently sent to Kolkata, where he stayed with an aunt. In Kolkata Neelanjan joined a commerce batch and he successfully passed eleventh STD.

Parvathi was one of the few freshers in eleventh standard. She was a Tamil Brahmin, born in Kochi. Until her tenth standard, she studied at another English medium, CBSE school, where her younger brother at the time of my fieldwork continues to go. Her parents' decision to attempt the transfer to a more reputable and expensive school was supported by Parvathi's outstanding score – more than ninety percent – in the CBSE tenth STD board examination. 'Everybody was telling us that she should try getting into a school with better coaching so that she can write entrance exams'.

Parvathi's father worked in a local newspaper, while her mother was a housewife. Her parents had what they called 'a normal [school] education'; that is, they attended Malayalam-medium, government schools. Later her father completed a BCom followed by a Master's in commerce (MCom). With three successfully completed graduate degrees – a BEd[89], a BA in political science, and another BA in social studies – Parvathi's mother was over qualified; yet, she never held any formal employment. After getting married, they pondered over the option of finding her a job as a teacher, but the bribe they had to give for such a job, from 5 to 7 lakh, deterred them from it. Her father worked as a clerk in Saudi Arabia for nine years between 1983 and 1992. Life in the Gulf was 'like a prison', he recalled. But at the time jobs in the Gulf were seen as 'something like a money mining job' that inspired him to dream of saving enough money to eventually return to Kerala and start

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[88] Although this is an English-medium school, which is known across the region for its alleged high standard teaching of English language, substantive parts of the lessons were delivered in Malayalam.
[89] Bachelor's degree in education.

a business of his own. Those ambitions faded away, and he settled with a white collar position at the newspaper.

Parvathi's results in the boards not only entailed an immediate reorientation of her schooling career, it conditioned much of what her parents expected from her in the long and short term. 'I want her to be better than us', the father confessed. He went on talking about computer engineering, the need for an MBA, and jobs at the nearest IT park – Infopark – as the kind of opportunities to which she should aspire after school. Her father went even further saying that if she got one of such job 'she could earn from 40,000 to 50,000, with this 90% mark she could study and get this engineering job. Now I am earning almost 10,000, so she could make 5 times more if she studies.' In consonance with this, Parvathi's parents placed her at the same entrance coaching institution as Priti, aiming that she secured a merit seat at a Kerala engineering college. Her parents enforced a strict studying routine at home. They were pressured from her head teacher, who reportedly called home to urge them to make sure she devoted more time to studying. They complained about the fact that Parvathi spent too much time watching TV.

For Parvathi, the changes that derived from her successful performance in the board exams were mostly a source of distressing. Repeatedly she spoke of feeling tense and narrowed her aspirations down to wishing to complete eleventh and twelfth STD, putting off her father's expectations. For Parvathi, sitting in front a computer – which she would have to do if she were to study computer engineering – seemed unhealthy, while attending entrance coaching was simply 'a waste of time'. The social struggle that resulted from changing school mattered a lot to her. Making friends in the new school turned out to be difficult, as 'there were gangs of friends already'. 'I was trying to mingle but they don't want to make friends.' This 'tension' was exacerbated by a heightened sense of competition, or at least a more demanding schooling environment, among her new peers. 'It's a very different situation over here… everybody is brilliant or something.' Parvathi thought these factors contributed to her getting a low mark in her first term examination at BVM.

Vijay is one of the few students at BVM who participated in the PEACE programme, which is said to cost Rs. 1.5 lakh per student. A class twelfth Hindu Nair student, he belonged to what some of his peers called the *English-speaking gang*, those who communicate in English among peers (and most of the time at home as well). He was an asset to the

school for his English public-speaking skills, which he had developed at a young age when his parents put him in English oratory classes. His sharp and eloquent use of the English language was at the school's disposal for all sort events and interschool competitions and as such he was one of a few youth who served as the public face of the institution. These activities, he confessed, worked as an excuse for his not so great academic performance, which Vijay simply saw a result of sloth. 'But you can't say you are lazy'. When I asked him about the future, Vijay said that he would be content with studying any business related degree and then look after his parent's business. However, his parents convinced him that he should 'learn science' now and subsequently acquire a *professional* (engineering) degree, and then get an MBA to finally work at expanding the family business. In 2011 Vijay, completed his first year of an engineering degree programme at VIT, Tamil Nadu.

Vijay, his younger brother and parents (and a Labrador retriever) lived in a sumptuous flat near the school. His parents, in their mid forties, held multiple postgraduate degrees, which they acquired in New Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. His father, son of Ayurvedic doctors, and his mother, daughter of a Navy official, were successful business people. He and his wife owned an advertising company that managed billboards across Kerala and a rice mill. Unlike Parvathi's parents, for Vijay's mother BVM was seriously falling in disfavour. Years back she valued the school's Hindu-oriented (or non-Christian) education, its lower fees (and the fact that it was not a government/aided school), and its physical proximity. She complained that the school had become so 'commercialised' that 'the quality of students they are taking now is almost equivalent to government schools'. Moreover, the facilities of the recently inaugurated top end schools, like GPS, were from her point of view undermining the school competitiveness.

Ernakulam Middle Classes

As the sketches above show, schools like BVM are social nods in which the various so-called middle class tiers coexist (Fernandes & Heller 2006). They agglutinate families from established middle class backgrounds, who have for various generations enjoyed maximum achiever status and who have inherited privilege from their upper caste and urban forbearers[90]. They also attract families who have more recently gained access to the material lifestyles generally understood as middle class. Having attained this economic base via

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[90] For a detailed literature on the upper caste stature of the new educated classes of the nineteenth century see Joshi (2010) and Misra (1961).

migration or/and education – mainly technical diplomas at industrial training institutes or university degrees in the arts and sciences – they now set out to reconvert their economic capital into higher forms of education (professional degrees), which they will aspire to reconvert once more into greater prestige and economic gain[91]. Through education, and eventually employment, these families attempt to either maintain or obtain significant amounts of wealth and prestige that can be transmitted to the next generation. Despite their disparate class positions their expectations on children were not discernibly different.

Yet, these families are different in many ways. In terms of employment, BVM parents constitute a pool of skilled, educated and employed people at various levels. A large portion of my informants' fathers work in the nationalised industries that saw the light in newly independent India: mainly CSL, with a few working for BSNL, the Indian Oil Corporation, or other central government undertakings. Many of those working at CSL occupy labour-intensive posts after completing diplomas, as welder for example, from ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes). These parents rarely spoke English, often had rural backgrounds and had migrated to Ernakulam in search for better fortune. Others, who held graduate and postgraduate degrees, occupied white collar or clerical positions within these companies. They generally spoke English although most of them attended Malayalam-medium schools. Others held previously coveted and distinctly middle-class government jobs such as police, military, and teachers. Many of these last cohorts also had a background in rural areas were their families own land.

A second, large section of my informants' fathers, like Balraj's fathers, worked in the private sector, either as entrepreneurs or salaried employees. Among entrepreneurs, most ventures were small to medium scale businesses, many of them within the medical supplies and equipments, or chemical fields. Other parents ran business of a more metropolitan outlook, such as beauty parlours or an interior design companies. Among entrepreneur families, mothers are usually said to 'assist' in their husbands' businesses, with the exception of some widowed or single mothers who run businesses on their own. They too have long established urban middle class backgrounds, some of which trace back to business communities in metropolitan Northern India. Private sector employees, like Neelanjan's father, held white collar positions in larger companies such as Bhima Jewellers,

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[91] This confirms Bourdieu's idea that capital has a multiplier effect, being convertible and reconvertible from one form of capital to another (Bourdieu 1990: 118).

Godrej or Hindustani Unilever, or smaller ones, as Parvathi's father's who worked at a local newspaper. In this group, most mothers are housewives.

Another cohort of fathers[92] was Gulf migrants. Being skilled or professionally qualified migrants, unlike the majority of migrants to the Gulf[93], they had managed to maintain long term contracts and visas. Having spent considerable amounts of time in the Gulf, some of them with over twenty years abroad with visits to Ernakulam every year, they have amassed considerable wealth, regularly remitted to their families in Ernakulam. Most of these Gulf migrants were Christians or Nairs who due to their privileged economic and educational backgrounds had access to those overseas jobs, and to the considerable amounts of capital needed in the initial stages of migration (Osella & Osella 2000: 79). Some of the entrepreneurs described above had started their businesses after saving up capital as a result of a long period in the Gulf. There was also a small number of parents from other communities (Ezhava and Muslim) employed as semi-skilled labourers in the Gulf.

A final cohort of families was that of the most affluent households: constituted by parents in the most coveted professions (engineers, medical doctors and lawyers) and entrepreneurs with large enterprises. They inherited the prestige and wealth of upper caste forbearers who themselves were professionals and held high rank government posts and/or owned large plots of land. Most of the families here presented oriented their children's education towards acquiring the sort of prestige and wealth this last cohort of families stood for. Now I move on to parents' educational practices and discourses.

The Choice of Education

The choice of formal education for their children is among middle class families the single most important factor in improving their children prospects for the future (Kumar 2011). Having consolidated wealth in previous generations, these middle class families are now in pursuit of what Osella and Osella (2000) term maximal achiever status. In Kerala, since the expansion of the colonial administration in the nineteenth century, the primary marker of this status has been the highest ranking professions. These professions, preceded by modern English education, created the economic and cultural basis for the middle class, a

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[92] This was exclusively a male phenomenon.
[93] These have been described as male, typically under 35, unmarried or recently married and with an education at or below SSLC (Osella & Osella 2000: 78). For them migration periods are usually limited and interspersed with periods in Kerala in which they apply for new contracts and visas.

class that had inherited privilege from upper caste and urbanised forbearers as seen in Chapter 2 (Kumar 2011: 224). If the Indian Administrative and Foreign Services were the most coveted professions in the recent past, at present the most sought after are the engineering, medical and managerial professionals. Today government service positions are losing their glamour vis-à-vis positions in the private sector. The attainment of maximal middle class status is supported by the child's success or destroyed by the child's failure to achieve these objectives. As elsewhere in India, parents live in hope that their sons and daughter will somehow attain (or reproduce) that position in the employment hierarchy, and realise with increasing urgency that to do so they must get the right education (Parry 2005: 297).

Therefore, from the standpoint of the majority of parents the reputation of a school is based on its ability to produce excellent academic results in board and the subsequent entrance examinations to professional degrees. Parents try to place their children in the school that is known for obtaining good academic results. In choosing a school for their children parents try to ensure the success of the child in school – understood almost strictly in terms of getting sufficient marks for securing admission to particular professional degree courses. This is not to say that school's academic outcome is the only criterion for choosing a school; other criteria like distance, facilities, or religious affiliation are also important criteria. But these are secondary by far against academic results, even more so when sons and daughters approach college age.

Parents and students keep track of schools' performance in board exams; and the news of exam toppers or IIT successful candidates quickly becomes public knowledge. BVM had received an extraordinary number of applications in 2009-2010 after Sathya (Chapter 3) had become second in the nation-wide CBSE tenth standard board exam in the previous year. Before meeting Sathya or even getting access to BVM, I had already heard of his achievement as well as of the school which had produced it. Sathya himself was quite aware of the great boost he had given to the school's reputation. In choosing schools according to results, parents typically end up incurring high expenses, often reported beyond the means of the family, as schools command a high price for their education as they become more successful at producing high ranking students. A mother put it this way: 'if the results are not good, the school will lose that student; every management tries to improve results and they take different fees according to performance.'

Families incurred in this and many other sacrifices in order to support their children through their education. Apart from fees there are books, stationary, uniforms and other supplies, tuition, entrance coaching, and leisure expenses. There is a need for space to study and there is the nutrition needed by a student imagined to be more crucial than what is needed by someone engaged in other activities (Kumar 2011: 230). In addition, parents waited for their children to come home in order to supervise their home assignments. A great portion of the family's functioning and routines is designed around giving the child time and support. Priti's mother described how she provided Priti with every single food item that she asked for as soon as she could, and laughed at the fact that Priti does not know how to cook anything[94]. This was often accompanied by a parental discourse of inadequacy. Many parents portrayed themselves as being ignorant in the contents and issues of contemporary school subjects, and therefore unable to help their children's success in school. Thus they increasingly rely on filling their children's agendas with coaching and extra-school tuitions to improve their prospect in the face of competitive entrance examinations (Kumar 2011). Neelanjan's father painted himself as only being able to spend money as a way to ensure his son's success.

While they portrayed themselves as *only* spending money, parents actively sought to instilled the message that there is a sacred responsibility – to succeed (Kumar 2011). At the Plus Two level, this mission became extraordinarily relevant. Priti's father talked of how they have inculcated in Priti the idea that studying is her work and good marks her pay. Other students humorously described themselves as being under 'house arrest', which meant that all kinds of leisure have been put on stand-by for the duration of the final year of school. Parents took their mobile phones, disconnected the internet and the TV cable to help their children in achieving success. Most youth cooperated with the house arrest and internalised the mission to succeed because of the successful combination of discipline, aspiration, and blackmail, deployed by parents (Kumar 2011: 222). In this sense Kumar (2011) notes that the middle class child is educated twice. First they are educated in the literal content imparted in the various educational institutions they are exposed to, and second they are educated in what their families have socialised them into: youth particularly disposed to seek success.

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[94] As Parry points, the domestic labour of BVM children remarkably underutilised (2005: 287).

The result was that among many parents and their children emerged, as Kumar (2011) describes, a discourse and the actual experience of the 'self-sacrificing parent' – the mother at home and the father working outside – and the 'dutiful progeny', par excellence a middle-class discourse. In the context of Kerala, Devika (2007) shows that this idea of productivity, 'of obedient, useful, productive subjects', as 'the norm by which the quality of domestic life [read of mothering] was evaluated' (2007: 57) is not new. This understanding of modern domesticity is indeed linked to the making of a Malayalee middle class since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by which the labour of women in the domestic domain was tied to the production of modern subjects. This notion used as a model the lives of large sections of upper-caste women, and also of 'women in the dominant strata of lower castes being mobilised into communities' (like Ezhavas), who were exposed earlier to such ideas, and were thus more readily able to produce the sort of successful children expected of them (Devika 2007: 22). In contemporary Kolkata, Donner (2006) has revealed strikingly similar good mothering practices among middle-class families. She shows that in the wake of globalisation and the integration of employment markets into worldwide discourses of skills and mobility, middle-class mothering has been reoriented towards supporting children throughout their educational career and hence towards producing future white collared workers for a global economy (Donner 2006: 378). Through practices like sending children from a very early age to English-medium nurseries, speaking English at home, or what she called the 'pedagogising' of the home, mothers attempt to enhance marketable skills acquired in educational institutions.

This sort of parenting is to some extent ungendered, involving similar practices, rhetoric and objectives for both boys and girls. As the sketches above show, girls and boys are expected to compete for marks in the end of year exams and to aspire to become professionals. Parental school choices for boys and girls are based on the same criteria, competitiveness. But as Kumar (2011) points out , and as I will further develop in Chapter 7, there are some nuanced differences in the way in which parents deploy aspirational regimes upon girls, especially when it comes to career preferences. For boys the formula used to orient their educational present and professional future is simpler, being all about trying to enhance their employability, wealth and prestige prospects. The family is important here as the locus of their initial formation, and as the agent that funnels resources into the opportunities provided for them to attain certain economic and social

objectives (Kumar 2011: 232). The matrix for making educational decisions pertaining to girls is always more complex, conditioned by ideas of morality and of girls' future role as mothers. Like in the case of boys, the family is also important as an initial site of education and with reference to the ways in which resources are mobilised. But for girls the family acquires a double importance as educational choices and career preferences are shaped in accordance with their future expectations in the family that they marry into (Kumar 2011: 232).

Entrance Coaching

Just as the success of youth in attaining maximum achiever status is the success of the family, the failure of youth is the failure of the family. In their Plus Two, youth have not yet been marked out as success or failure. But as they approach the crucial examination at the end of their schooling days, parental anxieties and their efforts to facilitate their children's success intensified. The rising number of middle-class families and contracting possible openings for their children in the employment market has resulted in the swelling number and demand for entrance coaching centres. Sending one's children to these centres has in turn become a marker of middle-classeness. Apart from investing in expensive private schooling, parents increasingly consume entrance coaching specially geared towards preparing young people to take entrance examinations for the most competitive professional degree courses, mainly in engineering or medicine. For each of these courses there is an examination, and for each examination there is a wide range of coaching centres.

In one of the twelfth standard batches with which I worked, 27 out 33 students attended at least one of the many entrance coaching courses in institutes in Ernakulam or beyond, with yearly fees ranging between Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 60,000. Parents chose entrance coaching using similar criteria used for choosing schools: based primarily on the institute's record of producing successful exam takers. There were some students who attended coaching centres in Kottayam, a city some 65 Km south of Ernakulam city just for the sake of attending a centre with the best record in a particular examination. Tutorials vary widely, and adapt to the needs of individual families. Centres offer courses starting from the primary, secondary, or higher secondary. They offer week days or weekend courses. They also offer 'crash course' right before entrance examinations. In Ernakulam these centres have rapidly increased in numbers and visibility: the city's roads are wrapped with entrance coaching publicity that often includes the headshots of their most successful students.

These centres aim their teaching towards making families feel they are getting their money's worth: conducting frequent mock tests, giving feedback, revision classes, and make-up classes. The director of one coaching centre attributed the expansion of these centres to the fact that schools do not train students in order to succeed in competitive exams like the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE).

The majority of parents saw entrance coaching education as an important complement to their children's school education, providing the necessary skills to succeed in the sort of questions asked in competitive entrance examinations. But for some parents entrance coaching was vastly superior to school education. They supported the idea of better education as 'better coaching' to do well in board and entrance examinations, and attributed the growth of the EC industry to what they saw as a 'lack of support' provided by schools to effectively prepare youth for the sort of questions formulated in competitive entrance examinations, like the JEE-IIT. Likewise, many students saw coaching centres as superior. Many argued that school is about cramming facts or 'mugging up', while entrance coaching centres imparted a higher level of education. In particular students valued coaching centres for teaching them how to solve 'HOT' (high order of thinking) questions, said to be 'application level' questions that make students/candidates think and apply concepts to real world problems. These youth devoted the majority of their time to studying and completing the assignments given by the coaching tutors and devoted little energy to school work.

Many BVM parents also valued entrance coaching positively for the level of discipline instilled in students, something they felt was being lost in school. They saw with scepticism some of the changes taking place in formal schooling, like the introduction of 'child friendly' approaches, holistic evaluation systems, or value education itself. Balraj's father for example, spoke of 'expecting much more' from the level of discipline enforced in the school. 'They don't impose much on students; there is no pressure given'[95]. Slightly nostalgic he recalled the 'gap' that existed between students and teachers before, whereas now 'that relationship [of friendship between students and teachers] is spoiling the discipline of the school.' By exposing their children to the stricter space of coaching centres parents sought not only to educate their children in the actual contents of the course but

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[95] Indeed the dominant discourse from educationists in India and central government education organisations is to reduce the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by students' exposure to external examinations.

also to educate them into discipline and hierarchy. Moreover, many parents saw coaching centres as teaching children how to handle 'pressure', generated not just by the burden of a larger work load but also by the competition among peers encourage in these centres. Unlike the smaller school lessons, in the entrance coaching lessons I audited there were over fifty students crammed in a classroom. In other centres there were reportedly lessons with up to 100 students. Youth, like Priti, complained about the distant relationship between tutors and students in the entrance coaching and often wished this was more individualised, personal and friendly, as in school.

Others, on the contrary felt ambivalent about the need to burden children with entrance coaching lessons, yet felt the pressure to conform to what has become a norm. Thus sending children to coaching centres for them was not a matter of desiring it but of needing it in order to remain a social equal to others. Here social equality refers to that among and between members of a class, rather than between caste members. As van Wessel (Van Wessel 2004: 97) notes, middle-class status demands practices and levels of consumption (of entrance coaching for example) that are in tune with 'the times', meaning that one must maintain the higher standard of living that upward mobility and the availability of new consumer goods have made 'normal'. An important reason entrance coaching has become a 'requirement' is the fact that status competition demands such possession. At least two of the parents I interviewed illustrated this point by using the Malayalam saying *nadodumbol naduve odanam*. Often translated as 'when people are running you should never be left alone' or 'when people are running, you should run in the middle' the proverb makes the point that one should always assimilate to the norm. Though some parents deplored the educational treadmill, they were nonetheless chained to it for it was as if their children's competitiveness was always hanging by the slenderest thread (Parry 2005: 290).

Student 'failure'

But what, then, of the students who did not straightforwardly embrace entrance coaching, or youth like Parvathi and others who considered 'entrance' – as they referred to it – to be a 'waste of time'? What, of students like Sameer who claimed to be exhausted and hungry by the time he left school and rushed to get to entrance on time, and who became depressed as a result of the level of competition among peers? What happened to students who are not as ambitious? As Kumar (2011) and Fuller and Narasimhan (2006) point out,

'failure' in the face of competitive entrance exams and subsequent job applications is more frequent than 'success.' In India, Kumar further explains, failure is interpreted through what he terms the dual discourse of the child and childhood (or youth) (2011: 237), which as I show exerts a kind of symbolic violence on youth through either end. 'At the one level, childhood is unmarked and undifferentiated, and children are theoretically the same in that they are malleable and formable' (Kumar 2011: 237). They are a stone to be sculpted, and private schooling and coaching are indeed parents' tools, the means of what Davies (2004) terms 'intensive parenting'. Davies argues that:

> Parents who hire or desire tutors are not overly busy but may in fact be more intensely involved with their children's education. Tutoring may be purchased by parents who are actually more closely involved with their children's homework schooling (2004: 239).

Entrance coaching in particular and 'systematic' studying in general were for parents an alchemy that produced maximum achiever status. Through them, as Priti's father told me, 'the sky is the limit'. Education is understood as capable of changing a person intellectually, psychologically, socially, and emotionally (Kumar 2011: 237). At the opposite end, the discourse is one of the individual youth as essentially unyielding to being taught. Failure here comes to be interpreted to reflect on the individual youth rather than the family. Neelanjan and Balraj illustrate the violence at both ends of the discourse.

A fresher to BVM and newly arrived to Ernakulam, Neelanjan was struggling to cope with school and entrance coaching. By mid-term it was clear that entrance coaching, which took up most of the afternoon, was undermining his ability to pass school exams. He failed all but one of the mid-term evaluations, which he attributed to the fact that entrance would drain all his energy. He explained that by the time he got home at seven in the evening he could not get himself to concentrate on studying. In the middle of the term Neelanjan's father told Neelanjan to stop going to the coaching centre. Instead 'my dad is asking me to come up with a concrete plan of what I want to do in the future and a concrete plan of studies for each day', Neelanjan told me. But three weeks later Neelanjan's father changed his mind and enforced entrance on his daily routine once again. Neelanjan's father insisted that through systematic studying and time management he could succeed in school and coaching centre. Sending him to entrance was also a way for Neelanjan's parents to monitor his efforts, for they felt Neelanjan might not be 'mature' enough to study in an unsupervised manner at home. In the end Neelanjan failed the eleventh standard.

Unlike Neelanjan, other youth whose marks were not as competitive were not submitted to parental authority in the same way. Youth, like Balraj, who felt that EC was too 'hectic', who failed to enter a science group (and hence, ended up in the commerce group), and who generally dreaded studies were seen as essentially lacking intelligence, what was locally referred to as not being 'bright' (the English word was used). 'Bright-ness', the main manifestation of which were marks, was often talked about by parents as a sort of intrinsic quality which individual youth lacked or possessed. Balraj's parents interpreted Balraj as essentially lacking bright-ness, and hence as being 'not that encouraging'. Thus, until the very last stages of the twelfth standard they showed a lack of concern and effort to mould Balraj into a competitive student. Balraj had already been labelled as failure. Parents like Balraj's mother and father still tried to inspire their sons and daughters to get higher marks, but the level of exigency was much less than towards 'bright' youth. Balraj and his elder sister illustrate this point. Their parents expected much less of Balraj, who showed signs of slackness, than of his elder sister, who attended EC, got a professional degree in North India and now worked in her parents business. In short, parents administer the intensity of their expectations according to their children's individual qualities and eagerness to embrace the exigencies that come with it. At the first sign of 'bright-ness', like Parvathi's case shows, parents heighten their level of intervention, expectations, investments, and hopes.

Neelanjan complied and yet was unsuccessful in coping with the exigencies of his parents' aspirational regime, while Balraj was essentially discarded as an unworthy candidate to be moulded according to his parents' aspirations. Both were instances of students failing to match the new normative neoliberal subjectivity – that of a responsible, goal-oriented, self-regulating, autonomous and hard-working individuals – underpinning the aspirational regimes I here describe. Far from unravelling the regimes, 'failure' bulwarked parental aspirational regimes by linking failure to a student's individual character or qualities. In many instances, siblings' success was actively emphasised by parents as the evidence that failure was strictly a result of a student's 'atypical' lack of 'brightness'.

Even though the lives of their children were governed by parents' educational ends and anxieties (Parry 2005), parents deployed narratives of contemporary youth as 'being on their own' and parents as being 'busy making money' that effectively disguised their intensive parenting. These narratives depict an idealised past in which the members of

extended families looked after the education needs of children. This portrayal is pitted against the imagined busy modern family. In the former, as Priti's father said the family 'would never allow anyone to go astray'. Elder siblings, cousins or aunts were said to make sure children studied every lesson. Now it is believed that youth have to fend for themselves. Shadowing their active role as educators, parents often draw on a narrative of modern busy parents and portray images of themselves as 'only spending money' and trying to put their children in the right place. As Neelanjan's father put: 'it is up to him how far he can grow.' Throughout my fieldwork in Ernakulam, teachers, parents and students alike contributed to an omnipresent view that in this generation it is *up to* the individual to work, learn, aspire, and achieve (grow). For example, when parents and prospect students were interviewed as part of the admission process at schools or EC institutes, school official were always keen to remind them that it was entirely up to the individual student to score high marks in boards and entrance exams.

Teachers and school staff reproduced this discourse and claimed that the mushrooming of coaching centres was a response to the lack of family support of youth's everyday studying. It is seen as evidence of the most pervasive of all stereotypes: modern parents are overworked, and thus have no time or energy to look after their children. This belief is the most recurrent basis for schools' critique of contemporary parenting. In an interview with the director of the school, he blamed many parents for failing to cooperate in the education of their children. Parents are said not to convey values and leave children freely exposed to valueless TV channels. He portrayed parents as neglecting family life and excessively focused on their professional lives, negative stereotypes attributed to the modern family across India (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007). But a look at parental engagement with education shows that while parents are indeed busy, youth were far from 'on their own'. Moreover, as Priti's father's educational trajectory shows extended families were not always supportive of children's education. As has been shown elsewhere in India, in extended families it is typical that only the youngest sibling is encouraged to study longer, while others are made to stop studying and start working or looking after younger siblings many of whom are in fact left alone from a very young age (De Neve 2011; Parry 2005).

By disguising intensive parenting practices behind 'we are only spending money' narratives, parents in effect helped craft a pervasive idealised image of contemporary youth as utterly busy, under stress, and yet self-motivated and highly ambitious individuals. By discursively

placing the responsibility of 'growth' on their children, they shaped and educated them into this subjectivity: the self-motivated, hardworking, and ambitious person. Parents helped cement this imagery by juxtaposing it with idealised memories of their school and college years. Their generation was often characterised by being 'relaxed', 'enjoying' and concerned with 'playing only', while their children's generation is said to be obsessed with studying, stressed and innately ambitious. Ambition, to which I now turn, was always marked by the quest for professional careers.

Career Choices

Parents' preferences for higher education were driven by the desire to guide their sons and daughters into careers with 'opportunities for growth', as Balraj's father dubbed them. For middle class parents, these refer mostly to what is known as 'professional degrees'– engineering, medicine, charter accountancy, or law. Parents almost unanimously expected their children to pursue professional degrees, which were seen both as the sources of wealth and prestige par excellence. As with Tamil Nadu's middle classes (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006), parents in Ernakulam seemed to increasingly favour engineering, more specifically computer or IT related engineering. Parents and student eagerly referred to jobs in the local IT park or the Indian IT industry in general to illustrate their aspirations in what many believed to be a thriving employment field. Priti, who wished to study mechanical engineering, spoke of her parents' attempts to stir her towards the IT engineering degree courses. In addition, a high number of parents agreed that an engineering degree should ideally be followed by a MBA. As Nisbett argues, following Holmström (1976), the shift from a generation of parents the majority of which were schooled in government aided institutions and subsequently got technical or basic university degrees, to a generation being groomed for professional degrees may be well interpreted as part of the qualification inflation begun in the 1970s (Nisbett 2007: 938). A twelfth standard female student put it succinctly: 'now those who get BSc Physics don't get jobs; now a BTech[96] is actually the *minimum qualification*, then you have to add an MBA. You start from the BTech, the basic degree, that's what my parents tell me'.

Having benefited from higher education and having accumulated wealth for several generations, BVM families now aspire to achieve (or maintain) the coveted professional

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[96] BTech refers to Bachelors in Technology.

status. From that position of privilege they were now keen to marking the arts and science degrees that they once acquired as lower class[97]. Parents who, for example, got a degree in commerce in St. Albert's college, one of the older and previously prestigious colleges in Ernakulam, now see the college as a place baring no prestige. One father explained that today only 'local mallus[98]' attend that college. Those people, he said, 'still have that mindset; they want education for the sake of it'. These 'local' colleges are now 'secondary', he continued, 'for lower middle class people'. Diametrically opposed to these degrees and colleges, professional degrees are seen as more desirable and as garnering greater prestige and opportunities for generating wealth (i.e. growth). Moreover they are marked as a starting point for the middle class person, a minimum qualification which is of course unaffordable for the bulk of society.

Similar to the 'culture of magical belief' surrounding the IT industry that Peter van der Veer (2005) describes, BMV parents' narratives of individual growth were embedded in profound optimism in India's economic situation. This was envisaged as a bountiful terrain of employment opportunities for professionals in the private sector in India and beyond, but also as a particularly fertile and rewarding field for individual creativity, innovation, and leadership – i.e. entrepreneurship. This vision was often accompanied and reinforced by narratives of the past as a time of very limited scope of employment opportunities and a concomitant lack of ambition among youth. Neelanjan's father believed there has been a:

Great change in opportunities, now there is no stoppage! Earlier, in our days, what it used to happen was after graduation you went off to get a government clerk job. You learned some typing so that you can do some letters and correspondence and all that, and join a government organisation as a typist. Then you get a promotion and become a senior clerk. Like that it was the ambition. Those days we used to think like that, now it is not so. Now there is no limitation; if one student wants to do anything, he can go up to that goal. If he really wants, he can go wherever he wants.

Like him, there was an almost pervasive belief among parents that there is no limit to what their children could achieve. Drawing from India's modern role models like the founder of Infosys Technologies, N. R. Narayana Murthy, and the concomitant disdain towards government employment, many parents I interviewed drew on the cliché 'the sky is the limit' to talk about their children's future prospects in the private sector.

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[97] This is similar to the way in which government and government-aided schools are now being coded as lower class.

[98] This is a derogatory term for Malayalees.

This imagery was coupled with what is perhaps the most entrenched stereotype surrounding Indian youth today: the belief that this generation is one of overflowing ambition and determination, rightly encapsulated in Lukose's 'Zippies' (2009: 4). This discourse of ambitious youth is par excellence a middle-class discourse. Priti's father once illustrated this idea by comparing himself as a child to an eight-year-old girl today. The 'modern generation has got lots of *opportunities*, and they have *awareness*, and they have lot of *avenue* too. Today, a girl studying 8th STD can talk about what she wants to be. Those days [when he was an eight STD student] it wasn't like that; simply, you studied.'

The majority of parents whom I interviewed sought to instil in their sons and daughters the desire for professional degrees, a generalised optimism about the future, and positive stereotypes of highly ambitious youth – what I would call parents' inspirational regimes. As I will examine in Chapter 7, during the final stages of the final year the majority of youth embraced the studying regimes, career aspirations and stereotypes of ambitious youth being circulate in urban India. However, youth cooperation with aspirational regimes was not straightforward. Many for example struggled to embody the level of determination expected of them, although in most cases actually did in the end. Vijay's story is a good example to illustrate this point. He recalled being quite sure of aspiring to become an engineer, and hence aiming to do well in the tenth standard board exam in order to get access to a computer/math batch. But well into the twelfth standard he felt that if he would have to do it again he 'would have taken commerce in a heart beat' for it is considered to be much easier than science streams. He felt his future was secure within the family venture, and believed there was not really a need to struggle with science subjects and rigorous, daily entrance training, which he described as 'hell'. Vijay said:

My dad is having a good business, but he told me that there is more than making money. I would be fine just running his business, making lots of money taking my son on trips. He told me I have to *achieve more*. He told me to better get over the suffering part as soon as possible, learn science now and not when I'm a grown up, it'll make things easier then. Then an MBA is pretty easy compare to this.

For Vijay's parents parenting was about inspiring hard-work, learning, and ambition ('to achieve more'), through a regime that made youth embody those very same values. Vijay continued to attend entrance and got admission to a reputed engineering college.

For others, the struggle to personify the vision and ambition expected of them was a source of distress. Parvathi kept disassociating herself from the professional ambitions her father envisaged during our interviews. She refused to embody the farsighted determination

expected of her, and limited herself to talking about short term objectives such as passing classes eleven. Murali, a twelfth standard Nair boy, recalled how since a young age parents, uncles, and aunts have brought up the question 'what are you going to become, an engineer or a doctor'? He spoke of the anxiety this question has always produced in him. Murali, like many others, wished he could pursue a career in music, but he resigned himself to doing an engineering degree, which his parents expected to be followed by an MBA.

Paradoxically parents always spoke of career choice as being a decision *entirely up to* their sons and daughters. Similar to the narratives of 'being on their own', statements like 'whatever they choose to study, they will study' immediately came up during interviews with parents as soon as I asked them about career options. These modern idioms of individual ambition and freedom to choose effectively concealed parental authority. As a way to obscure their decisive role in shaping his son's career choices, Neelanjan's father, for example claimed that he, as a commerce graduate could not have really informed Neelanjan's decision to aspire to pursue a medical career.

Confidence and Uncertainty

Recent works on contemporary middle classes in India have argued, in quite opposing ways, the degrees to which anxiety, or confidence and optimism constitute a substantive feature of being middle class (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; Liechty 2003). The parents of the families sketched above tell stories at both ends of the spectrum. Among the households that participated in my research, there were some families, like Vijay's, who belonged to the most privileged fraction of the middle classes. They easily match the income, housing and consumption levels of the most idealised images of the Indian middle class. The ways in which Vijay, for example, inhabited his own body, dressed in branded Bermuda trousers, flip-flops and t-shirts, rambling along the street waiting for his Labrador dog to sniff the kerb, embodied a sense of security similar to Fuller's IT professionals (2007). The way in which he, in perfect English, spoke of his already laid out educational trajectory, ending in a job in his parents' enterprise, transmitted a sense of confidence and security about the future that was unthreatened by the imminence of highly competitive entrance exams. Vijay's confidence derived from having a habitus attuned to the multiple spheres of social competition of, for example style, consumption or education, which in turn allowed him to routinely succeed within these spheres, giving him even more confidence (Jeffrey 2010: 20). That internalised sense of self-confidence has been shown to be of high importance when

it comes to employment interviews in the most sought companies (e.g. in IT companies), even greater than the educational qualifications themselves (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006).This confidence emanated largely from his family's economic capital, which could easily get him access to the desired professional degrees in the event that he failed to attain access via merit. Vast literature has shown how the highly privatised professional higher education sector favours those with the purchasing power, turning higher education into a site for furthering already existing social difference and exclusion (Jeffrey et al. 2004; Salim 2004).

Despite seeing the future with such confidence and so little risk, and not being particularly preoccupied by fees and donations of professional degree courses, parents like those of Vijay still invested heavily in schooling and entrance coaching. Vijay, for example, attended an expensive entrance coaching institute three hours a day from Monday to Saturday. Sending one's children to these institutes, as discussed above, was a key instance through which responsible parenting is established, as well as a sound investment in further prestige. The possibility of gaining the prestige derived from securing a merit seat in one of the top institutes of technology of India is always taken seriously.

At the other end of the spectrum, less privileged families experienced more anxiety towards their children's educational and professional prospects. Among these families there was much more at stake in their son's and daughter's performance at board and entrance exams at the end of the academic year, by which they would attempt to secure one of the scant merit seats available in the engineering, medicine, chartered accountancy, and law fields. Anxiety in the domestic sphere surfaced in many of my interviews. Securing their families' respectable professional status was more dependent on their performance than in the case of wealthier families. In the case of failure these families would have to either relinquish their prestige and wealth aspirations via education and employment or struggle harder to raise the money, and somehow afford their children's professional education. For their parents, the investment dimension of costly private education and entrance coaching was obviously more significant than the conspicuous element of it. At home parents demanded more hard work and systematic studying and repeatedly strove to let their sons and daughters know the dimension of the financial struggle implicated in sending them to BVM and entrance coaching. This worked as a way to make them aware of the share of responsibility in their family's strategy of upward mobility. Many youth embraced this

anxiety, like Priti, while others refused to partake in this responsibility and just concentrated in their personal struggle to complete school, like Parvathi. In short, education is a site for the making of middle-classness, bringing together families that safely inhabit it and other that are anxiously in the process of constructing and securing their middle-class status.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the domestic politics of education among a group of middle-class families in urban Ernakulam. In particular, I presented a set of parenting practices and discourses that are to a large extent shared across a disparate set of middle class families. I showed that parents are involved in what I have described as authoritarian aspirational regimes, aimed at both enhancing their children's individual future prospects, as well as the family's overall social status by having a son or daughter who is a successful professional. On the one hand these are constituted by more 'direct' practices like result-oriented school choices, sending youth from an increasingly earlier age to entrance coaching centres, and the enforcement of rigorous studying regimes at home. As Donner argues, it is through exposing them to particular forms of education that parent feel they are involved in the project of producing graduates, Indian white collar workers in a global economy (Donner 2006: 378). On the other hand, aspirational regimes are about instilling in youth a drive to succeed, and high doses of self-discipline, ambition and competitiveness. Perhaps more importantly, this chapter demonstrates how this authoritarian and intensive craft-like parenting is both imposed and disguised through idioms and stereotypes about the modern Indian family and youth, which portray modern parents as detached and highlight youth's supposed individual freedom and thirst for success. I drew attention to the often violent effects of these parenting regimes in a time, which in spite of the generalised optimism that characterises this moment of Indian history, is marked by uncertainty. In this chapter, the fact that education rather than being a site of equality, in fact acts as a resource to reproduce inequalities (as shown throughout the thesis) is revealed in this chapter by the reproduction of intense pressures, uncertainties and anxieties experienced by those at the lower middle class spectrum.

In the face of these shared parenting the following chapter explores the everyday experiences of a group of youth who attend BVM. It will consider how difference of social and economic background gets translated into youth everyday peer-to-peer interactions

inside and outside school. It will reveal that far from sharing a somewhat homogeneous experience, peer group interaction is a hierarchically structure field formed of distinctive peer groups and individuals engaged in exclusionary and inclusionary practices.

Chapter 5: 'Ego', Morality and Sophistication: The Making and Remaking of Middle-class Subjectivities among Urban Youth in Kerala

Introduction

In Chapter 4 I showed how youth from across the middle classes are enmeshed in shared aspirational regimes. Before looking at how these regimes in turn translate into almost script-like individual aspirations and visions of the future (Chapter 7), let us consider how difference of social and economic background gets translated into youth everyday interactions inside and outside school.

The increasing diversity and fragmentation of the Indian middle classes, heightened under the impetus of globalisation, has become the focus of the most recent literature on the Indian middle class. Some (Fernandes & Heller 2006) have even gone as far as mapping a form of typology, describing various layers of middle-classness[99]. However, research on the middle classes has tended to examine only one of these layers. Some have looked at the lower-middle classes (Jeffrey 2010), while more extensive research has concentrated on exploring the upper tiers (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; van Wessel 2004). However, there is rather less research being conducted across these so-called tiers, exploring the various ways in which people negotiate the experience of occupying a particular middle-class position vis-à-vis other positions of more or less status and power. This chapter is an attempt to fill this gap. Underpinned by Bourdieu's formula according to which social identity defines itself through difference (1984), the chapter provides an ethnographic account of the micro-politics involved in the making of middle-class identities among a group of school youth of disparate backgrounds. In doing so the chapter will interrogate two important arguments about Kerala youth: one that attributes an egalitarian ethos to youth-to-youth relations, and second, the pervasive argument of consumer citizenship which posits that the realm of consumption has become the foundation of youth cultures and identities (Liechty 2003; Lukose 2009).

Youth friendship in south India has been characterised as a period marked by an egalitarian ethos. Friends belonging to different caste, religious and class backgrounds have been said to reject established hierarchies of caste and community through practices such as sharing and 'timepass' (Nisbett 2007; Osella & Osella 2000). This chapter will look at youth experiences inside and, specially, outside educational sites – the 'zone of the informal' (Amit-Talai 1995: 153) – to examine these accounts and pose the question to what extent

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[99] In Chapter 4, I showed how these disparate tiers converge as consumers of certain forms of private education, such as private English-medium school and entrance coaching courses.

youth are encumbered by other hierarchies, which in turn may mediate processes of inclusion and exclusion. This chapter will demonstrate that interactions among peers are increasingly stratified according to particular kinds of cultural capital, mostly of its embodied kind, that are perceived to stand for an individual's or group of peers' 'cosmopolitan' character. This in turn will allow the chapter to move beyond recent work that suggests that the realm of consumption has become the foundation of youth cultures. Although consumption is an important element to the sort of 'global' identities being cultivated by youth in contemporary India, it is far from the essential dimension around which identities are built.

The chapter will specifically focus on the social and cultural practices of three students whom I came to know well in fieldwork: Vidwath, Jacob and Srijith. These students come from three divergent middle-class backgrounds: a traditional English-speaking affluent professional/entrepreneur elite family, a moderately wealthy Syrian Christian family, and an Ezhava, vernacular-speaking family. I show how embodied competences, including consumption, and morality are used as central resources that shape the exclusionary and inclusionary practices deployed by these youth. In what follows I describe how I got to meet these students and spend time with them. Then I move on to separately examine each of my informants' different ways of being and embodying middle-classeness, with particular attention to how they engage with gender, morality and consumption. In doing so, I aim to illustrate how they occupy three differentiated middle-class positions.

The Research Site

BVM's intake consists of students from a wide variety of middle-class backgrounds (see Chapter 4). Most students were either high status Christians or Hindus, the latter of a wide range of castes including Tamil and Namboodiri Brahmins, Nairs, and a few Ezhavas. There were very few Muslim students in the school. Class distinctions did not squarely reflect caste/religion hierarchies. There were students of affluent as well as less well-off standing from either Christian or Hindu families. However, I did not take account of any upper middle-class student who belonged to an Ezhava family. The housing conditions as well as the level of consumption of students' families varied accordingly. Students and their families lived in housing ranging from luxurious high rise flats to humble three-room houses. Many students were the first generation in their families to speak English proficiently, while others came from established English-speaking elites. There was a

correlation between students' financial standing, level of English, and the level of education of parents. Most of the parents, whose children were first generation English speakers, held some form of technical degree. Many of these parents (fathers) had benefited from the reservation quotas offered at the school to workers from the Cochin Shipyard Limited. These families too were from divergent caste/religion backgrounds. The parents of those students, who spoke English more confidently, were also proficient in English. Most of them held degrees with many having completed professional degrees.

The ethnographic material drawn upon in this chapter concentrates on the practices and narratives of students inside and outside the 'external structure' of school (Osella & Osella 1998: 191). In the school, I use material collected in the more formal setting of discussion sessions I conducted weekly almost throughout the entire academic year (see Chapter 1). I also draw on my observations of the relationship among peer groups in this environment. It was in the school where I first got to meet students. As in any classroom, in each of my sessions a number of students quickly stood out, actively seeking to engage in each week's activity. Their mastery of English, public speech and debating skills became evident from the onset. They eagerly and with great confidence voiced their opinions and concerns, taking control of most sessions. In addition, they showed special sympathy for my condition of foreign researcher, and constantly tried to facilitate me with 'the(ir) local world view'. I soon became aware of how these students' visibility in my sessions mirrored their general notability in the school's everyday life. Likewise I became aware of the silencing effect their effusiveness had on many of their peers, who lacked their competence in English and the self-confidence. This is how I met Vidwath and Jacob (the school's head boy). After a few weeks I was able to join Vidwath and Jacob, and their friends, in the walks away from school at the end of each day. I walked with Jacob and his friends and Vidwath and his friends on alternate days.

Outside school, I draw from my experiences among youth in these free intervals of time. Most of higher secondary students are engaged in hectic studying routines with schooling, entrance coaching, tutorials, extra classes, and studying at home taking up a large portion of their time. With all these responsibilities they had very limited time on their hands to hang out with friends and engage in prolonged 'timepass' unlike the friendship groups described in recent work (Jeffrey 2010; Nisbett 2007). However, the peer groups I here present made the most out of their limited spare time. Among the scant lapses of free time they had, the

walk away from school, which for some students was the walk home but for the majority was the walk towards entrance coaching institutes, was a prime moment to spend time in the company of friends. As I will discuss in more detail below, the walk was stretched out both in time and space as much as possible. I also consider other lapses of free time, further in the evenings.

The social terrain of urban, private, English medium schooling brings together youth who share *a priori* many things in common. First, students in private English-medium schools have the ability to speak English (at a higher or lower level of proficiency). As described in the previous chapter, students at BVM are also groomed towards common goals: towards board and entrance exams at the end of the twelfth STD. As I will later show (Chapter 7), they are thus committed towards convergent life aspirations: to participate in ideal middle-class spheres of learning (e.g. engineering colleges), employment, income and consumptian, which form part of the hype surrounding India's economic development (Nisbett 2007). Moreover, similar to the Bangalore friendship group Nisbett (2007) describes, these youth shared a common disdain towards caste, manifested both through their explicit rejection of it and in their willingness to establishe friendships irrespective of these differences. The rejection of hierarchy according to caste was accompanied by a general assertion of educational merit, employment, and income/wealth as legitimate forms of distinction, and integral part of middle-class cultural politics (Joshi 2010). In the face of all these commonalities, youth were engaged in creative processes of exclusion and inclusion, not according to caste/religion, but with regards to certain embodied competences of cultural cosmopolitanism, whose caste, class and family background remained hidden.

Global 'Ego'

Recent work shows how transformations in the consumption styles and tastes play an integral part in the making of middle-class identity and status with regards to newly emergent hierarchies of employment and income (Nisbett 2007). Material items such as motorcycles and mobile phones are in the rapidly expanding markets of liberalised middle-class India essential tools in people's performances as modern and upwardly mobile (De Neve 2004). However, in and around the school, material props could not be (openly) proudly displayed as markers of status. Instead, in the informal realm of peer-to-peer relations, hierarchically structured by peer groups, particular forms of competences and demeanours were the essential tools in youth's performances as modern or cosmopolitan.

Here it is important to differentiate between the status communicated and reinforced among peers and the institutional status/recognition conferred by the school. The competences and demeanours valued among peers often overlapped with those valued by the school. For that reason, most of the youth who were reputable among peers also possessed high standing in the institutional sense. However, there were important instances in which there was mismatch, which signalled ways in which the school did not straightforwardly reproduce the value and content of the cultural capital of elite groups (Bourdieu 1974: 42). This is best illustrated with the example of Vidwath, a 17-year-old male student, who represented the status to which many peers aspired, while amassing a rather ambiguous status with reference to the school. He is illustrative of how in the school context certain social competences and demeanours were central markers of social status that stratified the informal realm of peer relations, marking the struggle for domination and subordination between competing groups (Jenkins 2002: 85; Rogers 2008: 83).

Vidwath is the son of an English-speaking Tamil Brahmin mother and a Nair (Menon) father. Both his parents were successful medical doctors and entrepreneurs, holding jobs in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu and Ernakulam. Just as their parents, Vidwath and his younger brother were raised speaking English at home. With a reported monthly income nearing Rs. 2 lakh, Vidwath and his family possessed all the consumer goods that form part of the cosmopolitan middle-class image which the city's upper-middle class families yearn. They lived in a lavish flat in one of the many skyscrapers that increasingly dot the city. The collection of durable goods at home ticked all the boxes of an ideal urban middle-class lifestyle: flat screen TVs, car, motorbike, PCs, washing machine, fridge, and expensive mobile phones. The previous year, the family even treated itself for a ten day tour around Europe. Later on Vidwath visited the UK as he was among the few students to participate in the costly student exchange programme organised by the school (see the PEACE programme in Chapter 3).

Vidwath illustrates the consumption and the performance of modernity often related to his upper middle-class location. One of the most essential tools in youth's performances as modern and cosmopolitan was what Vidwath and his friend described as having 'ego' or being 'arrogant,' both English words were used by these students. This particular trait generated in turn a certain tension with school staff. The following excerpt of Vidwath's best friend, Rency, reveals this underlying tension between the school and the habitus of

these students from privileged backgrounds. Rency was a high status Christian boy son to successful entrepreneurs. Like Vidwath, he was also among the few who had gone to the UK with the students exchange programme. Rency said:

She hates me. They [teachers] basically hate any student who has an *ego*. You know this awards they give every year, like the 'best all-rounder', best reader, and stuff? They have to give these awards to someone... So they just give them to their favourite students, who are the students who study well, those who get high marks. For example, the guy who got the best reader award read in one year one fifth of what I read in a month! So because he studies well he is the teacher's favourite they get awarded... Well Vidwath, for example gets really high marks and he got the 'best all rounder' when he sucks in sports!!! Yeah but teacher hate him too because cause he's *arrogant* too... you can't show no ego. For example, I don't like to go on stage and act and stuff... and every time the teacher calls me to participate in something like this, I say No, simply no. And they don't like this.... You see, they believe that ego should be directly proportionate to age... for them age is what divides society... So for them, they are always right just because they are older than you. So, they believe that because you're younger to them you have to show respect to them and stuff... If they say something and you say 'why'... they don't like you anymore... If you show some arrogance they don't like you, *in the UK* is completely different, there people are encourage to do what they want.

A very important dimension of Vidwath's status among peers, and his tension with teachers and other school staff, resided in his possession of 'ego' or 'arrogance' – an undeferential confidence. Displaying 'ego' was one of the ways in which many upper middle class students communicated and reinforced their social standing.

In school, Vidwath and Rency communicated their possession of 'ego' through an undeferential attitude towards teachers. This rhetorical questioning of the hierarchies that divide teachers and students, as well as literally disobeying and challenging teachers whenever possible was an integral part of Vidwath and Rency's strategy to self-differentiate themselves from the rest of the pupils. Through displaying this social competence they aimed to be seen as cosmopolitan and modern, (like their imaginary students in the UK) and to distance themselves from the compliant, 'favourite', less-competent other. On one occasion, Srijith (see Chapter 1) – an Ezhava boy – challenged the argument of a teacher repeatedly. At the end of the school day, as Srijith left the school building, Vidwath put his arm around and congratulated him effusively (in Malayalam of course) 'for making the teacher doubt so much with such complicated questions'. Vidwath and Rency's undeferential attitude towards teachers resembled that which is found in Bollywood films like *3 Idiots*. The film celebrates the cockiness and wit of three first year engineering students towards their lecturers. But Rency's resentment towards 'favourites' uncovered the tension experienced at the intersection between a propensity to display arrogance and the overshadowing importance of complying with the demands of the wider hierarchy with regard to education (-al merit).

Their probing attitude was not limited to teachers, it permeated their vision of society at large, and in particular their assessment of social norms, mainly those around modesty and marriage. Vidwath often asked me questions about life in Spain or the UK, with the purpose of comparing those places to India, and depicting the latter as non-modern. One afternoon he asked if there was nudity in Spanish films, to what I could only give an honest 'yes' as an answer. Obfuscated, he replied: 'you see? This is India! Here it's even forbidden to hold hands'. Arjun, Vidwath friend, continued adding:

Here we can't even walk with one girl. This is why I want to go far away [to college]. You see, Kochi is not a metro, in places like Bangalore you begin to see that people are more liberal. But for me this is the last generation that is like this, when I'm a father I'm going to let my kids date and go out. Do you believe in all this religion thing? I mean this thing about Hindus only marrying Hindus and Christians only marrying Christian? I mean, don't you believe that everyone should be able to marry whomever they liked, and the husband prays to one God, and the wife prays to another? after all it's only one god we are all praying to, and God doesn't know about this distinctions... most of the girls I like are from another religion, she [Minu, his girlfriend] is Hindu. What do you think? Do you think is wrong to marry someone of another religion?

Vidwath and his friends often questioned social norms as a way to advertise themselves as liberal-minded and modern. They imagined their stance towards society as linked to the *metros* of India and beyond. Through embodying such an attitude they built cultural capital and justified their right to challenge school rules. In school the overall popularity of boys like Arjun and Vidwath was strongly linked to their competence at interacting with girls, being able to flirt and maintain sexualised 'dialogues' with girls[100] (Lukose 2009). This caused further tension between the school and youth like Vidwath. Rency for example, as several others, had an ongoing battle with teachers for refusing to share his bench with another boy and give up sitting with his girlfriend, breaking the norm of boy-girl segregation in the classroom. Moreover, boys like Arjun, Rency, and Vidwath did actually meet with girls outside school, especially in the new breed of fashionable coffee shops mushrooming in the city, spaces that reshape the interaction of gender and class status in courtship practices (Nisbett 2007: 944).

The use of English was an integral part of communicating 'ego'. Directly benefiting from their traditional English speaking elite backgrounds, a great deal of the overall popularity of students like Vidwath derived from their mastery of English, superior to that of most teachers and many fellow students. Within the privileged world of English medium schools

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[100] This dialogue took place in school corridors, on the walk away from school, and especially through text messages.

it is not the ability to speak the language that marks a difference, but the nuanced quality with which it is spoken. Vidwath and his peers demonstrated that the link between language and urban, middle class membership has been intensified by globalisation: the premium on de-indigenised English has increased (Fernandes & Heller 2006: 513). Among these post-liberalisation Indian youth there was a premium on speaking English infused with a contemporary 'western' quality. Extensive exposure to foreign English language media (fundamentally American films and sitcoms), as well as their first-hand experience and social ties with people in the UK added to their competence, already established through their English upbringing. Within Vidwath's group of friends, it was the only language spoken inside and outside school. They often used American slang. When addressing other peers who lacked that distinctively embodied competence in English, they often resorted to Malayalam drawing a gap with other students.

The school highly valued their language skills and mobilised it as representative of the English education provided in school. Vidwath, Rency and friends were often asked to take part in all sort of regional and national debating or oratory competitions. In addition, these students' financial capabilities and cosmopolitan outlook were essential to the school's exchange programme. They were the ones who went to Kent, and the ones who were in charge of housing and hosting Kent students in Ernakulam. This, together with their undeferential attitude, contributed to the rather ambivalent position of these students within school.

Vidwath and friends were better equipped financially and socially than other students of their caste/religious groups and of those of lower castes to associate themselves with demeanours and competences imagined locally as modern, liberal and cosmopolitan. This allowed them in turn to communicate and reinforce their status, which was aspired to by many of their school peers. Their possession of ego, together with the financial standing of their families and their caste/religious origin confirms for me the impossibility of disentangling 'caste' from 'class' (Osella & Osella 2000).

Consumption

Among youth, consumption played a significant part in shaping their everyday life and their middle class identity. For many friendship groups, as soon as the school day was over, walks home often included stops at various shops in order to purchase and share drinks

and snacks. Depending on their access to capital, this ranged from less regular stops to buy inexpensive 'sip-ups' – pencil shaped plastic tubes filled with flavoured and coloured ice – to literally daily buying more expensive branded snacks (e.g. Lays potato crisps) and drinks (Pepsi), as well as pastries from bakeries (e.g. egg puffs). Vidwath usually walked home accompanied by a mixed caste, community and class group of peers. It comprised two high caste Hindus, two Syrian Christians, Srijith (a Hindu Ezhava), and myself. The more affluent youth (all but one of the high caste Hindu boys, Neelanjan, and Srijith) often had considerably more disposable cash. They set the tone of this consumption 'norm' to which others tried to conform. On a daily basis they bought snacks and drinks to be shared, while Srijith and Neelanjan struggled to participate in this shared consumption. Srijith never treated, while Rency often bought rounds of soft drinks or snacks that were passed on from hand to hand and mouth to mouth. Still, Srijith's participation in this wider friendship cycle of shared food and drink infused the group with a similar egalitarian spirit to that described by Osella and Osella (1998) and Nisbett (2007) as well as in wider comparative work on friendship (Barcellos Rezende 1999).

But, while *sharing* rejected difference based on caste or community hierarchies, *buying* implicitly acknowledged hierarchy with regards to access to capital, remaking the social status of boys like Vidwath, through the cultural capital of consumption. While Neelanjan and Srijith were not explicitly compelled to buy, failing to purchase snacks or drinks for socio-economic equals undermined their performance as middle class. On one occasion Rency said that he was not going to buy any snacks or drinks since he was saving up in order to purchase a new mobile phone, for his parents had taken his phone away as a measure to make him concentrate more on his studies. Vidwath qualified his peer's decision as 'nonsense' and demanded he bought 'something'. In other words, buying played an integral part in communicating and reinforcing difference.

Mirroring this class-inflected divide among peers, the group's walk would usually end at a crossroad at the southern end of Kumar Nagar Avenue. There, the group split between those who lived in that middle-to-upper class part of the neighbourhood, dotted with giant apartment buildings, and those who lived further away. The latter were Neelanjan, who continued walking towards his entrance coaching training, and Srijith, who carried on walking towards the bus stop where he would catch the bus that took him beyond the city boundaries. In the evenings, the crossroad became a hub of a mixture of local residents. Its

chaat centre (a set of street food carts), the Cool Dale (a video rental/cyber café that also sold snacks and drinks), and a brand new coffee shop called the Coffee Beanz catered to college and school youth, passing workers and families. All three places were located a few meters away from each other.

Towards the end of fieldwork, the Coffee Beanz opened its doors and began serving European-like coffee drinks, adding to the hype surrounding the neighbourhood's cosmopolitan vibe. A sign of urban status (Rogers 2008: 82; Nisbett 2007: 945), the shop became an immediate success in the neighbourhood. Its modern décor, full blast AC (air conditioned), and voguish dishes and drinks, such as steak burgers, re-worked *appams*, and frappe coffee, attracted wealthier families yearning for a taste of cosmopolitan-ness in the want-to-be Kerala metropolis. For youth, purchasing drinks from it or hanging out just outside the shop was a big part of the consumption style they desired. In the evening, older, college-age young men gathered at its entrance to display their motorbikes to peers. Many higher secondary school age youth, such as Vidwath, too became fond of the shop. Although their walks always ended in front of the trendy restaurant, Vidwath never entered Coffee Beanz with Srijith or Neelanjan. Vidwath and Rency always entered soon after their peers had gone.

Contrary to arguments about egalitarian youth, their practices illustrate how youth differentiated each other and remade social hierarchy through the cultural capital of consumption choices (Osella & Osella 1999: 34; Rogers 2008: 82). It was hierarchy with regards to a middle-class sphere of consumption, guarded by practices of exclusion and inequality (similar to those deployed around language), that communicates and reinforces the privileged position of those from more advantaged backgrounds.

Later in the evening, as Vidwath and his local friends gathered at the coffee shop, interaction across classes, like that enabled in the school and in the post school walks, was much less significant. Here, rather than communicating difference, consumption reinforced a sense of community among youths of the dominant fraction. In this post-school sphere, in which uniforms had been shed off, other consumer items become central in playing out their middle class identity apart from snacks and drinks. Instead, in this space young rich urbanites generate a 'community' based to a large extent on a shared habitus in which, beside the use of English, the ostentatious display of particular consumer items was central

to their performances as modern and cosmopolitan. Youth wearing branded t-shirts, Bermuda trousers, and flip-flops; driving scooters; renting Hollywood (or Bollywood, but never South Indian) movies; and walking breed dogs (Labrador retrievers and pugs being the trendiest) strolled and hung out, displaying the consumer goods imagined locally as cosmopolitan and fashionable (Jeffrey 2008). Like their use of English and their display of ego, students imagined these products as linked to metros (metropolitan India) and to the lifestyles of their prosperous inhabitants. In short, wealthy youth displayed their class status through a kind of commodified masculinity, which in Kerala is commonly described with the youth slang word, *chethu*, figuratively meaning 'cool', 'sharp', or 'hip' (Lukose 2009; Osella & Osella 1999).

But what did they make out of these consumption practices? Just like the middle classes in Baroda that van Wessel describes, the dominant fraction of youth consistently turned to the topic of consumption as central to their experience of modern life and their views of the nation (Van Wessel 2004: 94). Like in the case of Baroda, many youth presented modern consumption as central to their own social lives, yet rationalised it as morally ambivalent (Van Wessel 2004). The following account illustrates this point.

On one occasion Vidwath, his group of friends and I talked about a newspaper article which reviewed a survey that sought to quantify people's responses to statements about India and 'its' culture. The statements read: 'our people [Indian people] are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others' and 'India is an emerging super power'. Vidwath disagreed: 'we used to have a superior culture in the past, but now it's not like that'. He talked about Pythagoras and the invention of the numerical zero as proof of an ancient superior culture. 'Now we are always following technologically advanced countries, *we have become like westerner*'. Rency added 'flip-flops, have you seen how many people wear flip-flops these days? These people pay 1000 bucks only because these flip-flops have a plastic tag that says PUMA[101], have you seen these PUMA flip-flops? Arjun spouted 'think of apartment buildings! Have you seen how in this area of the city apartment buildings are just popping up? We are copying the western way of living'.

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[101] This is a German multinational company that produces high-end athletic shoes.

Discourses of becoming like westerners, sometimes articulated as 'becoming like Americas', express experiences of ambivalence towards consumption. This is an ambivalence that has been described as part of the lives of the middle classes, pressured by the demands of globalised consumption made on those who want to participate in the flow of present society (Van Wessel 2004: 99). In particular, BVM youth's experiences of ambivalence were influenced by the notion of the ideal self embraced in school; an idea that depicts 'frugal' India as pitted against the spendthrift 'West'. These discourses, which date back to late nineteenth century Kerala, portray the ideal self as someone whose success will not prompt him to deck up and display his body (Devika 2007: 49). Yet, youth of the most advantaged backgrounds communicated and reinforced class status through careful and knowing consumption (Osella & Osella 2000).

Moral Discourses

But, what did youth of less well-off backgrounds make of the practices and discourses of peers like Vidwath? How did they view the rapidly changing social context, marked by the pressure to engage in forms of conduct and consumption imagined as global? As Fernandes and Heller (2006) rightly argue, many of the 'middle category'[102] people often engaged in emulating the practices of the most privileged fraction of the middle classes. My research shows that while many boys did indeed strive to mimic their peers, others, on the contrary, contested dominance and maintained their status by taking recourse to moral discourses[103]. Those who took on this strategy were usually from relatively prosperous Christian and Nair backgrounds but possessed much less money than students like Vidwath and his peers. That was the case of Jacob, the school's head boy and his group of friends. I recognised at least three dimensions along which Jacob's peer group defined themselves as mutually distinctive from groups of peers like Vidwath's: gender, the use of English, and consumption. Now I turn to Jacob himself and subsequently to the dimensions through which Jacob and his friends aim to communicate their moral superiority to youth like Vidwath, a contestation of power that went beyond a mere vocal evaluation, and entailed a more embodied critique.

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[102] For the authors, these are the children of the petty bourgeoisie who enjoy some material independence, but nonetheless aspire to dominant fraction status. They suggest that this fraction is constituted largely by small business owners, merchants, and rich farmers (Fernandes & Heller 2006: 500).

[103] Jeffrey (2008) and Rogers (2008) have described a similar strategy among relatively prosperous Dalits as a way to challenge the status of Jats and Gujar, in Jeffrey's case, or OBC middle-class youth in Roger's case. In this chapter though, moral discourses are deployed by high status Christians and Nairs.

Every week I spent considerable amounts of time in and outside the school in the company of Jacob and his friends, a group of twelfth STD boys. It was a mix group comprising three Hindu Nairs, one Tamil Brahmin, and two Syrian Christians. Among them, Jacob, a 17 year old Syrian Christian, was very eloquent when it came to critiquing wealthier students like Vidwath. Among all BVM students, he stood out as one of the most highly esteemed youth among teachers and staff. In many ways Jacob embodied the school's ethos. In 2009, Jacob had been named school head boy, for his exemplary conduct and academic achievements throughout his twelve years at BVM. As a result of his academic record and his excellent oratory he entered and won one of the few places in the Japan East Asia Network of Exchange for students and youth in 2008 (JENESYS). He was an all-round emblem of the school, a teacher's 'favourite' as Rency would argue. His words 'school attention' and 'school disperse' gave a solemn aura to every morning and afternoon assembly. Jacob's powerful voice addressed the school in all of its events, carrying with it moving messages that emphasise loyalty, pride, respect, and love towards the teachers, school and the nation. Jacob certainly lacked the kind of Ego that Vidwath and Rency boasted having.

Image 1: Jacob wearing his badge next to his friend Murali.

Jacob belonged to a relatively prosperous Syrian Christian family. Both his parents spoke English confidently. He and his parents lived in an old block of apartments in

Gandhinagar, a neighbourhood north of the school. His mother, a lawyer, worked in the People's Council for Social Justice (PCSJ) – an organisation that provides legal assistance and education to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward sections of society. Jacob's father worked for a furniture factory in Qatar, and visited them in Ernakulam for three months a year. Although a Christian, Jacob echoed the school's rhetoric when it came to his vision of Indian culture. He defended the idea that Hinduism was fundamentally 'a way of life'.

Jacob illustrates the moral ambivalence related to his more middle than upper class positionality. Jacob counterpoised a vision of his group of friends' frugal and plain living with the ostentation and wastefulness of wealthier peers. He and his group of peers critiqued the impropriety of wealthier peers by referring to their being 'posh' or 'too modern', discourses also noticed by Jeffrey et al. (2008: 67) and Osella and Osella (2000: 119). 'They are into this branding; they cannot wear something without a brand.' Jacob tried to project a sense of frugal living through wearing simple clothes and not purchasing expensive or branded snacks and drinks. 'Look at my or Murali's (a Nair friend) bag', said Jacob while showing me his bag, which displayed the logo of some kind of science competition. 'Murali's bag reads *Diesel*, but it's just an imitation'. On the contrary, he complained that 'they have to wear original Reebok flip-flops'. Jacob and most of his friends also avoided going into the new trendy coffee shops, so attractive to many youth of his age. He laughed at the idea of paying Rs. 75 for a coffee. They preferred to indulge in the non-expensive sip-ups and *chaat*. In short, Jacob and his friends tried to embody an idea of 'simplicity' – by which individuals organise their lives in a sober, dignified manner, live frugally and seek neither enjoyment nor status through consumption (Van Wessel 2004: 99). Echoing the school's rhetoric, for Jacob the possession of economic wealth was not without esteem whatsoever. But wasteful and ostentatious consumption for Jacob was understood as a sign of 'westernisation', a failure to selectively take up progress while retaining the 'Indian' core intact: the 'touch of tradition' as he called it.

For Jacob, trendy coffee shops not just epitomised modern wasteful consumption, he saw them as the quintessential place of loss of values. He counterpoised this vision of loss of values with a vision of his demure and righteous living. He rhetorically asked me: 'have you seen Kerala boys and girls hanging out [in public]'?

> If you go to this places [trendy coffee shops], this confined places... this kind of pattern is confined to these cool places, like Barista in the Bay Pride Mall. There you can see boys and girls together changing and exchanging boyfriends and girlfriends. This is supposed to be one of the coolest spots to hang out in the city. I don't believe in this thing. In traditional Kerala, one man is supposed to love only one woman, so I don't buy this whole dating thing.

Jacob claimed not to have had any girlfriends and critiqued peers like Vidwath for engaging in 'dating'. He tried to project his sense of a righteous living by eagerly participating in the festival of *Raksh Bandhan* held in school – a day in the Hindu month of *Shraavan* on which girls as fictitious 'sisters' tie *rakhis* (a protective talisman made of thread) on boy's/brothers' wrists. Through this festival, the school tried to impose a vision of pupils and staff as family, mainly against school romance (Lukose 2009: 117). In this celebration of brother-sister relations, the rakhis are said to symbolise a bond in which 'sisters' give asexual/fraternal care and affection to 'brothers', while the latter provide protection to their sisters. While this is generally perceived as a Hindu festival, recent research shows how it has rapidly been taken up by youth of varied religious, class, caste backgrounds as part of 'Indian traditions' (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2003: 432). For Jacob, Raksha Bandha provided a morally acceptable context in which to spend time together in physical proximity with his 'sister' (*penggal*), Aisha, with whom he shared 'a special sentimental relationship'. Despite his critique, Jacob understood as 'a positive effect of globalisation' the possibility of having female friends. However, he avoided places like coffee shops that were understood through a code of romance.

Jacob maintained his middle class status not only through critiquing wealthier peers for engaging in 'immoral' practices, but also by counterpoising a vision of himself as essentially modern and progressive with reactionary lower and upper classes. Jacob illustrated this when he proudly explained to me that his parents would have no trouble in seeing him marry a non-Christian girl. He said:

> Middle class parents are ok with love marriages and marriages across religion and caste; those at the richer strata and those at the lowest strata want to keep it the old fashion that is why India is still considered a traditional nation. India is not developing because it remains balanced by the ups and the downs, the middle are more modern.

This distancing, which has to be reinforced at each historical juncture (Joshi 2010: xxi), is a crucial element in the constitution of a middle class.

Jacob's role-model status within the school was strongly linked to his mastery of the English language. In countless speeches, events and competitions he displayed his

competence in English, and benefited from possessing that highly valued form of cultural capital. Moreover, his competence of English was fundamental to his academic achievements, like participating in the JENESYS programme. English was central to Jacob's biggest love: music. Beyond his rigorous studying regime, Jacob devoted himself tirelessly to composing new songs and lyrics (in English) and rehearing with his metal band: *Sublime*. They played in various school competitions and had a decent number of fans.

However, the use of English was an important dimension through which he challenged the status of wealthier peers. The use of language was in fact the most tangible way through which groups of peers distinguished themselves from others and through which intersecting categories of distinction – centrally class and caste – became manifested. Jacob would normally speak of students according to the language spoken among friends: 'Some are posh, this last group tends to speak in English, some people speak Malayalam, and then there are those who stay in between, they can hang out with both Malayalam gangs and English gangs'. Despite his mastery of English, which not all in his group shared, he classified his group of friends as Malayalam speaking for they always spoke in Malayalam among themselves. Echoing local scholars' criticism of the middle classes for becoming isolated and unsympathetic of the lives of the less privileged (Kumar & George 2009), Jacob expressed concern about an 'increasing tendency' among English speaking groups to exclude and ignore those who speak Malayalam. Jacob explained that while in previous years 'we all talk to each other, in the eleventh and the tenth [STD] there is a lot of difference between them, those who speak English don't even look at what the others are doing'.

For Jacob there was nothing intrinsically immoral in knowing English, but it was its use as exclusionary means that they criticised as immoral. In fact, for Jacob everything from consumption, to dress, to gendered norms, to language was discussed and evaluated in moral terms. English, for example, was central to his and his friends' middle-class identities, which he described as being 'modern too, but with a touch of tradition'. Jacob and his friends stressed their capacity to move in an accomplished manner between practices coded as 'traditional' and those imagined as 'modern' (Jeffrey et al. 2008: 68). Speaking Malayalam among peers was the central way through which they projected themselves as distinct from and morally superior to wealthier peers like Vidwath. Unlike Vidwath and his friends, English was, as Jacob said, 'out of place' when it came to

interacting with friends outside formal school situations. 'It is not that we don't know English, we do, but we speak Malayalam amongst us', he explained. For Jacob, Malayalam was the language of friendship, while English was the language of academic and the professional world.

Like with consumption, Jacob depicted the use of English among peers as a sign of 'westernisation', a phenomenon which he associated to morally inferior, rich urbanites. At the end of one of our post-school walks, Jacob, his friends Murali, JJ and I stopped in front of JJ's house, a sumptuous house on the more up-scale side of Kumar Nagar. JJ was son to a wealthy Christian family and was one of 'those who stay in between' language groups. He was one of Jacob's best friends. In a patronising tone, Jacob said of JJ:

He can't speak Malayalam fluently, but he is a Malayali. His parents are both well educated, and they gave an education at home in English. This things come from outside. *These people* look up to what America does. This Amrita lady[104] was in the USA and someone asked her "why do you come here to change the people of the US, why don't you change the people in your country?" And she said that I have to change the people here so that the people of India change... That much *these people* here look up to the Americans and what they do [my emphasis].

Jacob used peers like Vidwath and JJ to illustrate his vision of the larger social and cultural fabric of India as increasingly under threat by the forces of globalisation understood as 'westernisation'. His vision responded to narratives of cultural loss based on deep-seated anxieties about globalisation and the rapid pace of social change, so heavily entrenched in the school's discourse and practice. Mirroring his critique of wealthier students like Vidwath, Jacob also deployed similar moral nationalist discourses to challenge the reputation of more elitist schools. He strongly believed that I had made the right decision in coming to his school to conduct my study because:

There are some people that love *our culture*, some others that don't love it but don't regret it, and there are a third kind of people who regret our culture… you see, culture is the only thing balancing this modernity thing. That is why I think you have come to the right place, because in BVM there is balance between these two, in Chinmaya, the balance is a bit off… [What about the Choice School or GPS? I asked] oh there is no balance there.

There is no coincidence in that the last two schools I mentioned to Jacob were the two most expensive schools in the city, which are eagerly sought after by rich urbanites. There is no coincidence either in that the first two are run by Hindu trusts while the latter two are managed by Christian entrepreneurs.

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[104] Mata Amritanandamayi.

In the face of the overall currency of the styles of wealthy youth, Jacob sought to maintain his status by cultivating a righteous national identity and taking recourse to discourses of morality. In elaborating his superiority, Jacob displayed a particular vision of 'masculine acuity' (Jeffrey et al. 2008: 72) and demureness that contrasted with notions of male prowess of boys like Vidwath based on undeferential conduct, sexual boldness (Osella & Osella 2002) or the display of expensive consumer goods (Osella & Osella 1999). This masculine vision allowed him to critique wealthier peers through images of moral 'lacks' linked to 'westernisation' processes. In particular, he deployed a vision of peers like Vidwath as engaged in exclusionary practices, debased consumption, and 'immodest' conduct. His strategy was a highly rewarding one for it adopted the school's moral and nationalist rhetoric.

In the Quest for 'Sophistication'

While Jacob and his peers challenged the cultural dominance of youth like Vidwath – through a moralising discourse – others tried to adapt to it through building connections to dominant individuals and groups, the practices of which they tried to emulate. As the youth I describe below show, moulding one's embodied social and cultural location (Bourdieu 1977) so as to perform the urban styles of accomplished masculinity (Jeffrey et al. 2008) – to demonstrate 'affinities of habitus' (Bourdieu 1984) – of dominant groups is not an easy task. In what follows, I draw on Srijith – a 16 year old eleventh STD male student whose story began this thesis – in order to illustrate the struggle to establish connections and emulate the demeanour of more privileged youth. Being from a rural, middle-class Ezhava background, Srijith's story is telling of the disparities among youth in schools like BVM and of the currency school like this one have beyond their immediate context.

Unlike the vast majority of his peers, Srijith lived in a village north of the city, 27 kilometres away from school. Up until his 10th STD, Srijith attended a private school near the neighbouring town of Paravoor, just 5 kilometres away from home. When he was in tenth standard his 'big dream was to come to the city'. His excellent score (of 91%) in the CBSE class ten board exam, and his family's financial standing allowed him to get access to BVM, which was among the city's most reputed schools the easiest one to access from his home village. Srijith saw coming to urban Ernakulam as a strategy to transform himself into an urban 'modern' young man, and to distance himself from his rural background.

The financial backing of his father was certainly comparable to that of Jacob's parents. Srijith's father has worked as an operator at an oxygen plant near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for the last 25 years. After receiving his Secondary Schooling Leaving Certificate (SSLC), Srijith's father, Biju, completed a machinist technical diploma at a private industrial training institute (ITI) in Ernakulam. Biju reached Saudi Arabia at the height of Gulf migration in the 1980s. Migrating allowed him to purchase land, build a house, and pay for his sons' education[105]. Although from a relatively prosperous background, the disparities between Srijith's house (primarily its location), family, lifestyles, competence in English, and demeanours – in short his habitus – and the styles of most of his urban peers were significant. In this section I explore how, when it comes to negotiating his position among school peers, Srijith's story encapsulates both reproduction and self-transformation.

Srijith illustrates the aspirations and emulation by those at the lower levels of the middle class stratum. Essential to his strategy was being able to cultivate new relationships with urban peers. Almost from the beginning of the academic year, Srijith befriended another fresher: Neelanjan, a high caste boy from West Bengal. Both gradually joined the popular group constituted by Vidwath and his friends. By the time I joined Vidwath in his walks away from school, Srijith and Neelanjan already lingered around the group. Srijith felt particularly drawn to hang out with youth of markedly wealthy backgrounds. He developed a sort of admiration for boys like Arjun and what he saw as their 'sophisticated' (he used the English word) thinking and demeanour, which he actively sought to appropriate.

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[105] In 2009-2010 Sarath, Srijith's elder brother, was a third year engineering student at a local private college.

Image 2: Srijith (left), Neelanjan (right), and myself walking away from school.

Above all things, Srijith yearned being able gain his urban peers' competence in English. His English was much less eloquent and confident than his new peers' language skills. Before coming to BVM 'I thought I could talk in English with ease… but soon in school I found I was wrong', Srijith told me. His friendship with Neelanjan, who did not speak Malayalam, and spoke quite fluently in English, became a very positive resource for Srijith. With him Srijith practiced and probed new English skills. At the end of the academic year he gratefully spoke of having improved substantially as a result of being his friend. Similarly, he refused to speak to me in Malayalam, as he saw in me an opportunity to improve his language skills. Slowly Srijith began to rework his use of English and the body language linked to it, introducing American slang like 'dude' (frequently used by Arjun) in his speech repertoire. Through this sort of practice Srijith aimed to gain recognition among his new urban peers and to distance himself – by changing his very habitus – from his old peers, which confirmed Bourdieu's formula according to which social identity defines itself through difference (Bourdieu 1984). 'In my village they don't know what it [dude] is.' 'They also think I have changed.' Srijith then told me: 'I use these words on purpose to show I have changed.'

Other than developing his competence in English, Srijith treasured being exposed to and strove to take on a number of his peers' practices and taste. Early in the academic year, Srijith showed me his renovated play-list on his mobile phone. This was tailored to the likings of his new BVM peers. He spoke of how he had replaced his entire list of Malayali songs for American English songs. Proudly, he showed me a video of Slipknot and songs of Linkin Park straight out of the mobile phone. Similarly, like his new peers, he had become interested in Hollywood films. The afternoon walks often led to a movie-rental/snack shop where his peers not only bought and shared snacks but frequently shared opinions on recently rented Hollywood (and less frequently Bollywood) films. Srijith's participation in treating as well as in sharing film knowledge was limited by his lack of pocket money and exposure to English and Hindi movies. On one occasion, while in the Cool Dale, Srijith asked me if I could rent a film so that he could take it home. That afternoon he chose *Quantum of Solace*, a James Bond film. Srijith told me that, unlike his BVM friends, he did not know anything about James Bond, and hence he wanted to watch the film. Later in the evening Srijith sent me a text message that read: 'it was all right. But I didn't understand a word in it! [I] might have to watch it several times to get it.' Srijith also took on his new peers' passion for the English Premier League, and Facebook.

According to Srijith, one of the most challenging transformations that stood ahead of him was being able to embody urban boys' demeanour towards girls. For him, the way in which some urban boys and girls flirted and engaged in sexualised 'dialogues' (Lukose 2009: 116), was the best example of their 'sophisticated' ways. 'Guys in Infant are very much *conservative* in this issue, while BVM guys are too *forward*'. Srijith continued saying: 'I mean they [peers at his previous school] are sort of having a view that prevents them from having good relationships with girls. Many don't know girls can be good friends, and manages to keep distance from girls fearing of embracement from mates.' In addition, he described most guys in his previous school as 'perverts' for they used to 'talk dirty' about girls. Srijith added:

Some BVM guys are perverts too, but they are even sophisticated at this. The one thing that most amazes me is how boys and girls talk such stuffs [about sex] here... it's never going to happen in Infant [name of previous school].

Later in the academic year Srijith struggled to muster the courage to interact with girls in the confident way in which peers like Vidwath, Rency and Arjun did. 'I still have to improve that aspect, here girls go for the boys and get close, I have not got used to this

yet'. Srijith blamed his lack of success on this front on his 'natural' disposition in matters of romance, which he described as being more from 'Gowresswara [the name of his home village] than the city'.

The issue of inter-caste or -community marriage, vocally favoured by many of his urban peers, did pose some moral problems for Srijith. 'Interfaith marriage is a complex issue. You can support it till your brother or sister gets into it. What should be the religion of their child? What should he or she write in the community column in an application form? This is the part where differences arise. Most interfaith couples I feel don't think about this when they decide to marry as they are blinded by love.'

At times Srijith's attempts to appropriate the styles of his urban middle-class peers were undermined by the unequal treatment he received from them (with the exception of Neelanjan) and other peers. Even within the friendly environment of Vidwath's English speaking peer group, his position was subtly maintained by youth of more privileged class and caste backgrounds. They treated him politely, but the interaction with his new peers lacked the intimacy that enabled friendship practices such as teasing. At the beginning of the school year, as we walked through the streets, he usually remained quiet and slightly distant from the group. Later on, Srijith developed more confidence and developed a closer bond with Arjun. But most of the time the boys automatically switched from English to Malayalam when addressing Srijith; although he could have perfectly understood their English and replied to them as well. While throughout the year Srijith strove to cultivate friendship with the English-speaking boys, difference threw a shadow over his entire experience of friendship. 'In Gowreeswara I can talk to everyone the same, there is no difference [among students].' While motioning several horizontal layers stacked one on top of the next, Srijith spoke of there being different groups of students in BVM, each requiring a different style of engagement. 'There are some people you can treat as equal... but there are some people I have to engage differently.'

But dominance was not always reinforced via subtle means; it was also communicated and reinforced through more violent actions. Srijith was subject to bullying at various moments of the academic year. According to him, a group of BVM students mocked him because of 'the standard his previous school' and due to the fact that he comes from a village near the city. 'They say I am a burden to them'. He sadly spoke of how everything he said or did

was ridiculed by a group of classmates, boys and girls, who felt 'superior' and treated him as if he was 'inferior'. 'They tell me that they do not know how I manage to be your friend', Srijith told me. On the day he was bullied by a group of classmates, Srijith sent a series of text messages to my mobile phone. The messages clearly showed how much in distress he was. Some of his classmates had succeeded in making him feel like an 'uninvited guest', as lacking the 'qualities' to be a BVM student. That day he considered leaving the school. Srijith was struggling to negotiate the new social space, and his aspirations to 'better' educate himself (as he claimed) and become more sophisticated by coming to the prestigious school in the city seemed like a mistake. Srijith wrote: 'I wanted to change my outlook and attitude but ended up ruining my hopes, ambitions and desire to live. What's the use of changes that destroy you? I failed terribly'. For Srijith, gaining recognition from his new peers had an important role in his self-refashioning project. Failing to achieve such approbation from a group of classmates threatened to demoralise him.

Through subtle and more violent means, Srijith was reminded of his social position and his inability to 'pass' – to embody a middle-class, urban style so instinctive to his high status Hindu and Christian peers (Osella & Osella 2000). As Srijith 'developed a sense of his social position, and the relatively degraded value of his own cultural-linguistic resources among his peers, he also developed a sense of his social limits. A victim of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1984) like many others in the school, he learnt when to self-censor and self-silence in the new school field.

At a different level his story is one of transformation though. It shows how a sixteen year-old boy and his family actively seizes the opportunity to turn financial capital and the capital gained from academic results into the prestige of studying at a reputed urban school. But it also shows how this process of trading off financial capital for social and cultural capital is not a straightforward one. Srijith's quest to refashion himself is reflective of the ways in which youth creatively engage schooling and seek to confront the larger societal forces and structures instantiated in them. I show that much more than aiming to emulate their consumption practices, Srijith's self-transformation strategy spoke of an active struggle to embody his peer's globalised cultural knowledge, demeanour, dispositions, reflexes and taste: a habitus that he described as 'sophisticated'. His appropriation of new English skills, tastes, and demeanours enabled him to effectively perform and be

recognised as a person of high class, not just wealthy but cultured, among peers of his previous school.

Other youth of less advantaged backgrounds had been more successful in emulating dominant urban youth. Take Prassana, an eleventh STD Nair girl as an example. Prassana's parents moved from Kozhikode (Calicut) to Ernakulam in 1976 after her father was employed as a welding technician at the Cochin Shipyard Ltd. Prassana's father had completed his SSLC, and received a diploma in welding at an industrial training institute (ITI). Prassana's mother has never been formally employed, although she received a degree in economics. Helped by the admission concessions BVM provides to Cochin Shipyard workers, Prassana's parents, who like Srijith's parents did not speak English, managed to send both their children to the private school.

Asked about her experience at BVM, Prassana spoke enthusiastically about how much she valued being able to mingle with 'rich kids'. Unlike Srijith, she had attended BVM her entire school life and spoke in highly competent English. When asked why it was so important for her to mix with 'rich' kids, Prassana's discourse echoed Srijith's idea of self transformation and 'sophistication'. She claimed to have succeeded at speaking proper English and becoming modern as a result of befriending 'rich' peers like her closest friend Tanvi. Like Srijith, she too strove to distance herself from what she imagined as non-modern others. But while Srijith juxtaposed himself to his ex-classmates, Tanvi compared herself to her cousins back in Kozhikode. Relieved she said that if her parents had not moved to Ernakulam, she would have been raised in Kozhikode and she would have ended up, like her cousins, 'being from a village', like *goonda* (ruffian or rogue), and not being able to speak English at all.

Srijith's story speaks of the ways in which family backgrounds to a certain extent map onto interaction between and within groups of peers. But it also shows that youth interactions across differentiated class positions are sites in which youth of the lower levels of the middle class actively transform their own position by emulating others from upper middle-class locations. It shows how gaining competence in English, tastes and behaviours, more than consumption, are central to these transformations. Srijith and Prassana's accounts shows how interaction among youth of differentiated backgrounds may provide those of the less advantaged backgrounds the kind of resources necessary to subvert their

subordinate location and become equals to peers of more affluent backgrounds. Being able to speak English like them, take on their 'sophisticated' practices, tastes, and their confidence to flirt with and befriend girls stood for Srijith as an integral part of his transformation into a modern middle class subject.

Shared Othering Discourses: 'the locals'

Through the stories of three students this chapter has provided ethnographic evidence as to how the Indian middle class is itself enormously diverse, and under the impetus of globalisation, subject to increasing fragmentation (Fernandes & Heller 2006: 508). What brought these divergent classes together apart from the desire to be seen as modern and cosmopolitan? In what follows I show how youth at BVM, especially those of less privileged backgrounds, colluded in an effort to differentiate themselves from lower classes (Fernandes & Heller 2006: 496).

Srijith's efforts to distance himself from his previous school peers, or Prassana's sense of relief for not being like her cousins, are clear examples of this shared effort. Early in fieldwork, as I discussed with Jacob my plans to get access to a government-aided school, he tried to deter me from attempting it as he believed that my experience in an aided school would not be fruitful for what he called 'local' youth were 'not well mannered, not well behaved'. The shared articulation of discourses of the 'locals' (i.e. the personhood of the young non-modern other) was an important generative practices of middle-class identity. For lower middle class youth it was a useful strategy to maintain their status through the stigmatization of the lower-class other. Like BVM youth, I use the English word 'local' to refer to the imagined other whom they often described as lacking 'standard', not speaking fluent English, being *goonda*, and lacking financial resources. Usually used as code for low class, 'local' also held connotations of caste or community (Osella & Osella 2000) and carried overwhelmingly negative stereotypes about locals' innate lack of manners and their inability to behave (Jeffrey et al. 2008: 67). There were two areas that were frequently brought up by my informants when they explicitly talked about the 'locals': differences between youth from private and government run school, and the cinema. These were not necessarily the only areas through which this 'othering' took place. They merely illustrate how this othering is manifested.

Othering schools

The term 'local' was usually deployed to differentiate between youth who attend private-unaided schools from those who went to government or aided institutions. In February 2010, as two BVM students and I stood on the side of a road, we saw the bus of St. Teresa's Higher Secondary School (HSS) drive by in from of us. St. Teresa's HSS is one of the city's oldest girl's schools. It is a government-aided Christian school that imparts the state curriculum of studies. Until the emergence of the new brand of schools, this school enjoyed an unquestionable reputation among all social groups in Ernakulam. On that episode, one of the boys was talking about how eager he was about getting a girlfriend. In a boy-like joking manner, I asked my informants what they thought of St. Teresa's girls. With seriously displeasured gestures, one of them said: 'why would you like St Teresa's girls when you have BVM girls?' 'What is the matter with St. Teresa's girls', I replied. Raising their shoulders and closing their eyes as in dislike, one of them said: '[they are] local girls, you know.' One of them spoke of them as 'substandard' or 'poor'. These boys said that the local girls from St. Teresa's were not necessarily poor, financially speaking, but that they were poor in the sense of talking like *goonda*. One of them ridiculed the sound of a *goonda* way of speaking, and concluded: 'it's bad'.

Othering Cinema

Discourses of the 'locals' were also articulated in connection to the cinema. On a Sunday afternoon of 2010, I joined a group of five eleventh STD students in a trip to the cinema. The group of boys and I met at the theatre to watch *Avatar*, the epic sci-fi film that grossed Rs. 6.75 crore on its opening day in India. The queues were extraordinarily long. One of the boys informed us that the balcony seats had run out, and that we had to buy tickets to the main seating area. Once seated, Sathya – a 16 year old Tamil Brahmin – slightly disturbed for not getting balcony seats told me that this was indeed his first time to sit in the main sitting area of a cinema. He like all BVM students has always sat at the balcony. Sathya explained that it is the 'locals' who come to the ground sitting area. 'They come to the cinema to watch Malayalam films, but occasionally they come to see English movies'. Sathya spoke of why 'locals' come to English films.

They have different reasons to come, even if they don't know English, they come. And they won't understand the film but they still come to speak and say that they have seen the film... just for the glamour of it.

My BVM informants also elaborated on the behaviour of the 'local' people at the cinema. Sathya and his friends stressed that while they might at times scream while watching a movie in the theatre, it is the conduct of the 'locals' that was downright unseemly. Consuming English films discursively created boundaries around their middle-class identity. It defined the consumption of English films as a marker of middle-class status. Similarly, through practice and discourse they reoriented the physical space of the cinema so that interacting with it in specific ways (e.g. sitting at the balcony) sets the boundaries that define being 'local' or middle-class.

Image 3: A group of 11th STD boys and myself eating snacks after the cinema.

Conclusion

Through an examination of the everyday practices through which young people creatively occupy the schooling field, this chapter showed that far from being egalitarian, youth experiences in and around educational sites reveal a hierarchically structured field formed of distinctive peer groups and individuals engaged in processes of exclusion and inclusion, and defining themselves as mutually distinctive. This chapter reveals this field to be structured according to a new hierarchy which draws primarily from new social competences, demeanours, and consumption practices that are perceived to stand for an individual's or group of peers' cosmopolitan character. This hierarchy responds to a wider project of distinction that is driven by a middle-class desire to be seen as participating in

global cultures (Donner & De Neve 2011: 15). But far from being a site for the mechanistic (re)production of inequalities (Gordon 1984: 106), where dominant youth communicate and reinforce their position, youth interactions across a broad spectrum of middle classes are a site of struggle and contestation. In particular the chapter showed how non-elite youth challenge the cultural domination of the wealthiest peers, through the deployment of moral discourses. It also demonstrated that schooling is a field where less privileged youth also attempt to actively appropriate the culture of the dominant.

Going against recent work on South Asian youth, this chapter demonstrates that focusing on consumption as the central dimension upon which contemporary youth cultures and identities are built (Liechty 2003; Lukose 2009) is too narrow an approach. These approaches fall in the trap and public discourses of the link between globalisation, consumption and youth with the actual realities on the ground. This chapter shows that youth cultures in contemporary Kerala are driven by a desire to embody broader competences in a variety of globalised fields, of which consumption is only but one of such fields. Likewise, going against recent work on the Indian middle class, this chapter also showed that a focus on moral discourses as the main generative practice of middle-class identity (Van Wessel 2004) is indeed too narrow. This chapter corroborates that both consumption and morality are nothing but key resources used, often in contradictory ways, to craft cosmopolitan middle-class identities.

Finally the chapter showed that those who already knew English from home and whose habitus and actual lifestyles were already attuned to contemporary cosmopolitan exigencies were at large high status Hindus and Christians. While these youth rhetorically distanced themselves from hierarchies according to caste and community, and embrace class-based distinctions, this chapter showed that 'class' and 'caste' remain significantly entwined in the production of contemporary cosmopolitan identities.

Moving away from the city, the middle-class school and the families and youth brought together by it, the next chapter locates the enquiry of education in the perspectives of families from lower social strata. In particular it explores the educational experiences and strategies of Latin Catholic families in an islet at the northern fringes of the city of Ernakulam.

Chapter 6: Education at the fringes: Schooling in the Kerala backwaters

Introduction

It is early in the morning and Phil rides to school on one of the few city buses that run from Ernakulam to Kothad, located some six kilometres on the northern outskirts of the city. Up until recently Kothad was an islet in the Periyar backwaters without any road link to Ernakulam's mainland. Although it was located so near to Cochin's urban buzz, the only way in and out of Kothad were country boats especially adapted to carry two small cars, a few motorbikes and people. The journey across the backwaters to reach the mainland, and hence public services like the nearest hospital, was time-consuming and at times troublesome. On February 2005 the 180-metre-long Chitoor-Kothad Bridge was opened, finally making the islet easily accessible from the city. Kothad Bridge was built in order to facilitate the construction of a section of a new highway that will cut across the islet, which is part of one of the state's most, if not the most, ambitious development projects: the Vallarpadam International Container Transshipment Terminal[106] (ICTT). The terminal, dubbed by the state government the 'hub of Kerala's development', was built and is now ineffectively operated by Dubai Port World Pvt. Ltd. with collaboration of the central government of India. As per the contract between the two parties, the central government was to invest nearly Rs 1,000 crore to develop the shipping channel, and both railway and road links connecting the terminal to the hinterland. The International Container Terminal (ITC) Road, NH 966A, or Vallarpadam-Kallamassery Road, is the still-under-construction link between the ship terminal and India's NH47, the national highway connecting some of the most important cities of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In short, Kothad was turned into a construction platform of a small part of one of India's mega projects to improve Indian exporters' competitiveness in the global market.

Apart from bringing lorries and construction workers to the islet, Kothad Bridge has transformed the locality in much more profound ways: water pollution, loss of ancestral land, skyrocketing land value, abundant employment opportunities (mainly on the construction site) are some of its more pervasive effects. The main concern of this chapter,

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[106] In 2011 the ICTT became India's first hub port despite delays in the deepening of the channel as well as in restrictive laws that continue to limit foreign flag vessels to operate freely. The terminal was built to reduce India's dependence on neighbouring hub ports – mainly that of Colombo in Sri Lanka – to haul container cargo. Like many other development projects in the city of Cochin, the terminal has raised great expectations. In 2004 the government's magazine *Kerala Calling* wrote 'the possibilities are mind boggling and it is suffice to point out the example of Singapore, which thrived to the status of a developed nation thanks mainly to its port'. India's exporters and importers incur extra costs of at least Rs.1,000 crore a year on trans-shipment of containers via ports outside the country, according to the shipping ministry. In fact, India's traders pay an additional Rs.600 crore every year to ship their containers via Colombo alone.

though, is the rapid and very significant changes the construction of the bridge between the backwater area and the city has had on education. These changes became most evident in the increasing flow of students along the bridge from Kothad to Ernakulam, and vice-versa. It is precisely these movements, negligible before 2005 that I trace in this chapter. First, I turn to the rising number of mini vans and auto-rickshaws loaded with school children of all ages flowing from Kothad to the city. As I demonstrate, this flow reflects the spread of educational practices and aspirations that are generally seen as typically middle-class among the relatively wealthier semi-rural families of Kothad. Emulating urban middle classes, Kothad's 'rich' families increasingly seek the market of private, English-Medium, CBSE curriculum schools and coaching centres outside the islet as the most adequate provider of education. In their quest for private education nearer the city these families produce new social distinctions between themselves and those whose children remain in the local school. I show how through new practices and discourse new values like competitiveness and communication become relevant to these local elites, who use them to (re)think and (re)assess education. This phenomenon, by which better-off families opt out of local state schools, is translated in an overall *residualisation* (Jeffery 2005: 27) of public sector schooling in India, and very recently, Kothad, leaving only sections of the poor labouring classes to attend these institutions.

The second movement of youth, embodied by Phil riding a city bus onto the islet, signals on the contrary the reproduction of old spatial and social inequalities: those that pit the Periyar backwater areas against Ernakulam's metropolitan centre. Ideally, the opening of the bridge would have enhanced Kothad youth's educational prospects by providing them physical access to highly reputed state schools in urban Ernakulam. However, and despite a new educational policy[107] that increased the number of merit seats available to higher secondary applicants, I demonstrate how the poor educational background of the majority of Kothad's families has entailed that local youth continue to stand a poor chance at accessing these better, long established schools. By contrast, the physical linkage established with the construction of the bridge has indeed resulted in a surge of students flowing in the opposite direction. Like Phil, the majority of newcomers to Kothad's school – the government-aided Higher Secondary School of Jesus (HSS of Jesus) – also failed to

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[107] This 2008 policy, known as *Single Window System*, aimed to centralise through a government-controlled process, and increase the quota of HSS seats allocated through 'merit' (i.e. according to the mark students secure in the also centralised secondary school final examination) without any reference to socioeconomic difference.

benefit from widened merit quotas as a result of poor individual academic performance. Phil also lacked the capital to buy his access into a reputed state school, let alone into private institutions. Focusing on Phil's story, I argue that his relocation to Kothad illustrates a broader phenomenon whereby students belonging to sections of the financially and educationally poor, and mostly lower status Latin Catholics, end up attending marginal schools. The geographical rearrangement of these students seems to be turning them into an ever more socio-economically homogeneous group, effectively making local Kothad youth the object of a double residualisation: products of new and old inequalities.

Before turning to the flows of students back and forth, I focus on the continuities between this and the previous generation of residents of Kothad to show how, in line with various works on the coastal peoples of Kerala, their geographic marginality vis-à-vis the city continues to be a metaphor of their socioeconomic marginality. Then, drawing from a survey of sixty households, fieldwork in the local Kothad school and interviews with parents in Kothad and its surrounding areas, I move on to explore the practices and discourses of those leaving and entering the islet.

Research Site: Kothad

Kothad is the main village of the Kadamakkudi *grama panchayat*[108], concentrating the majority of its 21,000 inhabitants. With regards to community and caste, the population has a diverse composition, although Namboodiri Brahmins and Muslims are missing. Hindu Ezhava, Kudumbi, and Pulaya, and a trifling number of Syrian Christians, complete the Latin Catholic majority of over 12,000 people. This majority is even greater on Kothad, where I only surveyed two Hindu Ezhava and two Hindu Pulaya households. The islet is divided into three residential parts, showing a certain degree of residential segregation. The residents of the southern and western parts of Kothad, known as Kodampadam and Kothad respectively are Latin Catholics. There are few Hindu Ezhava and Pulaya families on the eastern part of Kothad, Kodanad.

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[108] This is a local self-government unit at the village or small town level. Kadamakkudi panchayat is in itself divided into three residential villages or karas, which are also three different islets: Moolampalli, Pizhala, and Kothad (Klausen 1968: 69). Grama panchayats constitute larger bloc panchayats. Multiple bloc panchayats in turn form district panchayats. The Kadamakkudi, Cheranalloor, and the Trikkakara grama panchayats constitute the Edappalli bloc panchayat.

Most of the islet's population belong to the Latin Catholic community. Catholics in Kerala date back to the visits of St. Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century, whose missionary undertaking led to various waves of conversion of mostly fisher castes (Mukkuvans and Arayas) along the coastal belt of Kerala (C. J Fuller 1976). Many became Christians, or Muslims, as a result of the burden of low status derived from being involved in the 'polluting' acquisition and processing of flesh food, according to the perspective of the dominant caste order (Ram 1991). Up until the nineteenth century, conversion of other lower castes took place, like Hindu Pulayas.

As a number of works (Klausen 1968; Ram 1991) exploring the coastal peoples of Kerala show, large sections of Latin Catholics on the Travancore coast, descendants of fishing castes converts, are still in the fishing profession. In Kothad, though, fishing appears less prominently (as an occupation for at least the last two generations). Located deeper into the backwater, the people of Kothad have been less dependent on sea resources, which Kerala fishermen have so intricately depended upon. While backwater fishing has been an occupation, other occupations based on local (backwater and sandbanks) resources were more common than fishing among the heads of households of the prior generation. Some of these professions were country boat driving, coconut farming, paddy field farmer, agricultural *coolie* (casual labourer), or sand mining. Many more worked as carpenters and masons. I am unable to say whether this is, as Klausen (1968) had already began to note in his 1960s study, the result of an inclination among Catholics to break the frame of the caste professions. He showed how Catholics from a fishing village on the Kollam District were involved in (non-fishing) salaried positions in and outside the village almost twice as much as their Hindu Arayan neighbours (Klausen 1968). Likewise, my data is unfit to say if this signals the continuation of caste professions after conversion. In other words, I am unable to ascertain, for instance, whether today's carpenters once belonged to the Hindu carpenter caste (Asari) or whether the agricultural coolie workers are descendants of Hindu Pulaya who converted to Christianity. What I can show is that by the mid twentieth century, the people of Kothad were engaged in a wide variety of salaried employment not linked to local resources (or caste professions). Some of these salaried occupations were: fitter, mechanic, construction worker, factory worker, teacher, tailor, auto driver, crane driver, clerk, tea/stationary shop owner, kathakali artist, toddy shop owner, military, health inspector, watchman, coir worker, merchant, painter, and engine retail shop worker. Many of these only engaged single persons, but all together constituted a sizable cohort. Work

was often found in large private or central Government enterprises, such as the Cochin Shipyard, the Cochin Port, FACT, Indian Rare Earth Company Ltd. (sand mining), the India Aluminium Company, and TATA. Finally, it is important to note that this was an important group, the majority still worked locally in the professions mentioned above.

Except for a few cases, in which advanced educational qualification were required, work in these large employers consisted of manual labour, demanding very little formal education. My survey shows that there were at least two people holding university degrees among the parents of the current head of households' generation. A few others held industrial training courses (ITC) or teacher training courses (TTC), while a handful got schooled up to matriculation, class ten. This is not to say that education was not sought after. On the contrary, obtaining at least some educational qualifications has been central to the social life of Kothad since the early twentieth century, when the school was inaugurated. As any other region exposed to missionary endeavours the islet's people have, since long, been exposed to a combination of new notions of society, morality, and aspirations of mobility, and strong critical appraisals of local society and its entrenched powers and hierarchies for a long time (Devika 2007). With the inauguration of what later became HSS of Jesus in 1917, they were also introduced to modern education institutions. Yet the large majority would not study past lower primary school (classes I – IV). Upper primary (classes V – VII) was sought after by a very few, like the forbearers of the families that today send their children to private schools. Ernakulam District, with the highest Christian population in Kerala (and India), Christian churches have been instrumental in making this the first totally literate district in India (Tharakan 2004). In urban Ernakulam, Christian-run schools have not only been the utmost provider of education, but are landmark institutions that embody the power of the Christian community in the district.

However, a number of studies have shown that Kothad's geographical exclusion, recently disrupted by the construction of Kothad Bridge, is a metaphor of how its people, like most fishing communities in Kerala have remained marginalised socially and politically from the mainstream population (George & Domi 2002: 16; Hoeppe 2007; Klausen 1968; Ram 1991). Moreover, shattering the image of Kerala as a development model, these works have shown how state achievements in education have failed to benefit Kerala's fisherfolk, among whom high dropout levels and low achievement levels are a common trend (George & Domi 2002). A look at the slow development of the Higher Secondary School of Jesus

illustrates how Kothad's Catholics have not only been geographically marginal but have been made educational 'fringe-dwellers' (Ram 1991). As early as 1917 the Latin Church's local authority in Kothad, the Archdiocese of Verapoly (Vazhapuzha), inaugurated a lower primary school which later became HSS of Jesus. Although the school has long been there, its development has been markedly sluggish when compared to schools in Ernakulam's mainland. In 1963, almost fifty years after its foundation, the school opened its upper primary section. Subsequently, in 1982 and 1998, the high school and higher secondary school were respectively inaugurated. In short, students in Kothad were only able to complete class ten for the first time half way through the eighties. In the meantime the archdiocese, under the direction of Joseph Attippetty, its first Indian archbishop, had already been running numerous high schools and two colleges (St. Teresa's and St. Albert's College) since before independence, fastidiously catering to and fuelling the demand for education among the urban dwellers. In Kothad, the minority who had attended school beyond primary levels had done so outside the islet, most of them in a school run by Muslims in the neighbouring residential area called Cheranalloor.

While Kothad remained marginal to the mainland in many regards, the development of backwater prawn fishing in the 1950s was of great importance to the economy of the area. Early in the decade, the governments of Norway and India had signed an agreement for a fisheries development project: the Indo-Norwegian Pilot Programme (INP), under the auspice of the United Nations. While the Norwegians aimed to introduce fishermen to new and 'more efficient' technology, the central government entered the agreement under the condition it would provide food for the rural poor, and not export (Hoeppe 2007: 140). At that time the government of Kerala had also taken steps at improving the organisation of fishermen and productivity by introducing nylon nets. Both approaches to fisheries development were based on raising the productive capacity of existing facilities by developing artisanal (caste-bound) fishing. However, it was the initiative of a private merchant, who independently began to export tons of frozen prawns to the United States, and later to Japan, that changed the face of the local economy (Hoeppe 2007; Klausen 1968). By 1962 the exports reached more than 2,000 tons and continued to rise thereafter (Hoeppe 2007: 141). The rush for the 'pink gold' spread hugely and 'fisheries development in Kerala soon became synonymous with increasing prawn harvest and earning foreign exchange' (Kurien & Achari 1990). The opening of the international prawn market had a direct impact on Kothad's economy.

One of the islet's leading families today made its current wealth and its locally high status through prawn fishing[109]. While the majority of residents in Kothad were landless labourers, not all were poor. A small group of families owned land, most of which were in the form of freshwater low-lying *Pokkali* rice fields, which used the age old prawn filtration practice (*chemmeen kettu*). With the booming international demand for prawns in the 1960s, these families turned their paddy fields into relatively successful prawn farms. Slowly they accumulated wealth, property, and education, boosting their relative status in the locality – more in conformity with a class society than with caste (Klausen 1968: 96). In Kothad there were also some key differences that distinguished these families from less privileged households. Among these leading families, now referred to locally as simply the 'rich' families, it was more common to find men occupying salaried jobs in the city. Likewise, they were more able to marry their sons to highly educated women holding degrees or even post graduate degrees, from Ernakulam families, whose parents had steady salaried employment in government posts in Ernakulam or worked in the Gulf[110]. They were also keener to educate their sons and daughters slightly more than the average Kothad family.

Thus far, I have explored the social, educational, employment and economic context from which the current generation of residents emerged. Now, drawing from data derived from a variety of methods, I turn to the families whose sons and daughters are *staying*, *leaving*, or *coming* to Kothad for education. I focus primarily on how they, with their own experiences in hindsight**,** engage with their children's education in the face of the newly 'bridged' relationship to the mainland.

Staying: Reproducing Continuities

In the previous section I showed how Kothad has been marked both by geographic, social and educational marginality with reference to the mainland, as well as by internal inequalities, mainly with regards to wealth, and less markedly, education. In what follows I refer to parents (fathers and mothers) as the current generation of head of households of Kothad with sons and daughters of schooling or college age. As I demonstrate, after the

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[109] The social stigma attached to fishing, a 'polluting' occupation of lower castes, prevented free entry of capital and persons from outside the traditional fishing communities into the fishery. However, this caste-bound nature of the fishery sector ceased to be a barrier in prawn fishing (Kurien & Achari 1990).

[110] Marriage alliances in which wealth is traded off against urban and educated status and prestige in Kothad and elsewhere in India has been shown to be a common calculated move (Jeffrey 2008: 520; Osella & Osella 2000: 59).

construction of Kothad Bridge in 2005 there have been marked continuities between this and the previous generation. In addition their contemporary strategies of employment, education, and marriage signal important continuities between these two generations and the upcoming one. With the exception of the 'rich families', the overall majority of families in Kothad continues to belong to the lower classes, in the broader context of urban Ernakulam. As with the previous generation, the large majority of fathers were manual labourers. Masons and carpenters, as well as sand miners, made up sixty percent of the working population, while agricultural and fishing workers constituted another twenty five percent. They were employed both outside and inside the islet. The construction of the ITC road provided relatively long-term employment for construction workers in the vicinity. The remaining fathers were engaged, like their predecessors, in a wide variety of salaried employment in factories, the retail sector, as well as menial jobs in the government sector.

Although flimsy, there has been a change in the educational qualifications between generations, with the current generation of parents being more likely to have reached class ten than the previous one. Although nearly half of fathers and a third of mothers still held less than a class ten pass, around a third of Kothad's parents did posses a Secondary Schooling Leaving Certificate (SSLC) pass. This is directly linked to the local school becoming a high school, introducing classes VIII to X in the early 1980s, a late yet direct response to an inflation in entry-level requirements for basic jobs, similar to that in 1970s Bangalore (Nisbett 2007: 938). An SSLC pass was required for many sought after factory and government jobs. In Kothad many parents agreed that 'at that time, if we passed 10th [SSLC] it was considered good education'. But many recalled that as little as four years of formal schooling would have been enough to gain access to a (menial or labour intensive) government or factory job.

The approach of the current generation of parents toward their sons' education and employment foretells key continuities between this and the upcoming generation. The bottom-line of the most common strategy among Kothad families remains the same: sons' education is loosely fastened to the minimum qualification required to enter basic jobs. This strategy derives from an overarching parental desire for sons to get a job and 'make money'. Ironically, parents almost always spoke about their strong willingness to support

their sons' study 'up to what they want'[111]. The over-supply of SSLC graduates in the job markets where their parents competed led to the further inflation of entry-level qualifications for basic jobs (in, for example, the construction sector, factories, or at the Cochin Shipyard). Before, 'tenth standard was enough' and 'now more qualification is needed for a good job'. The SSLC pass has inflated to industrial training courses (ITCs) or university degrees. The majority of Kothad families send their children, both sons and daughters, to the local HSS of Jesus. After completing their schooling, many sons are sent to the nearest industrial training institute. This means that many young men do leave Kothad in search for the qualifications that would help them gain access to basic jobs. In short this educational strategy remained almost the same; the change was only in the qualification required for basic jobs (Nisbett 2007: 939). However, many male children often continued to drop out of school after failing their SSLC, and to take on occupations (e.g. mason and carpenter) which were likely to be the same as their fathers'.

Many parents expressed a sense of frustration with regards to education and employment. The inflation for entry-level requirements has translated into myriad private colleges that cover the demand for education, which the dwindling seats available at government colleges (in the most sought after courses) do not suffice. For some parents the extended practice of donations – to enter school, to enter college, to get a job – adds to this frustration, making it seem aimless for some to invest in education when 'donations' ahead are insurmountable. 'Now education and employment is like a business, if we have to get good education or job we have to pay money'. Another parent commented 'before the value of money was more; with little education we got a good salary and we could live with that money'.

Here it is important to comment on the internal discrepancies in Kothad. As it was expected, there was an overrepresentation of the fathers and mothers belonging to the well-to-do families (e.g. the prawn entrepreneur family) among the few parents who studied beyond high school. Among this small, dissonant cohort fathers were more likely to attain PDC (Pre-Degree Course[112]) or shorter job oriented qualifications (i.e. industrial training

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[111] Jeffrey et al. (2008: 170) document a similar reported intention from parents to encourage youth to stay in education for 'as long as possible.'

[112] PDC refers to two years of formal education before college. These used to be taught in colleges themselves, but starting in the late nineties these became what is now known as higher secondary school (i.e. eleventh and twelfth standards).

courses). Among them I found two households that had asked for bank loans in order to send their sons to engineering colleges. Mothers on the other hand were more likely to have university studies. There were at least thirteen mothers holding bachelors or post graduate university degrees. This was a result of two trends. First, the leading families had started educating their daughters. For example, the daughter of the most senior prawn entrepreneur, now a full-time housewife, completed a master's degree in commerce when the majority of Kothad mothers only passed class ten. Secondly, the current generation of fathers among the most influential families were married to highly educated women from outside Kothad, and whose fathers held salaried jobs in government, the private sector, or the Gulf. I discuss the implications of this latter trend in the following section. The lack of formal higher education among local elite fathers, and the highly educated background of mothers shape the educational strategies of sons, who are made to climb up the educational ladder through professional coaching and degrees, mostly in engineering. I interviewed two fathers who had either taken a sizeable bank loan or sold the house to be able to afford donations of over Rs. 50,000 and yearly fees of Rs. 1 lakh at reputed engineering colleges.

Unlike sons' education trajectories, daughters' education has gone through more substantial changes (De Neve 2011). The educational profile of the daughters of Kothad's average families mimicked those of the richer families. As a mother explained to me, daughters now 'study up to their marriage' which means that they are likely to have a much higher level of education than their male siblings. One of the families I interviewed illustrates this change. The mother and father had been schooled up to class ten and class five respectively. The latter worked as a construction worker reportedly owning Rs. 500/day. They had two daughters and a son. The eldest of the daughters held a bachelor's degree in commerce (BCom) and had already been married; she was now a full-time housewife. The second daughter, already had a BA in sociology, and was currently working towards the completion of a bachelor's degree in education (BEd). Once completed, the father told me, there will be a *kalyani* (wedding). On the contrary, the son had stopped studying after failing class ten and was working in the construction field. The father was looking to send him to Dubai to work as a mason. He had already managed to get him a passport and had asked for help from his cousin, currently employed in Dubai.

Unlike the leading families, whose efforts to educate daughters is based on status considerations, education among the more average families in Kothad is more complexly

shaped by a mixture of status and income considerations. As in the previously described family, daughters were usually encouraged to obtain university degrees, like 'rich' families had began doing in the prior generation. Daughters studied in colleges in and around Ernakulam city. Degrees were sometimes enhanced with BEd, or post graduate degrees, usually followed by marriage. The purpose of daughters' education is a lot more complex than that of sons' formal education. In the following statement, Neelu, a key informant/collaborator in her early twenties, demonstrates how girls' education is shaped by ideas about marriage, income prospects, and child rearing.

The trend among the girls of my generation is to be educated to the level of a graduate. But they [girls] don't care about the studies, they just care about becoming a graduate, they don't care if they don't pass, they just care about being able to say 'I'm a graduate'. That means that when they finish the course work of the BA, for example, they'll get a certificate saying that they are graduates even if they failed the final examination of the degree. It's just a prestige issue. This is the reason why there are so many private colleges now [i.e. to cover this demand for degree and professional courses]. For the boys it is a prestige issue to say that my girl is a graduate, so that they can give a good education to their children. And if the girl is educated like this then the dowry is less, for the girl can work and the family can earn from her salary, plus if you are educated like this you get good marriage proposals. That is, a good educated girl can also receive proposals from higher status families with like engineers and doctors.

In this statement Neelu raises many important questions regarding the ways in which daughters may assess the education they receive. I return to these questions in the final section of this chapter. Let me turn to the education of daughters as a means to enhance marriage prospects. Ideally, having a highly educated daughter means that she could potentially be married off to the son of a highly educated, higher status family, as it was widely assumed that grooms should be equally or more educated than brides. In other words, marriage was used as a calculated strategy for social mobility among Kothad families (Osella & Osella 2000: 59). However, more often than not this strategy did not pay off and daughters were frequently married to grooms of similar social status and lower educational qualifications.

Among well-to-do families (e.g. the prawn entrepreneur family) neither parents nor husbands intended to let their daughters (or wives) enter paid employment (De Neve 2011). By contrast, income considerations – the idea of daughters contributing an extra salary to the household – are increasingly shaping ideas of education and marriage among the majority of less well off families in Kothad. During fieldwork, Neelu, still single, found a job in Ernakulam as an accountant. Generally parents agreed that daughters should ideally be married off after education. But they too recognised the benefits of having them enter salaried employment both as a way to provide cash to the household, often paying for

the debt created by their own qualifications, and as proof for potential grooms of their potential bride's ability to generate an extra income. After marriage though, parents believed that it is entirely up to the husband to decide whether or not their daughters should seek or continue paid work. The over qualification of some daughters deterred many local young men from proposing, scared off by the possibility of having a wife who earns a higher salary than them. A young man told me, 'this generation's trend is that boys are ready to send wives to work, both salaries are coming to the home, right?' However, he stressed that 'having a wife that makes more money than the husband is causing some problems, tensions.' In Kothad, young men realised the importance of an extra salary, but putting wives to work risked affecting their masculine respectability, closely dependent on their role as breadwinners, and their overall family status. Thus, Jinu (21, single) insisted: 'the importance of education (of women) comes after they are married so that they can give coefficient [knowledge] to the children'; in other words, so that mothers can support children's school education. Child rearing considerations are also an essential part of marriage as a strategy of social mobility, as it is widely assumed that better educated grooms of higher status are looking for well-educated brides who possess the knowledge and familiarity necessary to guide and manage their children's educational career (Parry 2005).

Apart from income considerations there were some other important ways in which the education of daughters among the more affluent families differed from that of the less well-off majority. In the case of daughter's seeking professional degrees (i.e. nursing), the education of daughters of local elites was much more local. Among poorer families the degrees studied by girls often did not require the investment of large sums of capital. At times, when daughters demonstrated great willingness and aptitude to study via school marks, parents invested more heavily in their education. This generally meant that a professional degree in nursing, highly coveted in Kerala for its income and migration prospects, would be considered. Girls have to 'be very bright' and 'show her talents', like a mother said to me, in order for parents to consider their wishes to pursue a costly nursing degree. However, the exorbitant cost of nursing schools (both donations and fees) in Kerala turned these courses into a preserve of the well-to-do families of Kothad. Other families seeking to turn their daughters into nurses sent them to private colleges in other Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh. In these places the combined cost of the course and the accommodation were still much lower than in Kerala. Similarly, there was also a qualitative difference when girls attended college in Ernakulam. Like the girls of

Tirupur's new entrepreneurs, daughters of poorer background tended to attend new institutions, the quality of which was still uncertain (De Neve 2011). On the contrary, because affluent parents could afford hefty donations, the daughters of the 'richer' families went to more prestigious and established colleges in Ernakulam.

While these distinctions marked the everyday life in the islet, what I aim to highlight now is that the construction of the bridge in 2005 offered an unprecedented opportunity to use school education as a means for the production of difference. After the construction of the bridge in 2005 most of the families in Kothad continued to send their children to the local HSS of Jesus. However, this event saw the rapid exodus of the children of the more upwardly mobile families towards private, English-medium schools outside the islet. This shift triggered a debate over the meaning of good education. The discussion centred on the standard of the local school in the face of English-medium schools having physically become more accessible after the construction of the bridge. Parents whose children remained in HSS of Jesus agreed that 'everyone should speak good English because every job in Kerala is asking for English.' But not only 'good English' figured in parents' discourses of a good education; other elements, like proper behaviour, good general knowledge and computers skills figured too. Similarly, I frequently heard parents talk about teaching methods as the core element of good quality education. When comparing methods used when they were students to those used now, many parents praised the recent changes in classroom methods from older approaches based on rote learning and towards new practices that encourage the application of knowledge to problem solving. Many also highlighted the obvious benefit of not having to pay hefty fees charged in the private English-medium sector. In short, English-medium education was not simply equated with quality education.

Faced with the increasingly socially residual character of HSS of Jesus, many parents launched vocal critiques on parents who opted out of the local school. As a way to resist new exclusionary practices via schooling, they criticised these parents' choices as being only 'a prestige issue' as 'they are only concerned about the name of the school and the standard of English'. Dismissing the relevance of the kind of school parents chose for their children, some other parents simply argued that if a student is good in studies, there is no difference between whether he or she goes to a private, government or aided school; he or she 'will reach whatever they want'. Naturally they questioned 'if there is a good local school why go

somewhere else?' Local teachers were also very outspoken about some parents' decision to opt out of government-aided schools like HSS of Jesus and enter private English-medium schools[113]. One of them vehemently complained that these parents sending their children to private school outside Kothad 'are not worried about what's happening inside the school, if teachers are prepared or not, they are only bothered about the name of the school and the standard of English'. She argued that the quality of teachers and the teaching methods used in such schools is poor for 'in those schools the teachers are not trained, they only have a good level of English; they receive the training after they are hired'. A teacher at HSS of Jesus critiqued the approach at CBSE schools: 'In CBSE schools they are spoon-fed; they are given the notes by the teachers to study'.

A sizeable number of parents whose children remained in the local HSS of Jesus were clearly feeling resentful as a result of the new trends. The linking of Kothad to the mainland and its concomitant opening to a broader and more stratified field of schooling meant that existing inequalities were not only amplified but that they became also more strongly felt by those belonging to the lower echelons of Kothad society. While many valued the construction of Kothad Bridge and the ITC road as bringing development to the region, they also were increasingly faced with the fact that 'today, good education changes according to each family. If a family has good financial capacity, they can spend money. If parents have no finance, good education is limited.' The mother of a poorer household illustrated this point when she, evidently feeling embarrassed, apologised for lacking 'proper' education, which prevented her from 'mingling and talking with [me] freely.' 'Bright children are going to waste because of lack of financial capacity'. A new sense of being left behind was acutely felt by Kothad's less well-off families.

Leaving: Producing Distinction through Schooling

The physical linkage established through the construction of Kothad Bridge has rapidly brought about an exodus of students from Kothad onto the mainland. Before 2005 moderately well-off families like those from the prawn fishing business and those from the bottom of the working class ladder sent their children to the local HSS of Jesus. At present the wealthiest families of Kothad have opted out of the local school and now invest hefty sums of capital in private unaided schooling and entrance coaching (EC) closer to the city.

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[113] I must note here that other local teachers were sending their children to private schools too.

Schooling and EC have thus become new tools central to the production of distinction among families on the islet. I heard of other families boosting their reported incomes on their ration cards so that they could demonstrate the sufficient financial capacity to pay fees and hence get admission to private schools. Ironically, an informant told me, some of these very same families used to undervalue their incomes so as to qualify for government concessions (of rice and fuel for example) reserved for the poorer section of the population.

The movement of students across the bridge has unleashed a debate over the appropriateness of HSS of Jesus to deliver quality education vis-à-vis private schools outside Kothad. The debate between those deserting the school and those remaining in it is highly reflective of the changing status of the region's upwardly mobile families. At the time I conducted the household interviews a minority of families had already opted out of the local school for considering it of 'low standard'. These included six different households who belong to the now extended prawn entrepreneur family. The recent construction of the bridge spurred them to reconsider their relationship with the local school, which was now thought to be inappropriate for their children's education. Joseph (41), an established prawn businessman, was the head of household in one of those families. His two elder sons, in 9th and 6th STD, attended the local HSS of Jesus, while his youngest daughter had just started first standard at the private SBOA Public School (SBOA henceforth). Glossing over varied local strategies of education, Joseph made the following statement:

People who are financially able send their children to private school. People who have no money also send their children to private because of its standard. I stopped my education at tenth standard. That was good because I learnt how to do business and make money. Now I'm financially stable. If I had gone for further education I would have lost time and money. 10th standard was enough, now there's no limit to education. Now things are different. Now I should give proper education for children otherwise they can't get any good job. Some people claim to be concerned about Malayalam [the language]. So this people send to Malayalam-medium. I'm not concerned about this, in today's world we should get good education otherwise we cannot face competition. Now Kothad is different, we can send our daughter to SBOA, a car comes to pick her up.

He explained that his sons were not being sent to SBOA because the bridge had not been built when they started school. But he proudly told me that it was his eldest son who compelled him to place his third child at the private school. Joseph recalled his son urging him not to let his sister 'suffer' the same 'language problems' he had been going through. Therefore Joseph sent his youngest child to private, English medium school. Joseph's story, whether or not it actually took place, portrays him as somewhat naïve of pervasive

pressures to send children to private, English-medium schools and expensive entrance coaching common to many middle classes across India. This helped highlight his narrative about a 'simple beginning' (De Neve 2011) and the fact that he carved out his wealth and social status by learning to manage the (already successful) family venture, and not so much as a result of formal education. Fathers, like Joseph, possessed similar or slightly higher educational qualifications than the poorer male heads of households of Kothad. But these families, mainly as a result of having highly educated mothers, had keen knowledge and familiarity with the available coaching courses, higher education institutions, and admission processes necessary to climb up the educational ladder. In other words, they knew how to go about producing potentially mobile youth out of Kerala's educational maze. Of course his account also attempted to de-emphasise the consumption of these forms of education as a way to stake social status by simply putting it as common sense or responsible parenting whether you are financially able to access them or not. What matters from this story is that Joseph saw the physical connection to the mainland as an enabling link, allowing him to provide his daughter with what he saw as an education of higher standard.

Although missing in Joseph's account, mothers were centrally active in the pursuit of 'quality' education among these families. Their often extensive educational experiences were the core of these families' familiarity with the educational field, which in turn shaped their expected role as mothers as guides, managers, and organisers of their children's school careers[114] (Donner 2005: 129). Mothers, unlike fathers, spoke more openly about how educating their children outside Kothad contributed to making them more competitive in 'today's world', and hence why local elite families felt a pressing need to direct all available resources towards certain forms of education (Donner 2005: 127). Mothers' focus was drastically changed by the construction of the bridge in 2005, after which they began to strategise and talk about education in terms of the acquisition of English language skills. The 'standard of English' was rapidly cited by almost all mothers as the reason behind schooling their children in a private school outside Kothad. Language skills also became the basis for these mothers' critique of Kothad's local school. HSS of Jesus was deemed of 'low standard' because Malayalam-speaking teachers were allegedly[115] imparting English lessons. Quickly after being introduced for the first time to English-

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[114] This has been described as a distinctively middle-class practice (Kumar 2011: 230).
[115] This is not really the case. I was able to corroborate that English teachers at the HSS of Jesus were indeed fully competent and qualified.

medium schools, educating children in English from the lower kindergarten rapidly became synonymous to giving one's children a good education (Donner 2005; De Neve 2011). A mother defined her aim as parent as doing everything it takes so that her son does not 'face communicative problem in his career'. This often involved grappling with new challenges, like the sense of inadequacy and anxiety which Malayalam-educated mothers felt in supporting and supervising children's English schoolwork. Apart from adequate English skills, parents also sought entrance coaching for professional courses outside Kothad. Mothers were in charge of compiling information about entrance coaching centres and managing all decisions concerning these.

Besides a sound knowledge of English, sending children to schools outside Kothad was frequently talked about as enabling youth to benefit from 'mingling with good educated children'. That is, schooling became understood as the site of cultural capital, where cash is converted into the possibility of establishing relationships with the 'right' class and changing the habitus of the schooled in consonance with the culture of the dominant (Osella & Osella 2000: 141). On the other hand, when probed about the HSS of Jesus, I frequently heard parents make statements like 'that is where the locals go', 'Kothad's standard is very weak, there is no competition among them' [students], and 'the circle of friends is no good' are quotes from mothers about the school and its students. In short, schooling beyond Kothad was understood as an immediate new marker of social status and distinction.

Most of the families who opted out of HSS of Jesus sent their children to SBOA, deserting the state/vernacular school system all together. The school embodied the new educational aspirations of Kothad's richer families. SBOA Public (Senior Secondary) School, located at the northern outskirts of Ernakulam, was privately managed by the State Bank of India Officers' Association Educational Trust. There are some important similarities between SBOA and city, elite schools (e.g. BVM in Chapter 3). Like many of the most recent private schools in India, it appeals to a 'modern' constituency by incorporating 'Public School' in its name (Jeffery et al. 2005: 54). Likewise, SBOA and most schools of its kind (i.e. outside the privileged world of metropolitan private, elite schools) is an English-medium, unaided school, in which students appear for examinations held by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). This syllabus is widely believed to provide better English training than the state syllabus. Both SBOA and elite urban schools boast having transportation facilities

and their infrastructure is usually comparable. The eye-catching aesthetics of SBOA's uniforms, with ties and shiny belt buckles with the school insignia cast on them, resembled that of city schools. In their vocal approach to education they too frame their objectives in terms of 'all-round' personality development. They claim 'to inculcate in the pupils social, moral and aesthetic values based on the Indian culture and heritage' and to produce citizens 'with a keen sense of commitment, responsibility, self-confidence, honesty, social consciousness and initiative'.

There are of course some important ways in which SBOA differs from elite urban schools. The reputation of institutions like SBOA is much more localised. Like in Advani's Rajya Mahal School (2009: 17), the school was a symbol of higher status among many families in and around Kothad. For Kothad's elite it stood as a school of reputation and a central part of their new middle class project, while seen from the perspective of an urban middle class dweller it would probably not stand out as a highly reputed institution. In SBOA almost all students are first generation learners of English, unlike the majority of students in elite city schools many of whom spoke English at home. Although relatively upscale, SBOA and other schools of its kind charge lower fees, ranging at around Rs. 15,000 per annum, with 'donations' near Rs. 10,000 for admission to the Plus Two level (between 2009-2010).

Let me now turn to how these nuanced layers of relative status, which map onto both the region and schools, are perceived by local Kothad elites. During a round of household interviews, my research assistant and I spoke to the mother of a Latin Catholic family. A fulltime housewife with an MA in commerce, she was daughter of a senior prawn entrepreneur. Her husband held an electrician diploma from a local ITI (industrial training institute) and had been working as a fire alarm technician in Dubai for the last seven years. She held the conviction that English education was the path to modernity and social mobility. Like the children of her five siblings, her two daughters attended SBOA, as opposed to the local, government-aided HSS of Jesus, which they themselves had attended. She proudly elaborated on this decision as a move to provide better education to their children, which later in the conversation became synonymous with giving them an English-medium education. The mother delivered the recurrent discourse of blame onto tenure teachers to justify their decision to desert the government aided system. Balagopalan (2005) points out that while the deteriorating standards of government and some government-aided schools in India is unequivocal, what is interesting is how the state has distanced

itself from this decline via discourses of inefficiency and sloth of the schoolteacher, which are now deeply entrenched in public opinion. Parents in Kerala have widely picked up these narratives and frequently imagine government school teachers' lack of commitment, of accountability and politicisation, being paid by the government while they go on strike, as a way to justify their opinion regarding the local school and their decision to choose the private sector (Balagopalan 2005: 95).

As our conversation moved on, the mother enquired more deeply into the nature of my research, as a result of which she learnt that I was simultaneously conducting research at an urban, middle class school. Clearly feeling very self-conscious (or embarrassed), she went on to compare SBOA to Chinmaya Vidyalaya, one of the city's most prestigious private schools, a few kilometres closer to Ernakulam city. Chinmaya, the mother said nodding her head, 'it is a nice school, a top school like BVM'. She continued saying:

> Only students with high standard go there, [those] *who speak very good English*. No *locals* can go there. They can't admit us there; they take *parents of reputation...* Children have to *know Hindi...* Students are bright there. In schools like SBOA they know English, but don't know! Understand? And [at Chinmaya Vidyalaya] the donation fee is Rs. 40,000.

While local elites quickly referred to education and 'financial stability' as the basis of their local prestige, this account is reflective of the mother's broader sense of her degraded caste/community (coded as 'local' or 'lacking reputation') and geographical position as a member of the Latin Catholic fishing community living in the backwaters. Thus it speaks of the ways and places in which older hierarchies (of caste) may continue to encompass newer hierarchies according to wealth or employment. Despite this, sending their children to SBOA – enabled by the bridge – indeed allowed them to transform economic capital into cultural capital, producing new distinctions between them and the 'locals' who continued to attend the HSS of Jesus. Knowledge of the English language, attained through English-medium schooling from LKG, was seen as pivotal to reinventing herself along the lines of the urban middle class imagination. Against the option of vernacular education in government-aided schools, these schools emerge as an alternative which matched more closely their aspirations and tastes of a socially mobile, semi-rural family. This suggests, as Advani (2009) notes, the continuous penetration of the metropolitan, middle class imagination among relatively affluent semi-rural families, who seek to stake a claim in its new cultural standard.

When set against the broader educational, economic and social backdrop, her sense of social mobility appeared to have been thwarted, and her feeling of being at land's end, their perception of themselves as fringe dwellers (Ram 1991) became entrenched in new ways. She used the same ideas deployed to stake her new status of local-ness and bright-ness, as well as the relative knowledge of English and economic capacity to rearticulate her sense of inferiority based on long existing differences between themselves and 'parents of reputation' (read: of mainland, urban, and higher caste/community status). English medium education is, on the one hand, a ladder that lifts families higher than those educated in Malayalam. On the other hand, it is a ladder from the bottom of which families like this look up at other inaccessible English medium schools. While teachers in urban middle class schools and those at the fringes may resort to English and Malayalam in the same proportion during classes or may have similar qualifications, a much larger number of students in the metropolitan, middle class schools – like BVM – use English independently and with ease when compared to students in schools like SBOA Public School. The distinction deepens the gap that already divided those who have independent access to English and those who do not.

Coming to Kothad: Ghettoisation

The opening of the bridge has not only unleashed the exodus of youth from Kothad, it has also resulted in the large movement of higher secondary students in the opposite direction. Before only students from Kothad and the neighbouring backwater areas attended the school. Now the physical proximity of Kothad to the city has resulted in the inclusion of HSS of Jesus in the list of schools being considered by broader applicants. Thus, youth from areas near the city, like Vaduthala, Cheranaloor, and Chitoor – to the north of Ernakulam – travel north to attend Kothad's HSS of Jesus. However the process by which these youth end up doing their final years of school at the HSS of Jesus is more complex than the simple choice based on status consideration of families voluntarily leaving the islet in search for private, English-medium education. Their reassignment to Kothad's school is bound to the complexities of the admission procedures at state schools (i.e. government or government-aided schools), whereby students – having passed their SSLCs – can apply to higher secondary school through merit, management, and/or community quotas. In other words, students can get admitted to a particular school either as a result of their SSLC marks, their financial capital (required to pay for a management seat), or their religious/caste identity (often requiring the payment of a 'donation' too).

The flow of students into Kothad has increased as a result of the implementation in 2008 of a new educational policy, the so-called single window system. The policy, which affects only the state system, is in turn nothing but the continuation of numerous waves of state reforms oscillating between attempts to play into the interests of communities[116] on the one hand, and on the other hand, attempts to undermine[117] the autonomy of aided schools' managements. The bill sought to increase the number of 'merit' seats allotted for higher secondary school through a centralised government-controlled process. In other words, it aimed to undermine school managements' discretion to allocate seats to students by broadening the quota of seats assigned solely according to students' performance in the SSLC, a centralised examination. As a result, seats assigned through either management or community quotas were reduced. Hence, ideally, the opening of the bridge and introduction of the single window policy would have enhanced Kothad youth's chances of gaining access to highly reputed Christian schools in Ernakulam.

But far from substantially changing the educational prospects of Kothad youth, the physical connection to the city and the implementation of the policy have resulted in the ghettoisation of HSS of Jesus (Jeffery et al. 2005: 59). Kothad youth have failed to benefit from having a broader school system with more merit seats at their disposal. The unwillingness to opt out of Kothad's school, together with their lack of strong educational backgrounds, extra tuitions and coaching – as well as the much lower competence in English among local families – have entailed that Kothad youth continue to stand a poor chance at benefiting from merit seats. On the contrary, the bridge has facilitated the inflow of students from a broader area outside Kothad, who belong mostly to sections of

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[116] As Lieten (1977) rightly noted, restrictive policies have continuously been interspersed with policies promoting private schools without too much supervision, thus allowing for the expansion of private (mostly church-run) schools responsible for a great deal of Kerala's renowned literacy record. In Ernakulam, Christian government-aided schools constitute the core of the state education system. These schools and colleges have not only been a key site for radical social transformation, responsible to a great extent for shaping Kerala's modernity (Devika 2007), but also an important economic resource for Christian communities, whose interests have become intertwined with these institutions. As such, education has become an object of political contestation between Christians (and other community identities with a vested interest in education) and the established socio-cultural and state forces (Jeffrey 1992; Lukose 2005). The former have actively negotiated with the state to corner material and cultural resources (Devika 2007), while successive state governments have oscillated between complying with community forces, in exchange for political support, and trying to undermine Christian control over the state education sector. In other words, education has become inextricably linked to Kerala's political modernity.

[117] The 1957 Education Bill, which sought to centralise teachers payments (Lieten 1977), was one of such attempts. Resembling the logic for launching the reforms in 2008, the 1957 policies were allegedly an attempt by the government to prevent private managements from utilising school seats to collect donations and to favour people of their particular religious community.

Ernakulam's poor labouring classes. The reason behind this is that among all Ernakulam schools, HSS of Jesus, for obvious reasons, ranks low in the preferences of higher secondary applicants. Long established schools, like St. Albert's or St. Teresa's and many others in Ernakulam, have a better reputation and rank very high in the list of school preferences handed out with students' higher secondary applications. As a result students that perform well in their SSLC tend to remain in their school or get access to 'better' schools, while those with poorer SSLC results end up attending schools lower in the prestige hierarchy[118], as with HSS of Jesus. This is further complicated by management or community quota applicants. What is important to note here is that the poor results of most Kothad's newcomers is reflective of their poor educational background marked by a lack of exposure to extra coaching and tuition courses and lack of independent access to English similar to that among most Kothad families. This lack is in turn reflective of their families' somewhat similar social and financial backgrounds, which impinge upon their capacity to afford management seats elsewhere, extra coaching, let alone private schooling. Thus, the bridge and the policy have translated into a broad movement of students whereby only sections of the financially and educationally poor and mostly lower status Latin Catholics attend HSS of Jesus. Adding to the residualisation resulting from the outward movement of wealthier students towards private schools, this inward movement seems to be doubly residualising Kothad's school: firstly residual because only the local poor are left to attend the school, and secondly, residual because educationally and financially poor Latin Catholics are flowing in from outside Kothad. As a result Kothad students became an ever more socio-economically homogeneous group, reinforcing existing educational inequalities.

These transformations spurred local concerns about the implication they may have on Kothad. Teachers often commented on the negative impact of this phenomenon of double residualisation. One of them said:

> The problem is that all bright children are going to CBSE schools; all educated parents are sending their children there. And this is affecting the proper functioning of our [government or government-aided/state syllabus] school. If we get a group of bright students, we'll be effective. We are only

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[118] The admission process thus produces a *de facto* hierarchy of state schools which are known by parents and students as schools that take students that have scored in the 60s, 70s, 80s, or 90s. The most reputed urban government-aided schools benefit from this change: a great part of their student intake now consists of the youth with top marks. Students who perform outstandingly in the SSLC do better in HSS and stand a better chance at securing some of the scarce merit seats in desirable university courses, hence furthering the reputation of these schools. This in turn allows them to lure parents and charge even higher *donations* for the shrinking and increasingly coveted management and community seats.

getting the *standard and below average students*. That's why we are not functioning properly, and we could bring good results if we got good bright students.' [I added the emphasis]

She vehemently complained of how students seem to be geographically rearranged and segregated into schools according to their bright-ness. As it became evident in the account of the mother in the previous section, and in the following excerpt, having bright-ness or being bright, locally used to describe academic ability or a student's ease at scoring marks, was often conflated with being wealthier, and sometimes, belonging to a higher status community group. More specifically, bright-ness was always associated with speaking 'good English', being from the city, knowing Hindi, having parents of reputation, and having financial capacity. The teacher continued:

> Almost all the students here come from Malayalam medium. There are maybe 3 or 4 students in a class who come from an English-medium school. But when I teach the class, I have to come down to the level of the rest. I cannot teach to these few students. In the schools like St. Teresa's and St. Albert's they get better students, from English-medium backgrounds. You know I taught in St. Albert's for 8 years... This Kothad is another school managed by the same management, the Archdioceses of Verapoly. You know St. Albert's is a boy's school, so they will be naughtier... But in terms of teaching in St. Albert's is much easier, they come from the city you know, many come from English medium. So it is easier to teach them. Here it is really a challenge; it is difficult to teach them. When I taught in a private school student come from a better financial background. The parents send their children also for tuition class. So we don't have difficulties to teach them. They come here to learn, they go home, study, and they will do well in the exam. They have educated parents; that makes a huge difference. The parents are better placed they have good jobs, you know these children here in Kothad their parents have... not so good jobs.

Many local parents felt alarmed by the challenges posed by the inflow of city youth. Parents expressed their trust in Kothad's school, but felt that being connected to the city in this new way posed a threat to their children. Their fears resonated with the parental narratives of city youth as aimless and as a moral danger described by Jeffrey et al. (2008: 180). One father said:

> According to me, Kothad is a good school. After studying there no one in my family has gone wrong. When we were students, only students from Moolampalli, Pizhala [neighbouring islets] were coming to Kothad. Now students from different schools, from different places are coming, having different nature and they are using drugs and all.

In reality Kothad's newcomers were in many ways similar to local students. Let me illustrate this with the stories of Phil and Shillu. A Latin Catholic boy, Phil was in the eleventh STD when we first met. An entirely new batch had been opened to accommodate all the students who had just arrived from various city schools. His father, mother, and younger sister lived in a small concrete house in a residential area to the north of Vaduthala, between Kothad and Ernakulam city. Phil's father failed his SSLC and has since then, like many fathers in Kothad, worked as a mason. Phil's mother only studied up to her

sixth STD and was a fulltime housewife. Up to his class ten Phil attended Sree Narayanan Higher Secondary School (SNHSS). After appearing for the SSLC examination he applied to continue studying in this school. But he also submitted an application for HSS of Jesus through community quota, for which he got a seat in the first allotment. 'So I opted for it, fearing I would not get the merit seat at SNHSS,' Phil recalled. Many of his new peers had actually been relocated to HSS of Jesus from various schools as a direct result of their SSLC results. He wished he could have continued his studies at his old school. In our last conversation Phil talked about missing his friends and complained about the daily complications involved in reaching the islet using public transport, being used to walking to school. However, when asked to compare his experience in SNHSS to that in HSS of Jesus, Phil did not discern any major difference about attending either school. When asked about the difference of studying in their previous school and attending HSS of Jesus, many of Phil's friends agreed that 'this [Kothad] is the city now'. In short, his coming to Kothad was not experienced as thwarting.

Shillu (16) was also a new student at HSS of Jesus. Up to her tenth STD, she attended LMCC Girls High School. Located at a northern neighbourhood of Ernakulam, this private state syllabus school ran by nuns catered to lower-middle class residents. Like Phil, Shillu too belonged to a working class Latin Catholic family. Her grandfather worked as an 'auto' (auto-rickshaw) driver, while her father was employed as a carpenter. None of them completed their secondary schooling. Shillu's mother has never been formally employed. Although she thought her old school was a good place to learn better English and 'manners', Shillu felt that HSS of Jesus was a better school to attend. Speaking in more fluent English than all of her peers, Shillu spoke with dismay of her previous school peers:

> You know I was in private, English medium school so I learnt these manners. Most of these people [pointing at her new classmates in Kothad] come from Malayalam medium. They don't have manners. In the private school we learn to wish our teachers: we say 'good morning teacher' [putting her hands together in front of her chest]. But this people here are loving people, they help each other. There, they might have more manners, but they care only about themselves.

Shillu felt truly happy at HSS of Jesus, where she claimed to experience affection, loyalty and a great deal of support from her classmates. Although she failed to secure a seat at the schools at the very top of her preference list, she felt content from having switch to Kothad for it exempted her parents from paying fees and it was close to her home.

Like Phil and Shillu, the majority of the newcomers to Kothad came from families that were very similar to the average Kothad family. The educational qualification of these families' head of households was often below SSLC, in both fathers and mothers. Like many mothers in Kothad, these mothers frequently expressed frustration for feeling unqualified to guide their children's educational careers, as a result of their lack of knowledge and familiarity with educational institutions, courses, coaching centres, as well as with their inability to speak English. Despite this, newcomers' parents expressed the desire to let their sons and daughters study 'up to what they want to study'. Like Kothad parents', I heard many newcomer parents speak of seeking advice from well-wishers to help them navigate their sons and daughters through their education. Similarly, many parents spoke of 'being ready' to take on financial challenges, such as selling property or land, in order to support their children's higher education. Talk of these practices, seldom put to work, were used as evidence of a larger parental discourse of 'willingness' to give their children a prolonged education: a narrative that resonated with the realities of local elites. 'Now parents are ready to give good education', or 'however much they want to study, we are willing to support them' frequently figured in the self-representation of the parents of new comers. This discourse also drew salience via a sharp distinction between today's parents and the previous generation of parents, described through imageries of 'poverty', 'ignorance' of 'the value of education', and of 'lack of encouragement' to become educated [similar to the narratives cited in Parry (2005)]. This discourse of willingness to educate was in tension with the necessity to have their sons enter paid employment sooner rather than later.

Unlike Phil and Shillu, some newcomers experience their shift into Kothad as a major setback. That was the case of Paul, a 17 year old Latin Catholic boy. Like Phil, Paul lived in the northern Ernakulam's neighbourhood of Vaduthala. But unlike his junior, he comes from a relatively well-to-do, landed Latin Catholic family. His parents studied up to their pre-university degree course. From first to seventh STD his father attended a reputed Christian boarding school, benefiting also from extra tuitions. From eighth STD onwards he attended the prestigious St. Albert's school and college in Ernakulam. But like Kothad's elite families, he too recalled wishing to quit his studies when he was in eighth STD in order to join the family business, a prawn and rice enterprise in Allapuzha District (south of Ernakulam District). Today he runs the family farm and, like Kothad's prawn entrepreneurs, Paul's father also deploys the neoliberal language of competition to assess

his and his son's educational experiences. 'At that time, our business and factories were in good flow', he noted. 'But after the years we came to know that we wanted qualifications for business too'. In hindsight, he now regretted not having continued studying and learning English, which he claimed would have allowed him to start exporting prawn directly without having to pay commissions to intermediaries. 'After getting to business we came to know that we did not get proper education', he said. He regretfully recalled receiving a letter from a client in English and not being able to understand it. Now, he told me, 'they [his sons] have to gain maximum education'. Paul's father had a very clear idea of what he meant by maximum education and that was an education geared to turn Paul into a businessman: a BCom followed by MBA or a chartered accountancy course.

Paul, who had applied to continue his studies in St. Albert's after his SSLC, did feel strong resentment towards the single window system for having forced him out of St. Albert's school and into HSS of Jesus. He sadly recalled how after failing to get a seat in the first two rounds of allotments, he applied to Kothad's community quota and got admitted. Only after having accepted the seat they got offered a management seat at St. Albert's for Rs. 10,000, but it was too late. Having failed to capture that seat in Albert's, Paul liked to talk about his ambitions and aims as a way to distance himself from his class peers, whom he described as those who 'are only interested in jobs' (see Chapter 7). Paul, like all newcomers to Kothad, missed his old school and friends and regretted the daily bus journey to the islet. He particularly missed the way he and his ex-schoolmates used to enjoy the life in the centre of the city, window shopping for the latest mobile phone and going to the cinema during school intervals.

Conclusion

That schooling has changed in significant ways since the construction of Kothad Bridge is clear. What I have endeavoured to document here is how since the construction of the bridge schooling has become a new means for the production of difference among the inhabitants of a backwater islet at the fringes of urban Ernakulam. With this aim I described the flow back and forth of students from Kothad into Ernakulam and vice-versa, and showed how these shifts are the outcome of new educational policies and physical linkages – roads, terminals, all in all connections to boost India's global trade – and old inequalities being reproduced. Furthermore, I demonstrated how these inequalities are reflective of old spatial – the coastal backwater region against the urban centre – as well as

social differences, which pits low status Latin Catholic groups against other higher status communities. As a result, schooling has become increasingly differentiated.

Wealthier prawn-fishing families live in hope that their sons and daughters will reproduce their status within the local context or perhaps attain a position of higher prestige and wealth in the city; and they realise that in order to do so they must get the right sort of school education. This unequivocally means leaving the local school and using their incomes to send their children to a private English-medium school closer to the city. Concomitantly, the poor and marginalised increasingly become subject to ghettoisation in Kothad's school (Jeffery et al. 2005: 59). Its intake now consists of the poorer section of the locality and of students discarded by more reputed city aided schools, on the basis of their low SSLC grades and lack of economic resources to pay capitation fees required to re-enrol for the +1 and +2 years. As these students are mainly low-status Latin Catholics (OBC), my thesis further demonstrates how regardless of policies of positive discrimination in higher education, their chances to access and benefit from higher learning will continue to be marginal, specially as a consequence of the marginalising effect of higher secondary school (Osella & Osella 2000: 142). In short, this chapter illustrates how schools catering to the lower strata of society may become sites where long standing inequalities are not just reproduced but further entrenched by processes such the dual residualisation here described.

Finally, having documented the educational scene at the fringes of the realm of urban middle-class life and the pursuit of professionalism and globalised competence, the next chapter consists of a comparison between the prospects and aspirations of a group of +1 and +2 youth in Kothad's HSS of Jesus and the final year students at BVM. It is therefore a chapter located in the realm of fantasies.

Chapter 7: Youth Aspirations

Introduction

It was January and the twelfth standard students of BVM and HSS of Jesus were both two months away from the end of their school days. However, the atmospheres in the urban and the peripheral schools were markedly different. In the city school teachers had rushed through their 'portions' to finish by November, which meant that students had been officially on study leave in order to prepare for their final exams for quite a while already. Students had long finished their first and second 'models' (mock final exams), practical models, the actual practical Board exams and were on study leave preparing for the Boards. They came to school for clarification and revisions on set times and dates. The ambience of these sessions was solemn. On one occasion, I was able to catch a glimpse of a maths revision session through one of the few classroom blinds that was not fully shut. Students, absolutely focussed, stared at the black board where the teacher went over some problems. The imminence of the Boards kept every soul under tension and focused.

In Kothad, the timetable was not as rushed and exam-oriented as it was in the city. Here the portions had not been finished yet and students kept coming to school every day; and as I was told they will continue to do so during their study leave. A teacher tells me that because this is a rural school they come every day. 'At home they'd sit in front of the TV, and not study at all; here they are made to study', he explained. On the day after I saw the city youth cloistered in that classroom, I went to HSS of Jesus in Kothad. The ambience was much more relaxed among final year students even as their 'models' were soon to start. While some students were indeed attending a maths revision in a classroom, others were busy finishing one of their final chemistry reports, neatly handwritten, in the corner of an otherwise unused classroom. Others were leisurely hanging out in classrooms or roaming into the *chayakada* (teashop) opposite the school gates. They come to study, do revisions, but also to 'enjoy' as another teacher explained. In a classroom towards the back, a group of female students were enthusiastically writing farewell messages on each other's leavers' books. I was asked to join, so I spent quite a nice afternoon among them writing my best wishes for what was to come. The nostalgia of finishing school and calmness in the daily sessions made it feel more like a prolonged farewell celebration, transmitting a different emotion about this moment of their lives.

Before getting to the final stages of the academic year, I imagined youth both in Kothad and Ernakulam would at least reveal similar sorts of anxieties, joys and hopes which I

presumed to be associated with the end of one's schooling years. But as the picture above shows, there was a markedly different ambiance at BVM and Kothad's HSS of Jesus. To a large extent of course, the differences in the picture portrayed above speak of differences in terms of types of school (aided/unaided), location of the school (urban/semi urban), and syllabi (Salim 2004)[119]. They are also revealing of the particular ways in which the final year of schooling was understood and hence structured by these particular schools (Chapter 3 in case of BVM) under the impetus, or not, of parental demands (Chapter 4). But on another and perhaps more important level, these differences speak of the distinctive ways in which two groups of youth – one that according to socio-economic definitions may strictly be classified as 'middle class' and another which may not – actually inhabited the final year. These differences between students' experiences of the final year at school in turn spoke of the various ways in which they envisaged their futures in twenty-first century India. This chapter examines these life projects and aspirations, as a terrain in which to explore how education harbours the reproduction of social and economic inequalities. Understanding aspirations, and their creative strategies to achieve them, across such disparate groups of youth helps to shed empirical light onto the sort of orientations that define being middle class and onto the extent to which middle class values and aspirations have captured the minds, at least partially, of a widening range of social groups (De Neve 2011) at the fringes of middle class metropolitan India. To go about this, I look at the ways in which they articulated idealised fantasies of the future as a projective method in the exploration of youth's lives' (Loizos 1993: 43). I then compared these to what they perceived as more realistic life outcomes. In Kothad, this comparison revealed deep seeded disjuncture between aspirations, strategies and more tangible outcomes. In Ernakulam youth aspirations converged in similar life projects, which in turn premised the pervasive sense of unity among the final year group towards the end of the academic year.

Imagined Futures in Kothad

In what follows I describe HSS of Jesus youth's idealised visions of the future, focusing primarily on the educational aspect of these visions. In the subsequent section, I juxtapose these with their more realistic aspirations and their strategies to get to them as they cropped up in conversations at the end of the academic year.

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[119] This study by Salim (2004) shows how the quality of education, understood according to parameters like type of school, medium of instruction, location of school, syllabi, is a determining factor in students' ability to secure admission to professional courses. He demonstrates how urban, English medium, unaided, Central syllabi schools account for the large majority of students who were able to secure admission to these courses.

Transitions: Sketching Fantasies of the Future

Early in fieldwork, during one of my first encounters with the +1 and +2 commerce students at the school in Kothad I conducted an activity, which I called 'transitions'. It was designed and conducted, with the help of a teacher and collaborator, as a way to open an arena for youth and teachers to share ideas about career choices and future life plans and aspirations – what is locally referred to as one's 'aims' in life. This practice – of thinking and talking about 'aims' – is pervasive in Kerala at various levels: the domestic (at home with parents), the institutional (at school with teachers and career counsellors), and among peer groups. The session, like the several others I conducted in the school, also worked as a space for students to practice their English and presentation skills, apart from constituting an important rapport-building and research tool.

Transitions consisted of two parts. In the first part each student (nearly eighty in total) was asked to imagine a character tantamount to their own self and to draw a portrayal of his or her idealised imaginary life using a line to depict the passage of time, from 15 to 70 years of age. Upon this 'transition line' they would draw events, places, people, and institutions that gave shape to the lives of their imaginary selves. In the second part, various students presented their transition lines to the rest of the class, who then were encouraged to ask questions and make comments. I now turn to the drawings themselves.

They all drew straight lines at the top of their sheets of paper. Below each line students wrote a sequence of numbers signifying age below which neatly arranged boxes filled with one-word labels represented the various events and achievements that constituted the dream-like lives of their imaginary selves. Arrows then shot from box to box signifying the connection and sequence between events. As I had expected, their pictures portrayed themselves moving seamlessly through time acquiring higher education credentials, jobs, and driving licenses; purchasing cars, motorbikes, and houses; achieving 'love success' and getting married; having children (one or two), educating and subsequently marrying off their children; and finally, retiring. Everything took place at the right time, place and order. Drawings showed no signs of difficulty, struggle or idleness, like the sort of relatively purposeless time periods characteristic of the lives of many educated un/under-employed youth across India (Jeffrey 2010).

Despite being educationally marginal (Chapter 6), they reflected a disposition to stay in formal education for a long time[120], almost always accumulating the graduate and post graduate degrees, as well as job-oriented or industrial training courses deemed ideal. Some of their drawing resembled the sort of 'strategic credentialing' (Fernandes 2000) that has been shown to be a practice central to being middle class, either as way to maintain one's status (Jeffrey et al. 2008) or as a means for marginal social groups to obtain middle class status (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 8). This is what recent works have identified as the more strategic sort of 'waiting' characterised by the investment on a variety of subsequent educational credentials, a characteristic feature of the middle classes (Jeffrey 2010). Among their sketches, the majority shared an almost script-like educational strategy, by which after finishing school most of them pictured their ideal selves acquiring Bachelor's degrees in commerce (BCom), followed by masters degrees in commerce (MCom), or chartered accountancy courses (CA course)[121]. Alternatively, a few boys pictured themselves completing industrial training courses after finishing their BCom degrees; while a few girls imagined themselves acquiring teacher training certificates (TTC) after acquiring degrees in commerce too. The accumulation of graduate and postgraduate imaginary degrees speaks of an overall grasp of the present day context, so heavily marked by the inflation of educational qualification (Chapter 4), in which undergraduate degrees are now worth very little. More broadly, it speaks of the deeply engrained, seemingly imperishable, and inflated believe in education as the primary means for building a brighter future for oneself.

Only a dozen of the near to eighty students who participated envisaged themselves getting only one educational credential after finishing school. Their choices however revealed a very strategic take on education. This group oriented themselves towards often very specific job-oriented courses premised on a seemingly more in tune and creative reading of the job market, in particular private service-sector jobs that in the face of pervasive un/underemployment appeared to offer them new and better opportunities. Akhil, for example, sketched himself getting a fire and safety diploma and subsequently finding work as a fire and safety technician in the Gulf. However, these choices may also turn out to be

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[120] See Jeffrey et al. (2008) for a similar example.

[121] The rather formulaic shift from +2 commerce to BCom (and MCom) may be viewed as a result of the fact that in Kerala only ten years ago higher secondary (the final two years of formal schooling) was not part of the school education system as it is today. It was indeed attended in colleges already as part of one's degree – what used to be called pre-university degree course (PUD or PDC) or 'pre-degree'. As a commerce pre-degree student, one would normally advance towards the degree in commerce once having completed the PDC.

too expensive or simply futile as many of this service-sector jobs towards which they orient themselves may not in fact exist[122] or do not offer the earnings they tend to promise (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 5).

Their sketches of educational strategies demonstrated that in their idealised worlds education was valued primarily as a means to avoiding wage manual labour, a field which employed most of their parents (Jeffrey et al. 2008; Rogers 2008). No boy pictured himself working as a mason, and no girl imagined herself being a full-time housewife. They all imagined themselves gaining some form of non-manual secure source of income. As local economic and employment patterns were being transformed under the conditions of liberalisation and more specifically by Kothad's renewed proximity to the city, local youth, mostly from fishing communities were also seeking to define themselves in terms of economic wealth and non-manual employment, in contrast to the caste-based occupations of their parents or grandparents (Busby 2000: 52; Osella & Osella 2000: 38; Ram 1991: 143; Rogers 2008: 82). Now I outline some of their ideal employment strategies.

Over fifty percent of the drawings depicted their imaginary selves working as what they simply described as 'accountants'. While most of these group of students gave detailed accounts of their ideal educational strategies[123], their employment strategies were depicted rather vaguely, without much detail, for example, as to where they pictured themselves working or how they were to access such work. This signalled two contradictory trends. On the one hand, their sketches captured their desire to access futures marked by education and white-collar employment. On the other hand, they revealed a deep lack of familiarity and exposure to the futures deemed ideal, largely a result of their lower social and economic backgrounds. Their formulaic educational choices may simultaneously be interpreted as students' attempt to provide the 'correct answer' considering also that they were in the classroom environment being supervised and often interjected by their economics teacher while sketching their ideas. They shared a sense that as commerce students they should pursue further studies in commerce, and that ideally this would lead to some form of clerical/administrative/accountant work. But as most of them were first

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[122] Chopra (2003) elaborates on a 2002 report by the Planning Commission's Special Group on Job Creation points out that the number of jobs created in the post-liberalisation decade of the 1990s was less than a third of the corresponding number in the decade preceding liberalization.

[123] Almost all of them drew the commonest educational strategy described above (BCom plus MCom or CA course).

generations in their families to reach +2 and most of their parents were manual labourers, they held very vague ideas as to the sort of job they should aspire to or might be able to secure. Moreover, many of them in fact lacked the knowledge pertaining to the admission and recruitment processes to the degrees outlined. In line with these findings, a local study cites families' occupational and educational background in Kerala as one the leading barriers into higher education (Salim 2004). This lack of familiarity did not preclude them from subscribing to the belief that the education sketched does lead to white collar employment as a channel of upward mobility.

Other students were not as vague and sketched their commerce educational paths leading to jobs in the public sector (such as becoming a police, or a military officer, or a teacher). Mary pictured herself completing a BCom and a chartered accountancy course, after which she saw her imaginary self securing a place in the coveted Indian Administrative Service (IAS). Phil depicted his imaginary self becoming a police officer after completing a BCom and an MBA. That way 'everyone would respect me; people would be afraid', Phil added. As shown in Chapter 6, these sort of high status government jobs[124] have rarely been accessed by Kothad's Latin Catholics. In spite of this, their never having actually seen or met anyone in such occupations[125] did not preclude Kothad student's strong sense of them. Their twenty-first century portrayal of an ideal life signalled the continuation of long pending outcomes that education is yet to deliver.

The drawings of a smaller yet equally important group of students depicted their commerce/business educations leading to much more specific outcomes, largely as entrepreneurs. These youths enthusiastically portrayed their ideal selves developing some form of business. Jude, for example, pictured his ideal self completing a Bachelor's in Business Administration (BBA) followed by an MBA, after which he pictured himself becoming a 'famous businessman'. Another student depicted himself acquiring the same credentials, and becoming a real-estate businessman. Paul (Chapter 6) imagined himself developing his business in Canada and Kerala after completing a BBA and MBA degrees. These idealised trajectories drew from an orientation towards business education different from that of many of their peers. They placed a high value on business education and the

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[124] This is the sort of government posts that inspired social reform movements and encapsulated the most pervasive ideas of acquired prestige and wealth among middle classes in the early twentieth century.
[125] This sort of government occupation matches the sort of jobs that in the decades after independence have been traditionally monopolised by the English-educated middle class (Varma 2003).

achievement of MBA degrees as paths leading to prosperous futures (Fernandes 2000: 93). Their visions found resonance with the value attributed to these degrees in the current neoliberal moment. As a newspaper article observed, BCom degrees, as the perfect base course, 'have witnessed an unprecedented rise with MBA degrees gaining glamour and business schools burgeoning across the country in recent decades' (Nazeer 2006). As such, BCom has been re-imagined as a course that mixes conventional character with a modern horizon: a course that is both essential for 'open[ing] a floodgate of job opportunities' and 'essential for instilling a confidence in entrepreneurship' (Nazeer 2006). Their orientation, inspired by pervasive images of prosperous young urban entrepreneurs (Fernandes 2006; Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; Jeffrey 2010), may well be seen as a manifestation of the extent to which the positive effects of globalisation and liberalisation have established themselves as a dominant discourse across Indian social space (Chopra 2003).

Neoliberal aspirations like Paul's found fertile ground among the children of successful Latin Catholic entrepreneur families, a community characterised for its business acumen (Osella & Osella 2000). Paul's aspirations to acquire business education and to open his father's business to the international markets found solid anchor in his family's entrepreneurial tradition. With this objective in mind, he took very seriously improving his English skills.

Education was not valued only with reference to employment. Education also emerged as central to their ideal marriage strategies. Many girls imagined their future ideal husbands not just as removed from manual labour but in possession of specific educational qualifications and secure forms of employment. In her sketches, girls depicted themselves accumulating higher education and post-graduate degrees as a way to access better grooms, who must ideally be equally or better qualified than brides. Sherin, for example, saw herself getting a MCom and marrying an MBA graduate and businessman. Simmy pictured herself marrying an engineer after completing a MCom degree. On the contrary, a few boys sketched their ideal selves marrying teachers.

Education also had a bearing in their depiction of themselves as parents. With an eye already put on their ideal future families' educational strategies, many of them depicted their imaginary selves as parents devoting enormous resources into private, English-medium schooling for their imaginary children. Neenu painted her imaginary children

attending a highly reputed private English-medium school in Ernakulam – Chinmaya Vidyalaya (see Chapters 3 and 6). Her choice matched the most pervasive understanding of quality schooling among the city's middle classes described in Chapter 3 and 4. This signals the extent to which these schools stand as markers of prestige and wealth across classes. Never having been part of such a space did not preclude their strong sense of the symbolic value attending these schools holds (Balagopalan 2005: 93).

Aspirations Revisited: Strategies at the Brink of Post-school Life

As the academic year came to an end the dreams and aspirations Gayathri had portrayed in her transition line had intensified. Gayathri belonged to a Dheevara[126] family from Cheranelloor. She was determined to live her ideal life. Gayathri was among those who during the transition activity had come up with creative and specific educational and employment strategies oriented towards emerging job markets in the private sector. Since the day she completed the transitions activity, Gayathri aspired to study animation. As I wrote my best wishes on her leaver's book she ran back towards her backpack, from which she pulled out a glossy brochure from the private institute where she was planning to get her animation training. Among the various courses offered at the institute, which ranged from 5-week-long to one-year-long courses, Gayathri wanted to complete the one year Diploma in animation, costing Rs. 80,000. 'It is very expensive', she acknowledged. But she had already thought of a plan, bold as herself, to collect the fee money. 'I will go visit one uncle, his son is a doctor there; I am going to go see them.' Excited, she carried on talking about the potentially very rewarding jobs she imagined awaited her as an animation graduate. 'The starting salary will be Rs. 20,000 for someone with this diploma. You have seen AVATAR? That film is full of animation, 3D animation; like that I want to do'. It is certainly true that normally Kothad youth did go to the cinema to watch Malayalam films, and Ernakulam middle class youth went to see Hollywood films in general. However, Gayathri proved how erroneous the perceptions held by urban middle class youth about 'locals' like Gayathri (Chapter 5), who they argued did not understand Hollywood films and only watched these in cinemas 'for the glamour of it'. Instead, she had been deeply inspired by the film as well as by the increasing number of television ads using animation in Indian channels. She had already identified in an animation studio in the city, precisely dedicated

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[126] This is an inland fishing Hindu community.

to producing advertising. Her reading of education, employment, and of her future in general was highly pragmatic.

Youth like Gayathri were full of wit; their orientation towards these sort of trajectories spoke, on the one hand, about an awareness that highly prestigious and expensive professional degrees and MBAs are out of reach for them, and hence the sort of jobs and lives associated to these degrees. On the other hand, it involved a perception that accessible and more conventional paths, like those commencing with the acquisition of university degrees and oriented towards securing clerical posts, have turned out ineffective in leading to better futures. Linked to this was the perception that jobs in the public sector were shrinking. They saw no promise in the government sector. These beliefs indeed spoke of their real predicament, by which neither the lives of the 'new-rich middle class' (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007: 121) nor that of the 'old' middle classes appeared to be reachable. Their orientation reflected the felt disjuncture between raising educational levels in the locality and the actual occupational outcomes among the later generations. Instead of rejecting education, these youth devised strategies that conceive education in new ways, something students like Gayathri prided. She imagined her strategy towards the field of animation as leading to job opportunities, higher salaries, greater consumer choice and a better quality of life. She viewed her own educational strategy as more adapted to current times and thus more effective to crafting an alternative future. Gayathri vocally critiqued and at the same time shored up status against those who claimed to want to get a BCom after completing school as people with no aims in life.

Certainly Gayathri and others with similar strategies were more tuned in and susceptible to what was going on around them. Augustine, a twelfth STD student from the science batch, was planning to get a Diploma offered in a private vocational institute to become a member of ground-crew at Cochin Airport. Amal, aspired to complete a Diploma in Nautical Science and get a job on board a merchant ship. Aiming to work on a merchant ship in Ernakulam is not new. What is new is the heightened sense of abundance of work opportunities imagined to be heading towards Ernakulam as a result of an increase in the flow of merchant ship that would in turn result from the transformation of the port into a transhipment terminal. A number of students said to have been advised by teachers to go for this sort of course for there will be plenty of jobs on board merchant ships. The strategies of these youth also drew from a number of educational fairs that pack many

venues in the city during the month of May. These feature not only Universities and colleges from India and abroad, but also a wide rage of private vocational and job oriented course providers, such as the ones being considered by Gayathri, Augustine and Amal. These fairs also include of course a wide range of banks and other financial institutions promoting education loans for students. Sales representatives from job-oriented course providers also visit schools like HSS of Jesus, disguised as career counselors, to advertise their course among possible new client-students.

However, Gayathri's strategy may in the end prove futile. First, her parents' lack of knowledge of emerging employment markets may preclude her from even attempting to carry out her strategy. Her father and mother, a fisherman now working in a cement factory and a fish vendor respectively, felt uneasy about the animation course she wished to pursue. They saw no job prospects for it, and hence thought it would be too risky for Gayathri to undertake it. In addition, her father said he would have to get a loan for which he would have to mortgage their house. Instead, he thought it would be sound for Gayathri to complete a BCom 'since she is doing +2 in commerce'. When I interviewed Gayathri's father, Gayathri's eldest brother was completing the final year of his BCom degree. 'After BCom, he has to start working; with the salary I get is not enough to educate them more', he explained. He expected Gayathri to follow a similar path, plus having her complete a degree to which most local parents were acquainted would allow him to navigate the marriage market more confidently. Second, although apparently tuned in, the private job-oriented courses these students planned to buy into may turn out to be either too expensive or incapable of living up to the hype and the promised employment or earnings advertised by them (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 5).

The experiences of Neelu and Jinu, both of whom assisted my research in Kothad while waiting to find employment, shed light on the effects of this sort of courses on local youth's lives. Like Gayathri, Neelu (Chapter 6) was a HSS of Jesus graduate. She dreamt of becoming a flight attendant, however, her father managed to persuade her to complete a BCom degree right after finishing school. After acquiring her degree, she persevered and got a loan to pay for the Rs. 125,000 fee to attend an air hostess course. After completion, she sadly recounted how she would not be able to qualify for a job interview as her arms bared some birthmark that would be visible when wearing the flight attendant uniform. She then signed up for a MCom degree at a private institution. When Neelu agreed to

collaborate with my work in Kothad, she had finished that degree and was on the look out for a job. Months of waiting passed until she found work looking after the accounts of a small godown (a warehouse) owned by her father's friend. The poorly paid work allowed her to begin to pay back her loan, while (intentionally) delaying marriage. Jinu had completed a marine science diploma a year ago, costing Rs. 400,000. He had been place on a waiting list for a placement as an officer on board of a merchant ship. During his wait he has been largely engaged in the sort of 'timepass' described by (Jeffrey 2010; Jeffrey et al. 2008) among Uttar Pradesh Chamars. With the exception of the work he did with me, Jinu spent his time roaming around on street corners, doing family errands once in a while and waiting for that call from the employment agency. He would also have to start paying back the huge loan sometime soon.

By the end of the school year, other students' visions of future were markedly different from that sketched at the beginning of the school year. Pious was one of them. He belonged to a Latin Catholic family in Vaduthala. His father worked as mason in a construction site outside the city. When I first met Pious while conducting the transition activity, he was sitting on the left of the classroom the first few buttons of his shirt were unbuttoned showing his rather muscled chest adorned with a pendant. On that day he took the activity fondly. He and a group of friends sitting around him took on their sketches together making a comment on every bit and often joking amongst themselves. At the end of the class period Pious and many of his friends, had produced similar transition-lines depicting ideal selves completing BCom and MCom degrees, and subsequently finding jobs, which he generically described as 'jobs'.

Unlike their transition-lines, many months later he sounded uncertain about his immediate future and aspiration. In the middle of a January morning, I chatted with Pious and two of his friends on the school ground. They spent those days hanging out and roaming between the school and the *chayakada* opposite the school gate, where they bought *bondas* and tea. At school they were finishing off their class portions and were soon to start their mock final exams. That morning, as he gave me a few 'goonda bands' to wear (plain black plastic bracelets) we spoke loosely about their plans after school once again. Pious' academic skills and knowledge of English were not above the average in the class. In fact, Pious and a few of his peers showed little enthusiasm and motivation for school work. Set against a backdrop of high competition for BCom merit seats, expensive donations for management

and community quota seats in the colleges in and around the city, and the increasing importance for English for higher education and white-collar employment, his sketch seemed illusory. He did not envisage himself moving seamlessly through desired degrees and acquiring respectable white-collar employment; Pious said he was not sure if he would even pass the twelfth STD. Rather than seeming concerned about their futures, Pious and his friends joked about their predicament. Like the Dalits described by Jeffrey et al. (2008), humour and jokes signalled a sense, although subtle, of them failing to embody the pervasive notions of idealised futures: of hard-working students who acquired good salaried jobs. Pious joked about having to become a mason after all, while one of his friends jested about his future work in a fabric shop after school. Finally, another friend made humorous references about his future as a 'goonda manager', succinctly marrying two terms ('goonda' and 'manager') that capture the tension between their predicament and their familiarity with values and aspirations widely spread across communities in India that will most certainly be unreachable for many in Kothad. Although they knew they would most probably be excluded from this future, their jokes still positioned them with reference to coveted managerial roles. These jokes also spoke of more plausible trajectories marked by the reliance on networks of kin – of parents working as masons for example – to assist them in the search for work.

Their awareness of their predicament did not seem to lead to a deeper sense of personal crisis, even in the face of an extended perception among Kothad youth that with the construction of Kothad Bridge 'this [Kothad] is the city now'. They imagined modernity, mainly understood as booming commerce/trade, as heading quickly towards the islet. Linked to this imagining, they also envisaged the town transformed by the abundance of businesses and hence of job opportunities for people trained in commerce and accounting. However, in my time there, they did not speak of themselves as potential beneficiaries of those changes.

Rather than developing a cultural style centred on a sense of failure or of being 'good for nothing' (Jeffrey et al. 2008: 181), Pious effectively carved out status among his group of friends. Among them (a group of around a dozen) status relied heavily, as made evident in their appearance and talk about being 'goonda' (see Chapter 5), on their ability to construct hyper-masculine identities, a hierarchy of performance (Osella & Osella 1998), which rather than through hard-work in studies and aim-talk was enacted around ideas concerning

physical strength, the muscularity of their bodies, and a particular style of fashion (Rogers 2008: 86). They devoted energy almost obsessively on body-building exercises at the gym and at home. At school, during the tea break, Pious once took me to a small empty room next to their classroom where he and some friends had been chalk-drawing on the walls. He told me: 'come see the muscle-mania.' On the walls, they had sketched a highly muscled male torso and a sign that read 'multi-gymnasium'. Pious' friends animatedly gathered around and prompted Pious and one other peer to show me their biceps and triceps. Linked to their emphasis on physical strength were practices such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Although I am unable to attest to their consumption of alcohol, cigarettes, or any other drug, Pious and many of his peers also devoted energy in talking about the consumption of these substances.

Pious' performance helped him balance out, or resist other peers' perception (like Gayathri) of him as someone without 'aims'. Gayathri and Paul (below) among others openly complained about boys like Pious who showed little interest in studying and allegedly engaged in drinking, smoking and doing drugs. 'I don't like studying in Kothad because the passing percentage of the final twelfth STD is less. The last batch was very bad, only fifty per cent passed, boys completely failed except for one, they were drinking, smoking, doing drugs. But boys in my class are better.' However, Pious' tactic, as that of the 'college rowdies' described by Rogers (2008), was self-defeating. As the economic structures, employment markets, and markers of status are transformed in the conditions of liberalisation, their resistance strategy of developing goonda identities risks only reproducing their situation.

For many others, whose aspirations had neither intensified (like Gayathri) nor focused on nurturing hyper-masculine facades (like Pious), the end of school year felt contradictory. The sadness of finishing school, and the imminence and uncertainties of their post-school life made a confounding mix. Nelson for example was among the many who during the transition activity pictured his ideal self acquiring a Bachelor's degrees in commerce (BCom) followed by a master degree in commerce (MCom). When Nelson and I talked at the end of the academic year, he did not question the fact that he, as a commerce student, had to carry on towards the completion of those degrees. Years ago, Nelson's mother who worked as a peon at Cochin University had died, which meant that Nelson was entitled to inherit her mother's public-sector employment. Working as peon, regardless of being a

government job, of course did not crop up in an exercise meant to depict idealised futures. Asked what sort of work he saw himself doing after college, Nelson replied bewildered, listing unrelated jobs: 'marine engineering, accounting, and peon.' Similarly, Shillu (Chapter 6) had somewhat clear aspirations as to what to study beyond higher secondary. As most students from their commerce batch, she unquestioningly envisaged herself getting a BCom. Shillu, seemed slightly more determined when she spoke of wanting to become a Chartered Account: the most highly coveted profession among non-science careers. However, when I asked Shillu about how she was planning to get charter accountancy qualifications, she had barely any knowledge of the rather intricate recruitment process leading to them. On the contrary, commerce students in BVM possessed that 'feel for the game'. 'Advantaged classes typically have an excellent sense of how to micro manage complex fields so that they act in a timely way' (Jeffrey 2010: 20).

There were very few exceptions to these experiences of disjuncture between idealised and more tangible aspirations. One of them, perhaps the most salient one, was the case of Paul (Chapter 6). He was among the very few youth who sketched his idealised life leading him to become a larger-scale entrepreneur. It was the end of the school year and nothing had changed: Paul's idealised future mirrored his real aspirations. Echoing his father's expectations, Paul aspired to become a successful businessman and to speak fluent English. He already spoke more fluently than any of his peers. He spoke resolutely of his life plan: completing a BBA in Bangalore[127], followed by an MBA. Paul had decided that he would pursue his higher studies outside Kerala both because seats in the state are too scarce and because studying in a different state with a different language, and away from family, would force him 'to concentrate in studies, and improve [his English] language'. Like Gayathri, Paul liked to talk about his ambitions and aims as a way to distance himself from the rest. 'In Albert's [his previous school] they all have aim; they enjoy life but they concentrate in studies and get marks also. But in Kothad only thirty percent have aims; some students even think plus two is enough'. He spoke of himself as having a superior set of aims than his peers. But unlike Gayathri, Paul's aspirations were backed by the economic, social, and cultural resources of a well established entrepreneur family. However, as Fernandes (2000) rightly notes, the attainment of an MBA requires a substantial financial investment that is out of the reach for most Kothad youth, even too costly perhaps for Paul's parents. Even

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[127] All others referred to local colleges.

though they may never be able to acquire MBA credentials, they may still turn to the vast field of private institutes that grant diplomas and certificates to provide credentials in an attempt to gain a foothold in the new middle class dream of neoliberal employment (Fernandes 2000: 94).

Imagined Futures in Ernakulam

While the lives of youth in Kothad became increasingly marked by experiences of disjuncture as they approached the end of their school days, this final sections will show how among Ernakulam's middle class, youth experiences of convergence prevailed at the brink of their post-school lives. Convergence processes occurred in at least two important levels. First, I will refer to the convergence of their life aspirations with the expectations stemming from the aspirational regimes (Chapter 4) constructed by parents, institutions and society at large. Second, as illustrated by the scene at the start of this chapter, students' convergence in similar aspirations created a sense of unity of the year group as a whole. While Chapter 5 considered how difference of cultural, social and economic background layered peer groups among urban middle class youth, this section explores the ways in which these youth's lives were increasingly marked by experiences of unity towards the end of the academic year (Winkler Reid 2011).

Future Aspirations: A Site of Convergence among Middle-class Youth

Among the qualities that I would argue are shared by the multiplicity and heterogeneous social segments that comprise the middle classes are their distinctive projects and aspirations. In a nutshell, urban youth's aspirations and visions of future consisted of becoming part, beneficiaries, and contributors of an internationally (super)powerful India, to become part of 'India Shining'. And, as recent research has shown, this has come to be equated with becoming part of India's IT industry as the idea of India as a global superpower has above all come to be linked to the process of liberalisation and in particular with the triumph of that particular sector. These aspirations have entailed the re-imagining of India as a 'knowledge society' where its human capital is its most valuable resource. Hence to become part of that capital, and later beneficiary and contributor of that imagined society starts fundamentally at becoming properly educated for it. Thus middle classes have become almost obsessively oriented towards forms of learning, and subsequently working and consuming, linked towards the IT industry (Nisbett 2009). But as their transition sketches revealed, middle class notions of progress – belonging properly to the new India –

signify not only the embrace of particular forms of education and employment oriented towards the IT sector (learning and working in fields such as engineering). It involves a particular orientation towards such education. I now turn to explore that orientation.

In an attempt to gauge their aspirations I conducted the transition exercise[128] among the twelfth and eleventh STD students at BVM. In addition, throughout fieldwork I revisited their aspirations by engaging in aim-talk with a reduced group of students. Unlike their Kothad counterparts, there was no sense of disjuncture between idealised aspirations sketched at the beginning of the academic year and their more tangible projects at the brink of their post-school lives. Indeed, there was little difference between what an ideal future was and what they realistically strived for.

For them, belonging properly to superpower India started from acquiring the right education. This journey had obviously started at kindergarten when their parents put them in the right private, English medium school. But for the first time, their faith to continue in the right trajectory apparently depended on their hard-work. So for Ernakulam urban middle class youth the end of the twelfth STD marked a crucial beginning. The career choices to which they oriented themselves mirrored to a large extent those their parents expected they would acquire. These career choices were those leading to professions with opportunity for 'growth' as Sidu's father dubbed them (Chapter 4): engineering, medicine, law, and chartered accountancy. Being a professional has been a central project by which the middle class came into being through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 4). Among their aspirations there was a clear preference for engineering (BTech), in particular IT engineering. This was reflected in the fact that computer/mathematics batches offered in school outnumbered the groups open in the biology/mathematics and commerce streams, a decision that schools took on the basis of demand. Apart from engineering degrees, they all envisaged themselves acquiring post graduate degrees: some in engineering (MTech) but mostly MBA degrees. The combination of BTech plus MBA was talked about as the 'basic degrees' needed in today's job market. One important difference between Kothad and Ernakulam youth was that while the former only sketched their idealised selves attending local colleges, the latter envisaged themselves attending colleges and universities in urban centres across India.

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[128] Three groups of approximately eighty students each participated in the activity.

Beyond education, urban middle class youth saw themselves moving seamlessly from college into their first jobs in 'private firms', many of them in the IT sector. In conversations with some of them, they were often specific in their imagined future employment, naming companies in the local IT Park, or some of the most prominent IT companies in India (Wipro or Infosys) or abroad. When engaged in aim-talk urban youth portrayed the IT sector as a thriving employment field, in which to forge one's riches. This employment orientation it has been argued constitutes one of the defining features of the 'new Indian middle class':

> The discursive boundaries of the new middle class are thus constituted by a shift in the aspirations, standards and direction of the new middle class. Thus, in symbolic terms, while for the old middle class the cultural and economic standard may have been represented by a job in a state bank or Indian civil service, the new middle class would aspire to a job in a multinational corporation or foreign bank.
>
> (Fernandes 2000: 92)

These jobs and the imaginary wealth generated by them were in turn imagined as enabling high levels of consumption. When I asked Balram, an 11th STD student, about what he expected from education, he replied 'a good job, a good income.' As Baviskar and Ray (2011: 8) point out, and many others have shown (Lukose 2009; Sheth 1999; van Wessel 2004) in liberalising India to be part of the middle class is (to some extent) to express oneself through consumption, and, as I showed in Chapter 5, to rearticulate social distance from the lower classes via cultural markers that proclaim one's competence in a number of other globalised fields. Their visions of the future involved the high salaries and purchasing of pets, motorbikes, cars, houses (abroad and in India), penthouses, flats in Bangalore, and family holidays in Europe. Their visions resonated with images of prosperous urban Indians occupying expensive suburban homes equipped with all modern conveniences that increasingly circulate in the Indian media (Jeffrey 2010: 8). In Fernandes' words, they adopted the 'social practices of taste and commodity consumption that mark a new cultural standard that is specifically associated with liberalisation and the opening of the Indian market to the global economy' (2000: 3).

Their fantasies were not just about engineering degrees, high salaries and consumerist lifestyles. For these youth, heavily shaped by the values promoted in school and at home, their fantasies revealed that being middle class was as much about wealth and consumption as it was about embodying a particular entrepreneurial mindset towards the future based on

a profound sense that in present day India 'the sky is the limit'. They shared a vision of India as a fertile and potentially very rewarding ground for individual creativity, innovation, and leadership – i.e. entrepreneurship. If the previous middle class generations sought to become professionals as a means to government employment, many urban middle class youth today seek these trajectories to become entrepreneurs. The lives youth envisaged were not just marked by the desire to secure highly remunerated, stable white collar posts in private firms, but by a clear impulse towards producing or leading some form of independent creation or innovation that would lead to much greater prestige, recognition and wealth. This orientation was influenced by modern heroes such as prominent IT entrepreneurs like N. R. Narayana Murthy (founder of Infosys Technologies) and Steve Jobs (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007). Within this scenario many of their sketches depicted both their technical education and first salaried employments as stepping stones towards all sorts of entrepreneurial projects. Echoing many of their parents, who urged them to always 'achieve more', many of them envisaged themselves opening new firms, starting new business, resorts, hospitals, dental clinics, or law firms; in other words becoming catalysts of new enterprises.

They demonstrated a wider disposition towards leading new enterprises not just as a means for generating wealth, but also as means for intellectual/knowledge and social change. Jacob (Chapter 5), for example, pictured himself as a future catalyst of scientific knowledge. When I first met him, Jacob aspired to access the reputed Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) in Tamil Nadu to pursue a degree in biotechnology. He dreamt of finding the cure for cancer. He spoke of being deeply concerned for the brain drain affecting India. He felt the duty to stay and 'do something' to push India in what he called 'the final stretch' to becoming a global superpower. Like Jacob, others aspired to becoming a best-seller author, making a major discovery in fields like history, medicine, or nano-technology, all forms of knowledge entrepreneurship. In short, there was an entrepreneurial duty that defined their understanding of citizenship.

Similarly, many envisaged themselves engaging in various kinds of social entrepreneurship. This included, for example, engaging in charity work, starting a home for rescued animals, doing social work, adoption or voluntarism. They all aspired to becoming known for these individual achievements and endeavours, which they in turn identified as the sort of contribution responsible for India's development into one of the world's superpowers.

Finally, some middle class youth envisaged their future selves engaging in politics. The drawings of a small yet equally important group of students depicted their ideal selves 'getting into politics' after having become successful engineers and entrepreneurs. These students often talked about 'politics' and 'politicians' as the reason why India has not yet become fully modern or a superpower. These were often mocked through jokes and SMS messages that centred on the lack of education of many politicians[129]. These drawings gave evidence to how within the social world of the urban middle classes there is a sense that public civility, middle class material aspirations in modern urban life, and the country's development at large are being thwarted by a rise of 'plebeian' politicians – drawn from peasant communities and lower caste-groups (Hansen 1999: 56). This critique was linked to a broader disdain towards public-sector employment and institution, mainly government schools (older middle class aspirations and values). They expressed what has been described as a distinctively middle-class moral duty to become active in politics and to 'lead India' out of the predicament of corruption (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 6). This goes against Varma's (2003) idea that the middle classes have become disinterested in the poor, inequality and politics.

Middle class youth projects and aspirations became thus a field of convergence, bringing together a distinctively middle class set of practices (e.g. technical education, private sector employment and consumption), dispositions (e.g. entrepreneurial acumen), and values (e.g. ambition, determination and the duty to lead India). These particular sets of practices, dispositions, and values (pitted against their opposite pairs) form the particular set of tastes (and distastes), fantasies (and phobias) that forge the unconscious unity of a class (Bourdieu 1984: 77).

Living in 'the Year That Can Break or Make You'

> 'Middleclassness relies heavily on imagery and on the production and consumption of images of spaces, [achievement], sites and practices that are not necessarily ever fully realisable'
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> (Donner & De Neve 2011: 13).

Through the informal realm of peer group interactions explored in Chapter 5, I showed how the lives of higher secondary middle class students were hierarchically structured by

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[129] These critiques were mainly directed towards Kerala politicians and not so much at political figures in the central government.

peer group identities, defining groups as mutually distinctive: e.g. the English-speaking and the Malayalam speaking. I demonstrated how intersecting categories of distinction – caste, class, gender, and religion – were manifested and reworked through different social practices, and forms of worth and status (language proficiency, consumption, particular tastes, and styles) alternative to those offered by formal education. However, as the year came to an end, and their post-school lives were increasingly imminent, a growing sense of unity overshadowed those experiences of difference.

The pervasive sense of unity among the final year students at BVM was premised on the convergence of projects and aspirations and the joint struggle to achieve these. The struggle was based on the idea that the twelfth STD (not so much the 11th STD) was a determining year for their life-long projects. A few months before the end of their school days, the twelfth STD students seemed to talk mostly of a common dream: doing well enough in the board and entrance exams so as to secure seats in the desired higher education courses and universities. They united literally in tense revision sessions like the one described at the introduction of the chapter. But most importantly they united in the common experience of hardship and sacrifice. Even though the struggle towards their projects was ultimately an individual experience, the collective sense of hardship 'we are put through' was an important element in these students' collective experience. This involved the actual giving up of 'leisure', anything from going to the cinema, playing football, and the use of internet and mobile phones, what a student defined as putting himself on 'house arrest.' It also included the self-imposition of pressure and studying routines that involved long hours studying at home alone or in groups. This sense of unity in sacrifice was premised on the idea that only through hard work and merit will they successfully achieve their aims. This in turn formed the basis for their shared self-disciplining into the set of practices and motifs that constituted the experience of the twelfth STD, what they described as 'the year that can break or make you.' One afternoon in the middle of fieldwork, on the walk home, Srijith (Chapter 5) wanted, once again, to go over some of the essential questions of my research and to know whether or not I have learned what I had come to find out. He told me that if my aim was to look at youth's experiences of education I must write about the pressure *we* are put through.

I first came to hear of 'the year that can break or make you' from Vijay (Chapter 4). He was in fact quoting one of his entrance coaching tutors, who described in this fashion the way

they should understand their predicament as twelfth STD students. 'You should be like a bird in a cage,' the teacher explained to them. But later, once they had reached the study leave period before board and entrance exams, the phrase cropped up as students rationalise the sacrifices and strenuous routines they disciplined themselves into. Vijay, who early in the academic year described himself as being 'lazy,' although as he said '[in India] you can't say you are lazy', exemplified the process of embodying that heightened sense of hardship/sacrifice and the drive to work hard. Midway through the year, he told me how 'the entire mood ha[d] changed.' At first, 'my mother used to wake me up very early in the morning', but now he would just wake up on his own at 3.30 in the morning to study. 'The people of the back benches are coming to the front benches to take notes', Vijay added. I asked him, 'like whom?' To what he replied 'me! I'm serious now, I'm feeling the pressure.' In the revision session described at the beginning of the chapter, Vijay sat in the front row, surrounded by students from his and other peer groups; they all looked ahead more focused than ever.

Like Vijay, many youth talked about this regime of hardship, especially about the sacrifices related to managing school and entrance coaching. Asked about their daily studying routine, many talked about being 'exhausted and hungry'. 'We finish class at 3 and have to be there [entrance coaching] by 3.30 pm, until 5.30 pm.' Many students complained about the way entrance coaching was conducted by various centres but never hesitated acknowledging the importance it had for their futures. For example, Priti (Chapter 4) complained that 'they [tutors] give a question and the top five brilliant guys shout the answer, while many of us feel inferior. Finally, when they [the top students in the class] reach the IIT[130], they do well, and they [the EC institute] say oh, we have done it again': we have made someone get admission to a top institution. While she strongly regretted the pressure and stressed entrance coaching produced in students, she valued the sort of skills gained in her coaching class. Similarly, Sameer said to have become depressed by the pressure generated by Mr. Nandakumar, his entrance coaching teacher. 'At the beginning of the session Mr. Nandakumar said that in the group there were only ten students who were on the right track to get in to IITs and that the rest needed to work' Sameer explained. The teacher read the names and Sameer was not among them. So, Sameer left

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[130] Here IIT refers to the Joint Engineering Entrance Exam (JEEE). This is considered to be the most challenging and sought after All India engineering entrance exam, leading to a seat in the most prestigious institutes of technology in the country, the IITs.

soon after the class, feeling disheartened. After that incident, Sathya, Sameer's school and entrance coaching peer, helped him regain confidence and return to his studying routine. Both Priti and Sameer continued to attend and embrace their coaching classes. Enduring these hardships together, providing support and empathy for each other, became a prominent unifying experience towards the end of the school year.

Their sense of sacrifice was premised on the idea that life-long projects and aspirations were at stake, and depended on one's level of sacrifice and hard-work in this one year. At this stage their aspirations and their family and wider social expectations blend into a more or less seamless whole. There was truly a feeling among many youth that their entire adult life was at stake in this one crucial year, leading to important exams that determined to a large extent how far one could 'grow'. Hence, it was understood that if they worked extraordinarily hard at this stage, a great deal of the years to come were taken care of. In an address to his fellow seniors during their farewell ceremony at school, two months away from exams, the Head Boy reminded his peers that:

> This may probably be the last day, remind you, the last day that we get to enjoy ourselves for some amount of time, because in the next two months we have a lot of *pain to undergo*, we have to concentrate, we have to *sacrifice*, we have to avoid all leisure. And if we become successful, then, you guys know the rest…

What was most interesting perhaps was that although the experience of 'undergoing pain' and 'sacrifice' to acquire merit served as the basis for a growing sense of unity among them, in reality some students' projects and aspirations were much more at stake than others'. By compounding students of divergent backgrounds, with different cultural, social and economic resources (i.e. of divergent middle classes), the shared regime of hardship, hard-work, and merit performed the cultural task of concealing inequality (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 7). For some, those who belonged to the more dominant fractions of the middle class, this year was not as much of a crossroad – a 'year that can break or make you' – as it was for others. Following Deshpande's (2006) reading of Galanter (1992):

> Three broad kinds of resources are necessary to produce the results in competitive exams that qualify as indicators of merit: (a) economic resources (for prior education, training, materials, freedom from work, etc); (b) social and cultural resources (networks of contacts, confidence, guidance and advice, information, etc); (c) intrinsic ability and hard-work.

Let us go back to Vijay now. Belonging to a Hindu Nair family of successful entrepreneurs, he possessed the key material, social and cultural resources that would certainly pave his way into the degrees, jobs, and lifestyles of his choice. Moreover, youth like him had the

financial backing to get them into the desired professional and postgraduate degrees in case their efforts to achieve these through 'merit' failed them. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, youths like Vijay posses the sort of social skills and cultural knowledge (i.e. the 'exposure') that have been shown to be critical for dominant middle class fractions' ability to reproduce their social status via new forms of employment like jobs in leading IT companies (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006). Vijay's attitude, sharp English, and 'communication skills' – predominantly vested in the educated, professional, urban middle class – will most probably allow him to face interviews and become part of a highly-paid IT professional minority, before he takes on the reigns of his father's multiple enterprises.

For many other middle class youth, like Parvathi, Priti, or Srijith (Chapters 4 and 5) for instance, whose projects and aspirations depended more heavily on places in state-run colleges and universities, and on their intrinsic ability and hard-work, their post-school predicaments were more uncertain. For them securing a 'merit' place in prestigious government institutions was more critical. Take for instance the case of Prassana's (Chapter 5) brother, Visakh, a BVM graduate and first year student of pharmacy at a private local college. Visakh belonged to a Hindu Nair family from Kozhikode. The family's sole provider was his father, who was employed as a welding technician at the Cochin Shipyard. Visakh's father held an SSLC and a diploma in welding at an industrial training institute (ITI). Like many others in his batch, he aspired to become a medical doctor. Likewise he had embodied the regime of hardship and hard-work of 'the year that can break or make you' a year ago. However, he failed to acquire one of the limited number of merit seats available in government colleges. In addition his family lacked the social and cultural resources that would have guided him into alternative routes, as well as the exorbitant economic resources required for accessing a place at a private medical college. Visakh opted to study pharmacy instead – a much cheaper option.

Girls too embodied these regimes in very similar ways, actively imposing hectic studying regimes and restrictions on leisure activities on themselves with the aim to achieve similar goals to boys. Inequality with reference to gender was concealed by the experiences of unity in hardship. Girls' aspirations, and their actual embodying of hardship and hard work, were conditioned by parental decisions. These were in turn shaped primarily by ideas of morality and of girls' future role as mothers. For example, when conversing with Priti's

father, in the presence of Priti herself, he explained what for him the ideal career choice was for Priti: that she should aim for engineering, and not medicine, because jobs in the former field would allow for time for the family. On the contrary,

> If you are a famous doctor, you will never have time for the family... But, engineering is OK, you work in a company or she can go as a teacher, especially for girls. If it was a boy, it is a different stand you'd have to take [as parent]. Girls got certain limitations; we consider family setup very much important. Children, she should be able to look [after]. There are couples both of them go to IT, their children psychologically are gone. The value system, the family should have a strong foundation. Then they [the children of that sort of families] grow and they don't' know what affection is.

While her father did try to inspire her to join the ranks of young IT professionals, this came from an understanding that this choice was compatible with her responsibilities as wife/mother. Girls' choices of colleges or universities were also shaped by morally-based limitations imposed by parents. A few girls spoke of not being allowed to go outside Kerala for college, while boys were not imposed any sort of spatial limit other than that of their parents' economic resource to cover the cost of college, accommodation and living expenses beyond Ernakulam. Likewise, when it came to attending entrance coaching, girls would never be allowed to attend evening sessions, greatly reducing the number of coaching available to them. In the coaching lessons I audited three fourths of the class were boys (it was the late at night course). In some families, parents skimped on their daughters' entrance coaching, sending them to a less known centre, while their sons attended a more expensive option.

Furthermore, their experience and discourses of unity in hardship and hard-work to attain merit not only concealed inequalities among them, but also with reference to wider less privileged social groups (e.g. Kothad youth). Let me illustrate this final point with a debate held by students in one of the discussion sessions I conducted in BVM. That morning I had organised a discussion about the competitive examinations looming ahead and the relationship between these and the education offered in school and coaching centres. This worked as a mean to getting them to formulate contradicting arguments: some the ways in which they valued different forms of education and discuss their relative importance in the face of examinations[131]. During the discussion students formulated a vision different from

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[131] This was indeed a debate going on in the printed media as well as among local scholars (Kumar & George 2009; Salim 2004) during fieldwork. With an increasing number of applicants to top public institutions of specialised and professional education, hence subjecting them to increasing social and political pressures (Deshpande 2006: 2441), educationalists are beginning to reconsider the efficacy of examination systems. This has led to proposals aiming to revamp engineering entrance examinations starting 2013-14 and launching a new version of the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE for IITs) in 2013

those aired in public debates. While there were a few students who argued that EC only teaches 'short-cut' methods (i.e. ways of getting around solving exam problems without 'knowing' the subject), the majority believed that in fact coaching centres imparted a 'higher order' of knowledge than schools. 'If you want to know that the bear is white, you go to school; now if want to know why the bear is white you go to coaching', a student argued. At EC 'we learn application level questions[132], you can't mug up for entrance [examinations]' and 'if you study only for school you'll be missing out so many other things' were some of their comments. Some went as far arguing that 'bunking school' (not attending) to attend or study for coaching was legitimate. In short, the majority believed that coaching was central for gaining that competitive edge upon which their projects and aspirations relied.

When I probed into the inequality resulting from the capacity, or lack of, to afford EC, their discussion immediately turned towards the issue of reservations. While they recognised that EC gave students a competitive advantage over those who were not exposed to coaching, they argued that EC involved hard work and hence was a legitimate form of acquiring merit. Assuming that EC seamlessly translated into good job opportunities, Vinay expressed sorrow for those 'bright people who can't get into high positions because they can't afford the [EC] fees.' Students talked, almost entirely agreeing, about the need to dismantle the caste-based reservation system and to create instead a reservation system based on families' income level. Their arguments emphasised both images of financially poor upper caste people unable to access EC and images of rich OBC (Other Backward Castes) people who could afford EC and took advantage of caste-based

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(http://www.indianexpress.com/news/school-score-options-weigh-on-jt-engg-entrance-future/887840/0). Authorities claimed to be concerned about the manifold difference between the number of candidates and actual admissions. Many blamed the rising number of applicants on the allegedly Rs. 2.000 crore coaching industry and the promises and the methods used in these centres, allegedly teaching students to 'memorise concepts' or 'track answer patterns' without actually understanding the concepts. In short, they were blamed for inciting students to strategise and manage their learning so as to making it more examination-efficient. The argument goes, students are then so focused on coaching for entrance examinations that school education will not be taken seriously, thus leading to an overall deterioration of education. Measures have been put in place to curb the number of students appearing for these major public examinations, for example the use of the 12th STD final examination result as screening for appearing for the JEE. Further proposals include the introduction of a section in examinations aimed at testing 'language skills', to allegedly avoid people who do not understand lectures to enter top professional institutions (that is, to stop non-English-medium students from accessing these institutions).

[132] This was also referred to as HOT (high order of thought) questions, which were believed to be the sort of questions in competitive entrance examinations. Answering this sort of questions, they explained, required one to understand concepts and being able to apply them in order to solve problems.

quotas. 'Creamy layer' arguments[133] like the latter are not new. They were vociferously used, for example, in the 2006 anti-reservation movement resulting from the decision to introduce 27 per cent reservation for OBC in elite institutions of higher and professional education (Deshpande & Yadav 2006; Deshpande 2006). Like the 2006 movement, the majority in the classroom rejected the validity of advantages given on the basis of caste. 'Is not that he [someone] deserves a seat because of his caste, you have to work hard!' Vedu declared when one of her peers suggested caste-based reservations make sense. She felt that her right to be identified as meritorious of professional education was being infringed by caste-reservations. They emphasised merit and hard work, measured through examination results/ranks, as the only legitimate criteria to discriminate those with merit and those without. Together, narratives of sacrifice and merit concealed any other factor shaping people's capacity to use higher education as a means to crafting better futures for them and their families. Through their imagery of hard work and merit (as opposed to little work and caste-based quotas) everyone was assumed to be competing directly to demonstrate one's individual merit, in one single ranking. This imagined illusory 'equality' was for them the legitimate basis upon which they could compete to stake their rightful claim on the best degrees the nation has to offer, that is, their 'right' to put themselves on the right track to become beneficiaries of and contributors to an internationally super-powerful India.

As illustrated in the story at the start of this chapter, in Kothad the final year was not seen as crucial as it was experienced in BVM. Unlike BVM students, Kothad's students did not speak of the transition from the twelfth STD to their post-school lives with reference to a breaking point. In other words, for them there was no crucial year that could 'break' or 'make' them, nor was there a similar experience of unity at the end of the year.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the life projects and aspirations, and the multiple strategies designed to attain these, of two distinct groups of Malayalee youth. In Kothad, the end of the academic year revealed a wide range of aspirations and strategies. Although they came

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[133] Creamy layer arguments are self-defeating for in its very nature, quoting Deshpande (2006: 2441), higher education presupposes access to a minimum level of economic, cultural and political resources. Thus, indiscriminate use if these risk disqualifying precisely those segments of socially disadvantaged castes who have indeed a good chance of succeeding. Deshpande argues further that heavy handed use of creamy layer arguments would end up admitting students whose cumulative disadvantages make it highly probable that they will fail, thus discrediting the affirmative action programme itself (2006: 2441).

from relatively homogenous backgrounds, many of them sought to produce differences according to the sort of futures they claimed to aspire to. While some oriented themselves towards more conventional trajectories aimed at completing university degrees, some others invested energy in creating bold trajectories aimed at capturing opportunities in what they perceived to be blossoming new job markets in the private sector. Others generated strategies that built upon their families' long trajectories in the trade and commerce sector, while dreaming of giving those businesses a more global dimension. These last two sought to augment their position by creatively cultivating identities of people with educational and employment 'aims'. They strove to differentiate themselves from and exclude others by labelling them as people 'without aims'. In this way they sought to construct themselves as superior and modern. Despite their efforts, I argued that their strategies may never produce the expected outcomes as the burden of their social, familial, and educational position will most likely outweigh their fantasies about the future.

The opposite occurs in middle class urban Ernakulam: youth of disparate middle class backgrounds are united under the same projects and aspirations, but the outcome of their shared experience of sacrifice will be one marked by inequalities. Today, a disproportionate number of families and youth imbibe the middle-class dream that in India through sacrifice and merit in education 'the sky is the limit'. In the final year students actively united and oriented themselves towards a common struggle to improve their prospects in the face of competitive entrance examinations, without which larger dreams would be rendered unachievable. While their prospects to succeed in these examinations and in the professional lives that follow are heavily shaped by their structural position their efforts made no reference to such differences and actively hailed their equality in the face of their quests ahead. Sacrifice and merit conjured up a unifying experience of 'the year that can break you or make you' that concealed differences and inequalities, and thus rallied legitimacy for projects and lifestyles achievable for those in the dominant middle class, upper caste minority. Disguised as an equal quest for success, their fantasies only risked reproducing inequalities.

Finally, this chapter sheds light onto the extent to which middle class values and aspirations have captured the minds, at least partially, of a widening range of social groups (De Neve 2011) within what one may undeniably describe as middle classes as well as at the fringes of these privileged groups. The spread of middle class values (e.g. the value of English-

medium, private education), aspirations, as well as of the idea of abundance tells us that we cannot talk about two youths as local analysts have described the youth divided by the public-private schooling divide (Kumar & George 2009). Instead, my ethnography reveals one youth inhabiting a multitude of positions, and influenced by the cultural dominance of a small minority.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Starting from a critical take on education, this thesis endeavoured to document the politics of secondary schooling, 'the primary bottleneck in the [Indian] education system today' (World Bank 2012). This thesis sought to understand the ways in which education and in particular higher secondary schooling, rather than being spaces of equality, are in fact key resources in the (re)production of inequalities. Yet, pervasively valued as positive, education remains a highly contradictory resource. The thesis sought to reveal the social processes that contribute to its contradictory nature in the primary locations where education takes place and holds utmost importance: in schools, families, peer groups and youth's individual aspirations. In each chapter I revealed a different aspect of this larger argument, composing complex picture of the contemporary schooling field in Kerala. Let us briefly recapitulate each one of these facets.

As a prelude to its core chapters, the thesis started by revealing the history behind what is today a fragmented and complexly stratified schooling field in Kerala, arguing that it cannot be fully understood unless we examine it in the face of its historical links with its twin modernising enterprise: the middle class project. This chapter showed that through nineteenth and twentieth century Kerala modern education served to propel processes of social change and has mediated the reproduction of previously existing inequalities. Early access to modern English education, the primary path to new economic and social roles, became the cultural base for the emergence of a Malayalee middle class from the ranks of rich and upper caste/community elites. Departing from the privileges inherited from their traditional status, they set out to access education and new employment opportunities and to re-articulate the basis of their status and wealth with reference to those educational achievements and through ideas of social mobility and competence, and no longer on social group membership. This quest however, took the form of separate and competing communal struggles to become part of the new educated middle classes. As these progressed education and schooling took many forms and produced varied outcomes. In the meantime the idea of competence, the banner of the modern person to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century, captured the imagination and aspirations of an ever larger portion of society. Sometimes supported and at other times opposed by the state government, community-based schools helped spread this imaginary of progress across all social groups, eventually becoming part of Kerala's nationalist rhetoric, while schooling became a profitable activity on its own. But what is most important is that out of these developments emerged a highly fragmented and stratified educational field offering

different resources according to class, community/caste, and gender. In other words, while education has been seen as a modernising tool able to displace social difference according to caste/religion, it has been a key site for the maintenance of those differences with a shift from direct to mediated reproduction. In short, caste and class remained entwined within twenty-first century education. Most private English medium educated Keralites are higher status Christians and Hindus, as are most of those who get privileged access to entrance coaching centres and to professional degree courses. Today's wide array of government, aided, and private schools is reflective of the long affair between the middle class project and education.

From that starting point, the thesis examined the experiences of education of two highly disparate groups of youth – one attending a top end private English medium school at the heart of the city and the other educated in an institution at the bottom of the schooling ladder. I located their experiences within the two educational sites par excellence: the school and the home. The thesis showed that in Ernakulam private English medium schools catering to the middle classes are increasingly orienting their educational missions (at least rhetorically) towards the production of competent middle class subjects for the global economy. By instilling in its pupils a mixture of academic excellence, global exposure, communication skills, assertiveness, leadership, ambition, entrepreneurship, and the value of sacrifice, these schools aim to produce global citizens, who are equally competent in India and beyond. Simultaneously they aimed to produce subjects who were also fundamentally Indian (traditional), which in many ways was conflated with being upper caste Hindu. Increasingly these schools cater to the rising popular Hinduism among the middle classes, and its connection to national pride and dreams of becoming a superpower. As such, these institutions aim to create cosmopolitan subjects who are able to culturally mediate India's new relationship with the world, unequivocally representing the subjectivities which dominant groups within the city's middle classes endorse. In this way, the lives of those at the lower middle class spectrum are coded as failure as they do not match the kind of ideal subject being produced at school. Thus the chapter demonstrated that schools like BVM contribute to the construction of contemporary idealised images of the urban middle class person as an exemplary cosmopolitan citizen whose living standards and competences are comparable to people living in the so called 'west'.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, this thesis showed that schools catering to the lower strata of society have become sites where long standing inequalities are not just reproduced but further entrenched. The thesis illustrated this point with the example of Kothad, an islet in the backwaters of Ernakulam's fringes. In Kothad's aided school inequalities according to space (pitting the urban centre against its fringes) and community (pitting fisherfolk against urban Latin Catholics) become further entrenched as a result of a 'dual residualisation' or ghettoisation: firstly residual because only the local poor are left to attend the school, and secondly, residual because educationally and financially poor Latin Catholics are flowing in from outside Kothad. As a consequence the periphery became more deeply marked as educationally backward. In the meantime wealthier prawn-fishing Kothad families opt out of the local school and send their children to private English-medium schools outside Kothad (i.e. they use schooling as a means to distance themselves from the rest of the islet). The outcome being that old inequalities are being reproduced and intensified by new educational policies and physical linkages – roads, terminals, all in all connections to boost India's global trade.

In the home, the thesis also examined the domestic politics of education among a group of middle-class families in urban Ernakulam. In particular, I presented a set of parenting practices and discourses that are to a large extent shared across a disparate set of middle class families. I showed parents actively intervening in their children's education through 'direct' practices (e.g. school choices, entrance coaching, and the enforcement of rigorous studying regimes at home) aimed at enhancing their children's individual prospects as well as the family's overall status. Simultaneously, the chapter showed parents involved in the creation of what I termed aspirational regimes, a set of discourses aimed at arousing in youth a drive to succeed, self-discipline, ambition and competitiveness. This chapter revealed that although parents of differentiated class positions are somewhat homogenously engaged in the same parenting practices and discourses, the more pronounced levels of pressures, uncertainties, and anxieties about the future experienced by those located at the lower middle class spectrum signalled the way in which these parenting regimes reproduced existing inequalities. Finally, the chapter demonstrated how high levels of anxieties meant that youth inevitably became the target of a sort of symbolic violence derived from being labelled a failure.

However, while remaining in tune with Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the thesis showed that educational institutions cannot simply be assumed to straightforwardly reproduce inequalities and shape youth into particular models. They are also sites of contestation. This thesis showed that youth's educational experience and aspirations are key sites in which to explore not only the reproduction of caste, class an gender inequalities, but also the contestation and transformation of these inequalities as a result of youth people' cultural production. While the realm of informal peer relations in the city school revealed an overtly hierarchical field that reflected youth's (caste and class) differences, peer relations revealed youth involved in the active appropriation of resources and crafting of identities that sought to undermine or otherwise partially adapt to dominant groups. In particular, this thesis showed that while youth from established middle class backgrounds were in a privilege position to reify their status in the informal arena, youth of less dominant positions actively sought to launch embodied critiques or adapt to their cultural dominance by cultivating antagonistic identities or by nurturing connections to dominant individuals and groups. These efforts to challenge or adapt to the cultural dominance of wealthier peers projected a field stratified according to hierarchies that drew from new social competences, demeanours, tastes, morality and consumption practices constructed as markers of a 'global' competence.

Likewise, in Kothad the aspirations of the local school's youth did not only speak of reproduction. Their vision of the future did not simply reveal an internalised sense of their social position, and of the relatively debased value of their own cultural resources (Bourdieu 1984). Instead, the thesis revealed how some sought to augment their position by creatively embracing education and cultivating identities of people with educational and employment 'aims'. These were based upon inflated fantasies that drew from creative readings of the educational and employment markets. Belonging to somewhat homogeneous backgrounds – educationally, geographically, socially, and financially marginalised – their identities of people with 'aims' allowed them to respond to their precarious position by producing aspirational distinctions between them and those 'without aims.' In this way they sought to construct themselves as superior and modern, although their aspirations may not always prove attainable as a consequence of their families' limited economic, social and cultural resources.

An opposite trend occurred in middle class urban Ernakulam. Coming from markedly differentiated middle class backgrounds BVM pupils cultivated highly homogeneous projects and aspirations, giving the final stages of their schooling days an aura of unity. Despite the fact that their projects to attain the coveted outcomes were markedly unequal lower middle class students actively appropriated the language and conduct of equal sacrifice and merit of the 'the year that can break or make you' as a strategy to navigate the high level of (un)certainty and expectations place upon them at this cross-road year. In that way final year students actively united and oriented themselves towards a common struggle to improve their chances in competitive examinations. Making no reference to their structural position, and effects these may have on their chances to achieve 'success', they emphasised their equality in the face of their quests ahead. In this manner sacrifice and merit conjured up a unifying experience of 'the year that can break you or make you' that concealed differences and inequalities, in the end rallying legitimacy for projects and lifestyles more feasibly achievable to those in the dominant middle class (and predominantly upper caste) minority.

Based on this thesis, it makes sense to propose a move away from consumption-centric understandings of the middle classes and in particular of youth. My thesis urges us to look beyond consumption and direct our attention towards the idea of *competence* as the main axis to understand what it means to be middle-class and young in India. Being able to demonstrate competence, the ability to operate in the globalised world and its economy of paid employment and multiple other fields of social competition is the common denominator in young people's lives across regions and social distinctions. Consumption is in fact only one of such fields. Finally an emphasis on competence inevitably puts education at the centre of the debate, and makes the enquiry of how education despite seemingly holding the key to attain competence, continues to mediate the reproduction of previously existing inequalities.

Together, these chapters build upon and go beyond a Kerala or South Asian focus, showing how schooling in and around urban Ernakulam attests to how the seeming democratisation of education systems conceals differences and acts as an important resource for the reproduction of entrenched social and economic inequalities. But far from being rigid structures that served to reproduced rather than undermine class inequalities, education systems are better understood as flexible structures, catering to highly layered

and stratified affiliations and economic capabilities. Increasingly becoming fragmented, multi-scalar and multi-sectoral (Robertson & Dale 2008: 20) education systems around the world become ever more malleable resources for the (re)production of inequalities. Moreover, my thesis shows that if we consider the multiplicity of ways in which families and youth utilise and interpret particular educational resources, then the flexibility of education as a resource to create difference multiplies. While Bourdieu was at least partially right in suggesting that educational institutions give special currency and legitimacy to the bodily comportment and skills possessed by elite classes, and hence helped reproduce their position, his analysis lacks a serious consideration of the creative and unpredictable ways in which less privileged groups may use and interpret those very educational resources as part of their strategies to improve their social position.

With regards to the middle class this thesis provides rich evidence to broader arguments that point to the extent to which middle class values and aspirations have captured the minds, at least partially, of a widening range of social groups (De Neve 2011) within what one may unquestionably describe as new 'middle classes' as well as at the fringes of these privileged groups. But while there seems to be a growing democratisation of middle class projects and aspirations, an analysis of the middle class project on the ground should (like this thesis has attempted to do) highlight the complex ways in which middle classness is actually being fought at very different levels and stages. This became evident in the ways in which BVM lower middle class parents understood the school's reputation, mainly in term of its academic record, paying little attention and hence undermining the school's moral-global project. My chapters also point to the importance of looking at the struggle for middle classness relationally. Following Bourdieu's formula according to which social identity defines itself through difference (1984) the accounts that emerge from this thesis showed how youth from disparate middle classes sought to craft their own identities always in relation to others' in rather unpredictable ways. This approach – one that pays attention to the multiplicity of positions within the middle class field at once – allows us then to look beyond simplistic approaches that attempt to centre the analysis of the middle class on one primary axis or practice: be it consumption (Liechty 2003) or morality (Van Wessel 2004). My thesis showed that despite being a highly fragmented project, middle-class practices and discourses are ultimately linked to the quest to embody success and competence in multiple fields, for which education holds central importance.

Finally, this thesis builds upon and goes beyond a South Asian focus showing how the youth of Ernakulam and its periphery represent the lives and experiences of youth inhabiting markedly different structural positions in postcolonial contexts marked by neoliberal economic and social transformations. In a world shaped by stories of modern heroes such as N. R. Narayana Murthy, Mark Zuckerberg, and Steve Jobs; and portrayals of youth gaining rapid social mobility and wealth through formal education and employment coupled with increasing unemployment and the 'precarisation' of existing jobs, youth's experiences and their transitions into adult life are inevitably marked by progressive pressures and uncertainties. 'The year that can break or can make you' is nothing but the internalisation of these pressures to demonstrate ever increasing levels of competence in multiple fields of competition. As youth (and their families) increasingly internalised these pressures – to have authentically remarkable live trajectories because 'the sky is the limit' – the fulfilment of their aspirations increasingly becomes problematic and illusory. Nevertheless youth and their families are increasingly drawn towards strategic investment in formal schooling, graduate and postgraduate education and parallel forms of education as means for dealing with uncertainty.

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