

Classrooms and Playgrounds

Classrooms and Playgrounds:
Mapping Educational Change, Kerala

By

Ratheesh Kumar

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P U B L I S H I N G

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ABBREVIATIONS

BA	Bachelor of Arts
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BRC	Block Resource Centre
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CISCE	Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
DDE	Deputy Director of Education
DEO	District Educational Officer
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DPI	Directorate of Public Instructions
EDTLP	Ernakulam District Total Literacy Program
HS	High School
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICSE	Indian Certificate of Secondary Education
IDA	International Development Agency
ISA	Ideological State Apparatus
JTS	Junior Technical Schools
KANFED	Kerala Adult and Non Formal Education
KRPLLD	Kerala Research Program on Local Level Development
KSSP	Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad
LP	Lower Primary
MA	Master of Arts
MGLC	Multi Grade learning Centre
MLL	Minimum Level of Learning
M Phil	Master of Philosophy
MTA	Mother Teachers Association
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
NLM	National Literacy Mission

ODA	Overseas Development Administration
PEDSK	Primary Education Development Society of Kerala
PSC	Public Service Commission
PTA	Parent Teachers Association
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SFI	Students Federation of India
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SIEMT	State Institute of Educational Management and Training
SJPS	Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham
SLAP	Second Language Association Program
SNDP	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
SPD	State Project Director
SPO	State Project Office
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRC	School Resource Centre
SRG	State Resource Group
SSLC	Secondary School Leaving Certificate
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
TTI	Teachers Training Institute
UEE	Universalization of Elementary Education
UNICEF	United Nations International Child Emergency Fund
UP	Upper Primary
VEC	Village Education Committee

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This book attempts to explore the interfaces of schooling and its cultural setting in Kerala, the southwest costal state of India. In the initial phases of this work, my research topic often failed to offer the possibility of a precise single line description while expressing its larger theme. Though on many occasions, to the casual question “what are you working on?” I tried to provide short answers, they all remained either broad or vague, failing to express the purpose of my work. The easily available answers to describe the project were ‘education and cultural contexts’, ‘ethnography of education’, ‘sociology of education’, ‘primary education in Kerala’, ‘ideology and education’, ‘cultural reproduction in education’ and so on. At the early stage of this work, when I offered certain key words as descriptions of my project, I had not yet fully seized my research questions. Complexities ranging from narrowing down the objectives to conceiving the theoretical and methodological frameworks occupied the core of the project. These inevitable dilemmas in the evolution of the research problem were mainly due to the larger meaning of the term education and its increasing potential to deal with wide-ranging as well as intersecting issues and themes. Moreover the ‘uniqueness’ of Kerala’s educational setting and its socio-political character made the task further challenging.

In the initial phase of my inquiry, I was involved primarily in a resistance against the dominant structural functionalist and developmental paradigms in education. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Frierie 1970), *Deschooling Society* (Illich 1974), *Schooling in Capitalist America* (Bowles and Gintis 1976) and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeran 1977) were some of the prominent critical works in education that initially shaped my own critical understanding of the concepts of schooling and education. My preliminary readings of educational literature introduced me to the idea that education serves as a means for development of the individual and society, for nation building and so on. This functional notion was often central to the discourse of

education as a discipline thereby marginalizing or ignoring the multiple dimensions in which the process and the discipline of education can be understood.

In the Indian context of educational literature also, the 'input-output' assessment of achievements is the dominant perspective. Educational studies seek to explain the role of institutions in bringing social change and development, but fail to provide crucial linkages to important aspects of society and culture.

The 1964 Education Commission, soon after its appointment, invited a group of sociologists to make a sociological evaluation of the education system in India. In its report, the Education Commission has stated that research by social scientists in the field of education is an urgent requirement. The discussions in the collection of papers by a group of sociologists have identified three broad themes in which educational research should be focused. 1. Education and culture. 2. Education and the social system. 3. The internal organization of the system of education (Gore et al 1967). Even though the significance of the linkages between education and socio-cultural factors was recognized during the Education Commission of 1964, the research investigations in those areas did not make any impressionistic development.

As Krishna Kumar et al note, "All one can find in the name of educational analysis is a body of promotional literature. Apathy towards history and a studied blindness towards the linkages between education and social change are two prominent characteristics of this literature" (Kumar et al 2001: 560). They further argue that this manner of analysis has helped the state to construct a smokescreen, which discourages any critical study of primary education policies and their impact. As it is, the social sciences in India have been indifferent to the study of education. Here, my research direction is not towards any attempt to evaluate state interventions in education in the form of policies and programs. However, I make certain connections to some of the policy changes and implications that emerge in the context of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The direct connection of this factor to the major discussions in this book can be identified in my examination of District Primary Education Program (DPEP) and the curriculum reform in Kerala in the mid 1990s. The focus of the present project has shifted from the administrative discourse of the program to the socio-cultural aspects. I would like to elaborate on two key questions that might surface here. 1. Why did I select the area of *primary education in contemporary Kerala*? 2. What is the significance of studying the *cultural aspects* of education? Firstly I will sketch briefly the

educational map of contemporary Kerala and the socio-cultural profile in which it is located.

Educational transitions in Kerala in the last two decades offer immense scope for sociological and anthropological research and understanding as well as entry points for examining cultural mediations in the field of schooling. In the backdrop of the much hyped ‘Kerala model of education and development’ and its critique, it becomes significant to go deeper in understanding the nature and cultural meanings of educational transition. The field of primary education in Kerala has been subjected to considerable interventions in the forms of curriculum revision, to debates and controversies over the restructuring of pedagogy and to discussions on the increasing private initiatives in education in recent years. Before looking into the developments and debates in Kerala’s primary education in the last decade, which is the entry point of this project, there is a need to understand its educational profile and the socio-cultural context.

In terms of national educational achievements Kerala stands ahead of other states, in the number of schools, number of trained and qualified teachers, children’s accessibility to school, education of girl children, lower rate of dropout and material conditions of schooling. These were some of the key indicators in the making of the so called “Kerala model”, which became significant in the developmental landscape of the 1980s and after. Broadly, there are three categories of schools in Kerala. Government (run by the state government), aided (run by individuals or groups, and partially financed by the state government) and private (totally governed and financed by individuals or groups) schools are these three categories. Besides these, there are also a few schools run by the central government and schools under special schemes.

Statistics prove that Kerala is placed far ahead of other parts of India and other “third world” countries. This includes a high rate of literacy, life expectancy, low birth rate and low infant mortality. A high level of political consciousness, education, mobilization and health care are the other main factors which constituted the so called ‘Kerala model’ of development. However, simultaneous with this projected model of the socio-developmental profile is its dismal condition in terms of economic stagnation, high unemployment rate, low per capita income and fiscal crisis. The Kerala model and the socio-developmental profile have further collapsed in the mid 1990s in the wake of increasing economic instability, high suicide rate, increasing sex scandals, violence against women, crime, and political and communal conflicts. The crises in the field of higher education and professional education correspond with the increasing population of the unemployed youth in the state.

The achievements in primary and secondary education did not result in creating employment opportunities and job markets for the educated. The quality of education has become a crucial theme of discussion in the policy making of school education. When the Government of India and the Ministry of Human Resource Development opened up the field of primary education for external interventions in the forms of foreign aid, Kerala also figured in the list of sixteen states that came under the collaborative experiment in primary education. This initiative in primary education that characterizes the involvement of agencies like the World Bank materialized in the year 1995 with the introduction of District Primary Education Program (DPEP). Introduction of a foreign funded educational program in Kerala, the state that had achieved the highest enrollment rate of students in primary education, provoked criticism from different quarters.

In the year 1996, the Kerala state government revised the primary school curriculum as part of DPEP. The curriculum approach in DPEP was entirely different from the existing methods of teaching and learning. DPEP introduced a new set of ideas and techniques in organising and implementing pedagogic materials. Curricular activities were transformed into group based exercises, discussions, seminars, project works. These replaced the lecture mode of teaching and the textbook centred approach. Student centred and activity oriented learning methods were given emphasis.

However, the alterations made in the curriculum evoked mixed responses from different groups of people; it created wide-ranging discussions on the matter of primary education all over the state. There were two major dimensions to the debates over DPEP. One was on the intervention of World Bank and the other foreign agencies in the field of primary education in Kerala, during the rule of the Left front government. The other critical point was against the new restructuring in curriculum and pedagogy¹. The argument was that it did not fit in with the contemporary educational goals, social needs, economy and market. The DPEP curriculum was exclusive to the government and aided schools. Private schools, at the same time, had begun to form strategies to accommodate the educational needs of the critics of the new curriculum introduced by DPEP. These wide ranging issues and developments in the field of primary education in Kerala offer enormous potential for a socio-cultural investigation into the sites of schooling. DPEP and curriculum revision was one of the crucial movements in the educational history of Kerala. The DPEP curriculum introduced pervasive changes in the structuring of school practices. These wide ranging changes in the primary

education system of Kerala propelled my interest in studying the processes of transition in schooling and locating them in the local cultural context.

Shifting the discussion to the second key question—the significant *cultural* aspects of education—this book focuses on the cultural mediations which take place in the everyday of schooling. Initially, the research problem was formulated as a critique that questioned and disturbed the neatness of the ‘Kerala model of development’ in general and its educational achievements in particular. The significance of this attempt was that besides providing a *cultural* critique it tried to redefine the celebrated Kerala model of educational development against the backdrop of revivalist ideologies, communal conflicts and increasing caste and gender inequalities. There has been a notable absence of critiques of the educational development in Kerala from the dimensions of social class and gender. Most of the studies have made use of quantitative methodologies or have been confined within the structural functionalist paradigm of research, including micro level analysis. Apparently, attempts that mark the linkages between education and culture have remained at the margins of research in Kerala. However, this methodological gap is not peculiar to the studies on education in Kerala alone. In the vast body of Indian literature also, the cultural underpinnings of everyday practice in schooling have been limited to the margins. Before reviewing the perspectives of educational inquiries in India, I highlight some methodological and theoretical issues in understanding the process of schooling in the larger context of education as a discipline.

There has been a methodological gap in the understanding of the process of schooling between two dominant perspectives. First, the structural functionalist and developmental paradigms in education treat the process as the means for social change, growth, personal development and nation building. The system of education is treated as a resource for human development. This functional notion of education (Durkheim 1956) was central to the discourse of education as a discipline about four decades, thereby marginalizing or ignoring the multiple dimensions in which the process of education can be understood. The absence of a cultural critique of the educational process was the fundamental weakness of this perspective.

McLaren and Giroux (1995), in their preface to ‘Social theory and education: A critique of theories of social and cultural reproduction’ (Morrow and Torres 1995), underline the absence of the reflections of the new theoretical movements of social sciences in the realm of educational inquiries. This argument, though a much later one, concerns the limitations

in educational research especially in conceiving the linkages between education and socio-cultural dynamics. McLaren and Giroux write:

Over the last three decades the social sciences have witnessed a number of exciting theoretical developments. Regrettably, the sociology of education has not always reflected these new developments, preferring instead to restrict its reading of social life to a truncated theoretical framework and epistemological parochialism (McLoren and Giroux 1995: ix).

This argument has emerged as part of the attempt to provide a critique of the theories of social and cultural reproduction in education (Bowles and Gintis 1976, Bourdieu and Passeran 1977, Karabel and Halsey 1977). The dominant role of the theories of social and cultural reproduction in the 1970s and after has brought a new language against the structural functionalist and the pragmatic approaches in education.

Most of the investigations of educational systems (inspired by the critical vision of the *new sociology of education*) focused on the concept of reproduction because it provides a convenient synthetic reference point for comparing the full range of conceptions of the relation between society and education. Such endeavors underscore the linkages between the process of schooling and the socio-cultural aspects. “Whatever a sociology of education does, it must make sense of the contribution of educational activity to the processes of socialization as a source of social continuity and potential discontinuity, or reproduction of the given and production of the new” (Morrow and Torres 1995: 7). In that sort of a framework, the analysis of processes of schooling can be foregrounded rather than be confined to the evaluation of educational output. The present project is framed in such a way that the focus is on the ways of social practices. It makes the desirable distance from conventional notion of schooling that reduces the process into the realm of teaching and learning through the defined structures of curriculum and pedagogy. My entry into the proposed framework was through the initial dialogue with the social and cultural reproduction theories. The theoretical possibilities to understand the site of schooling thus opened up my engagement with the concepts of reproduction in education.

From the late 1960s onwards, the renewed insights in Marxist social theory, structuralist approaches in anthropology and sociology and the new sociology of education (Young 1971, McLaren 1999) were translated into well-articulated educational critiques questioning the dominant structural functionalist approaches and developmental paradigms.² The question of reproduction of the relations of production has become crucial in the arena of educational explorations (Althusser 1971, Bowles and Gintis 1976).

The reproduction of the social division of labour within the premise of educational institutions and the legitimization of dominant and ruling class ideology through the instruments of pedagogic communication were subjected to critical analysis by a number of scholars, both theoretically and empirically. After an extensive investigation into the links between cultural practices and habitus and the schooling system in France, Bourdieu argues that the French school curriculum serves the cultural, and therefore class, interests of the middle and upper classes.³ To put this in more concrete terms: “the educational system reproduces all the more perfectly the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes (and sections of a class) in that the culture which it transmits is closer to the dominant culture and that the mode of inculcation to which it has recourse is less removed from the mode of inculcation practiced by the family” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 493).⁴

However, the theories of reproduction failed to accommodate the conceptual and theoretical issues which are situated outside the domain of Marxist and Structuralist paradigms (Morrow and Torres 1995). I do not intend to state that the theories of reproduction were not critically looked at. The point is that the large amount of critical literature that emerged for reformulating the theories in reproduction could not escape the boundaries of Marxist class analysis (Apple 1982, Connell 1995, Wexler 1987, Liston 1988). Presumably, the issues of race, gender and other ethnic and cultural factors remained unnoticed in these analyses of schooling. Moreover, the deterministic and mechanical properties of social and cultural reproduction theories did not allow any room for theorizing significant categories such as agency, resistance and the multiple locations of power (Willis 1977, Giroux 1983, Scrase 1993, Morrow and Torres 1995).

By critically analyzing Bourdieu’s proposition of cultural inculcation and ideological indoctrination, Willis (1977) expresses his views (similar to Gramsci’s notion of counter hegemony):

The working class does not have to believe the dominant ideology. It does not need the mask of democracy to cover its face of oppression. The very existence and consciousness of the middle class is deeply integrated into that structure which gives its dominance... the working class is the only group in capitalism that does not have to believe in capitalist legitimization as a condition of its own survival (Willis 1977: 123).

Willis thus attaches in his argument the possibility of the subordinate class’ political consciousness and resistance towards the dominant class structures. In fact he recognizes the scope of conceptually developing the notions of power and domination from a multi-dimensional approach. The

positive vision of Willis (1977) towards the idea of resistance (the counter ideological) was critically reviewed. The argument was that the essential approach should be on understanding how theories of resistance can analytically record the way in which class and culture combine to offer outlines for a theory of cultural politics (Giroux 1983). Moreover, the theoretical issues developed over the theme of agency classification – the question, how do distinct agencies such as schools, family, religious institutions and media function with the agenda of inculcation of the dominant ideological current, seem very obscure and complex; especially when it comes to the question of reception and comparison of the ideological categories that are channeled through those agencies. This is because the modes in which they operate and the outcomes occasionally differ; sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting, depending on the context. It is highly challenging to distinguish the range. An empirical control over this issue is not feasible and sometimes the boundaries of different agencies are ambiguous and identifying them becomes problematic as they are interchangeably located.

The field of cultural reproduction theories has been subjected to different modes of critical evaluations and interventions across the borders of disciplines. A series of such interventions has created a productive space for debate that can redefine the theoretical and methodological approaches in understanding the process of schooling. Theories of social and cultural reproduction have provided an opening to address the issues of power and domination in educational practice. As discussed earlier, the areas of inquiry take different turns and the domain of reproduction theories have been subjected to critical interventions from various theoretical sub fields. The initial areas of concerns were redefined and new arenas were explored within the reproductionist theories in different stages. A series of academic interventions by deploying new conceptual and analytical tools have provided new theoretical and methodological possibilities in the realm of reproduction theories (Willis 1977, Giroux 1983, Morrow and Torres 1995).

Crucial to this inquiry, contrasting from the functionalist and developmental approaches, educational institutions in theories of social reproduction are linked with power, knowledge, and the moral bases of cultural production and acquisition. In other words, theories of social reproduction in education point to the interplay between theories of culture, society and education, and hence the larger context in which the themes and issues in sociology of education (e.g., the study of the school, classroom, curriculum and pedagogy) are played out.

The development of the reproduction approach in my initial phase of formulating the research problem, as the sole dimension of understanding the issues in education, had later been transposed to a wider field of multidimensional perspectives through which different modes of cultural practices can be observed and explained. While formulating my theoretical and methodological framework, in order to go beyond the deterministic and mechanical conceptions of social and cultural reproduction theories, I propose to focus on sets of practices in the sites of schooling. The analytical constraints within the theories of reproduction had led me to examine the possibilities of deploying the concepts such as critical pedagogy, capitals and habitus in order to understand the cultural locations to which the system of education intersects. These would offer possibilities of understanding schooling as a field of different modes of practices, negotiations, relationships, strategies and conflicts among the participants. These practices constitute cultural outputs in the forms of production, reproduction, counter-production and resistance. The analysis of these processes requires an examination of the everyday practice of schooling in order to trace its interconnectedness to society and culture.

As I have previously mentioned, most of the critical literature on the 'Kerala model of education and development' revolves around a similar methodology relying more on quantitative inferences, economic analysis and altogether an input-output evaluation of the whole set of processes in education, thereby distancing from the context specific cultural mediations. These attempts do not focus on the everyday socio-cultural aspects of school life. This project hopes to address the methodological gap in the understanding of the practice of schooling through an ethnographic study. In Kerala the contemporary state of primary education with its structural changes and transition offer additional possibilities for an ethnographic understanding of the practices of schooling.

Ethnographic approaches in educational research have surged to prominence only in the recent past (Spindler 1982). Before the 1980s, the scope of ethnographic interventions in the spaces of schooling remained in the margins of educational enquiries. The relative absence of deploying new frameworks in social theory and methodology had enslaved educational inquiries within conventional boundaries. Ethnography as a methodology, which was understood as a domain within the "parent discipline" of anthropology, had been limited to studying only limited social institutions.

Though classical anthropological literature has given primacy to the concept of socialization, its explanation from an agency perspective was limited to a few institutional analyses. But the fact remains that some of

the key institutions like that of education was not given adequate importance for theorizing socialization and cultural transmission from the anthropological perspective. The major focus was on marriage, family, kinship, economic organization, political organization, religion and so on. This was true equally of anthropological studies in the west as well. The present situation is however, considerably diverse due to the proliferation of different sub-fields of specialization, such as education, theatre and performance, nutrition, cognition, psychoanalysis, psychology and gender (Moore, 1994). The argument for not including education in the analytical framework may have been the absence of organized ways of schooling or the lack of institutional forms of learning and teaching in the so called 'primitive' societies since the major focus of anthropology was restricted to those communities. However, even after the expansion of the anthropological subject of research into a wide range of issues and topics, we are left with very few attempts that explore the space of education with an ethnographic lens (Spindler and Spindler 1987).

The need of an ethnographic approach to unravel the process of schooling is more or less absent in the popular understanding of schools, especially in the case of government primary schools which are perceived as familiar, monotonous and self-explanatory. The apparent ordinariness of the primary schools provides the notion that special efforts are not necessary to understand the discourse of school activities. Thus a micro-level approach in this area becomes irrelevant even from a researchers' point of view (Sarangapani 2003).

However, the last decade has witnessed the rise of ethnographic studies in education in the Indian context (Thapan 1991, Viruru 2001, Sarangapani 2003). Such efforts in understanding the everyday practice of schooling through ethnography have prompted me to apply similar methodological tools within the context of Kerala's educational system. Imagining such a methodology, this project, as its larger objective, hopes to underline the cultural meanings that the educational system (re)produces. It seeks to understand the contributions of the educational activity to the process of socialization. Here, the term *schooling* is understood as cultural *practice* rather than just as a process of teaching and learning of prescribed texts and topics.

The study is located in Dharmadam, a north Kerala village. Dharmadam, has an area of 10.68 sq. km. and a population of 29,169 (Census of India 2001). The 24 primary schools in this village fall into the three aforementioned categories (government, aided and private). Besides this, the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET-a centrally sponsored scheme for restructuring teacher education and providing

academic/resource support) has its centre in Dharmadam. This village has also seen continuing interventions in primary education through the village panchayat. In order to explain the multiple ways in which the participants of schooling socialize in a particular cultural context, different types of primary schools in the village have been studied. The project involved extensive fieldwork and qualitative methods of analysis. In addition survey methods were selectively used.

The notion of schooling is understood not just as a process of curricular exchanges of knowledge under a particular policy framework of education. Different sets of practices—both formal and informal interactions and negotiations—among the participants are closely observed. My aim is to locate the linkages between socio-cultural patterns of domination and subordination among the participants and the system of power relations that impinge on the process of schooling. The term *practice* in schooling does not just represent the process of teaching and learning; rather, it includes wide ranging activities of teachers and students, which involve the elements of power and control. Power and control mechanisms operate distinctly at different levels in the realm of practice in the sites of schooling. Here I hope to capture the modes of cultural mediations and the dominant patterns in the interplay of power, domination and subordination in the everyday practice of schooling.

Schools “exist and function not only by virtue of the physical and human infrastructure such as building, blackboard, student and teacher, but perhaps more importantly because of the activity and the discourse through which, each day, life in the school is re-created, relationships are established and learning takes place” (Sarangapani 2003: 12). In a similar mode, the book examines the entire set of practices including the ‘primary functions’ of schooling i.e. teaching and learning by making a conceptual demarcation of the field of schooling. In order to make a distinction for analytical convenience and micro level understanding, I attempt to split the sites of schooling into two conceptual domains - ‘classroom’ and ‘playground’. ‘Classroom’ and ‘playground’ are conceptualized here differently from their conventional meanings. Classroom as a concept deployed here stretches beyond its spatial properties—it is an abstract notion of the schooling site where the formal structures of power and control in the form of rules, regulations and principles operate in a systemic way. It is understood as the formal site of both curricular and extracurricular activities as part of a policy design. Those practices are formally governed, regulated and evaluated as the key activities of an education system. In the book, the conventional classroom is termed as *curricular space*.

The notion of playground is also reframed in this project. It is the informal site of schooling—the domain of ‘free-play’ among the participants, in which informal interaction takes place outside the curricular and extracurricular activities. These activities can be in the form of informal conversations, group formations, negotiations, confrontations, settlements and so forth. In the present study, playground is a significant area of analysis since my key objective is to target the practices in schooling over and above the activities of teaching and learning. This distinction in the sites of schooling provides the scope for understanding cultural practices with their exceptional characteristics in the backdrop of differences in the structuring of power and control. An evaluation of these outlines the larger shifts and turns in the system of education.

The different schooling practices in this phase of transition can be seen not only to reflect larger debates and aspirations from education, but also of intervening in them in the day to day practice of schooling. This book has sought to map the complicated sets of transitions that mark the primary education scene in Kerala today.

I have here only briefly discussed the points of entry into the ethnographic space of my inquiry. Detailed accounts of the evolution of the themes and issues of the study, organization and implementation of the methodological strategies, reporting and analysis of the field data, and interpretation are provided in the subsequent chapters.

The book does not seek to provide a comprehensive review of the vast body of theoretical literature in education. However, with a view to provide a roadmap for understanding the perspectives of this work have evolved, I preferred to focus on certain theoretical and conceptual debates in this introductory note. The critical reviews presented earlier over the structural functional approaches and the theories of social and cultural reproduction in education chart out the conceptual trajectory of this work. The inclusion of particular theoretical schools and perspectives here serves the purpose of exploring the area of education from an interdisciplinary perspective that can offer more possibilities for exploring the cultural themes and issues in the sites of schooling. The linkages between *culture* and education are the key factors in focusing on some schools of thoughts and debates rather than some others. The theme of the book suggests the significance of cultural sites in education, as the attempt is to seek an understanding of the linkages between schooling and its cultural locations. Specifically, the question ‘what is cultural in education’ is at the core of this project while shaping the theoretical framework.

As discussed earlier, the conventionally dominant models of developmental, psychological and moral approaches in educational studies

are more or less dissociated in conceiving the theoretical framework of the present project. One major reason for this detachment is due to the universal scales and functional parameters found in those perspectives and methods. In general, such approaches tend to set universal standards and ahistorical categories in analyzing the issues in education thereby undermining the local cultural and social context.

The forthcoming chapter provides an account of the social character of school education in Kerala, and outlines the framing of the methodology. It introduces the study area (Dharmadam village) and the field experiences in capturing the different sets of practices among the participants of schooling. Analyses of the practices and cultural mediations in schooling are inscribed in the third, fourth and fifth chapters through an ethnographic lens. The sixth chapter examines the popular conceptions in Kerala that construct the hierarchy and the ranking of educational institutions according to certain criteria of contemporary relevance. This external sequence of viewing schools from the cultural setting impacts as well as brings different meanings to the performance and practices of schools both in the classroom and in the playground. Such categorization and ranking of schools and practices raise critical questions on the functioning of the institution in a particular cultural and political context. This mutual impact between popular evaluation and the restructured practices of schooling maps out the transitional phase of education and the cultural context to which it is closely linked. The forthcoming chapters detail these issues and themes.

Notes

¹ DPEP introduced the primary school curriculum by radically altering the conventional methods of teaching and learning by critiquing certain linear methods of learning. The issue of curriculum revision in DPEP has been detailed in the second chapter of the book.

² In his work “Knowledge and Control” 1971, M F D Young questions the predominance of structural functionalist tradition in sociology of education. See Young 1971.

³ By conceptualizing the word *Habitus*, Bourdieu writes “...the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them”. See Bourdieu, 1990a.

⁴ For Bourdieu and Passeron every pedagogic action is, “objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power”. By symbolic violence Bourdieu and Passeron imply the exercise of power within the domain of pedagogic action. It takes indirect forms through symbols of different capitals. In more concrete terms the dominant classes exercise their power symbolically in the sense that the cultural capital of the dominant classes is being reproduced in language curriculum and pedagogy. See Bourdieu and Passeron 1977.

CHAPTER TWO

FRAMING THE FIELD

My journey to understand the practices of schooling by deploying ethnographic methods began when I was introduced to the earlier anthropological explorations in the fields of society and culture. In those accounts, the scope of examining the educational institutions as one of the key agents of cultural transmission had been given very little emphasis (Spindler and Spindler 1987, Moore 1994). One of the reasons for the absence of such attempts can be traced back to the focus of earlier anthropological studies in understanding 'primitive' cultures. In many of those 'primitive' cultures that were subjected to early anthropological investigations, the formal types of educational institutions seemed to be absent or not found interesting for many of the ethnographers. In most of the introductory texts of anthropology and in the ethnographic studies a similar pattern can be noticed i.e. the sequence of chapters explaining social structure, kinship, economy, religion, political system and social stratification. Schools, other types of educational institutions or the role of education figured in the margins of early anthropological inquiries of culture and cultural transmission (Moore 1994). Though there were plenty of anthropological attempts to examine the concept of socialization, the understanding of institutions of education and their cultural linkages were not adequately focused.

Tracing the Indian context of ethnographic observation on schooling, there are some exceptional contributions. To mention one of the most significant works, Verrier Elwin's ethnographic accounts will figure in this context. His most important work in Bastar was his study of the 'ghotul,' the unique dormitory-club of the boys and girls of the Muria tribe in the Central Provinces. In this work, he traces the formal sets of practices in the Ghotul school by locating the practice in the cultural context of the Muria tribe (Elwin 1968).¹

Such attempts of crossing the traditional disciplinary borders to accommodate and borrow theoretical and methodological tools of culture and education triggered during the late nineteen sixties. Thus the traditional classification of the domain of anthropological inquiry of kinship, politics,

economics, religion, archaeology, socio-cultural anthropology, biological anthropology and linguistics, was restructured with the expansion of the discipline to considerably more diverse avenues.

With the proliferation of specialist subfields, such as the anthropology of development, organizations, education, theatre and performance, nutrition, cognition, psychoanalysis, psychology, gender and medicine (to mention only a few), the boundaries of discipline became blurred. By maintaining the degrees of theoretical specialization, the subfields borrow theories, concepts and methodologies from varying disciplines or from particular intellectual traditions or critiques that cross-cut the disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences. Within the subfields, further boundary crossing processes become typical when the topics, to list a few, such as the body, memory, the household, the person, land, consumption, nationalism, violence and art were listed among the objects of anthropological inquiry. In fact the boundaries between 'sub-fields' and 'topics' are never fixed and are a matter of contestation (Moore 1994).

In the field of educational inquiries, qualitative tools and ethnographic methods have become a significant component. Ethnographic approaches in the area of educational research, as a subset of qualitative research has surged to prominence. In these approaches, new questions were asked and sets of answers were offered that co relational and experimental research designs could not offer (Spindler and Spindler 1987). Unsettling the universal scales provided by the dominant psychological perspectives in educational research in understanding the process of knowledge transmission, teaching and learning, ethnographic perspectives in education could offer more cultural rather than psychological explanations that make processes and problems more context specific. However, in such processes of constructing the ethnography of education, there is nothing parochial or purely anthropological rather the theoretical and methodological components are borrowed freely from other disciplines (ibid).

Ethnography observes education as cultural transmission, in which cultural learning is required, in that sense of understanding the process of learning and transmission are separated only by convention (Spindler and Spindler 1982, Wolcot 1983). The ethnographic approach sharpens the focus on the aspects of cultural transmission and learning in a more specific way by understanding education in a broad sense and schooling in a narrower sense as a *calculated intervention* in the learning spaces.

I would like to give emphasis on this narrower sense of schooling, i.e., what I understand as school and the very concept I intent to locate within the spaces of calculated interventions in the process of learning when I

deploy the ethnographic approaches. The concept of schooling per se does not essentially attach itself to the notion of schools or educational institutions; rather it acquires a broader meaning of learning outside the spaces of calculated interventions. When I engage with the concept of schooling in the present context, it is not my purpose to include the sites other than the domain of calculated interventions.

As a project of educational ethnography, this work does not make any attempt to understand the entire process of learning that takes place in varying spaces as children grow into adults or get older. The point that Spindler and Spindler make on the focus of educational anthropologist on the learning that take place, whether it is intended or unanticipated, as a result of calculated intervention, makes relevant to the present context of inquiry. Spindler and Spindler conceive it as the unique subject matter of educational anthropology (Spindler and Spindler 1987). I would like to stretch my focus from the modes of learning that take place in the space of *calculated intervention* to the different sets of practices in that space; relationships, negotiations, interactions and strategies through which the participants perform. So the process of schooling is conceptualized not just in the domain of learning or teaching but rather in terms of a broad term 'practice'. I do not intend to reduce the space of calculated interventions to just the domain of teaching and learning, rather the entire set of activities in that space is given emphasis in my analysis.

The entire set of activities including the 'primary functions'—teaching and learning are focused by making a conceptual demarcation of the field of schooling. The sites of schooling, as mentioned earlier, are understood as classroom and playground. These two distinct sites have different roles in the exercise of power and control. The analytical details of the concepts of classroom and playground are explained in the forthcoming pages.

Schooling and Socialization

As an entry point to the sites of schooling, I would like to discuss about the transitional phases of socialization that children experience from home to school. There appears to be a substantial difference in the structure and modes of conditioning between these two institutions. However, this difference between home and school structures and patterns of socialization does not detach entirely from their intersections. The transitional phase of socialization assumes significance in observing the schooling practice especially when it comes to the analysis of gender, religion, caste and class.

The discipline of anthropology had devoted much attention on the process of cultural transmission in the specific approaches to understand socialization. Sociologists and Anthropologists have understood the process of socialization as the exchange or transmission of norms, values, morals and other cultural traits in order to make one eligible for participating in that cultural setting (Douglas 1968, Kerckhoff 1972, Freeman 1975). The entry to schooling space is also involved with certain basic criteria. This includes both cultural and physical aspects with which a system decides the inclusion and exclusion of members in the field. In the present context, I try to understand socialization as everyday practice. The major concern is not on the culture that is transmitted, rather the ways in which people socialize in the realm of schooling. The sites of schooling are contested terrains; where the notions of strategies and negotiations among the participants are significant.

The possibilities of understanding the field of schooling as a means of socialization, more specifically, a field of interaction and negotiation among different social and economic classes and groups were drawn as part of the objectives of this work. In order to explore the practices and productions inherent to the institutional structures of education, I have adopted the methods of ethnography.

For narrowing down the scope of the space of knowledge transmission, my focus is on the schools of different types in a village setting. The study area is Dharmadam, a north Kerala village, located in Kannur district. The spatial boundaries are further reduced to primary schools. In Kerala, as I have previously mentioned, the contemporary state of primary education with its structural changes and transition offers more scope for an ethnographic understanding. The next section will provide a detailed description of the contemporary educational debates in Kerala, which created my research interest for pursuing an ethnographic inquiry.

Locating the Field

One of my initial research interests was to provide a critique on the celebrated Kerala model of education by posing the cultural question. It was not the relative absence of the critiques on the 'model' that prompted me to think in this direction. In fact there exists a large body of critical literature (mostly from inside) questioning the character of the 'model'.² However, most of the critical literature revolved around a similar methodology relying more on quantitative inferences, economic analysis and altogether an input-output equation of understanding the whole set of processes of culture and society. Sociological or ethnographic approaches

were at the margins of analysis in explaining the problematic of the 'model'. The issues of caste and gender remained more or less untouched in the evaluations since the dominant problems of the 'model' are considered to be the low economic and industrial profile of the state. Except a few attempts of critiques, women and the subaltern groups of Kerala are considered to be liberated from the evermore spheres of struggles and oppression.³ Here my emphasis is on the articles and reports from individual researchers, the 'first world' agencies, and institutions like UNESCO, UNICEF and Richard Franke to list a few.⁴ Though this sort of production and retention of the 'model' are constructed in comparison to other parts of India and other 'third world' countries, they tend to over project the statistics of 'development indicators by ignoring the social and cultural struggles⁵ of the groups on the margins.

Achievements in literacy and education in comparison with other states of India were the pillars of the development 'model' of Kerala. The similar problems of understanding and evaluating the 'model' of education from a micro-sociological and ethnographic perspective were typical to the approaches like the larger developmental paradigm that was discussed earlier. In order to provide a birds eye view on the larger cultural domain of the field of study, I will discuss briefly on the socio-political aspects of contemporary Kerala. The attempt here is not to understand or construct 'the' Kerala on the basis of certain dominant patterns of culture and social factors which impinge on certain dominant regions, class, caste gender or religious groups' lives. In fact such dominant forms of social practices are observed in view of constructing a sociological critique.

Before charting out Kerala's educational profile, my concern is to locate it within the 'exceptional' Kerala model of development. Being one of the most significant components in Kerala's developmental achievements, education is projected exceptionally without paying much attention to its covert structure. The discrepancies inherently attached to the Kerala model also remained in the margins of developmental studies. By unfolding some of the implicit factors and inherent trends in the present day Kerala society, I try to relate those issues with the educational system in the state.

Unmasking the 'Kerala Model of Development'

There have been a variety of descriptions on the Kerala model of development, both ornamental and critical point of views and commentaries from a large number of experts in the field of social science and development studies. For projecting the Kerala model as unique and

exceptional, most of the authors highlighted the achievements in education, health and other demographic factors such as literacy, life expectancy and low birth rate.⁶ And more recently the United Nation's (UN) recognition of Kerala as 'the most baby friendly state' is another 'first world' construction to celebrate the state's social profile.⁷ The narratives pertaining to the issues in education and health often embrace the sketchy phrase "*Pakshe Keralathil...*"(But in Kerala) to emphasize the exceptional character of Kerala's achievements, especially in education and health.

Statistics demonstrate that Kerala is placed far ahead of other states of India and other 'third world' countries with an exceptional demographic profile. Despite its economic stagnation, unemployment rate, low per capita income and fiscal crisis, Kerala produces a remarkable social profile. This includes high rate of literacy, life expectancy, favourable sex ratio, low birth rate and low infant mortality. A high level of political consciousness, education, mobilization and health care are the other major aspects that add to Kerala's so called development (Tharamangalam 1998, Franke and Chasin 1995). But all these factors are projected in many sites of discussions as they are beyond limitations. On the flip side is its notoriety as the state with highest suicide rate and violence against women, the categories seldom addressed with rigorous analysis. Themes of crises often constrained with the issues of unemployment, low per capita income and economic stagnation when it comes to the vast body of developmental literature.

A large amount of exaggeration about Kerala model as exceptionally unique (overlooking the severe drawbacks of Kerala society) appears in the narratives experientially external to the state. Some of the 'first world' scholars tend to ignore the crisis that Kerala society face and indulge in romantic and naive portrayal of the Kerala model. This statement does not attempt to authorize that all the insiders' perspectives on the Kerala model is purely critical. The articulation of the Kerala model by Richard Franke and Barbara Chasin sounds a perfect example of romanticization. They depict Kerala society as a classic case for land reform, overcoming caste inequality, promoting rights of workers, reducing violence, improving lives of women and creating general condition for democracy, empowerment and participation (Franke and Chasin, 1995). These conclusions explicitly contradict with the real lives of people in Kerala.

All the myths of land reforms have been challenged with the recent Adivasi movements demanding land for a majority of landless Adivasis in Kerala.⁸ The question is what prompted the Adivasis and dalits of Kerala