Development, Value, and Education in India's Digital Age

Arjun Shankar

University of Pennsylvania, arjunishankar@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations

Part of the Education Commons, and the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2000

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2000
For more information, please contact libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu.
Development, Value, and Education in India's Digital Age

Abstract
This ethnography is an attempt to show the particular relationships between globalization, development, digitality, and urban-rural change as they are re-articulated in the actions and interactions between several groups – NGO personnel, teachers, students – living, working, and studying within educational spaces in South Karnataka, in regions in and around Bangalore city. My intervention, to put it simply, is to show how the condition of development in India, and specifically education-as-development, has changed in the contemporary global digital moment, and I identify the new concerns of each of these groups – how they sought to develop themselves and Others – in the wake of technologically-enabled globality and social reform-oriented connection. My own set of ethnographic stories begins at the heart of these education-as-development concerns, but relies on the specificity of my interactions with a single NGO, Adhyaapaka, based in Bangalore, but that worked with school communities outside of it. I have placed these NGO narratives in relation to another set of narratives from one school site in which Adhyaapaka works, Adavisandra school. What I discovered, inadvertently, was an alternative shape that global development takes when seen through the stories of teachers and students, equally tied to the idea of a changing India, but inflected with aspirations and commitments that reflected the unique lived experiences of those who were participating in schooling in the village. This is also to say that, at least in India, any global-digital future is always a “global-urban-rural future” and throughout this study I mark instances of urban-rural linkage and boundary, always as a means to understand how individuals perceive development-based change. To this end, I further the concept of value migrations, a set of mediated imaginings and aspirations that reflect the circulation of values and the concomitant changes wrought in villages. In unpacking the concept of “value” I foreground the inextricable link between global economic structures, human development, and village change. Further, I connect value to affect, showing how structures of economic power work on a psychosocial register, manifesting as dreams, hopes, desires, nostalgias, anxieties, and sufferings and together are what I term the “affects of development”.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Anthropology

First Advisor
John L. Jackson

Keywords
Development, Education, Globalization, South Asia, Value, Visual Anthropology

Subject Categories
Education | Social and Cultural Anthropology

This dissertation is available at ScholarlyCommons: http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2000
DEVELOPMENT, VALUE, AND EDUCATION IN INDIA’S DIGITAL AGE

Arjun Shankar

A DISSERTATION

in

Education and Anthropology

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

Supervisor of Dissertation:

_______________________________________

John L. Jackson, Jr., Richard Perry University Professor

Graduate Group Chairperson, Education

_______________________________________

J. Matthew Hartley, Professor of Education

Graduate Group Chairperson, Anthropology

_______________________________________

Deborah A. Thomas, Professor of Anthropology

Dissertation Committee:

John L. Jackson, Jr., Richard Perry University Professor
Lisa Mitchell, Associate Professor of South Asian Studies
Sharon M. Ravitch, Senior Lecture of Education
Ritty Lukose, Associate Professor of South Asian Studies, NYU
Indira Vijaysimha, Associate Professor, Azim Premji University
To my Amma, Patti, and Sister, the three women who are my constant role models.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have always felt I was most productive and most engaged during my doctoral degree when I was concerned with learning and learning alone, unencumbered by ego, the future, or any of the other small anxieties associated with a PhD. And so, I hope that this dissertation reflects some of the immense amount I’ve been lucky enough to learn as a member of both the Graduate School of Education and the Anthropology Department at Penn.

I would like to thank: Dean Jackson, whose insights into visual anthropology, film, media, and the art of storytelling are foundational to how this dissertation has been conceived, whose role at Penn has been one of the major reasons I still believe in the value of the PhD, and whose encouragement gave me the confidence to be ambitious and to take intellectual risks; Dr. Mitchell, who believed in my potential enough to give me my first teaching opportunity at Penn and who has encouraged me to think deeply about the study of South Asia; Dr. Ravitch, who has been a source of emotional support and who introduced me to the world of development and how to navigate it; Dr. Vijayasimha, who accepted me as a co-teacher at Azim Premji University despite my youth and whose suggestions about how to conduct my fieldwork in schools in Karnataka has been foundational; Dr. Lukose, who was kind enough to join my committee and whose provocations during our conversations to read more and think more critically about my research approach has been etched in my memory as I struggled to figure out how to write this dissertation. Thanks to all my many professors at Penn GSE and Anthropology, Dr. Hall, Dr. Thomas, Dr. Ben Porath, Dr. Bourgois, Dr. Agha, and a few outside of Penn as well, especially Dr. Tsing, whose intellectual influence drips off every page of this document. I would like to thank my many colleagues here at Penn, most importantly Mariam Durrani whose brilliance, political strength, and commitment to intellectual rigor always inspires me to be a better and more rigorous thinker. Secondly, Dr. E. Gabriel Dattatrayen, who traveled through the world of the PhD with me from its very beginning, shaping the kind of scholarship I would like to create in the future. I’d also like to thank, Matthew Tarditi, Leya Mathew, Sofia Chaparro, and the many other members of camra @ Penn who made this experience what it was. Special thanks goes to the faculty at Azim Premji University who welcomed me despite not knowing exactly why I was there or
what my intentions were. To my two research assistants, Sripriya Pratinidhi and Lekha Adavi, without whom the work would quite literally not have happened.

This project could not have been completed without so much support from all of my participants in this study, who gave their time and energy to helping me learn despite their many more pressing concerns. To all of the members of Adhyaanapaka, who while their names have all been changed here, know who they are and who were always willing to talk about what they were doing and what they were dreaming. To all of the teachers and students who embraced my presence, believing in the sincerity of my ethnographic engagement, and always taking my work in directions that I could not have predicted. I hope this work does some justice to all of our time together and I cannot wait to go back and think even more deeply with all of you about the past, present, and future.

Funding for this project came from many sources: a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Abroad Scholarship that gave me the opportunity to conduct my research in India without constraint, the Zwicker Fund through the Anthropology Department at UPenn, a New Media and Research grant through UPenn SASgov and the Dean’s office, earlier funding through CASI for preliminary trips to the field, and a FLAS fellowship from the South Asia Center at UPenn. A small portion of this work have been previously published in Visual Communication, and other parts of this dissertation have been presented at the CRASSH “Visual Anthropology and Contemporary South Asian History” Conference, at Villanova’s “Communication, Postcoloniality, and Social Justice: Decolonizing Imaginations” Conference, and at Azim Premji University’s Conference on the “Teaching of History with Visual Methods”.

Last, and most importantly, thanks to my family, my Mama and Mami in New Jersey, who gave me a second home that I could turn to whenever I needed a break from the travails of dissertation writing, and especially my Amma, Patti, and sister, whose strength and intelligence have always been a source of inspiration and who have kept encouraging me even when I have been shrouded in self-doubt and anxiety about my capabilities as an academic.
ABSTRACT

DEVELOPMENT, VALUE, AND EDUCATION IN INDIA’S DIGITAL AGE

Arjun Shankar

John L. Jackson, Jr.

This ethnography is an attempt to show the particular relationships between globalization, development, digitality, and urban-rural change as they are re-articulated in the actions and interactions between several groups – NGO personnel, teachers, students – living, working, and studying within educational spaces in South Karnataka, in regions in and around Bangalore city. My intervention, to put it simply, is to show how the condition of development in India, and specifically education-as-development, has changed in the contemporary global digital moment, and I identify the new concerns of each of these groups – how they sought to develop themselves and Others – in the wake of technologically-enabled globality and social reform-oriented connection. My own set of ethnographic stories begins at the heart of these education-as-development concerns, but relies on the specificity of my interactions with a single NGO, Adhyaapaka, based in Bangalore, but that worked with school communities outside of it. I have placed these NGO narratives in relation to another set of narratives from one school site in which Adhyaapaka works, Adavisandra school. What I discovered, inadvertently, was an alternative shape that global development takes when seen through the stories of teachers and students, equally tied to the idea of a changing India, but inflected with aspirations and commitments that reflected the unique lived experiences of those who were participating in schooling in the village. This is also to say that, at least in India, any global-digital future is always a “global-urban-rural future” and throughout this study I mark instances of urban-rural linkage and boundary, always as a means to understand how individuals perceive development-based change. To this end, I further the concept of value migrations, a set of mediated imaginings and aspirations that reflect the circulation of values and the concomitant changes wrought in villages. In unpacking the concept of “value” I foreground the inextricable link between global economic structures, human development, and village change. Further, I connect value to affect, showing how structures of economic power work on a psychosocial register, manifesting as dreams, hopes, desires, nostalgias, anxieties, and sufferings and together are what I term the “affects of development”.

vi
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT ........................................................................................................ IV

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................ VI

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS ................................................................................................. VIII

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................... IX

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................... 1

PART ONE

CHAPTER 2: THE NGO ..................................................................................................... 35

CHAPTER 3: PEDAGOGY, VALUE, AND MENTORSHIP .................................................... 70

CHAPTER 4: BUREAUCRATIC DISSATISFACTION .......................................................... 119

PART TWO

CHAPTER 5: THE SCHOOL ............................................................................................... 167

CHAPTER 6: STUDENT PORTRAITS ............................................................................... 238

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION/ADDENDUM ...................................................................... 297

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................ 307
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1.1 “In the field” ..................................................................................................................33
Photo 3.1 Channapatna Land of Toys..........................................................................................78
Photo 4.1 A photograph of the table tennis table.................................................................145
Photo 5.1 Suresh sir with five students on Independence Day..............................................183
Photo 5.2 The secondary school building at Adavisandra.....................................................189
Photo 6.1 “The stove” by Nagraj...............................................................................................244
Photo 6.2 “Surya” by Chandrika...............................................................................................254
Photo 6.3 “My house” by Usha.................................................................................................264
Photo 6.4: “Shadow Selfie” by Naveen....................................................................................272
Photo 6.5: “Bull on a Hill” by Ajay............................................................................................281
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1 Drafting Machine.................................................................47
FIGURE 2.2 W. Edwards Deming..........................................................49
FIGURE 2.3 Screenshot “Deming Today” page of the W. Edwards Deming Institute........50
FIGURE 2.4 Screenshot of Tehelka’s Independence Day Special on Education..............53
FIGURE 3.1 The lobby of the Taj Hotel Hubli.........................................85
FIGURE 3.2 Sociological portrait of the education department.............................91
FIGURE 4.1: The idealization of technology for development............................125
FIGURE 4.2: Screenshot of the “exit strategy” deck....................................134
FIGURE 5.1 Comic of Akshayapatra founder Guru Prabuphada..........................207
FIGURE 6.1: Screenshot of “Punyakoti story” on Litte Krishna...........................286
FIGURE 6.2: Sheet of Darshan Playing Cards.............................................288
CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

On the Road

I’m in the passenger seat of a car riding down the Kanakapura Road. I’ve been down this road so many times now that I can anticipate the turns, winding from city to town to village and back again, connecting Bangalore and Harohalli, approximately 35 kilometers south of the city and the closest town to Adavisandra school, where I had been teaching and conducting research for the past twelve months. It is February and it is much less green than it has been for most of my stay in Karnataka, less rain leading to a visible browning of the earth. The temperature is wonderful, 24C with a gusting wind that makes the drive seem effortless. It’s cooler here than in the heart of Bangalore city where I live, the congestion and pollution producing a stifling, windless heat. This day I’m almost 20 kilometers outside of Bangalore, on my way back from Adavisandra, when I’m captivated by a pond filled with pink water lilies that always surprises me, emerging seemingly out of nowhere just around a bend in the road, a stark example of the differing ecologies that distinguished these rural peripheries from their urban neighbor despite being so very close. In India, and in Karnataka especially, the rural and the urban sit side-by-side, blending together and producing this paradoxical feeling of physical closeness and ecological distance that gave shape to my fieldwork.

I’m exhausted. We had finally unveiled our student-led photo exhibit at the school. I’d printed out some thirty photographs, in A2 size paper (16.5in*23.4in), along with hundreds of standard sized photographs at Printo, a Bangalore-based print center just three minutes car ride from my house in Jayanagar, framed each of the larger photographs, and taken them to school, where they were displayed in the secondary school’s cavernous, gray-walled assembly hall, resting on plastic blue chairs we had placed in a semi-circle lining one side of the room, and kept from slipping off the chairs with rocks that we’d brought in from outside. Four long tables displayed the smaller photographs, and over the course of the day students fought over who had taken what image, excitedly pointing at photos that they were depicted in, negotiating who would get to take each photograph home, and asking to have their photographs taken while holding particular photographs that they liked best – a meta-process that I enjoyed very much.

It's a small affair, just the school community – teachers, parents, and a few mentors from Adhyaapaka, the NGO that I had initially been researching and that had eventually led me to
Adavisandra\(^1\). It might be small, but it is still incredibly important to me. We’ve been working on this exhibit for almost eight months, taking photographs and filming, looking through footage together in class, sifting through works of art that depicted themselves, their friends, their parents, their teachers, their school building, the inside of their homes, their agricultural land, the sky, their television sets, and on and on and on in ever-more experimental forms. And I was carrying my computer with me, the devise that had facilitated all of the viewing and deciding and printing. It was as much a part of the story as I was.

Raju, one of the drivers in Bangalore who I’d relied on throughout my stay, is sitting next to me and chatting, more talkative than usual. He tells me about the area and how it had changed. He is from Tamil Nadu, just across the border from Karnataka past Hosur, about 100 km from where we are currently driving. He doesn’t speak with any kind of nostalgia; instead, he makes matter-of-fact statements about how things have changed since he first arrived in Bangalore to work as a driver some twenty years back. “See here,” he nods his head towards the shops on his right as we move into the peripheries of a small town, “This was where Bangalore used to start, ten years ago, right here at Talaghattapura.” When I ask him what he means, he tells me, in Tamil, “We all knew this was really the end because this was the last stop on the bus. You could not go any further beyond this point. But now, buses go all over the place, all the way to Kanakapura and you can even go to Adavisandra on the bus now.” He emphasizes “even to Adavisandra” to remind me just how far into the interior my school site is, well off the main Kanakapura Road, a journey he has helped to facilitate though always with an air of befuddlement: why that school seemingly so far away from the city?

He also wants to make sure I take note of how much the bus system has expanded in the past ten years, his own ethnographic eye slowly aligning with my own over the past few months as Raju takes it upon himself to answer questions that he suspects I might have before I ever ask them. He reminds me of some advice that P. Sainath, the famous Indian rural reporter, gave me a few years prior. “If you want to know how India is changing,” he said, “Just sit on the bus. See the frequency of the buses to different locations and who is on the bus and you’ll know everything you want to know about movement and change in India.” I had taken this advice and I had taken the KSRTC (Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation) bus from the Jayanagar bus stand next to my house to Harohalli busstand, the closest stop to Adavisandra for the first seven months of my fieldwork, never having to wait more than 15 minutes for a bus that travelled on

---

\(^1\) The place, organization, and people’s names throughout this dissertation have been given pseudonyms to protect anonymity wherever possible.
the Kanakapura road, and watching who got on and where, sometimes through a camera’s lens and sometimes not. Sometimes I would see people drag huge bags filled with silk cocoons which they would sell in markets in Ramanagara, a few kilometers west of the road, the final destination for these silkworms before their untimely death in silk factories all over the region.

However, bus rides stopped abruptly after I fell off the bus one day when, in a rush, I had jumped on, asked if I was on the right bus, received a response in the negative, and jumped off, not realizing that the bus had already started to move. I rolled on the ground for a few meters, shielded by my backpack, filled with photo and video cameras that I would take into the field each trip. Thankfully, I was unhurt, but for some scratches and scrapes on the right side of my body, and I got on the same bus, which had stopped when the conductor had seen me fall and who then corrected himself to let me know that yes, this was in fact the bus I wanted. But the incident had made me less than eager to ride the bus, and so now I merely watched through the window of the car. And it was still impossible not to see large red KSRTC government buses on our way, always on the verge of running into oncoming traffic, as they tried to make better time on Kanakapura’s one lane road, veering back and forth between the right, then left, then right again and leaving in their wake a slew of shrieking car horns.

Sitting in the back seat are Sulekha madam, the Adavisandra students’ science teacher, who was thankful for the ride that will cut her trip from school back to her home on the outskirts in Bangalore by almost an hour, Sripriya, one of my students who I taught at Azim Premji University, who had started to join me on school visits as part of her role as my research assistant, and Manoj, one of the mentors working for Adhyaapaka, the Bangalore-based NGO that made up a large part of my early fieldwork, who needed to get back to the Adhyaapaka office located only 5 minutes from my apartment in Jayanagar. Manoj promises to tell everyone at the head offices, and specifically Founder Ramaswamy and CEO Prakash, about the exhibit, though I am admittedly disappointed that they were unable to attend themselves. Together these groups, the NGO personnel, the school personnel, along with my students from both Azim Premji University and Adavisandra, became the primary participants in my study, the people without which there would be no stories to tell in this particular ethnography.

During our ride, Manoj pulls out his cellphone and starts to laugh, quickly showing it to Sulekha, who looks and smiles, before stretching out to show it to me in the front seat. It’s an image of three of his friends, sent via WhatsApp, two sitting on motorcycles wearing collared shirts and sunglasses and one standing in between them, behind a fence. They’re smiling with glee in the foreground of a scene of flat, green agricultural land. The photograph has been edited
to include a bit of text, “D.ed” (Diploma in Education), “B.Sc Agri” (Bachelor of Science in Agriculture), and “MBA” (Master of Business Administration) typed onto each of the three men, marking them with their highest degree of completion. The photograph is intended to be lighthearted, three friends having fun in their native village. But Manoj is also proud of the image, one that shows his friends as both from a village and successfully achieving higher levels of education.

Indeed, everyone in the car, and in my study, has dedicated their lives to social change in India through education and Manoj, Sulekha, Ramaswamy, Prakash, my students, and myself are all differentially invested in the production of this type of educational aspiration, one that sees education as the central means towards upward mobility and self-development, what might be termed education-as-development. And yet, each of these people are very differently positioned in this narrative, connected though we are in a dizzying array of physical migrations: Ramaswamy, an eighty-year-old former chemical engineer who found his second calling as an education-based developmentalist; Prakash, a forty year old former computer engineer who sold his Texas-based tech startup before deciding to join Adhyaapaka as CEO; Sulekha, a Muslim woman from Chittradurga, some 200 miles north of Bangalore who now lives on the outskirts of Bangalore; Sripriya, a Masters student who grew up in a highly orthodox Brahmin family in Gulbarga, a town in North Karnataka before moving to Bangalore for school; Manoj, whose family lives in a village just 20 kilometers outside of Bangalore and who worked in a Bangalore factory in order to help his family pay-off its debts before being able to join the education sector he so dearly loved; and myself, an American-born researcher of Indian-descent whose entrance into this story emerged because of my previous engagements in NGO-based education interventions.

But as important as our differential roles within the education-as-development space is the very form by which Manoj communicates his story by using WhatsApp on his smartphone, which (1) connotes the digital capabilities that are constitutive of contemporary development and (2) marks a set of technologically-centered imaginaries about what education should provide to students in contemporary India. In other words, Manoj showing me this photograph is not just about the content of the photograph, but also intended to illustrate his own capabilities as a technologically-savvy developmentalist, what I want to call “digital development” to mark the shift in India’s development condition in the 21st century, during which urban technological centers, namely Bangalore, have become symbols of India’s newfound prosperity.
I start with the four of us on the road to signify that our relationships to one another were always mediated by the road, and the newfound connection between Bangalore, “the Silicon Valley of India”, and its peripheral areas, that allowed myself, my students, their parents, and a whole slew of education workers to move, work, and re-configure what change looks like in 21st century India. In a sense, then, the road is allegorical, both an iconic instantiation of increased connectivity through infrastructural development and the method by which other changes, aspirational, educational, and occupational begin to take place.

Tsing (2005) writes, in explaining her concepts of global connection and friction, that “roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement” (6). And it is this conceptual space opened by the road, always deeply saturated with dynamics of power in everyday life, but equally about connectivity and change, that sets the stage for my study (Moore, 2011), one that focuses on education-as-development in this zone of connection between Bangalore and its peripheries, made possible only because of roads, ICTs, and the increased movement of people, ideas, and commodities, and together which produce the “shifting boundaries” of how change can and should look in a rapidly globalizing India.

The stories I will tell throughout this ethnography really attempt to, together, show the particular relationships between globalization, development, digitality, and urban-rural change as they are re-articulated in the actions and interactions between several groups – NGO personnel, teachers, students – living, working, and studying within educational spaces in South Karnataka, in regions in and around Bangalore city. My intervention, to put it simply, is to show how the condition of development in India has changed in the contemporary global digital moment, and I will identify the concerns of each of these groups – how they sought to develop themselves and Others – in the wake of technologically-enabled globality and social justice-oriented connection.

To study educational spaces, in this case focused on the education NGO as well as the rural school, was to understand the simultaneous process of (1) re-articulations of human development that have pervaded the education space, that rely heavily on a social change agenda led by the private-sector; (2) Bangalore’s expansion and transformation into India’s high-tech “World City”.
Recent anthropological work on India has focused much energy on assessing the changing economic, political, and sociocultural impact of its rapid global integration (Appadurai, 1996). This attention to globality and global integration is not, of course, restricted to India, but has become a constitutive part of nearly every 21st century ethnography, given, as Tsing argues in her ethnography based in Indonesia, that “it has become increasingly clear that all human cultures are shaped and transformed in long histories of regional-to-global networks of power, trade, and meaning” (Tsing, 2005, 3). And yet, the risk of taking globalization i.e. the flow of people, ideas, technology, media, and capital across national contexts and, its empirical counterpart, transnationalism, as a priori and constitutive aspects of current ethnographic experience is to overdetermine what and how it is researchers “see” their fieldsites, laying waste to context and culturally-specific understandings that have been the bedrock of anthropological study. The challenge, then, for any ethnographer is to empirically chart the specific practices of globality that are emerging, that always engage with a world beyond any physical location, but also remain deeply imbued with the particular cultural context that influence exactly how people, ideas, and capital can and do move.

In India, the era of globalization is marked most often by the moment of “economic liberalization” in the late 1980s, when India’s economic reforms opened its borders to free trade and allowed market forces to influence economic flow unencumbered by state regulations. As the economy was globalized, by the late 20th century a new conception of India’s cultural globality emerged, what Lukose (2009) describes, using a Newsweek article entitled *India Rising*, as best represented by a generation of urban middle class youth, that “admires capitalism and wants to get rich, grew up in the era of food surpluses, can watch fifty television channels, is technology savvy, consume guiltlessly, grew up with shaky coalition governments and assertive lower-caste political parties, favors jobs in the private, corporate sector, and has high literacy rates” (6). This new cultural ethos was juxtaposed with the remnants of an earlier postcolonial moment in India, represented by upper caste leadership, Nehruvian non-alignment politics and industrial models for economic growth, along with Gandhian idealizations of village-life.

More recently, in 2004 the BJP government created the new slogan *India Shining*, an update of the earlier slogan, but now characterizing India as having already taken its place as a global superpower possessing the 4th largest economy in the world. One way in which India inaugurated this newfound economic status on the world stage was by creating, along with the other four BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) nations, the New Development Bank in 2013, a multilateral development bank of $100 billion intended as an alternative to the
IMF and World Bank, the two supranational organizations that had been the primary lenders to developing nations over the past 70 years. The opening of the New Development Bank can be seen as the convergence of economic liberalization with a longer history on how to “develop” the Indian nation within a framework of “North-South” global divides, a framework that is symbolically blown apart in the new South-South capital networks associated with the New Development Bank.

In *Postcolonial Developments*, Gupta (1998) locates the beginnings of the “postcolonial condition” of development in India at the very inception of the Indian nation-state in 1947, when its leaders were seeking to break from their British colonialist past and find global economic standing while simultaneously being restricted by the mandates of the Bretton Woods institutions, specifically the IMF and World Bank, which deemed newly independent nation-states as “suffering from the malady of underdevelopment” based on “a small and standardized list of selected indices – gross national product (GNP), savings, investment, population density, production, input/output ratios, and balance of payments…” (39). Gupta’s primary thrust is that these indicators of development were not merely quantitative but became a constitutive part of individual identities given the “life stages of personal growth serve as the metonym for the growth of the nation”. In other words, economic development has and continues to have an incredibly strong relationship with *human* development, especially in determining the kind of educational needs citizens must possess such that they can drive the nation from “childhood” to “adulthood” based on the teleological model of progress modeled upon the West. And indeed, the *India Rising* and *India Shining* discourses are still founded upon the question of national development, an obsessive attention to India’s continued progress in the 21st Century, one which might have different precepts but which still leaves the underlying assumption – “that we need to develop” – unchanged, albeit now reflecting the infrastructural and human projects that are necessary to navigate the ever more rapidly globalizing world. To borrow a phrase from Piot (1999), India and those living in India, whether urban or rural, elite or non-elite, should be considered as “existing within global development” just as they must also be considered as “existing within modernity”, the term always juxtaposed with “tradition”, its binary opposite in the postcolonial era (Piot, 1999, 1). In other words, and this is key with regards to my own study, *everyone is part of the global development story* i.e. active producers of what development is, and no one is merely a passive “receiver” of changes imposed from the outside, even if what and how they produce this discourse is shaped by their social positioning and all of the power inequalities that lie therein.
India’s rapid rise in global economic status has only made the co-occurring increases in social inequality more visible. For example it was ranked #135 out of 187 countries on the UN Human Development Index, which is the “human” counterpart to the economic indices laid forth by the World Bank, determined based on quantitative appraisals regarding the ability for individuals to (1) have a long and healthy life, (2) be knowledgeable and (3) have a decent standard of living. In particular, the UNHDI measures the second factor by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age, making obvious the need for education-as-development. At the same time, much has been made about the significant population living in poverty in India, a number that can range from 250 million to 450 million depending on the metric being used, and how to alleviate this poverty in India (Gupta, 2012; Roy, 2010). Clearly, then, the benefits of India’s growth have been uneven at best, a blight upon the otherwise pristine story of progress, and whose visibility has promoted a different development model intended to alleviate these wrongs.

The former President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a figure who will return to my story again in Chapter 5, presented the most concrete version of the 21st century national development agenda in his books, India 2020 (1996) and Ignited Minds (2002), noteworthy because they were directed towards India’s youth, implicitly mapping their development into adults, with particular skills and capabilities, onto the final phase of India’s development into a “developed country”. In Ignited Minds, he begins with a story of his interactions with a twelfth standard child who he asks, “Who is our enemy” and who in turn replies, “Our enemy is poverty”. The story sets off a series of chapters on the appropriate education for an Indian child, independent of region or locality, one who will help to rid the country of poverty through his or her technological knowledge and ethical and spiritual learnings, which he sums up as, “The development of education and healthcare will yield benefits of smaller families and a more efficient workforce. It is the key to employability and social development” (Kalam, 2002, 157). Perhaps not surprisingly, Kalam takes advise from Azim Premji, the billionaire founder of Bangalore-based tech giant Wipro, who also founded the Azim Premji Foundation, an NGO dedicated to education-based development all over India and whose university at which I taught during my year and half in India. In a chapter called “the Knowledge Society” he re-frames the goals of education within the needs of the technological-driven private sector. He writes:

A common thread runs through the experience of these institutions. It is that we can deliver high-technology systems in spite of control and denial regimes. The presence of a competitive environment, networking capabilities, wealth generation with social concern and above all
ignited minds of the young: these are very important ingredients for building the knowledge economy.”

Kalam’s statement assumes: first, that India should build towards a knowledge economy; second, that the delivery of high technology systems is the central and key element in this knowledge economy; three, those who participate in the technology sector have the key knowledge necessary for youth and education in contemporary India; four, that government restrictions, here referenced by “control and denial regimes” are debilitating, but thankfully can be overcome. But perhaps most interesting is Kalam’s phrasing, “wealth generation with a social concern”, a statement that hits at the heart of India’s current development model and sees the potential for the eradication of poverty and social ills through private industry, which, at the same time, will benefit these very same industries, a circular model of social justice linked to capitalism that creates its own justification. In sum, this narrative of India’s current development, especially in education, is centrally related to private sector and technological know-how in response to and despite the ineffectiveness of State-led development.

There are a few especially strong examples of this new development model in education. First, there has been a large increase in private schooling in India, once only associated with the urban elite, with recent studies showing a proliferation of private schools along with increased aspirations for private schooling in villages (Aggarwal, 2000; Tooley, 2003; Srivatsava, 2007). For example, James Tooley, a professor of Education Policy from the University of Newcastle and a consultant for the World Bank, wrote a book in collaboration with Pauline Dixon, also at Newcastle, entitled, *Private Schools for the Poor: a case study from India*. The book has gained notoriety for its enthusiastic portrayal of low-cost private schools, which they argue should become the standard model for education, not just in India, but globally. His approach became a point of debate throughout my fieldwork, especially with Ramaswamy, the aforementioned Founder of Adhyaapaka, who lambasted the argument for its superficial understanding of the Indian schooling context and failed to acknowledge that most school age children (around 80%)

---

2 The effects of the privatization of education have not been limited to K-10 education, but have also been felt in higher education as well. Nakassis (2010), for example, writes, “Liberalization has also resulted in changes to colleges. In Tamil Nadu, the privatization of college education and the increase in engineering colleges (Fuller and Narasimha 2006), semi-private “autonomous” colleges and self-financing programs, and “parallel colleges” and private tutoring centers (of which spoken English learning centers are a huge part) (Lukose 2009) has catered to and created an increase in the demand for higher education across social community, sex, and region (urban, rural) (Chitnis 2003)” (9).

3 Sarangapani (2009) criticizes these privatization advocates, arguing that as compared to government schools “there is no credible evidence to prove that the education offered by budget private schools is comparable, leave alone viable or desirable” (67). Jain and Dholakia (2010) respond to Sarangapani, again claiming that private schools can and do provide better education than their government counterparts. Only highlighting the highly contested terrain of the privatization of education in India today.
still went to government schools⁴. Arguments like Tooley’s, he would warn, could only exacerbate the problem and would actually obfuscate the education inequities faced by the majority of India’s youth, who could never partake in private education however low the cost. Ramaswamy’s biggest fear was that so many people were taking Tooley’s ideas as truth, never having set foot in any private or government schools.

Second, corporate social responsibility (CSR) mandates started in 2013 have stipulated that any company with a net worth of over 500 crore rupees must provide at least 2% of their average revenue over the past three years on CSR activities (Ghuliani, 2013)⁵. Third, and most important for my own study, has been the incredible proliferation of NGOs in India, with a majority, like Adhyaapaka, working in the education or health sectors. In 2014, the Central Bureau of Investigation reported that India has over 2 million NGOs, or 1 NGO for every 600 Indian citizens (Johari, 2014), the most NGOs in any nation-state the world-over. The proliferation of NGOs in India has itself been linked to the expanding CSR sector as more funds become available for social sector initiatives beyond those that have traditionally been conferred by international funders, both aid organizations and multinational corporations via charitable trusts. These circuits of funding that make up the backbone of development interventions are what Roy (2010) terms “poverty capital” and there are moments in this ethnography when these circuits emerge, connecting global and national funders with local actors and producing particular dilemmas therein, especially in Chapter 4, when I consider how an NGOs funding stream begins to shape how it can or cannot intervene in schools.

Recent anthropological scholarship has shown how NGOs sit at the nexus of market and moral economies, drawing funds from corporations (Gill, 2000) and deriving their principles from finance and management (Robinson, 2001; Roy, 2010; Ong, 2011). At the same time, they disseminate these values to those who they seek to develop, especially those who work in education and therefore have direct relationships with students in schools, the contemporary version of “development as identity” (Foucault, 1997; Gupta, 1998; Pandian, 2008). They have been an important site for research given that they have been traditionally thought to drive such globally-circulating moral sentiments (Shiva, 1989; Kilby, 2011; Redfield, 2008; Sharma, 2009).

⁴ http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/In-India-96-5-kids-go-to-school-Survey/articleshow/7288637.cms
My own set of ethnographic stories begins at the heart of these education-as-development concerns, but relies on the specificity of my interactions with a single NGO, Adhyaapaka\(^6\), based in Bangalore, but that worked with school communities outside of it. Indeed, part of the attraction of my ethnographic approach is that I was able to observe exactly who is working in the development space, what their goals are, and how they go about intervening in the field. Such an endeavor is, of course, not a generalizable one, given the complexity of any single NGO, in its personnel, vision/mission, and connection to the circuits of poverty capital, and yet, what I hope my study illustrates at one level are the global and technological entanglements that shape how an NGO can do its work, if the particularities of these entanglements are unique to Adhyaapaka.

At the same time, studies of development, especially NGO-based development, have been limited by their focus on the NGO itself, on its vision and mission, and on what its particular intervention is, a focus that has, inadvertently, led to narrow discussions of how development is experienced, ultimately framing these experiences within India’s new economic configuration that leaves out much of the contested terrain upon which development interventions occur in practice (Sharma, 2009). As Sharma (2009) writes, with regards to her ethnography of a government-run NGO in Uttar Pradesh, “one-sided pictures of development allows little room for examining how various actors engage with development discourse…” and that her ethnography is “not so much about a unified smoothly-functioning hegemonic development discourse but about contestations, ruptures, and counterhegemonic moves” (xxxiii-xxiv). Following Sharma, my own work attempts to excavate the differences in how members of an NGO produce and experience development. In the case of Adhyaapaka, the heads of the organization and the grassroots personnel differed in what they desired, aspired to, and expected from their participation in Adhyaapaka’s particular development project.

However, because everyone experiences education-as-development from different positions, I have placed these NGO narratives in relation to another set of narratives from one school site in which Adhyaapaka works, Adavisandra school, in order to resist the potential of a study of NGO-based development to inadvertently overestimate the impact and importance of such interventions within communities which they serve (Sriprakash, 2013). Indeed, part of what this study shows is just how little importance Adhyaapaka’s intervention has on Adavisandra and the overall “thinness” of their relationship (to foreshadow a concept that I will use later in this introduction), embedded as the school community is in the particular economic, political, and

---

\(^6\) I have used pseudonyms for all organizations, people, and places in this dissertation. I’ve used the term Adhyaapaka, which means teacher in Kannada, here as a light reminder as to where the organization works and to harken, at least loosely, to its real name.
cultural dynamics of a village. What I discovered, inadvertently, was an alternative shape that global development takes when seen through the stories of teachers and students, equally tied to the idea of a changing India, but inflected with aspirations and commitments that reflected the unique lived experiences of those who were participating in schooling in the village.

And yet, these experiences, those of NGO personnel and those of teachers and students, are connected, the Kanakapura road providing a physical indicator of this fact, linking Bangalore city, in which Adhyaaapaka is headquartered, with schools like Adavisandra that sit outside the city. Indeed, it is the relationship between the urban and the rural that mediates the experience of education-as-development, whether from an office in Bangalore or from the village, creating both the basis for and the constraints on changing aspirations, and which will be the connective tissue in each of the stories that I tell.

Kalam’s discussion above foreshadows this attention to Bangalore in the development narrative, as he explicitly references one of Bangalore’s biggest tech companies, Wipro, who also happens to have founded one of the largest NGOs in all of India, Azim Premji Foundation (APF), who works in schools all over Karnataka state, both urban and rural. For example, when I first started thinking about development in India in 2011, I worked with an APF team in Mandya, a town further down the Kanakapura road and closer to Mysore, Bangalore’s neighboring city. It was then that I began to see NGO interventions as connected to Bangalore’s rapid growth into a “World City”. Bangalore has been considered the “Silicon Valley of India”, the new IT hub whose population has doubled in the last fifteen years while also tripling in physical size over the past ten years as it seeks to make room for the ever increasing number of companies and people, both from across the globe and from neighboring villages, who continue to migrate to the city seeking opportunities, sometimes imagined and sometimes concrete (Heitzman, 2004).

Bangalore’s airport is one of the most obvious markers of its new “World City” status, inaugurated in 2008 as a culmination of Bangalore’s emergence, now the third busiest airport in India and by far the busiest in all of South India (meaning Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu). In other words, the narrative of India’s development is incomplete without an attention to the city, and Bangalore has been one of the key cities in imagining India’s global urban and technological future.

Cities have been characterized as nodes in an emergent global capitalist network, where material processes and new infrastructures are developed to ‘tap into’ global economic flows (Sassen, 2001; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Castells, 2010). Such scholarly works emphasize the transnational and cosmopolitan character of the global city (Batliwala and Brown, 2006; Keck
and Sikkink, 1998). Other scholars have focused on the inequality that these global networks have produced (Davis, 2006; Holston, 2009; Appadurai, 2002; Chatterjee, 2006). In order to combat monolithic representations of globalization’s effect on the city, Ong (2011:3) proposes the concept of worlding practices, “an array of often overlooked urban initiatives that compete for world recognition in the midst of inter-city rivalry and globalized contingency”. This methodological reorientation calls for an analytics of assemblage i.e. an attention to emergent rather than predetermined systems of meaning (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Latour, 2005; Collier and Ong, 2005).

Bangalore was a key site to analyze emerging worlding practices given just how recent its expansion has been, and beyond the aforementioned airport, we can also think with a new road project to illustrate its growth. Goldman (2011) undertakes a detailed excavation of the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructural Corridor (BMIC), a project that was primarily sponsored by a US-based investor, NICE, and whose ambition was to create a series of circular highways on the perimeters of Bangalore along with a highway that would connect Bangalore to its closest neighboring city, Mysore. The first portion of highway development was completed in 2010 and I pass over the NICE road each time I’d drive along the Kanakapura Road and, on occasion, would take the NICE Road, paying its 100-rupee fee each time, to pass from the Kanakapura Road to areas both east and west of it. The NICE Road has been especially controversial because, as Goldman notes,

“The 130km expressway will become a catalyst for regional urbanization with NICE building five new private townships and multiple industrial parks on agricultural, village, and forested land... Besides reducing travel time, it will also denude up to 7,000 acres of forested land and drain eight lakes. The government chose to lease the land at a controversially low subsidy of Rs.10 per acre per year (in 2010, Rs.45 equaled US$1)... Under the law of eminent domain, based on the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the government can acquire land from farmers if it is for a project that is for the “good of the nation,” but it must offer a fair market price (D’Rozario n.d.). The state-level Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB), however, offers a relative pittance to the non-elite members of rural communities, exercising its right to choose the depressed rural market price and not the upscale world-city market price as its marker. The difference comprises “the rent” that shapes and fuels the new urban economy and its governance structure. The rationale for offering farmers a low price relative to land’s new urban value is based on the belief that many of Karnataka’s farmers have become quite poor, in debt, and judged as uncompetitive” (Goldman, 2011, 243).

The project’s particular development strategy rests on the boundary between the urban and the rural, a boundary that sets the monetary value of land. First, even as the road crosses through Karnataka’s rural heartland, its official name, the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructural Corridor, itself implies a revaluation of the area between Bangalore and Mysore, de-emphasizing its
agricultural capacity and emphasizing its instrumental value as urban connection; it becomes, within this logic merely “space” (or a “development frontier” to use Tsing’s terms) rather than complex historical “places”. This revaluation is produced during construction itself as over 200,000 farmers have been displaced (and more will be continue to be displaced) as commercial enclaves, conceived as part of the road project, get erected along the road (Saldanha, 2007).

Still, whether or not these types of initiatives are intended to help Bangalore compete globally and whether or not such initiatives seek to erase non-city places, they are always still in conversation, the rural exerting force on the urban and its “global future”. The area around the road, as noted, is not empty - people live there and have strong associations with these places. Therefore, it is not surprising that farmers began protesting their physical and forced displacement from the land, traveling to urban centers and standing in front of the town halls in Bangalore, or even the houses of local politicians, and demanding just compensation for their land. Ultimately, the road, which had been conceived and planned in 1995, is still incomplete.

At the same time, urban-rural linkage is not just witnessed in infrastructural projects, but also in human development projects, in, for example, the dissemination of particular urban values to those who live and work in rural areas. In other words, development is as much about psychosocial changes, in what people aspire for and desire as it is about material change itself. Indeed, part of Kalam’s emphasis above is on the need for those who are not in urban India to be educated such that they can assist in India’s global urban future. He writes, in a passage that I reference in Chapter 5 during a lesson that I observe in Adavisandra:

Bright young entrepreneurs have energized the national technology scene. Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad are hubs of business activities. But even though the IT sector is a very visible area of success and has brought in some capital investment in terms of overall development this is not enough. Even if you take up the IT area as a mission, manpower is the most important need. Those living away from the cities must also have access to a good education to join the talent pool.

The rural in this classification is named only as a “ghost”, in the reference to those “living away from the city” who must be educated such that they too can help in the urban-based technology projects that are the basis for India’s development.

Anthropological studies of India’s growing digitality have remained quite limited, focused mostly on the IT sector itself, showing how IT workers navigate their relationship to technology and globality (Aneesh, 2010; Nadeem, 2011) and the effects of these new jobs on their sense of national, regional, and ethnic identities (Biao, 2008; Amrute, 2008; Varma, 2007). The ethnographic film series Coding Culture (2008), directed by Sonti and Upadhya, is an
especially important Bangalore-based contribution to this discourse, three short films each which follow a different group of IT professionals in the city as they are differentially integrated into the global economy. These studies (and films) take the digital in its most limited sense, focusing on those working directly with computer technologies and leaving out the myriad of other forms that digitality takes i.e. television, mobile technologies, computer software, social media, and also do not link the burgeoning technology sectors with changes in values and aspirations for people and places not directly within the urban-based technology sector. In one sense, discussions of media, traditionally considered its own field, might be re-framed as part of the digital, television and filmic consumption practices one of the most basic aspects of how those outside of cities partake in digitality on their now-digitally enabled televisions and mobile phones.\footnote{I follow Horst and Miller (2012) in defining the digital as “everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to, the binary – that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s” which create new technologies but also modify older ones, for example television, which has now gone digital. Anthropologically speaking, these digital tools create their own digital cultures, one of which I am arguing is a culture of development influenced by the technology sector (5). The digital also does the work of eliminating the false binary with between the virtual and the real, seeing mediation as a constitutive form of everyday life, whether it be technological or otherwise (13).}

I argue that this persistent emphasis on information technology in India is foundational to understanding contemporary development initiatives in India as well, a newfound emphasis on “digital development” in which those who are not in urban areas should begin to place value on technology-based occupations and those who work in the technology sector are seen as de-facto experts in how development interventions in education should look (Keniston and Kumar, 2004; Tacchi, 2012).\footnote{In India, as in the USA, all television signals have been changed from analog to digital signals, a point that will come up again in Chapter 6.} This particular emphasis on technology was an ongoing thread in my study, in both how I was able to draw together global connections via internet and media excavation and in the stories that were told by NGO personnel, teachers, and students, many of which included mentions of digital influences on values and future aspirations or technology-based reasoning for particular interventions. Indeed, part of why I chose to study Adhyaapaka Foundation was because their Founder Ramaswamy and CEO Prakash had each left jobs in the technology sector, Ramaswamy moving into education from his work in chemical engineering and Prakash moving into education from his previous work as a computer engineer. These backgrounds, as I will discuss in Chapter Two, had a central influence on what and how they chose to intervene in the

\footnote{Keniston (2004) writes, “The ‘digital divide’ is the subject of almost daily reports and conferences by international agencies, national and local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private foundations. But since when have desperately poor people had an urgent ‘need’ for a computer or an Internet connection? (20). Tacchi’s (2012) work describes more explicitly the link between ICTs and development, arguing that concepts such as ‘digital inequality’ or ‘digital inclusion’ (Dimaggio and Hargittai, 2001; Selwyn, 2004)” are more useful ways “to describe the relationship between ICTs and development to those who are more focused on development itself” (227).}
education space. In other words, while not every story told here begins and ends with a discussion of technology, the development story that this ethnography undertakes is one founded upon the changes wrought by contemporary digitality, in the kinds of aspirations and ways of being that are influenced by new ways of consuming information and partaking in a world that is ever more global; a story, just to reinforce the point, that everyone is a part of in differential and highly personal ways.¹⁰

This is also to say that, at least in India, any global-digital future is always a “global-urban-rural future” and throughout this study I mark instances of urban-rural linkage and boundary, always as a means to understand how individuals perceive development-based change. This is why part of my study remains rooted, at least physically, in the village school, with teachers and students who provide an alternative development gaze, equally global in aspiration, but markedly different than that posited by the NGO personnel working from the city.

Adavisandra, a village with a population of 1072 as of 2011 population census, is, like much of the rural peripheries of Bangalore, deeply rooted in sericulture, producing silk cocoons that begin a silk commodity chain that moves from the village to market towns where the cocoons are sold, to factories in these towns in which the cocoons are spun into silk before moving on to the textile factories that dot Bangalore’s inner peripheries. Unlike the cosmopolitanism associated with Bangalore and many of the towns in Ramanagara district (where many of Karnataka’s 10% Muslim minority live), Adavisandra remains almost exclusively Hindu, “Kannadiga”, a term used to describe those who speak Kannada and which is also associated with a shared set of cultural practices, and come from the Vokkaliga caste, categorized as an Other Backwards Caste (OBC) by the Indian government, the primary agricultural caste in South Karnataka, and the second largest agricultural caste group in all of Karnataka behind Lingayats, who are concentrated more often in North Karnataka, though the teachers from the school come from all over Karnataka and from differing cultural and religious backgrounds, lest we too easily group the school and the community in which the school is located.

Anthropological studies have typically separated the urban from the rural and part of the reason for this separation is because of the urge to “bind” our studies, a central part of how the research imagination is constructed, productive in so far as without some focus i.e. binding, one cannot come up with any research insights at all. At the same time, when a study’s boundaries are physical i.e. created around a particular place or set of places, we are left with some glaring

¹⁰ I follow Horst and Miller (2012), who draw from Ginsburg and Tacchi, in “asserting that any and every social fraction or marginal community has an equal right to be seen as the exemplification of digital culture” (11).
blindspots in our research. In this case, when scholars create a category of “urban objects” they seem to presuppose that the contemporary logic and practices of urbanization results in objects that are somehow purely “urban”. This presupposition can lead to a conceptual blindspot, which 1) does not allow one to study the emergent relations between the urban and the rural i.e. particular urban-rural linkages which are both the result of and lead to processes of urbanization, and 2) prevents an exploration of social processes, occurring in ‘rural’ places, that may be the result of development but do not fit into the neat physical confines of the urban. Ong and Roy’s (2011) concept of worlding practices, for example, suffers from this tendency, placing an emphasis on the projection of the world class city imaginary at the expense of the other myriad of practices that are equally global, but also link the urban and the rural.

In the case of the anthropology of India, this separation has been particularly stark as, traditionally, ethnographic studies of India have focused almost exclusively on the village, drawing from the imagined centrality of the village in the early political thought of, most prominently, M.K. Gandhi and Nehru, as well as the earlier colonialist representations of village India as India, focused their attention on ‘salvaging’ the village (a goal which has many resonances with Boas’ anthropological project) from the changes brought on by modernity (Nair, 2005; Srinivas, 1976). As a response, recent ethnography’s have focused on Indian urbanization and transformation, an important corrective to an overemphasis on village ways of life, a corrective which has created a new set of anxieties about whether “villages still matter” (Mines and Yazgi, 2010). Mines and Yazgi claim:

That something – the village – has been cast aside perhaps more due to academic fashion than any other reason. After all, fields are ploughed, oxen washed in the tank, and seedlings transplanted; workers, women, and others circulate along with their money and their ideas; urbanites ‘return’ to negotiate their village-based networks; NGOs advocate neo-Gandhian villagization agendas; and image(s) of village(r)s feed fiction works from literature to cinema. They shape their own and others’ political, social, and cultural worlds as well. In many ways, ‘the village’ is an integral aspect of this world-shaping activity (2).

The problem, of course, is that each group of studies maintain a separation, the primacy of one coming at the expense of the other, which does not help to explain the complex changes occurring in India today. Even in Mines and Yazgi’s discussion above, the village and the city are in relation, urbanites, for example, returning to their native villages to negotiate their village-based networks. Take as another example the very first chapter of Nair’s (2005) ethnography of Bangalore, The Promise of the Metropolis, which she begins with the question “Where Does the City Begin?” The question indicates the anxiety associated with bounding her study, of trying to separate the city of Bangalore from its surrounding areas even as she is simultaneously compelled
to define and delineate the borders of a study that can be termed purely about Bangalore city.

Whatever the reason, by creating this conceptual separation, the anthropology of India has yet to thoroughly engage with the ways in which worlding practices *link the urban and the rural*. This weakness in scholarship is especially striking given the noted blurring of demarcation between the urban and the rural itself (Harvey, 2012; de Haan, 1994; Nair, 2005; Biao, 2007). For example, Raymond Williams famously wrote that the city and the countryside were inextricably linked in the modernist imagination, through which “we become conscious of a central part of our experience and of the crisis of our society” (Williams, 1973, 289). In *Writings on the City*, Lefebvre (1996) sketches the changing relationship between the city and the country over the course of history. In his outline he argues that simple characterizations of ‘blurring between’ or ‘separation of’ lack the analytical precision to capture both the material forms and the representational forms - both ideological and imaginary - which shape urban-rural relations. Harvey (2012: 145) characterizes this changing relationship as the “urban-rural continuum” and uses examples from La Paz, Bolivia to show how peasant populations circulate within city regions, re-shaping urban practices and using urban space to fight for particular rural interests. A few anthropological studies have also explored urban-rural linkages, showing how rural ideas and practices exert influence on urban areas (Ferguson, 1992), how urban labor migrations impact rural families (Murray, 1981), how monetary flows connect the rural, the urban, and the global (Biao, 2006), how students from cities forge new relationships with the countryside (Tsing, 2005), how villagers no longer migrate to cities, but rather have cities migrate to them (Guldin, 2001; Yeboah, 2003), and how media and consumer culture changes values in rural communities (Sreekumar, 2007; Rajagopal 2001).

Building on such studies, my study addresses the dynamic interactions between the urban and the rural in a post-liberalization India. What are the changing migration patterns, values, and aspirations that link the urban and the rural? How might these linkages be reflective of global patterns of development? In what ways does digital technology shape how these linkages are forged?

The reality is that Bangalore and villages like Adavisandra are entangled with one another, *both* re-configured within the contemporary “digital development” moment, and in the next section I will discuss how these changes can be viewed through an attention to value and the particular affective states that changes in value generate, a key to understanding the contemporary development condition.

* * *
On Value and Affect

My study furthers two concepts, the affect of development and value migrations, which together provide one means by which to analyze the current state of global-digital movement, interaction, and change in contemporary India. While my study focuses on the region just south of Bangalore city and on the urban-rural linkages that produce sociohistorically, regionally specific instantiations of these concepts, it is also my belief that these framings may be useful for those interested in linking the ethnographic – saturated with the experiential, affective, and subjective – with the economic, political, and cultural context in which contemporary experience takes place.¹¹

My initial interest in the questions of value and affect began while reading Fassin’s (2012) Humanitarian Reason, a text in which he attempts to outline a general theory of humanitarianism in the 21st Century, an imagined global moral community congealed around the circulation of images (mostly on online spaces) of suffering and destitution. He argues that in order for humanitarian organizations – supranational, state-driven, and nongovernmental – to justify and legitimate interventions, “moral sentiments” i.e. “the emotions that direct our attention to suffering of others and make us want to remedy them”, have become essential (1). These moral sentiments do their work by linking “affect with values” (Fassin, 2012, 2) and it was this linking of affect and value that seemed to be reflected in my own ethnographic work with education NGOs and schools in India and in which I saw an opportunity to conceptualize the practices of a much wider array of development organizations, perhaps not always directly humanitarian, but still deeply preceded by a moral rationale couched in social change rhetoric within the sphere of education.

And yet, my own ethnographic experience with Indian education NGOs seemed to paint a far more complex picture of value-affect than Fassin’s theorization, one that did not seem to begin and end with the paradoxes derived from the relationship between a human beings ability to empathize, show compassion, or show solidarity. Indeed, Fassin’s theory seemed, in some sense, to take the meaning of “value”, as it pertained to humanitarian organizations, as “altruism”, a

¹¹ Here I am drawing on the work of Ramos Zayas (2012) who writes, “I am not in search of the "essence" of emotional, passionate, or attitudinal modes of consciousness; nor do I want to delineate their dynamics as if they were independent of the circumstances in which they occur. In this sense, a phenomenological approach is tempered by the political economic context in which affect is grounded, so that a "natural" or "intimate" attitude is not extrapolated from the always-already racial projects in which they are ensconced. Like Crapanzano (2004,103-10), I question the possibility of a full phenomenological reduction given that we are embedded in a linguistically endorsed universe that prevents a prerreflexive moment that is fully divorced from its endorsement. While affect may have its own linguistic and cultural logic, it is based on experiences of a socially encumbered personhood, not simply a cultural interior-focused "self." A focus on structure in relation to phenomenology allows the possibility not only for different modes of consciousness to be produced in different linguistic or cultural contexts, but to recognize that these differences are grounded and constitutive of particular political economic and historical conditions of inequality” (285).
disambiguous definition that did not do the work of excavating the highly textured derivations of value—economic, national, cultural, religious, moral, and especially technological—that overlap and drive development action.

The ambiguity in Fassin’s usage is reflective of a more general critique of the use of the term “value” in scholarly literature, many times presumed to have a shared meaning. Take, for example, the use of the term in the aforementioned article by Goldman’s Speculating on the Next World City, an article in which Goldman describes the parameters of Bangalore’s expansion into a “World City”. In the wake of the United States financial meltdown in 2008, Goldman (2011) writes, “...investors were looking elsewhere for ‘value’ and one of their first stops has been India” (230). The use of scare-quotes around the term ‘value’ in Goldman’s article suggests an ambiguity that he is struggling to parse: what type of value and for whom? Besides this particular use of the term value, Goldman also references value in the context of (1) “new urban value” to describe how rural land is reimagined for investors and (2) “undervalued public spaces for privatized value creation” to describe the conversion of small towns into large entertainment complexes. Taken together, Goldman’s articulation of value implicitly bundles market value with private, urban-global valuation by a particular group of transnational elites i.e. global investors who could no longer count on the United States or, more specifically the US housing market, to receive returns on their investments.

What is most striking about Goldman’s powerful discussion is how reliant it is on a structural model of capitalism, in which capitalism is exclusively about profit maximization and value is taken as a gloss for a commodity’s exchange-value, in this case land itself functioning as that commodity. Bear, Ho, Tsing, and Yanagisako (2015) argue that this analytical problem pervades the work of scholarship that take Marx, Weber, and Foucault as their principle theoretical bases, and therefore neglects the many heterogeneous ways in which capitalism functions empirically. In response, they call for an ethnographically-driven “generative capitalism” that:

“does not just involve the mapping of a structural capitalist logic. Rather, instead of a political economy ornamented by inequalities of gender and race, feminist scholars showed us a system emerging from histories of difference, including gender and race...we turn to feminist substantivist traditions within anthropology in which the specificity and multiplicity of power relations shape both the contexts and forms of systemic processes, and thus are essential to

---

12 Spivak provides a classic example of this in her theorization of value: “Inheritance in the male line by way of patronymic legitimacy, indirectly sustaining the complex lines of class-formation, is, for example, a case where the money-form, and that of the ego-form in the dialectic of the phallus, support each other and lend the subject the attributes of class- and gender-identity” (Spivak, 1996, 112)
every level of analysis... Our focus is on how the generative powers of the body, spirit, and world are imagined, deployed, and experienced in contemporary capitalism. All of this is not just ethnographic detail, but also the basis of political and practical generalization” (Bear, Ho, Tsing, Yanagisako, 2015).

It is with this view in mind that I turn to an anthropological theorization of value-affect, one which attends to the “body, spirit, and world” in relation to value’s economic, political, and moral dimensions, especially important given the focus on human development and education in this study, within specific histories of difference that are not epiphenomenon of capitalism but which are constitutive of both the contexts and forms that capitalism can take; differences that include gender, race, but also, in the Indian context, rurality, urbanity, caste, religion, regional, and national identities. I do not start from the premise that value “already exists” in a particular form, economic or otherwise, but I instead understand value as “a way in which people make sense of their relations in a specific setting” (Ortiz, 2013, 66). In this case, the setting I am concerned with is the region outside of Bangalore, in the NGO and school settings that reflect varying conceptions of education-as-development and, in turn, generate specific forms of value; what we might term a “generative development” that takes social justice as a constitutive value, but is also enmeshed in capital-based relations of power. In Chapter 5, I provide one example of this form of generative development in the example of the midday meals at Adavisandra, a national development initiative that sought to increase student enrollment in schools by providing free meals. In attending to the women who make the meals at the school I find an example of the emergent social relations generated based on the negotiation of gendered and class positioning.

The anthropological tradition has attempted to map its own particular theory of value, also fraught with a similar ambiguity that has led some anthropologists to conclude that a theory of anthropological value has, ultimately, been a failure (Otto and Willeslev, 2013). Graeber (2001) has perhaps been the most ardent advocate of a truly anthropological theory of value (for him, it is “value that makes the world go round”) and he begins with Kluckhohn’s definition of value as:

The central assumption though was that values are “conceptions of the desirable”—conceptions which play some sort of role in influencing the choices people make between different possible courses of action (1951a: 395). The key term here is “desirable.” The desirable refers not simply to what people actually want—in practice, people want all sorts of things. Values are ideas about what they ought to want. They are the criteria by which people judge which desires they consider legitimate and worthwhile and which they do not. Kluckhohn also insisted that these were not just abstract philosophies of life but ideas that had direct effects on people’s actual behavior. The problem was to determine how. (Graeber, 2001, 3).
Its this idea of what one desired in relation to what one “ought to want” that drove my own ethnographic fieldwork as I moved through NGO and school spaces, the ought always suggesting potentialities for the future (the basis for affect, as I will discuss below), but driving present action. One method by which I was able to seek out how these types of values influenced behavior was by studying a bundle of affectively-laden, future-oriented concepts, including aspirations, dreams, and hopes: what did people aspire and hope for and why? How were these aspirations situated within the particular sociohistorical context of Karnataka and Bangalore? I draw from Chua’s (2014) work in this line of reasoning and questioning, in her argument that attending to aspiration “offers a powerful lens onto affective and experiential dimensions of development and global change in the postcolonial world” (3). In my own study, I focus on these aspirations, dreams, and hopes as they reflect the prerogatives of contemporary development.

Critically, these affective, future-oriented conceptions were never only focused on the Self. In fact, and perhaps because of the nature of development intervention, the question of aspiration was always focused on both the Self and Others, which has also been historically, as Pandian argues, one of the central ethical tenants of development (Pandian, 2010). Moore (2011) terms this the “ethical imagination: the way in which technologies of the self, forms of subjectification and imagined relations with others lead to novel ways of approaching social transformation” (15). For example, Ramaswamy, the founder of the education NGO Adhyaapaka, had his own aspirations for Karnataka’s youth. He was focused on getting them to pass their 10th standard exams such that they could get jobs in Bangalore or elsewhere in the country. The premise for his particular intervention was undoubtedly pragmatic and moral, he would tell me matter-of-factly that India’s future was urban and that agricultural life was no longer tenable. Rural youth, he argued, necessarily needed to shift their own aspirations away from traditional occupations because of the material changes wrought on their communities and, whether one found these material changes problematic or not, it was a moral obligation to help students pass

---

13 Desirability in late capitalism also has another important conceptual starting point, that derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Summarizing their position, Udupa writes, “I borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical revision of the concept of ‘desire’, which steers it clear of the psychoanalytical and modernist (universalist) underpinnings, to locate it firmly within the social field. Deleuze and Guattari recuperate ‘desire’ from the psychoanalytical assumption of a ‘fundamental lack’, which according to Freud and Lacan, constitutes the subjectivity of an individual striving to overcome the absence of the object. Turning this logic on its head, Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire is not the effect of lack, but the inverse. The primary gesture of their thesis is to emphasize the productivity and materiality of desire that is constitutive of the social field, and that ‘social production is...desiring-production...under determinate conditions’. Deleuze and Guattari locate desire within the cadences of capitalist economy to show how they provoke and manage the interlinked phenomena of lack and desire in the face of production excess” (Udupa, 2015, 16)

14 Chua’s work focuses specifically on suicide as the lens through which she seeks to excavate these dimensions of development and global change. In my study, the lens is the question of education-as-development itself.
out of their secondary education such that they would have occupational choice and possibility. When discussing these issues, Ramaswamy had a visceral reaction whenever anyone questioned this view, snapping back that any more altruistic ideas about the nature of learning or critiques of the current politico-economic structure in India were always irrelevant until the immediate, practical needs of children in the country were being addressed.

At the same time, the need to “develop Others” was also a call for Ramaswamy to focus on his own developmental Self, on the kinds of knowledge about the NGO sector and education more generally he would need in order to help those he was working with. Ramaswamy had never worked in the education sector before his retirement from the private sector, a move that he made based on his desire to “do something good in the world”. Given his altruistic motivations and his lack of knowledge of education, Ramaswamy was and is constantly developing himself, through field visits, reading about education, speaking with others who work as part of the education-as-development sector, burdened by his own underdevelopment within the new sector that he has made his calling.

But what might be most important about this first salvo into value is the clear overlap of moral and economic value, in a moral justification that is derived from a pragmatic understanding of what is an economically expedient occupational choice. The work of Ortiz (2013) is especially helpful towards this end. Working as an assistant analyst, he was able to observe the ways in which financial managers, investing in asset-backed securities, made sense of their own practices through complex and interrelated notions of financial, political, global, and moral values. These ethnographic insights argues Ortiz, “shows that everyday practice in the financial industry challenges the opposition, found in Weber and in neo-liberalism, between an economic value (in the singular) and moral and political values (in the plural)” (Ortiz, 2013, 64). Similarly, Ramaswamy’s moral reasoning is “bundled” with monetary concerns premised on the division of the urban and rural, in what can and should be valued within the constellation of imagined market forces driving the reconfiguration of Karnataka (and Indian) society. From a theory building perspective, such ethnographic insights are also what challenge both Fassin’s overdetermining focus on the moral sentiments that undergird the actions of humanitarian organizations and the structurally overdetermined theorizings of capitalism, opening the space for “generative development”.

As importantly, starting with the idea of “generative development” and its relation to value explicitly connotes a process of movement, change, and re-configuration, which is central to understanding the functioning of development in contemporary India. This sense of value and
movement also serves as a natural critique to older structural notions of value that were used as a proxy by which to understand the bounded, homogenous cultural Other. In the case of India, the most prominent version of this sensibility emerged in the work of Louis Dumont (1980), whose study of value in India started and ended with the idea that hierarchy and a value system based on caste hierarchy specifically, was the key method by which to understand the unique mindset of “Indians”, equated with Hindus in his analysis. As described by Graeber “…one of Dumont’s most notorious arguments is that the Indian caste system cannot, by definition, change. Its structure is fixed; therefore, it can either continue, or it can collapse and be replaced by an entirely different system: like a chair eaten away by termites, it will maintain the same form until it falls apart (1970:219)” (Graeber, 2001, 20).

It is with this critique of structuralism in mind that I deploy the concept of “value migrations”, a term that takes as a given the interplay between physical and non-physical (see: digital) movements, the constant emergence of new forms of sociality, and obviates the fact that whether or not values move through the physical migration of people from one context to another, or by way of media circulations, new infrastructures, changing aspirations, or a mix thereof, they always still carry intersecting markers of belonging that are traditionally associated with “culture” – ethnic, regional, religious, national, gendered identities that still tether and constrain how these values move and influence who can partake in particular economic and political opportunities. This is one reason why I choose to think with a term like “value migrations” instead of terms such as networks, assemblages, scapes, and flows, all of which have strong utility in helping to chart connections across (global) contexts, especially with regards to the

---

15 It should be clear at this point that my study takes to heart the discussions of intersectionality which began with Crenshaw’s (1993) legal writing in which she used the concept to denote the “various ways in which gender and race interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (1244). Her central argument was that these intersecting identities together shaped the particularities of oppression and marginalization. In my work here, I consider the intersection of categories as a means to see movement in relation to the power dynamics that continue to marginalize particular communities simultaneously.

16 Dick’s (2010) work has been especially useful in this regard. She writes, in regards to her own Uriangatense research participants that, “In this neighborhood, the majority of households have family members in the United States, and people regularly evoke lives “beyond here” in the course of routine activities. In evoking these lives, migrants and their nonmigrant relations engage in an activity scholars have posited is a central way the practices of contemporary globalization, such as transnational migration, enter into the lived experience of actors: the refraction of one’s present life through a prism of possible lives inhabitable somewhere else (Appadurai 1996; Gupta 1992; Larkin 2002; Messing 2007). The existing scholarship has paid special attention to the role of mass media as suppliers of images of lives “beyond here.” Although mass-mediated images influence Uriangatense global imaginings, there is a much more immediate supplier of images of a life beyond: discourse about migration spoken by Uriangatenses themselves. In Uriangatense migrant enclaves, migration discourse is as pervasive as the movement of people. It flows through conversations between spouses separated by migration. It animates sidewalk gossip sessions. And it draws lives imagined in migration into actually unfolding happenings in Uriangate, even for people who have never migrated and who may never migrate. In this way, migration discourse serves as a form of “virtual space-time travel” (Lempert and Perrino 2007a:208), a fulcrum through which the “beyond here” enters into the present (Urban 1996:71). And a key feature of this discourse is the production and circulation of images of a ‘life beyond’” (Dick, 2010, 276).
chaotic, unbounded relation between human and non-human actors, but can tend towards abstractions that dislocate from particular markers of identity and the power dynamics therein (Rockefeller, 2014).

In a sense, the idea of value migrations is one method by which to, in Strathern’s (1996) terms, “cut the network”. She argues that Latour’s actor-network theory as well as studies of hybridity in anthropology, “have captured similar properties of auto-limitlessness; that is a concept that works indigenously as a metaphor for the endless extension and intermeshing of phenomena” (522). And my study also takes this idea of enmeshed, endless phenomenom as a given, what might be considered the “quantum” realities that all ethnographers now inhabit, entangled in complex webs of (non)digital signification that are both phenomenologically present and not-present simultaneously (Jackson, 2013; Shankar, 2014). And yet, for Strathern this auto-limitlessness results in its own problem of study: “analysis”, she writes, “must have a point, it must be enacted as a stopping place”, and these stopping places, are, in one sense, the embedded values that prevent limitless intermeshing of phenomena (Strathern, 1996, 523).

Therefore, my approach, at one level, takes its starting point from another, perhaps more traditional, idea of the network: that of the transnational migratory network. This form of networking relies almost exclusively on kinship and ethnic ties, which remain embedded as individuals move across contexts, intra- and inter-nationally to partake in new economic possibilities (Massey, 1994). Indeed, almost everyone in my study had some migration story, whether it was a teacher who moved from North to South Karnataka to join his new school, or a student whose family moved from three villages away, or an NGO member who moved from a village to the city.

However, this over-emphasis on embeddedness has been critiqued for trying to maintain the primacy of ethnicity in economic activity and movement. For example Biao argues that:

“...in studies of transnational migration – an important dimension of globalization—much of the existing anthropological and sociological literature has explained it centrally by the existence of “networks” in which migratory flow are said to embed... Certainly such insights provide valuable correctives to the neoclassical universalistic view of society and atomized view of actor, but there is a danger here of losing sight of the overall trend of social change. For most people, the real pressing questions concern why and how their society is changing so fast, rather then what has not changed. People may need to be told that ethnic networks still matter in migration, but they are keener to know, say, why IT professionals were constantly on the move and why they made a

17 With regards to “power” Mitchell (2009) writes, “Power is understood as a network of relations, meanings, and exchanges that are defined, produced, transmitted, and circulated in particular ways – a network that undergoes change whenever one element within it is altered” (21). This definition is one way to understand how I want to think about value migrations in relation to power and should be taken in relation to the discussion of “generative capitalism” earlier.
fortune by creating nothing but websites. By emphasizing “embeddedness,” anthropologists and sociologists have perhaps asked the wrong question in the first place about how economic activities – as though imposed from the outside – are inserted into social relations. A more fruitful question may be exactly the opposite: how people develop social relations – seen as a holistic process of which their economic activities are a part – that lead to economic globalization.” (Biao, 2007, 3).

In one sense, I take Biao’s insight to heart, starting, like him, from the point of view of social change. And yet, Biao’s discussion of embeddedness, and perhaps the broader literature on embeddedness in migration studies, suffers from a myopic view of ethnicity, one which is assumed to be stable and static and easily equated to a single region or community, somehow opposed to the new social relations created in migrations at the behest of economic and technologically-driven globalization, and without which the anthropologist’s raison d’être is forever vanquished. In Biao’s study, for example, ethnicity is glossed as “Indian” or “Filipino”, simplistically equating national identity with ethnic identity. By contrast, the idea of value migrations posits a “newness” to all identity categories in the wake of movement and change, still holding partial-congruencies with their sociohistorical antecedents but always re-configured in their bundled movements: what it means to be Kannadiga, for example, is re-valued in the wake of technological and economic changes, as I discuss in Chapter 4. I do not mean to fetishize the idea of novelty in the global digital era, but rather to suggest that ethnic identities have never been static, always being reappraised based on the ever-changing social and material relations that make-up the experience of everyday life in any place. Stuesse and Coleman (2014) remark matter-of-factly that “places are ‘places of movement’ or are constituted through mobilities that they are too frequently counterposed. This seems to be a basic but often neglected point in immigration research” (55). Perhaps this is where the experience of being part of a diaspora, in this case the Indian diaspora, is important to how I make sense of the anthropological project, having always experienced identity as fractured and multiple and constituted by mobility.

As a reminder, I began this section with a reference to the link between “value and affect” and it is at this point that I return to this link. In a sense, what I want to suggest is that value migrations, and development-based change more generally, are experienced affectively, in the hopes, dreams, anxieties, sufferings, nostalgias that accompany change, whether conscious or not. I begin with the classic Spinozian definition of affects as that which impacts whether or not “the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked” (Spinoza 2002, 278). Affects are, in this classic definition, potentialities, constraining exactly how we will act, while at the same time remaining unpredictable given that they have not yet been actualized.
(Nouvet, 2014), and aspirations, dreams, and the like are steeped with this kind of potential, anticipation about a future that has not been already actualized (Moore, 2011, 22). In my study, affects, emotions, and sentiments are constrained by ones place within the development regime described above, and these are what I have termed the “affects of development”, affective entanglements that accompany these changes in value i.e. in what one “ought to want”, as much about the past as the future and as much about those living half a world away as they are about those who live right next door. Importantly, these affects are not merely epiphenomna, but rather the producers of context and systemic processes. Povinelli (2011) writes, “For Deleuze, the perpetual variation between vis existendi and potentia agendi — between striving to persevere and any actual idea or action that emerges from this striving — provides a space of potentiality where new forms of life can emerge” (Povinelli, 2011, 9). In this space of potentiality, for me, lies the generative possibilities of development, in the powers of the “body, spirit, and world” to be (re)imagined, (re)deployed, (re)experienced vis a vis contemporary development. For example, in the Adhyaapaka organization praxis, the method of intervention was to “motivate” rather than provide skills, explicitly attempting to change how headmasters, teachers, and students felt about themselves and their capabilities and, in so doing, promoting a new set of techno-managerial values in schools, including those of accountability and sustainability. The affective fervor that “motivation” was intended to promote was necessarily imagined to include new potentiality i.e. academic success for students, a potentiality that was, however, not yet actualized at the moment of intervention.

For those who study a postcolonial context, the place of affect in the colonial past still serves to make this type of work particularly political. As Spivak (1999) reminds, “the rejection of affect served and serves as the energetic and successful defense of the civilizing mission” and, by way of poking at the heart of the anthropological project, she argues that the “native informant”, the individual taken only for his or her cultural information, carries with him or her (but most likely him) the “inaugurating affect of being human” necessary in relation to the researcher whose rationality forecloses the most human of traits (Spivak, 1999, 5). In a sense, then, both studying affect and writing affectively, especially in the context of India, pays service to this continuing de-construction of the civilizing mission, sometimes felt in its last vestige within the pages of our research approaches and techniques, in which we are taught, subtly when not directly, to prevent affect from intruding into our work and sullying the well-researched, well-

---

18 Ramos Zayas (2012) reminds, “affect animates desires, intentions, and motivations, but does this within an internalized understanding of possibility derived from concrete historical and material conditions” (9).
argued, well-reasoned voice that we are expected to convey to our reasonable, logical, and well-read academic audiences.  

On Nervous Ethnography: (Digital) Writing and Method

The challenge in this ethnography was to narrate these moments of affective intensity linked to changes in value within the everyday, what, according to Stewart (2007), begins with the simple dilemma as to, “what counts as an event, a movement, an impact, a reason to react” (18). In these words I am reminded of a very different thought experiment linked to “catastrophe theory”. The theory’s central dilemma goes something like this: a bridge has fallen and everyone wants to know why. Was it a final event, the moment when the last suspender cable snapped, leaving the entire bridge to collapse, or was it all of the small micro-moments before that last cable snapped, a loose screw, a crack in the tower’s foundations, a car that crashed into one of the main cables? Stewart’s answer for the affectively attuned ethnographer is a simple one: “From the perspective of ordinary affects, things like narrative and identity become tentative though forceful compositions of disparate and moving elements” (8). In other words, the answer to catastrophe theory is that both points of view are true, different parts brought into contact by the narrative itself; a narrative that builds “an idiosyncratic map of connections between a series of singularities”.

Perhaps surprisingly, Stewart describes her concept of ordinary affects through a metaphor taken from film. “Hitchcock,” she says, “was a master of the still in film production. A simple pause of the moving camera to focus on a door or a telephone could produce a powerful suspense…Ordinary life, too, draws its charge from rhythms of flow and arrest. Still life’s punctuate its significance… A still life is a static state filled with vibratory motion or resonance… When a still life pops up out of the ordinary, it can come as a shock or as some kind of wake up call…” (21). Elsewhere the image has been theorized as especially dangerous because of its potential towards affectivity, what has resulted in “iconophobia” within some anthropological quarters (Castings Taylor, 1996). But it's precisely the flatness of the camera’s lens that captures

---

19 Ramos Zayas (2009) writes, “The way in which people experience events emotionally influences judgment about what kind of people they must be in order to participate in the events, while creating an impression of powerfulness instigates emotions of mastery. Likewise, although interrelated, talk or writing about emotions is different from the interweaving of emotions and discourse. This is the distinction between what is articulated/represented about feelings (and how) versus the phenomenological experience of feelings (or observable emotions). The distinction also allows us to examine how sensibilities are part of the constitution of social locations and hierarchies; in fact, one can oftentimes map class or other forms of social location through emotions in a way that expands traditional analyses of inequality” (16).
This punctuation of ordinary life, a version of Barthes’ “punctum”, the moment of significance that may not be considered a thick description of a reality per se, but which is nevertheless significant. Another way of saying this is that an affectively laden moment that punctures the ethnographer’s eye is similar to the way that viewing life through a camera’s lens can make the ordinary feel extraordinary.

But for the global and/or digital ethnographer, these singularities and moments of still life can never be just about our traditional anthropological notions of “being there” (Borneman, 2009), the expectation that all of our affective entanglements stem from direct face-to-face contact with our research participants during their “everyday lives”. Instead, “being there” has a much broader meaning: it can mean surfing a website that one of our participants reference, or an online chat, or a whatsapp message, or a long distance telephone call, or a figure from the distant past that still holds sway over how individuals enact change, or, yes, the act of face-to-face dialogue that has always been a part of the ethnographic project.

One example of this engagement with the flatness of our contemporary ethnographic experience is Jackson’s *Thin Description*, a text which is, on one level, about the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, while at another is about the changing nature of ethnography itself. In it, Jackson (2013) writes,

“*Thin Description* is also about how lives and ethnographic information flow, a story about how we all travel... through the thicket of time and space, about the way that both of those trajectories might be constructively thinned, theorized, concretized, or dislodged in service of questions about how we relate to one another in a digital age. I would want to call this a kind of flat ethnography, where you slice into a world from different perspectives, scales, registers, and angles – all distinctively useful, valid, and worthy of consideration. And the thinness of these slices is central. A flat ethnography values such thin-slicing, even if the scope of the questions posed are, in some ways, as massive as ever” (2013, 16).

And it is from this perspective that my own ethnographic sensibility emerges, in trying to make sense of the vastness of global development as it plays out in my own ethnographic fieldsites through thin slices, stories that are partial, incomplete, purposefully shaped, and satisfied in the knowledge that no matter how much is on the page, an infinite amount remains buried off of it – useful, but not total; affectively-driven, but still reasoned; about other people in another place, but also about our own “faraway selves”. This approach reflects the influence of the digital in ‘re-framing’ both my own ethnographic reality as well as those of my research informants, in adjusting to a time-space characterized by disparate temporalities, multiscalar connections, and ever-changing digital subjectivities. As such, I treat each section of this ethnography, and the brief vignettes which transpire within them, as “frames”, invoking Jackson’s (2012) delineation
of the frame “both in the sense of (1) a gesture toward contextualization (a conceptual framing of
the relevant issues) and (2) a singular impression captured in time (as in the presentation of a
framed painting or the relative irreducibility of a film or video still)” (485) and, as an addition, (3)
a “still life” that gives rise to affective intensity.

And yet, some may find the imaginary of the frame and the still life as an overly static
metaphor for an ever-changing ethnographic reality, especially if we do not take the metaphor of
the film camera to its end and remember that filmic movement is created by the rapid replacement
of one frame after another i.e. its frame rate. As such, the writing of this ethnography is an
attempt to “textualize” movement by juxtaposing frames to create its own internal frame-rate,
perhaps more like “stop motion” than the motion that we normally associate with film, but motion
nevertheless, and a direct example of the “digital parallax” changing not only, as I have discussed
before, how we film, but how we write as well (Shankar, 2014).

In this discussion there is an implicit critique of the very notion of the everyday in
traditional ethnography, in what we are looking for and how we go about looking for it. Take, for
example, Ring’s (2006) ethnography entitled, *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment
Building*, a monograph about the domestic lives of women in a particular apartment complex,
lives that, she argues, illustrate as much about how peace-violence are propagated through
affective registers within the domestic sphere, an undoubtedly intriguing claim. What puzzles me
in her discussion, however, is a passage on methodology, when she writes:

“The bulk of my days were thus spent visiting in one flat after another, building friendships,
observing the details of everyday life and social interaction, asking questions and also answering
them. In such a context, props like tape recorders or notebooks were impractical and prohibitive.
The few times that I did bring along a tape recorder to a neighbor’s flat with the express purpose
of “conducting an interview,” it failed miserably. Women would clam up, claiming that they had
nothing “of importance to say” and that I should ask such questions of their fathers, or husbands,
or brothers, who “knew much more” about such things. I am not saying that, had I persevered in
my (abortive) effort to conduct interviews, I would have failed to elicit anything of value. But
such formal methods of information gathering quite simply took me too far away from that
which I was seeking: the routine, the everyday, and the unremarked” (Ring, 2006, 29).

Perhaps this passage is especially irritating for me because of my own approach to visual
ethnography, one that begins and ends with audiovisual technologies, and within which I have
spent countless hours with my peers thinking about exactly how recording equipment might
impact our ethnographic encounters, a set of discourses which is never as simple as “just leave
the recorder at home”.

But there are a few pieces that need to be parsed before the discussion of technology in
fieldwork. First, the notion of everyday evoked by Ring (though admittedly vague) still maintains
an anthropological hope that somehow, someway, we can, if we just stay long enough and sit quietly enough, see beyond the pale of what people do, gaining some insights into how people act when we aren’t looking despite the fact that our presence was always going to influence how they acted and what they did. This attempt at finding the “hidden everyday” begins with the assumption that our participants’ lives could ever be routinized, a constitutive imaginary for those cultural anthropologists who want to hold to some claim of “generalizability”; that our participants could ever see, hear, think, feel their lives as a routine even when the practices might look the same. And, to be frank, I would be hard pressed to find any anthropologist himself or herself who would say that their own lives were so mundane as to be routine, experienced in exactly the same way from day to day. My own ethnographic approach starts with the inversion of this particular version of the everyday, to think along with Stewart about the everyday punctuations of life. The “everyday” here is the everyday-ness of constant, unending ethnographic interaction in which the anthropologist is never out of the field, saturated with all of its digital instantiations and unexpected affects, in which we are obligated to, as best as possible, “understand every individual [and every thing] as a valuable being worthy and deserving of understanding, fair judgment, and our caring attention” (Madison, 2011, 106). To put it plainly, the everyday is the everyday of finding a butterfly whose wing is broken, or hearing someone say something you’ve never heard before, or being baffled by the color of a billboard, or any of the other daily moments that capture our attention.

And a large part of the ethics of the everyday is the knowledge that we are, by the very nature of our interactions as researchers, intruders, restructuring how things can and do function within any particular ethnographic context. And this, I think, is what makes the audio recorder, video camera, or photo camera especially important: if, in Ring’s account, she can make herself feel less like an intruder without an audio recorder present, the inclusion of such equipment makes that move impossible. We feel the presence of the audiovisual apparatus and its imposition, and whether we like it or not, it makes us feel nervous, a nervousness which is not just about the technology (although it is partly about that) but is also about the fact that we are prying into peoples’ lives, going into homes, schools, work places, and communities that we know very little about; a position which should make us nervous, though not in a way that renders us immobile, but rather in way that’s altogether productive, forcing at least a moment’s hesitation before we make a leap in our procedure, in our questions or in our argumentation.

Each page of this ethnography is filled with this nervous energy of being in dialogue with people, taking pictures, recording audio, filming, teaching, and, as importantly, being filmed,
photographed, and recorded myself. Over my time in Adavisandra I had twenty students from the
ninth standard class with which I was working, learn to use the five pieces of audiovisual
equipment that I had brought with me on my trip: a small handheld camcorder, three point-and-
shoot digital cameras with video capability, and one audio recorder. Out of this participatory film
and photography project came thousands of photographs and pieces of film footage, some of
which has become part of the fabric of this ethnography, and all of which fall within an attempt to
develop an image-culture based on the “right to look”, a form of countervisuality that challenges
the precepts of a hegemonic development gaze, and which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6
(Mirzoeff, 2011). And of the thousands of photographs they took of their homes, friends, and
school, they also took photographs of me. Hundreds of them. Each of which is a constant
reminder that I was there, implicated in the developmental regime which their own photographic
activity was challenging, a source of curiosity because I had somehow stumbled into their space,
impacting their world in an admittedly small way, but just enough to make me nervous.

And I’ll start with one of these photographs of myself, the nervous ethnographer, taken
by one of my students, as the first “still life” in this ethnography, which, without giving too much
away, is split into two parts, the first dedicated to the functioning of the NGO and the second
dedicated to the Adavisandra school and its students. In Chapter Two I frame the story of
Adhyaapaka by understanding the ideas and values of its Founder and CEO. In Chapter Three, I
tell short stories of the Adhyaapaka mentors, a group of grassroots employees who are tasked
with the daily management of the organization’s programming, but who also hail from villages
similar to those in which they work. In Chapter Four, I return to the NGO headquarters, exploring
the bureaucratic and charismatic dysfunction that eventually led to the fracturing of the
organization. In Chapter Five, I provide a glimpse into Adavisandra school and the kinds of
worlding practices taking place at the school. In Chapter Six, I use a set of student digital portraits

20 I very much like Bourgois’ succinct discussion of photography as both problem and affordance: “Photography’s strength comes
from the visceral, emotional responses it evokes. But the capacity to spark Rorschach reactions gives photography both its power
and its problems (Harper 2002). Interpretation, judgment, and imagination move to the eyes of the beholder. The personality,
cultural values, and ideologies of the viewer, as well as the context in which the images are presented, all shape the meaning of
pictures (Berger 1972). The multitude of meanings in a photograph makes it risky, arguably even irresponsible, to trust raw images
of marginalization, suffering, and addiction to an often judgmental public. Letting a picture speak its thousand words can result in a
thousand deceptions (see Sandweiss 2002:326–333; Schonberg and Bourgois 2002). For this reason, we insist that without our text
much of the meaning of the photographs we present could be lost or distorted... As representational practices they are torn
between objectifying and humanizing; exploiting and giving voice; propagandizing and documenting injustice; stigmatizing and
revealing; fomenting voyeurism and promoting empathy; stereotyping and analyzing” (Bourgois, 2009, 14).
to emphasize their auterial sensibility as well as to reveal a bit about their homes, communities, and aspirations. Finally, I conclude with a brief summation of the entire project along with a brief mention of the study’s future goals.

“A Note on Collaboration

This ethnography and whatever limited insights which emerged through my time in the field could not have been made possible without many, many collaborators who were not merely peripheral to the making of this ethnography, but central to its completion. Especially given my own limitations with spoken Kannada and my lack of knowledge of many of the contexts in which I ended up working, I relied heavily on members of Adhyaapaka, my students at Azim Premji University, and my students in Adavisandra to explain – sometimes very slowly – what I was seeing, what we were doing, or what I should pay attention to.

Bourgois (2009) notes that,

“There are surprisingly few examples of co-authored collaborative ethnographies in the history of anthropology, with the notable exception of works by married couples that too frequently have
not acknowledged the intellectual contribution of the wife (for a critical review, see Ariëns and Strijp 1989; see also Mead 1970:326). The experience of the solo fieldworker in an exotic hamlet emerged as a rite of passage for anthropologists in the 1930s and 1940s (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Stocking 1992). Collaborative fieldwork, however, can greatly improve ethnographic technique and analysis. Participant-observation is by definition an intensely subjective process requiring systematic self-reflection. Collaborators have the advantage of being able to scrutinize one another’s contrasting interpretations and insights” (11).

In my own fieldwork, I worked most closely with Sripriya Pratinidhi, a former Masters student in Education at Azim Premji University who joined in my fieldwork approximately halfway through its completion. Having Sripriya accompany was invaluable in speaking with parents and other members of the Adavisandra community, clarifying phrases and ideas that I was unable to articulate myself, sharing her perspectives on what we were together seeing during our days in the field, writing fieldnotes that captured different perceptions of what we were doing, and helping me enter spaces that otherwise may have been difficult to access given my position as a primarily English-speaking male.
CHAPTER 2: The NGO

Frame 1: Setting the scene

I finally returned to the United States from Bangalore in March of 2014. The physicalized break between contexts, marked by a fifteen hour plane ride, and three stops in Europe had momentarily tricked me into believing my fieldwork was ‘done’, that I had somehow completely removed myself from the context in which I had spent the past fourteen months.

In some ways it was true. For one, my students in Adavisandra village, who never hesitated to call me at any time of day or night while I was living in Bangalore, now could no longer reach me, limited by their lack of access to the internet. They did, however, try calling several times, spending the entirety of the money left on their pre-paid mobile plans to speak to me. I felt ashamed when they did this, burning under the sensation of radical class difference, and I would try to get them to hang up with a promise that I would call them right back. Inevitably on the return call the connection would drop as the network in the village was weak at best. In other words, forty-minute calls every other day were now limited to three minute calls once in a month.

Still, within a week of my return, other friends and colleagues started to reach out, not the least of which were my research informants at Adhyaapaka, the Bangalore-based education NGO who I had worked with most closely while in India. First, there were two emails from Manoj asking whether I had reached and telling me that he was thinking about me all the time. Then, there was a What’s App message from Shiva telling me that he had jaundice and had to go back to his native village to take rest. Then, there was an ominous message from Ramaswamy, the founder of Adhyaapaka:

“I have quit Adhyaapaka; it was a hostile takeover by a group of three persons. If I had fought it, the Foundation and the students would have suffered severe consequences. I thought I should not risk it and hence the decision. Ganesh has also given notice. We need to talk about this. You can call me.”

I sent an email. “Sure. When? How about now?”

The 21st Century ethnographer never leaves the field; no matter how far he or she travels, no matter how seemingly disconnected his chosen fieldsite may be, the field always follows close behind.
Frame 2: Development Fiction

The story of Adhyaapaka is a window into the process of corporatization of a global NGO within the specific context of Indian education-as-development, marked by the ever-expanding set of global networks facilitated by technology, the struggles to procure funding along with the associated shifts in priorities these funds precipitate and, ultimately, the ouster of a Founder from the organization that he founded.

I met Ramaswamy in the Winter of 2010, during my early explorations of NGOs in India. Then, I was working with another doctoral student, trying to understand what, if anything, was being done in the NGO space, having never worked in India and therefore having only (limited) theoretical knowledge culled from several thousand pages of required graduate school reading.

I stumbled upon Adhyaapaka on the ASHA for Education website, an organization whose specified mission is to “catalyze socio-economic change in India through education of underprivileged children” (ASHA website). Asha was started by a group of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) during their time as students at UC Berkeley and has chapters all over Europe and the United States, including one in Philadelphia (which is how I came to know of them), and has funded 400 projects in 24 Indian States. I emailed some twenty of the NGOs listed on Asha’s website, describing who I was (in the best possible light with as many institutional references as possible), what my research was about (totally undefined at the time), and a set of ideas, requirements, and potential collaborations that might ensue if I were to get a response.

Of all the NGOs I emailed, Adhyaapaka – and Ramaswamy specifically – was the only one to reply. After a call of about two hours, during which Ramaswamy’s charisma won me over, I was ready to see Adhyaapaka for myself.

That my relationship with Adhyaapaka started through ASHA is more than just coincidental. The transnational network of NGOs in 21st Century India – in their funding, in their values, and in their personnel – also influences how university students, who, in many cases, have little previous relationship with the voluntary sector in India, can access schools and communities which they are interested in researching or “developing” as it were (Batliwala and Brown, 2005). That my own ethnographic story starts from this particular position, as part of a connected set of US-Indian NGOs, cannot be overstated; it reflects who I am as an Indian American academic and has shaped the story that I can tell and how I can tell it, if simultaneously obviating the
contemporary circuit of “poverty capital” which those working within the development space are inextricably tied to and which I discuss further below (Roy, 2010).

Indeed, to understand an Indian education NGO like Adhyaapaka is to understand the sociohistorical context in which it functions, situating it within a liberalized India driven by the expansion of the private sector, the hyper-visibility of social inequality and poverty, and the changes in the education sector which have corresponded to it.

In Capitalism: A Ghost Story, Arundhati Roy summarizes the “critical” story of the 21st Century Indian NGO. She writes,

“As the IMF enforced Structural Adjustment, and arm-twisted governments into cutting back on public spending on health, education, childcare, development, the NGOs moved in. The Privatisation of Everything has also meant the NGO-isation of Everything (emphasis added). As jobs and livelihoods disappeared, NGOs have become an important source of employment, even for those who see them for what they are. And they are certainly not all bad. Of the millions of NGOs, some do remarkable, radical work and it would be a travesty to tar all NGOs with the same brush. However, the corporate or Foundation-endowed NGOs are global finance’s way of buying into resistance movements, literally like shareholders buy shares in companies, and then try to control them from within. They sit like nodes on the central nervous system, the pathways along which global finance flows…” (Roy, 2012)

Such activist narratives “read” NGO-led development initiatives in India through the lens of transnational economic flow; a frame which applies principally to “Foundation-endowed” NGOs, like Adhyaapaka, and extends the logics of early global urban studies scholarship dedicated to “the network society”, popularized by the likes of Castells (2010) and Sassen (2000), in which cities function as the “nodes” in an ever expanding network, facilitating capital flow in a web of financial, ICT, and human connection.

And yet, these types of universalizing narratives do little to help us to understand how such financial networks are forged, who the particular characters are, what the affect of these relationships are on interventions, and how those who “receive” development aid experience these changes. Tsing (2010) critiques these kinds of framing of global development, arguing, “If globalization can be predicted in advance, there is nothing to learn from research except how the details support the plan” (3). Indeed, for Tsing, the contingency of encounters, “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference,” are what makes ethnographic research worth undertaking. Such an approach does not mean a kind of “return-to-the-local”, finding situations that are somehow divorced from the material apparatus of global capitalism and commodity chains. Rather, it entails a re-orientation in ethnographic method and research representation.

In the case of development scholarship, these re-orientations also change how we study
organizational spaces like NGOs. Lewis, Rodgers, and Woolcock (2008) argue that
“too much attention to the formal organisational world and has assumed its boundaries, thereby
ignoring the stories of the people who work in and with these organisations as well as the formal
and informal relationships which link everyday practices across formal organisational
boundaries” (Lewis, Rodgers, Woolcock, 2008, 10).

These formal and informal relationships are the grist of development narratives, one best
captured through a framework conceived out of a novelistic tradition dedicated to ephemeral
details, moments of interaction, unfolding processes, and always colored within subjective
experiences, including that of the researcher.

What I seek to instantiate in this chapter is this type of development “fiction” – fiction
understood in the sense articulated by Clifford (1986) in his now classic Writing Culture essay, as
“It suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and
exclusive. Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of "something made
or fashioned," the principal burden of the word’s Latin root, fingere. But it is important to
preserve the meaning not merely of making, but also of making up, of inventing things not
actually real” (6). The invention arises in the framing itself, in the boundedness of the text, the
lenses employed, the narratological tropes utilized, and the exclusions that they necessarily beget.

It is with this “frame” in mind that I return to the story of Adhyaapaka, an education
NGO working principally, though not exclusively, in Karnataka, India. If Adhyaapaka’s
personnel and my relationships with them provide a starting point for this development fiction,
the lines of global connection move far beyond, rhizomatically extending as my own field
experience foretold.

* * *

Frame 3: A History of Adhyaapaka with a “Personal Touch”

Adhyaapaka was founded in 2002 by E.L. Ramaswamy, who had retired after almost fifty
years working in Chemical Engineering most notably as a manager for the Electronics Division of
Bharat Heavy Electricals (BHEL), a government of India owned power plant equipment
manufacturer. Ramaswamy was nearing seventy-five years old, skinny, with a head of white hair,
crooked bottom teeth, thick glasses, and a slightly hunched posture. He was considered either
totally endearing or irritating by those who spoke to him, his conviction in his position, loud,
fast-talking, and impassioned argumentation style, and tendency to interrupt during conversations
making him an undeniably polarizing figure, fitting awkwardly in social spaces – corporate and
not-for-profit – that were slowly tending towards a model of etiquette in which strong, emotional
positions were to remain hidden from view. I myself gravitated towards Ramaswamy because I could not imagine many 75 year old men remaining so staunchly focused and determined at his age, still driving back and forth between home and school sites, caring enough to push forth his educational agenda despite its potential flaws. Ramaswamy’s insistence that he visit schools – at least ten every week – and his core belief that any possibility of sustainable change had to come through long term engagement with schools and through “bottom-up” approaches to change resonated with my own ethnographic sensibilities, meaning that change had to be initiated and/or implemented in collaboration with those who were the end stakeholders i.e. students, teachers, and the broader community in which the schools were located. But most importantly, Ramaswamy was committed to *rural change*, targeting schools in villages rather than schools in Bangalore itself for intervention. After visiting over one hundred school sites in his first year, Ramaswamy had determined that village schools were where change was most necessary, given that over 800 million people (about 70% of India’s population) lived in villages and were provided, based on his own early observations, the least amount of educational resources.

I was, perhaps, also drawn to Ramaswamy for other reasons – less conscious yet just as powerful – tied to my own diasporic identity as a Tamil Brahmin whose family resembled, in some structural ways, Ramaswamy’s family. Ramaswamy’s two children had made their homes in the United States, in Atlanta and Boston respectively, and this particular NRI (Non- Resident Indian) tale created a set of affective entanglements that were undeniable; a kind of understanding that preceded and complicated my ethnographic work – not a “native” anthropologist, but a “diasporic” one, a position inflected with complex emotional resonances based on migration, narratives of migration, and the kind of genealogies constructed through them.

Regarding his reasons for founding the organization, Ramaswamy once wrote, in an October 2011 draft for an article that was never published,

> “Adhyaapaka came into existence in 2002 when I opted to quit a lucrative career as a Management Professional and get involved with a socially relevant and productive cause. After a careful study of the various options available, I ended up in the field of Education in India as it was obviously the most powerful tool to assist the deprived sections of the society. In this sector, the PES (Public Education System) offered me the ideal platform since it was the inevitable destination of the kids from these strata. A product of the same system from a different period dating a few decades back, I could easily empathize with it in its current shape; a cursory review of available material showed that it is in dire need of substantial change both at macro and field levels. While some of this had to come necessarily from the State, I could see that a lot could be achieved through the involvement of the civil society through the Voluntary Sector. The goal, in line with my experience and expertise, was not just to improve a few schools but to evolve a model that is *sustainable* and can be *replicated* on a wider scale in the country... All of Adhyaapaka’s founding members were from the fields of Industry and Management with little to
show by way of experience in the Educational sector. However, this proved to be a major positive factor for us on two counts. We brought in sound practices that had a good track record in other sectors; besides this, we had little baggage to contend with, having had no prior exposure to the then current processes that needed to be overturned.”

Though he does not say it explicitly, the “deprived populations” Ramamurthy is referring to here are mostly rural populations, though Adhyaapaka did also work in towns around Karnataka as well. Other values are also bundled in this short paragraph: a high value placed on education based change, an overvaluation of management knowledge and a undervaluation of knowledge from those who were already working in the education sector, and a value placed on non-state civil society interventions. These were the core values that Adhyaapaka brought into their work in government (rural) schools.

The organizational philosophy has been constructed on a kind of fatal pragmatism, assuming the inevitability of Bangalore’s urban expansion and the loss of agricultural jobs, the economic imperatives in India creating a foundational urban-rural boundary. Their solution was to teach basic language and math skills to government school children, with the primary goal of getting them to pass the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) Exam administered each March to 10th standard students. Passing that exam, in turn, would be a step towards a steady job in a non-agricultural occupation.

But this fatalist pragmatism also pervaded internal organizational decision making as well, in finding new avenues for funding from donor organizations and pragmatically justifying the kinds of stipulations to Adhyaapaka’s programming that resulted from taking funding, forcing Adhyaapaka to change its mission and values in order to sustain itself. In this sense, the very process by which funding was generated would deal a fatal blow to the foundation of the organization, which I will return to in Chapter 3.

The optimism with which Ramamurthy wrote these words in 2011 is jarring in retrospect. At the time, his optimism seemed well-founded as Adhyaapaka had just expanded from 400 schools in the South Karnataka area (mostly in the peri-rural areas surrounding Bangalore), to over 1000 schools in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, receiving an infusion of funding from private donors abroad and agreeing to Memorandums of Understanding with state governments which allowed them to expand their intervention. It was a moment when the organization was receiving wide acclaim for being one of the most successful NGOs in India, having just received the prestigious Namma Bengaluru Award in 2010 and soon afterwards being nominated for the Times of India Social Impact Award in education.
Such acclaim resulted in instances of hubris; in, for example, Ramaswamy writing and publishing an E-Book entitled *Adhyaapaka: The Early Days*, a “story with a personal touch”, the personal touch at least partly forged in Ramaswamy’s claim that his impetus towards changing the government school system was due to his own experience as a “product” of the same system over fifty years earlier, which Ramaswamy does not mention was also very different time in India, when the majority of the population, regardless of class or caste position, was attending government schools in India prior to the beginnings of privatization of the education sector mentioned in the introduction (Kumar, 2008). In other words, Ramaswamy’s statement disregards the dramatic changes in the class and caste compositions of the government school system in his writing, justifying his intervention by personalizing it and in so doing obfuscating the very real differences that make his own intervention into the education system less easy to justify through experience.

In the E-book, he outlines how Adhyaapaka became so successful just ten years after its initial founding, a period which Ramaswamy characterized as a “one person show” before he hired a CEO and created a Board of Trustees to oversee the organization’s everyday operations. This kind of hubris, in the belief that one could, should, and did have a particular ability to change the government system as currently constituted, was a central and necessary affect for development initiatives like Adhyaapaka’s, providing justification and spurring the drive to intervene.

Ramamurthy was aggressively selling Adhyaapaka’s ideas, a belief that educational know-how was less important than managerial know-how. “Sustainability” and “replicability” were the catch-terms for Adhyaapaka, lifted directly from the private sector, what Ramamurthy called “industry” – a term which marked his own position not as a member of the finance or information technology worlds, but from a different paradigm linked to industrial engineering. For Ramamurthy, educational interventions were not of much value if the outcomes and goals were not statistically significant and therefore the approach necessitated expansion so that Adhyaapaka could legitimize their intervention. Hence, the push to expand from 400 to 1000 schools.

It was the concept of “Total Quality Management” (TQM) that provided the basis for Ramamurthy’s particular understanding of what and how educational change needed to occur. TQM was primarily associated with the growth of the Japanese manufacturing industry in the 1950s and 1960s and with the thought of American engineer statistician, and mathematical physicist, W. Edward Deming.
Frame 4: Computer-Aided Design

I surf through clip after clip of Edward Deming on Youtube, trying to understand how this man’s ideas had come to influence the mission of an Indian education NGO and, ultimately, had come to impact students in a school in rural Karnataka; how had this “value migration” occurred and to what end?

I find an early-90s news story about Deming, produced during Bush Sr.’s term in the White House, digitized and uploaded in 2007, which starts in that know-it-all journalistic voice, “The dream is misting over as America loses her primacy in the world market place. And the old enemy is still there, still Japan...” The words trail into a montage of white women holding signs protesting the loss of jobs, large white men holding American flags, cars being demolished, men cracking sticks against cans of oil – a representation of the “Japanese bashing” which characterized the period – as the song “American Pie” plays along; the scene doubles as a stereotypical depiction of White America in the late-80s and early-90s, one in which America’s industrial and manufacturing prowess, especially in automobile manufacturing, is completely outclassed by the Japanese manufacturing industry. There’s one last mention of George Bush Sr. being brought to his knees in the face of Japanese industrial progress, before a mythology of Deming begins to take shape, “The irony is that the staggering success of the Japanese was built on the principles of an American, a management intellectual largely ignored in his own country.” Even in defeat, the narrator insinuates, America can take solace in the fact that Japanese success was really still a byproduct of American inventiveness.

The clip feels its “analog” age: in the last-gasp influences of the manufacturing industry and a particular form of nationalist sentimentality that sits awkwardly in this digital representation on youtube, a past that a 2014 Economist article still nostalgically remembers as the “sense of a common purpose amongst American firms and politicians” during that earlier era. Then, after a few last seconds of fading music, a crew of middle aged white Americans – “the traditional talking heads” of a documentary film – praise W. Edwards Deming for ushering in the “managerial revolution”, a shift in the definition of quality in management which they claim was as revolutionary as the industrial and/or the agricultural revolution. Deming’s “Fourteen Points”

21 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHvnIml9UEoQ
to managerial success, a not so subtle reference to Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points”, was intended to bring statistical methods of assessment to manufacturing, measuring the “quality” of processes based on inputs and outputs. Deming’s stance on measuring quality was that most on-going processes could not be measured – for example, the impact of professional training for workers – so for quality to be maintained at higher levels of efficiency and scale meant measuring outputs and inputs, assessing quality based on a quantifiable statistical significance. The point was not to eliminate defects, but to keep the level and number of defects within an “acceptable” limit, a strategy that could increase production efficiency and decrease costs. It was a perfect model for a third phase of industrial society, eager to stay relevant by partaking in the possibilities of an emerging ICT world.

Deming’s ideas were as much about an anxiety over automation as they were an eagerness to participate in technology’s possibility. For industrial workers, the idea of a “perfect” robot, able to assemble at a rate of efficiency far greater than they could ever imagine, loomed over their heads, a challenge to their occupations. This particular neurosis was probably best represented in the fantastical robot-human world of Blade Runner, the film adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s science fiction story of robots who looked and nearly acted like humans, but for that missing element of “emotion”. As a response, Deming’s method advocated what the Japanese termed “automation with a human touch” or “autonomation”, a managerial sensibility that encouraged at least some small amount of human creative thought and critical problem solving within industrial production. The term “autonomation” is itself evocative, suggesting a kind of human-robot hybrid that could have the best parts of both.

It was this anxiety over the introduction of “autonomation” into industry that Ramaswamy articulated as one of the formative moments of his early career, outlining the resistance to the introduction of Computer Aided Design (CAD) – software used by architects, engineers, drafters, artists to create precision drawings or technical illustrations – at Bharat Heavy Electricals (BHEL) in 1990, one of his last projects as a member of BHEL before he left in 1993.

BHEL, as he affectionately calls the company that shaped his managerial style, is one of India’s oldest and largest engineering and manufacturing companies. Ramaswamy proudly tells me that for every year of his tenure, BHEL’s financial results were the best in India for any public sector undertaking, with the highest dividends of any company (except oil). But, for him, what differentiated BHEL from its counterparts was that the company was supplying equipment against a “global tender,” meaning that there were no state protections and they were competing on a global market. BHEL, then, was differentiated from other industrial sectors such as the
automobile industry in India because, as Ramaswamy put it, it was never funded by the government, but rather was funded by the World Bank and, in receiving World Bank funding, was tied to its particular developmental stipulations, the now infamous “structural adjustment policies” that liberalized markets through a reconfiguration of specific sectors, in this case that of power, though Ramaswamy admits that the World Bank did allow a 5% price preference to local suppliers. Ramaswamy’s pride arises precisely from this “global frame” within which BHEL succeeded, matching Siemens, Asia Brown Baveri, and other global suppliers in an India which had been, up till that moment, primarily State-driven.

Though its history dates back to the mid-1960s, when Nehru’s nationalist industrial growth model was at its peak, BHEL began to manufacture power equipment in 1982 for industrial sectors including transmission, transportation, oil, and gas, a moment which marked BHEL’s transition into one of India’s preeminent national electronics companies, employing almost 50000 employees. Primarily, it specializes in the manufacturing of electronic parts for thermal, nuclear, and hydro power plants in India and, therefore, has been the central figure in India’s power sector, still holding over 70% of India’s market share while also exporting electronic products to 21 countries globally, including Malaysia, Oman, Iraq, UAE, Bhutan, Egypt and New Zealand, which they claim has contributed to an output capacity of over 9000 megawatts (MW) for those countries.

Ramaswamy ran BHEL’s Electronics Divisions, which was based out of Bangalore and was the original reason for Ramaswamy’s move to Bangalore in 1976. I sit with Ramaswamy one evening, a few months after his final ouster from Adhyaapaka, in a retirement village just outside of Bangalore, where he and his wife are slowly transitioning while still maintaining their flat in the City. The “village” is located on the Kanakapura road, upon which I would travel hundreds of times during my fieldwork in Bangalore, almost halfway between the heart of the city and my school site in Adavisandra. And yet, not once did I notice the place on my earlier travels, hidden as it was just two kilometers off the main road and camouflaged by an umbrella of trees. As I drive up to his new home for the first time, I can’t help but notice the placards on each surrounding villa, names like Dr. Ganesh and Dr. Venkat, which mark this as a residence for the elderly upper-class and upper-caste, a new-age village constructed out of the imagination of those who had rarely, if ever, set foot in the myriad of villages surrounding it to the south, east, and west (remembering that Bangalore was directly north). Ramaswamy was aware of the class-based contradictions that emerged when juxtaposing where he made his residence and the kind of social change which he advocated, mentioning many times that his earlier residence in one of
Bangalore’s many gated apartment complexes was due to “unfortunate circumstance” rather than by preference. The implication was always that he would rather live without these ties to Bangalore’s privatization and urban re-development.

Sitting on a veranda that overlooks the well-manicured estate, we talk about Ramaswamy’s early career, the learnings that shaped his eventual philosophy of social change, a mapping of the beginning onto the end as it were. I am gripped by Ramaswamy’s storytelling style, the vigor with which he recounts the moments from his past.

“My biggest influence was KR Parameshwar,” he begins, “He was really the architect of BHEL. He worked for the company quietly, he was not widely known. But all of BHEL’s major sites – Bhopal, Haridwar, Hyderabad – he was the architect of all of them. He was the one who made BHEL what it is today. And he taught me a lot. He would not accept anything, when you would set a target he would never be satisfied. If I say I’ll make 120 crores profit, he’ll say is that all you can do? Then I’ll say 150, and again he’ll ask, is that all you can do? And the idea was to see the maximum which he can stretch you. He used to say, ‘You don’t know what you are capable of doing yourself’ and I’ve put this to idea to use both when I was working with BHEL and with Adhyaapaka as well.

For example, once we had been commissioned to work on a powerplant, a 700-800 crore project for which we were commissioned to provide 2 crores of equipment. The prime minister had already given a date to visit the site and so the Chairman said the plant should be ready in three months. But I told him we can’t do it... Why? Because you require a particular card for which we don’t have the components, nor do we manufacture them. But the Chairman told me, ‘Ramaswamy, there is no question of no. The Prime Minister will see the whole plant there, all the employees there, he will expect that the power plant should be functional, there is no question of the plant not working because one switch is not in place.’ So, I have no solution, but I have to blindly follow a date, and I tell my engineers, there is no question of ‘can’t do it’, you have to and, as I had learned from Parameshwar, I told them, ‘you don’t know what you’re capable of’. And the next day, I get a call from the engineers, they say, ‘Sir, whatever you say, it simply can’t happen. We cannot do it in that time frame.’ I could not accept this response, so we take a look at the PERT Chart...”

I pause the story to ask more about the PERT chart, which stands for Program Evaluation Review Technique and is a standard management tool used to schedule, organize, and coordinate tasks within a project. I find out later that PERT was developed by the US Navy in the 1950s to manage the Polaris submarine missile program. The Polaris A1 Ballistic missile was developed by Lockheed Martin and was intended to replace cruise missile systems that needed to come to the surface in order to launch, a major drawback that the solid-fueled ballistic missiles were able to correct. Known as a Fleet Ballistic Missile (FBM), the Polaris was first launched from the Cape Canaveral, Florida, missile test base on January 7, 1960. In other words, the PERT system was directly connected to Cold War-era military infrastructure and generated antecedents such as the Critical Path Method (CPM) which was then used for project management in civilian sectors, an example of migrating values, beginning with US military-economic infrastructure.
“So I looked at the PERT chart,” Ramaswamy explains, “and we tried to find the critical path, the path which took the longest time to complete, and we used that to find out where the bottleneck was. And once we identified the critical path I told them that no one would go home until we could figure out a way to finish in three months. I said, ‘I’ll get you food from the best hotel in Bangalore, whatever you want, but you have to find a solution.’ I think this must have been the first time this had ever been said in BHEL. At first they said, ‘You are blackmailing, etc.’ And I said, ‘I know, and I’ll stay if you want me to, for moral support.’ So finally they said okay, we will try. Now this particular part is supplied by Asia Brown Boveri (ABB) to companies all over the world and they thought maybe someone will have a spare. So they called plants all over the world, surprisingly they could get through even at that time of night because most of the plants were working on a 24-hour schedule... Finally, I got a call at 7am the next day, saying ‘Sir, it is done. We will complete it.’ And even I was astonished. When you do something like I had done you always wonder, what if it doesn’t work? At a certain point, if they can’t find a solution, I’ll have to withdraw. So it really is a gamble. But the point is you don’t know unless you try. You have to be in a situation where there is no going back. Parameshwar used to say, there shouldn’t be a door behind you to exit, that is only when you will find out what you can do.

Now what they had done, they had found out that ABB was buying the parts themselves from a supplier. And that the supplier was providing the parts to other plants all over the world. And they managed to find the information for these plants with the hope that one would have a spare and eventually they found that in one firm in Singapore they had the item in stock. Now, mind you, these are the best guys in their field, I mean I am nobody compared to them. They were all smarter than me and if they say they can’t do it it shouldn’t be taken lightly. You know companies all over were trying to take our people – Siemens, ABB – but the point was that someone who knows far less than them could make them deliver.”

Ramaswamy pauses the story and we sit quietly as he prepares himself to explain the heart of what he wants to share with me. He sips a cup of tea as he returns to BHEL:

“Now we once had to take over a sick unit from Remco…” The Sick Industrial Companies Act (SICA) passed in 1985 defined a sick industrial unit as one that had existed for at least five years and had incurred accumulated losses equal to or exceeding its entire net worth at the end of any financial year. SICA was passed in order to alleviate the effects of rampant industrial decay in India that marked the period from the late 1970s to early 1980s. Under SICA, companies deemed “sick” could see a takeover in management and/or the sale or lease of the company.

“So when we took over the sick unit we have to take over all aspects of the power plant undertaking. Now most of the people working were illiterate, they had given fake documents that they had passed 10th standard, etc, but part of the stipulations was that we could not get rid of them and, not only that, but we have to use them productively and so we have to train them. But many of them were over 50 and would say, ‘why should we be trained? What can you do to me? I’ll sit here idol.’ But we had to find a way to train them.

The most difficult moment during all of this came in 1990. We were the first to bring in Computer Aided Design (CAD) possibly in all of South India and Bangalore also, particularly in the manufacturing industry. Our collaborators started to provide us drawings in CAD form. I don’t think you would have seen them, but previously the drawings used to be huge – A1 size, at least 24inch * 36inch. They would be drawn meticulously, to draw even one will take over a week. And so they gave us these discs, and said

46
download it, print it, and from this month onwards we cannot supply you those drawing in hard copy form, we’ve dispensed with all that, we don’t even have printing equipment for that size drawing.

Now in one year I’m forced to change my entire design department to CAD. We had some 200 drafting machines, really huge machines, 6 feet by 3 feet, very complicated apparatus. It will be like a drawing board, one three dimensional moving arm that will be a scale and you have different templates which you can attach and you use that to create your drawings.

Figure 2.1 Drafting machine

Now, the first problem we had was with manpower. As I said, they were older, many illiterate, and the supervisor association said we can’t replace them. And many of the workers said ‘no, we won’t do it’. So I said fine, then I’ll withdraw the drawing machines entirely. They argued and said give us a different job, we won’t do this and I tried to tell them, ‘Listen, the whole world is changing, you have to read it on the computer.’ And I tried to put it on the collaborator, saying that they’re giving it to me in this form and there is nothing I can do. They would tell me, ‘Okay, give me the soft copy and I’ll physically draw it.’ But why? ‘So you can put it in the archive!’ they’d tell me. But, then, why do we need an archive from him, when I can archive directly on the hard disc? But, you know, they couldn’t understand, it was the first time the country was seeing CAD. It changed everything. You previously needed a library of components, each component had an individual drawing which would be used to create one part and when you put them together you would have the entire part, so to change that was very, very difficult. But I did it, in one year I did it.
We brought in HCL, you know the Nadar group, and they brought their people to train mine, they did a very good job. But I asked our union President for help, I told him, ‘You need to help me, you cannot stop this, technology will not be stopped, it will keep happening’. Then he started saying, ‘No, no, people will lose their jobs,’ a kind of leftist thing, ‘if you want to mechanize these things people will lose jobs, you’ll only need 80 people instead of 120.’ I told him, what can I do? My partners are saying I have to do it, and that was the most challenging job, to have to convince people. Even our board of directors was not convinced. You know, at that time, anything having to do with computers was part of EDP (Electronic Data Processing) and not part of engineering. EDP was basically payroll, attendance, basic administrative stuff. Computers were never used in engineering until 1990! So when I asked for these OCs, the board asked me to get it approved by the head of the EDP. That person needed to approve that this equipment needed to be bought. But that guy won’t even understand what I’m trying to do. All he is telling is that the previous years budget was two crores, I can make it four or five, but I cannot make it 50 crores, some twenty five times the budget. And then he said he wanted to see the software, to be assured of the configuration of the PC. The guy knows nothing about software or design for engineering and he wants final approval. So you had a problem with the board, with the allocation of finances, convincing employees to accept. It was very, very challenging at that time, but I did it.”

With this Ramaswamy returns to education, explaining his first time entering into an agreement with a government school in Karnataka. “I used to tell Headmasters (HM), I can make you deliver not because I am better than you, you are a far better teacher than me. I mean, I don’t even know how to teach so there is really no comparison! But the issue is that you don’t know what you’re capable of doing. You know, the first school I took in Harohalli, I told the HM that all students must pass their SSLC exam. And he told me, ‘No, no, four cannot pass.’ And I told him absolutely no, you have to make them all pass and you won’t believe, in four months they made all the students pass the exam. Afterwards they all said, “O nimminda aithu” (Because of you it happened), and of course I told them the credit goes to them, but they said something very interesting in response, they said, ‘You are the guy who made us realize we can do it.’ And I used to tell Prakash (the CEO), you have no right to say it can’t be done. You have the right to ask for resources, but you have no right to say no.”

Ramaswamy’s early experiences at BHEL have deeply shaped what he values and what he believes should be the basis of a valuable intervention in education despite the obvious and dramatic difference in contexts. “I won’t take no for an answer” and “You have no right to say it can’t be done” work on an affective register, intended to motivate people regardless of their occupation or the structural constraints which they face. As importantly, Ramaswamy articulates very precisely how he sees headmasters as deficient and in-need-of-development, especially in his phrasing: “You don’t know what you’re capable of doing.” What needs to be developed, then,

---

23 Ramaswamy is referring to Shiv Nadar and his company HCL (Hindustan Computers Limited) Technologies, whose net worth is now over US$6.7 billion.
is an inner sense that one is capable, a capability that, in Ramaswamy’s telling, can only be produced through the particular managerial value system that is his specialized knowledge given his experience at the moment when CAD was introduced (not even CEO Prakash possesses it) and which he must confer on headmasters as well as the rest of the Adhyaapaka staff, including the mentors who would then also motivate school communities, as I will discuss in the next chapter. In turn, it is an example of how managerial values migrate into schools, intended to change what headmasters believe they can do and ought to do, changes that are as much psychosocial as they are material.

* * *

Frame 5: W. Edwards Deming

I’m still watching the documentary on W. Edwards Deming and seven minutes into it the title of the film finally appears on the screen, *W. Edwards Deming: Prophet Unheard*, a title so hyperbolic that its hard to take it too seriously, though the evocation of a religious savior hints at the zeal with which Deming’s followers continue to abide by his word. Deming comes on screen, a 90-year old man with glasses, bald with a large paunch, speaking at a snails pace to an eager, mostly white male crowd of managerial professionals. He is stuck in time, a lasting ‘last impression’ of the man no longer at the height of his abilities or influence. Everyone’s death has the potential to be a “slow” death in the digital age, a ghost that remains with us, suspended in virtual time by the digitized image and surviving forever in this semi-static non-physicalized
form, a manifestation of Turner’s liminality for a digital society. It is hard to hear Deming’s throaty muffled words, and I can’t help but pity this fight for relevancy, forever memorialized online.

At the W. Edward Deming Institute, a website which tries to keep his memory alive in practice, a section is dedicated exclusively to “Deming Today”. The page is a series of pictures with prominent titles, “Business”, “Not-for-Profit”, “Education”, and “Government” with examples of each. Under business, it showcases the Oklahoma City-based Great Plains Coca-Cola Bottling Company, whose claim to fame had been its success as the fifth largest independent Coca-Cola bottling plant till it was finally sold to its corporate parent in 2011. Under education, they showcase the work at the Leander Independent School District, 25 miles northwest of Austin, Texas, who claim to have applied Deming’s theories to 33 schools serving 33000 students.

Figure 2.3 Screenshot “Deming Today” page of the W. Edwards Deming Institute
And yet, in education spaces, Deming’s ideas, if not the man himself, need very little introduction. The global push towards standardized assessment, which has taken hold in the American public school system as well as, at the very least, the Indian government school system, was one direct instantiation of his ideas. Kumar and Sarangapani (2004) chart the travels of this idea of quality into the education sector, writing:

“As has been noted, since the 1960s onwards we find specific references to the term ‘quality’, or rather the lack of it, and the need to ensure it in schools. The wider ethos was one in which the economic discourse of quality was acquiring precision and appeal in areas such as industrial production and marketing (Dooley, 2000). Ideas of quality control and assurance through statistics-based monitoring laid the foundation for testing-based production with W. Edwards Deming’s ideas of ‘total quality management’, ‘quality control’, and ‘assurance’ to ensure maximum efficiency and standards in manufactured goods. From the 1960s, the school boards of several states across the United States of America began to employ these concepts in examining the status of the state system of education (e.g. The Quality Measurement Project 1970). Testing designed around teaching objectives (of the behaviorist school) lent itself to a planning model of education in term of inputs and outputs. Scores of children were used to judge school characteristics, teacher efficiency and school effectiveness. This model has informed the production-function approach to school quality adopted by education economists and planners” (41).

Adhyaapaka’s model relied on these ideas of measurement, efficiency, uniformity, and quality control, which meant standardized accountability models that could be replicated in any of Adhyaapaka’s schools. It led Ramaswamy to make statements like, “We don't care about the processes themselves, if whatever we are doing creates our intended outcome” and “If X begets Y, I don't necessarily care why X begets Y.” It was this idea of inputs and outputs, in glossing over the process of educating entirely, in which I saw the greatest influence of Deming’s philosophy.

There was one story Ramaswamy loved to tell in order to justify his particular intervention. “You know the problem with Indians?” he would start:

“See the Japanese and the Germans, they understand how to follow directions and produce. We (Indians) are not like that. You know what happens? See... if you give an Indian worker some directions, for example you specifically ask him to put a blue ball in a white basket, he may follow for a while. But then, he may run out of the white baskets and he will think, well, why don’t I use these blue baskets. He won’t think to himself, well maybe there is some reason why the instructions were given as such. Instead, he will simply start putting blue balls in the blue baskets. Then, you know the entire factory will have to shut down for two weeks because, as it turns out, the ink from the blue baskets results in some chemical reaction that erodes most of the equipment... See, the Indian will not follow instructions properly. Instead, he will think to himself, ‘Yes, let me try and figure out some other method.’”
Ramaswamy’s justification for his TQM-based interventions reveals an instance of value bundling, beginning with this cultural assumption regarding ‘Indian-ness’, which presupposed that somehow Indians – implicitly bounded by the imagined nation-state – could not follow rules and were naturally inclined to question and self-innovate to the detriment of an entire system of production. Ramaswamy’s own transnational experiences and, as he notes earlier, background in industry and management, provided him a lens which his imagined, parochial, stereotypic Indian could never possess, and, therefore, it was this personal history which was his primary justification for why he, and not someone more attune to education itself, should intervene.

For someone like myself, who has been schooled in a form of critical education, the idea of asking why seemed an educational tool of the utmost importance, which could and should be cultivated. And yet, from an educational standpoint in which rote skill development was the priority, the same skills were simply an obstacle to success. Ramaswamy remained an absolute pragmatist – fatally pragmatic – in his sensibilities and he would argue whenever I brought up this critique that in a country where children were living in dire poverty and simply needed to develop the basic skills to find jobs, high-minded ideals regarding learning were of negligible importance. Instead, it was merely about output: a student who passed tests and measures that would hold schools accountable towards that goal.

Back on the Deming Institute’s “Deming Today” page there is some reference to Deming’s influence on the education NGO sector in India. However, unlike the “Business” and “Education” tags, which link to pages with examples of particular organizations using Deming’s ideas, it alludes to this influence in one single picture: a shot of a brown girl, between ten and fourteen, a smile revealing crooked teeth, wearing a bluish collared shirt which I, given my own ethnographer’s eye, cannot help but see as a generic representation of the Indian government school child. For an American audience, it seems, the Indian government school child is, by default, a child in-need of NGO assistance; that is to say, in need of development.

* * *

Figure 2.4: Screenshot of Tehelka’s Independence Day Special on Education

In August of 2013 I stand in front of a group of Karnataka state government schoolteachers about to conduct a lecture on media and education. I’m nervous, as it is my first encounter with this many government schoolteachers at one time, and I am unsure whether my Kannada and English language skills will prove strong enough to communicate the particular ideas I have been tasked with discussing. The teachers have gathered at Azim Premji university (APU), a five-year-old private university in Bangalore at which I taught during my fieldwork and which is part of a trending model of newly minted private universities proliferating all over India. APU’s particular uniqueness is its dual emphasis on Education and Development, a commitment to practical interventions in education and social welfare based on the research of its parent organization, the Azim Premji Foundation, which had been established by the billionaire Azim Premji, former Stanford University graduate and founder of Wipro, one of the largest technology companies in India, with an estimated worth of approximately $20 billion. In other words, APU is another instantiation of the transnational capital networks that facilitate development work in India today (Nambissan and Ball, 2010).

About fifty Karnataka government schoolteachers have gathered in a classroom at APU ready to hear me speak about the utility of media towards the teaching of history. I began my
presentation with a screen shot taken from Tehelka’s “Independence Day Special” on the state of education in India; an image that I know will be controversial (see image above). Tehelka is an Indian national English-language media outlet hailed globally as “one of the best sources of news in India” (www.tehelka.com/about/). It began online as a news website before creating its own news magazine. From its inception, therefore, Tehelka’s audience has not been limited to those within the nation-state itself, but includes “First World” audiences who have access to online technologies and can read English, a sharp example of the distinction between the “nationalist” imaginary of W. Edwards Deming’s era and the new logics of the contemporary digital worldview and the global publics to which it is linked. Tehelka’s import is linked to this global circulation, providing information about ‘India’ to upper-middle class readers both inside and outside of India’s political borders. The image on the expose’s webpage depicts a smiling student, clad in a shoddy and unbuttoned school uniform, standing in front of a chalkboard with the alphabets written in both English and Hindi, underneath the words “Can’t Read. Can’t Write. Can’t Count”.

The picture juxtaposed with words does an incredibly good job of “framing” the hegemonic view of development, with regards to who is in-need of development, who should do the developing, and how such development should take place. The child in the photograph is marked as a government school child based on his uniform and, during my discussion with teachers, they also “saw” marks of rurality in the photograph, though they could not agree exactly as to why this child should necessarily be from a rural area. What was clear to all of us was that it was this child, who “can’t read, can’t write, and can’t count”, who was the one to be developed by, presumably, people like the ones who had written articles for the expose. The writers represent India’s elite, the richest, most successful members of the private and NGO-sectors in the country: Rohini Nilekani, the wife of billionaire Infosys founder, Nandan Nilekani; Sunil and Rakesh Mittal, brothers best known for their parts in founding the telecommunications giant, Bharti Enterprises; Ashish Dhawan, the Foudner and CEO of Chrysalis Capital, India’s leading private equity firm; Safeena Husain, the founder of the award-winning NGO, Educate Girls, whose past life included stops in London and San Francisco; Shaheen Mistri, the Founder of the Akanksha Foundation and the current CEO of Teach for India. The list goes on like this, notable both in whose voices are heard and the fact that no government employees, teachers, or headmasters except in a section entitled, “The Problems faced by Teachers” and “The Problems Faced by Students”, a not-so-subtle allusion to the fact that these groups face challenges that they themselves cannot solve.
When I showed this image to the teachers they were livid. Five got up at once to lecture me on how misinformed my assessment of government schools/rural children was and how wrong the image itself was. In a misunderstanding partly brought on by a communication gap and partly brought on by their emotional response to the images themselves, they started chastising me for creating the image, thinking that I was showing them something of my own making. After fifteen minutes of shouting, I went to the board and wrote, “DANGEROUS”, with an arrow pointing towards the image.

The teachers were angry because of the exposé’s message, which reflected poorly on them and their students. They were unhappy that their students could be depicted as dirty, poor, unkempt, and unintelligent. The child’s image mattered a great deal and the teachers were quick to critically engage with it.

Our dialogue focused on the risks associated with such images of poverty and suffering and the pedagogic sensibility that must accompany the presentation and consumption of these images. How do we situate the Tehelka image in a sociohistorical context? What are the implicit messages associated with the image and how does the visual convey these meanings? What power differentials shape the interpretation of the photograph?

And yet, no matter the risks, images like the Tehelka image have become part of the substance of development discourses, justifying and legitimizing NGO interventions within the education space.

The NGO sits within a particular historical configuration initiated by the IMF and World Bank in the post-Cold War Era. Since the late 1980s, neoliberal policies have resulted in an increase in economic inequality between countries and within countries. As a result, the ‘end of history’ has been replaced with a global discourse on the ‘end of poverty’ (Sachs, 2005, referenced in Roy, 2010). This particular discourse sees the increase in malnutrition, human subjugation, and illiteracy as a byproduct of neoliberal values and argues that poverty alleviation should be a central goal of development interventions, represented most directly by the work of Sen and Nussbaum, whose “capabilities approach” to development sought to measure national development through education and healthcare indicators.

One primary outgrowth of this ‘end of poverty’ narrative has been the redeployment of financial resources to poverty alleviation and human development – a growing circuit of capital that Roy (2010) terms ‘poverty capital’. This circuit of capital seems to have the double advantage of creating new markets for continued capital accumulation – the primary goal of capital – while alleviating a social ill.
Those working within the development space actively interpret the nature of poverty in their depictions of local communities, associating poverty with powerlessness and despair or worse, pathology, in order to justify intervention. This strategy is crystallized by the World Bank when it explains its reasons for intervening in ‘underdeveloped nations’. The website notes:

Any of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals for 2015 seem out of reach for the world’s poorest countries. An estimated 1.4 billion people survive on incomes of $1.25 or less a day. Rising food prices threaten to increase hunger and malnutrition, while climate change is affecting agriculture, the mainstay of most people in poor countries. Communicable diseases, especially HIV/AIDS and malaria, are widespread. (‘Global challenges: The poorest countries’)

In trying to argue for their development projects, the World Bank’s rhetoric effectively erases people from the discourse, replacing human subjects with disease and poverty.

Images play a key role in the ‘end of poverty’ narrative. Because they are taken during an experiential moment, images seem to convey ‘authentic’ data about a space and time. Viewers see, hear, and feel the referent’s force, link it to themselves, and are therefore likely to reinforce the image’s authenticity (Barthes, 1981). Jackson (2012: 481) relates one such audiovisual experience, describing how Marlon Riggs’s film, Black Is... Black Ain’t (1994), was ‘an early trip to one mass-mediated field site from which a portion of my own anthropological subconscious has never completely returned’. What Jackson sees and hears becomes a part of him, resting in his subconscious and leading to a particular kind of experiential authentication. Drawing on the work of Anne Grimshaw and Thomas Csordas, he concludes that ‘The filmic’s problem ... is that it always bends toward the aesthetic, the emotive, the artistic, the affective, and maybe even ... the “preobjective”’ (p. 482). This particular quality of image and film has been reinforced by high definition, a digital technology which makes photographs and film look so perfectly clear that viewers feel ‘just like they are there’.

Yet, the camera’s gaze always mediates the visual product and the visual’s aesthetic carries particular ideological qualities, i.e. ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger, 2008[1972]). Jackson (2012: 482) argues that mass-mediatization, and the social relations therein, demand critical attention precisely because “the digital can still have ethnocentric inflections when uncritically presumed to be the sort of universalist rubric that it is not”. When images of communities circulate with the implicit assumption that the renderings are unmediated, the viewer can make meaning of images without critically appraising who produced the image, why it was produced, or how it was produced.

As Chouliaraki and Blaagaard (2013: 254) state:
Rather than interpretation being concerned with the witness’s ‘spontaneous’ faculty of empathy, it emerges instead at the interface between the witness and the object of his or her gaze precisely through those texts that produce meaning about vulnerability and violence.

The images and films associated with the ‘end of poverty narrative’ function as these ‘texts’, guiding how groups that are marginalized along racial, ethnic, gender, and class differences are made visible. Without a critical exploration of how these images make marginalized communities visible, we can neither ethically engage with them nor understand how communities are (re-) constituted because of them.

As an example, take one of ActionAid India’s short films, ‘Landless’. ActionAid is an anti-poverty agency working in communities all over the world, including India. ActionAid India claims to reach over seven million people within India alone and has assets worth over US$100 million (ActionAid Annual Report, 2012–2013). ActionAid India’s mission is certainly not reflective of every NGO’s vision or ideology, nor is ‘Landless’ a ‘stand-in’ for all humanitarian films. However, in critically considering the film, one recognizes how imagery associated with poverty begins ‘new processes of inclusion and exclusion’ which ‘create Otherness’ linked to humanitarianism and the flow of poverty capital (Rizvi, 2004: 90).

The film tells the story of the Dalit and Mushar communities in Bihar, India, who have been left landless for years. The story unfolds with images of landless laborers working, standing unclothed, malnourished and hopeless. A child stares into the camera unsmiling, unclothed from waist up. An unsmiling woman in an orange and blue sari stares into the distance while sitting against a crumbling brick building. Interviews comprise the voiceover, in which members of the community tell stories about their plight, their feelings of hopelessness and despair. Text screens show statistics of malnourishment and landlessness. It ends on a hopeful note, with the community fighting for land rights under a new policy, which ActionAid is working to promote. A woman with a breathtaking smile tells the camera that now that the community has come together, their lives can be better. A child smiles while brushing his teeth. The scene shifts to a green room, where a man sits at a typewriter and types away. The film nears its end with two text screens. First, ‘Millions of Dalits are now entitled to own land. / By supporting communities applications, / we are able to access land for the landless.’ Second, the ActionAid logo with the caption, ‘supporting vulnerable communities’ rights to land and livelihood across India’.

How do we excavate the meanings associated with a visual representation like ‘Landless’? An empowerment narrative emphasizes the communities’ self-generated power to change, and shapes the selection of images, the story arch, and the given text. Images slowly shift
from those depicting despair and marginality to those that suggest hope and opportunity in the future. The smiling woman refers to her community and the change that is occurring from within it. Throughout the film, the ‘melodramatic mode’ renders the moral landscape black/white and ‘produces an identification of the spectator with the experiences of the suffering subject’ (Wells, 2013: 278). Children play a special role in this melodrama, smiling innocently into the camera with looks that suggest that they can do no wrong. Such visual strategies produce a compassion that, in turn, may lead to mobilization to stop the forms of suffering experienced by the Dalit and Mushar communities.

The film’s aesthetic conveys other messages as well. Men and women stare from just beyond the screen, a look into ‘real life’. They are frozen in poses and are rarely, if ever, seen in action. When they are moving, it is to show them labouring, both in the field and at home. The characters – their faces, ordeals, and despairs – come to ‘stand for’ poverty and destitution. We are not given access to other aspects of their lives. How, for example, do they find hope in their everyday lives; what joys do they have; what is their community like; what oral histories do they share? In this sense, ‘Landless’ does very little to convey the complex ‘felt experience’ of the communities which are depicted. Characters and storylines are one-dimensional, and therefore their social life is also rendered as such.

The illusion of authenticity makes this collapse even starker: the men and women stare from just beyond the screen, a look into ‘real life’. And yet, this reality is kept separate: it never interacts with realities more like our own. For example, we never see community members talking directly or working with those behind the camera, nor do we see anybody from ‘outside’ the community, depictions that would complicate the stark rendering of difference and Otherness. This Otherness is coupled with ActionAid India’s prominent position in the community’s newfound success: ActionAid India can access land for the landless when the landless themselves cannot. This foundational ‘savior narrative’ serves to justify ActionAid India’s intervention by characterizing them as the catalysts for the change in the Dalit and Mushar communities.

The film’s aesthetic has been constructed to facilitate the broader purpose of ActionAid India’s web presence. Clearly, ActionAid is obligated not only to those they help, but to those who fund and bring visibility to their efforts. ActionAid’s imagined audience must have access to and knowledge of the English-language and digital media, two characteristics that mark them as part of the global upper middle class (Goldfarb, 2002: 6). In trying to make their efforts legible to those that they seek to reach, ActionAid India relies on historically constituted semiotic resources – images of difference and poverty in the global south – that are broadly recognizable by their
imagined audience. The webpage upon which ActionAid’s films are viewed includes, in the right-hand column, a link that reads ‘Help us end poverty ... Donate now’. ActionAid India’s audience is included in the savior narrative: we can help ActionAid India end poverty by funding the organization. In this sense, the savior narrative is constitutive of the circuit of poverty capital, providing justification both for ActionAid India’s intervention and for continued funding of these interventions.

Not surprisingly, Adhyaapaka also has a few versions of the NGO film, one called Adhyaapaka: The Change Drivers, a low budget video that clocks in at 2 minutes and 42 seconds, uploaded onto Youtube, which consists entirely of static images of students in Adhyaapaka’s network of schools. There are no markers to differentiate one school from the next as images are juxtaposed without context beyond a series of captions that highlight Adhyaapaka’s program and successes. The captions read, “With dreams in their eyes and hopes in their hearts... They wait to break all shackles... Their ambition knows no boundaries... Their enthusiasm in infectious... Their faith is undeterred... They have come out of their cocoons to give wings to their dreams... A pat on the back and a little hand holding is all it takes to shape up their dreams... Adhyaapaka Foundation (since 2002) striving to provide quality education for every child studying in the government schools... The program has grown to reach 1,80,000 children in 1115 government schools... Touching the lives of every child, impacting them and ensuring every child learns... Giving them an opportunity to perform and excel... And bring them the joy and pride for their achievements... Nurturing and providing critical resources have been the core objectives of the program... Reading program: to improve and track learning levels... Writing sheet program: providing sheets to improve writing levels... Mentoring: their guides to help them achieve beyond... Motivation program: star badges awarded for their extraordinary skills... Delhi trip: a dream come true for a child from a rural area... Summer camps: to let loose their imagination... Gurapuruskar: a way to motivate the children’s “Motivators”... Teacher training: focuses on how teachers can open minds and create interest in children... Community engagement: engage and aware the most important part of the system - Parents... All of this and much more... RESULT...” At which point the film moves into a series of graphs that reveal the impact of Adhyaapaka’s programming on Kannada and Math scores in relation to the Karnataka state average. The film ends with Adhyaapaka’s logo accompanied by the tag line, “Adhyaapaka Foundation: Nurturing, Improving, and Empowering Government Schools”.

Like Action Aid’s films, we do not get any sense of the students Adhyaapaka works with, the complex lived experiences that may or may not make intervention necessary. What we do
encounter is a discourse emphasizing Adhyaapaka’s agentic capacity, the organization is the “driver” of change; rhetoric that justifies the need for their interventions. The music only adds to this feeling that government school children need help, as the soundtrack was borrowed from the 2010 critically-acclaimed Hindi drama, *Udaan*, a film in which a boy, Rohan, is physically and mentally abused by his father after leaving school.

The Adhyaapaka film was produced by students at NMIMS (Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies) whose university-base began in Mumbai in 1981, but which has expanded to several other cities, including Bangalore in 2008, where it established a new School of Business Management; an expansion which reflects the increased attention to managerial training and private sector values across India, but especially in cities such as Bangalore. That NMIMS business students produced this film only reinforces the link between the corporate and the not-for-profit sector in India, corporate logics steering how NGOs depict their interventions to broader audiences in order to maximize funding possibilities.

I find a mention of the video on Adhyaapaka CEO V.R. Prakash’s facebook page, remarking, “MBA students from NMIMS, Bangalore spent 3 wks with us and here is a small video they created on the way they saw us.” While Prakash’s reference to a way of seeing is notable given the discussion above, the question I could not help asking when I read his comment is quite simple: who exactly is this “us” Prakash refers to?

*   *   *

*Frame 7: The Overseas Citizen of India*

If Ramaswamy represented Adhyaapaka’s old guard, a managerial logic associated with his industrial past, V.R. Prakash was Adhyaapaka’s future, a CEO whose vision was shaped by a different transnational migration story, linked to computer engineering and a later moment in the ICT revolution.

I meet Prakash one night in Jayanagar 4th block, where Adhyaapaka’s main office is located. Jayanagar is one of Bangalore’s oldest neighborhoods and gained special recognition because it was the first planned neighborhood in Bangalore and was the largest planned neighborhood in all of Asia when it was developed in 1948, just after India’s independence. The area was traditionally considered the southern end of Bangalore, though as Bangalore expanded southward, it no longer holds that title, replaced by newer neighborhoods to its south.

I knew Jayanagar well, having lived in the area for the majority of my fieldwork stay, strategically chosen due to its proximity to Adhyaapaka’s headquarters, to the heart of the city to
its North, and to the city’s southern outskirts, making travel to rural schools in Bangalore Rural and Ramanagara Districts, starting just 10km to its south, manageable. When I first moved to Jayanagar, I was incessantly mocked by several of my friends who had lived in Bangalore all their lives, albeit in its central Cantonment area established by the British Raj in the late 18th Century, but now inhabited by the cosmopolitan elite of the city. They called Jayanagar “real South” and told me that the problem was that in Jayanagar all the restaurants were vegetarian, a statement which I did not find to be true during my stay but which indicated a perception of the neighborhood as one of the last bastions of Bangalore’s Kannadiga upper class and upper caste population (upper caste almost always marked by vegetarianism), of which Prakash and his family are a part.

The Adhyaapaka office is just above Prakash’s family home, the top floor re-created to fit the needs of the organization, two small rooms packed with computers and boxes of Adhyaapaka resources – books, papers, t-shirts, etc. I have been to the office many times and as I make my way to the office to meet Prakash, I wave at his wife and daughter, sitting downstairs with Prakash’s parents as he works upstairs.

There are only three fulltime employees who work in Adhyaapaka’s main office in Bangalore. The majority of the staff are “mentors” who work in the Adhyaapaka field offices and whose role I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3.

When I meet Prakash he gives me an affectionate handshake and a smile, it's the end of the workday and he is just getting ready to leave the office. When he smiles his entire face scrunches, a very endearing facial tick that gives him a boyish air. Every time I have met him, he has dressed in a nearly identical fashion, jeans and a polo shirt, oversized, and well-worn sneakers. He wears this outfit proudly, claiming that he refuses to change whether he is meeting a donor, a government official, or one of his mentors, bolstering his down-to-earth persona with the added bonus that it reminded everyone that he had come to Adhyaapaka from the technology world rather than the corporate boardroom.

After completing his Bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from S.J. College of Engineering in Mysore, Bangalore’s closest neighboring city in Karnataka, located approximately 150km southwest, Prakash had lived in the United States for over fifteen years, staying there after completing his M.A. in Computer Engineering at Texas A&M. He lived in Austin, Texas, founding a startup called TPSFutures that specialized in Transaction Processing Systems (TPS). TPS is a form of information processing in which a series of operations are made indivisible, such that if one operation in the system fails the entire transaction fails. This logic remains the basis for
most contemporary online transactions, manifesting in its current digital reformulation to facilitate online consumer practices. Prakash once explained TPS with the example of buying a movie ticket online. “To pay and receive your ticket,” he explained, “there are a number of intermediary operations, processing of the ticket with the store, checking the validity of the credit card you used, etc. If any one of those operations fails, then the entire transaction fails; and the transaction is only successful if all of the operations are completed successfully.”

I found out later that TPS was a relatively old computer technology, first developed in 1960 as part of the American Airlines SABRE System, in order to create an automated system to better handle the incredible increase in passenger volume during the late 1950s. SABRE’s early success with American Airlines expanded over the next fifty years and the Sabre Global Distribution System became the transaction processing system for American Express, Expedia, Frontier, JetBlue, Travelocity, amongst others. This link between early Information Communication Technologies and travel is more than just a coincidence; it is reflective of the simultaneous “worlding practices” that emerged during the mid-20th C, materializing the kinds of interconnections which were once only imagined aspirations and which have produced the global assemblages constitutive of the present (Ong and Roy, 2012).

Prakash founded TPSFutures in 1998 in Texas to develop a more efficient digital TPS software. In his words, the innovation of his particular TPS software had nothing to do with technological advancement at all, but rather manipulating a users perception of how long the entire transaction process takes:

“You know, no matter what you do, it takes some 12 seconds from the time you swipe your credit card, for the signal to reach the main office, usually in Nevada somewhere, and come back. You just can’t change the amount of time it takes. It will always take that long. And so for us, it wasn’t about creating some highly complex new algorithm, it was finding the simplest solution. What we did was we looked at the clients needs, and one of ours was Chevron. What we did was figure out a user interface that asked a series of questions to a customer while they’re waiting for the transaction to be processed. I’m sure you’ve seen it, when you’re at the gas station and you swipe, it asks you for your zip code, whether you want to get a car wash. We already know the zip code, we don’t actually need that information, but it passes the waiting time. So those were the kinds of solutions with clients, we did something similar for Safeway. We would create a system that would just track a customer’s buying trends, if they were frequent customers, we would just cut short the circuit, and have a ‘local’ approval so that they get approved faster, and just have the ‘real’ approval happen later. So it’s always the simplest solution. Even in education its that way.”

This idea of the “simplest solution” was one of Prakash’s key values as CEO of Adhyapaka. He never wanted to recreate classroom practices or introduce many new ones. Instead, he wanted to make sure that the few resources that were added to classrooms, paper, small prizes, would have the maximal impact.
Prakash eventually sold TPSFutures when he decided to return to India to join Adhyaapaka, what he termed a logical move given that he had already been interested in social change while living in Austin, having co-founded Pragathi in 2005, a Texas-based not-for-profit whose goal was to fund India-based NGOs while helping these organizations develop their intervention strategies. Not surprisingly, his co-founders were also NRIs (non-resident Indians) who had received their degrees in Texas’ university network or were working within this network of universities i.e. Texas A&M, University of Texas-Austin, Texas Tech university, Texas State University-San Marcos, etc.

Indeed, Prakash was nostalgic about his time in Texas and part of our bond was my perceived American-ness, something which allowed him to both embody and discuss the many things which he missed about the USA and Texas in particular, even though I have been to Texas only twice.

On this day he wants to go to dinner at La Casa, a restaurant whose original location was established on Jayanagar 4th Block in 1990, just five minutes walk from the Adhyaapaka main office, and whose gastronomic philosophy is articulated on its website as,

“‘La Casa’ or ‘The House’ is meant to be just that. Our décor is mostly minimalist and natural, in keeping with the homely warmth that we want our customers to experience. Our menu transcends borders. We have cuisine that covers all parts of the world, as it does India. Perhaps some would call it a fusion of cuisines. We could call it ‘global’.” (La Casa website)

It’s partly this attempt to transcend borders and establish a place that begins with a global frame that endears La Casa to Prakash, but that also reflects Bangalore’s slow push for “world city” status. He explains that this restaurant is where he brings all of his American friends, a place in which they can relax and have a beer, in a space that reflects their shared global sensibilities. But, of course, the globe is never abstract, but rather infused with particular place-based markers of belonging. And Prakash brings me to La Casa because it reminds him of the Tex-Mex cuisine that he had come to love while living in Texas, a cuisine which he tells me he cannot find anywhere in Bangalore. He orders a pitcher of Kingfisher, masala peanuts (a specialty of the Mysore region), and a burrito which he dismisses almost immediately, explaining that it can never taste as good as the Mexican food he would get in Texas. “No matter what,” he tells me sighingly, “they just can’t get it right. Something about the ingredients or the palette here – it doesn’t taste the same.”

Prakash readily acknowledges that he now embodies a particular form of transnational personhood, no longer tied in the same way to Bangalore, Karnataka, or India, which was
reflected in his palette itself. This, in turn, made him nostalgic about his time in the USA and the possibility of going back. He fondly recalls the band that he was a part of while in Texas, in which he sang and played the guitar – mostly Beatles covers – and when I mention that I have brought my guitar from the States he excitedly tells me that we should play together.

We do play together, only one time, at an Adhyaapaka foundation event celebrating the successes of the Adhyaapaka mentors at one of the fieldsites outside of Bangalore and I sit next to him nervously in the center of an audience of forty, a mix of mentors, Board members, and family, about to play songs without having practiced or played even once. We end up playing three songs, two Hindi songs – *Chura Liya* from the 1973 Bollywood superhit *Yadon ki Baarat*, *Papa Kehte Hai* from the 1988 Bollywood drama *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak* starring Aamir Khan and Juhi Chawla in their first major acting roles, and *Anna (Go to Him)*, from the Beatles 1963 debut album *Please Please Me*, which they appropriated from African American country songwriter and soul singer Arthur Alexander.

We finished and I run off stage as quickly as possible, uncomfortable with the hypervisibility (without preparation) that the performance brings. Prakash, on the other hand, seems thankful for the opportunity to share this part of his identity, hidden from view in his Kannadiga, not-for-profit context. I am unsure how he perceives the reaction to the songs we play, but I cannot help but feel that the songs sit strangely with our primarily Kannada-speaking rural audience who, though they listen to both contemporary Hindi and English songs, have little affective relationship with any of the songs which we have chosen. Their reaction is a mix of both admiration and befuddlement, emotions that reflect the distance between Prakash (and myself) and the many other members of Adhyaapaka. Our performance is followed by a Carnatic song sung by one of the Board of Trustees, music which is deeply marked as a historically Brahmin art form, and a Kannada folk poem recited by one of the Adhyaapaka mentors, which is met with shouts, applause, interruptions, and other marks of appreciative pleasure.

Back at dinner Prakash fondly retells a story that I had heard before, recalling the moment he received his OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) Card in 2006. The OCI scheme was devised for Non-Resident Indians, eager to remain connected to the Indian nation even while residing permanently overseas. From a State perspective, the card was a method by which to facilitate the “reverse-flow” of money, ideas, and people back to India from abroad (Kapur, 2010; Varadarajan, 2010). Although an OCI card holder must still have a visa, the cardholder is conferred a “forever” visa when they receive their card and thus, a citizen of another country –
the United States or Britain, for example – can freely enter India without having to renew their visa at all.

In one theorization of the return of the Indian diaspora or, to use Varadarajan’s (2010) term “the domestic abroad”:

is the product of two simultaneous processes currently underway. The first is the “neoliberal restructuring” of the state. And, the second is the “diaporic reimagination of the nation” in a specific historical and political context… To comprehend the role of the state in creating the transnational phenomenon of “domestic abroad,” “we need to understand it [the state] as a dynamic and historically evolving structure linked to the development of capitalism on a global scale”… diasporas are playing “a critical role” in reinforcing the nation-state structure. This process is produced by a host of state policies and initiatives that seek to institutionalize the relationship between the nation-state and the diaspora. (Raghavan, 2012, 66)

The OCI can be seen as an almost classic example of this state-centric view of the diaspora, one that functions as a critique of the unmediated imaginary of the transnational subject and re-orient us to the kinds of neoliberal governmentality in which the OCI card holder “as flexible citizen” and therefore “exception” serves to optimize the functioning of the neoliberal Indian state, facilitating market driven development through global NRI networks (Ong, 1999; Ong, 2006).

Prakash pours himself a beer and begins to re-tell the story of his OCI card. “I really like this place. The only problem is that they let people here smoke…” Smoking is stigmatized in this moment and I am unsure if it marks Prakash’s upper caste Brahmanism, his American-ness, or an intersection of both. Then, transitioning a bit jarringly into his main story, “It was very surreal because I had just gotten off a flight from India and gotten back to my house in Austin. I was looking through my mail and found that I had gotten an invitation to celebrate being one of the first OCI cardholders in Texas. Turns out I was the sixth person in all of Texas who got my card! So I just ran out of the house, still very groggy, and went to the celebration. There were cameras there and they made it into a really big thing. I couldn’t believe how emotional everyone was. There was an older man there who was crying, just kept telling us he never thought he would see the day when he could get Indian citizenship again…”

The way that Prakash tells the story is as interesting as the story itself – in the kind of laughter and affectionate incredulity with which he describes this older man – which distances himself, a younger man who is less committed to the nostalgic call of a homeland represented by citizenship, from an older gentleman, still seeped in the imaginary of India constructed, perhaps, in an earlier nationalist moment. And yet, Prakash is not completely removed from these ties to India – he feels compelled to attend the OCI ceremony just as his compatriot does – it is simply
that his position necessitates a different type of transnational fashioning, a far more flexible entanglement in both national contexts.

Almost twenty months later, Prakash calls me on the phone wanting to catch-up. He is now living in Cupertino, California, and trying to run Adhyaapaka from afar, one of the many explanations that Ramaswamy gives for the organizations deterioration and his eventual departure from the organization. “How can someone run an organization without living in the country?” Ramaswamy would yell to me, “Either he is trying to find another job or something else, but whatever it is the organization will suffer.” And yet, when I talk to Prakash on the phone he still seems committed to Adhyaapaka, calling me from the airport as he boards to return to Bangalore to show some of his funders around the Adhyaapaka schools. He admits that his new long distance professional life is unorthodox, both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, he happily tells me that he has finally gotten the time to really sit down and think and read and begin to take the questions of education much more seriously; questions which his background in engineering had never prepared him for. “You know when I was there, I was too tied to the day-to-day logistics, emailing, phone calls, putting out fires. Now, because of the time difference I’m able to spend my mornings reading, and then in the evenings, once the day gets started in India, I can start to do my general emailing, skyping, and the work that needs to be done there.”

In this particular narrative, there is no sense of the temporal collapse that we have come to associate with cybernetic spacetime, in which meetings are planned on a global corporate timescale, virtual conferencing allowing for, theoretically, unhindered workflow, what Virilio might characterize as corporate communications “war against time itself” (Virilio, 1986) that is merely an illusion, a “false proximity of the world without any density of shadow (Virilio, 1995:10). Indeed, Prakash is clear in his comments that it is the very real distance, in both time and space, that provides him the opportunity to think and work, the splitting of time by spatial distance its own valuable commodity as cybernetic spacetime continues to place pressure on the physical world. Partly, this challenge to a supposed space-time collapse stems from Adhyaapaka’s very functioning, a physical intervention into particular local schools and communities which cannot occur outside of another space-time, that associated with the school calendar – the school day that begins at 9 am and goes onto 4 pm and the complete academic school year, which begins in June and ends in March – that provides the “density of shadow” for Adhyaapaka’s work. Prakash might even be considered an “alchemist of time,” ably manipulating it using the privileges of his translocality, working during times that no one else in his timezone
works and spending the rest of the day on other activities more appropriate to where he is physically located.

Simultaneously, Prakash is struggling with his distance, with his family’s newfound comfort in Cupertino and the difficulty he is having moving back to India. “When I left in March 2014, I thought this would only be for a year. I wanted to make sure I had all of my daughter’s US citizenship paperwork in order but I didn’t think it would take this long. But now it looks like another year. And my daughter loves it here, we’ve put her in these art classes and she really doesn’t want to go back to Bangalore. The education system is just too rigid there for her I think.”

There is a deep irony in Prakash’s sentiment, in finding it hard to leave the United States because of the educational opportunities his daughter has at her disposal here and the interventions Adhyaapaka continues to embark on in Karnataka, ones which were always predicated on the pragmatics of getting low-income students to pass tests and get jobs. This class-based positioning and differentiation is part of the foundational basis for the kinds of social justice interventions produced by this particular class of transnational elites. At the same time, his daughter’s happiness only further entangles Prakash in two places, affectively imprinting an impossible need to be physically in both contexts at once; a need which no number of information communication technologies can satiate.

Back at La Casa in May 2013, Prakash is sighingly thinking about the work he has done thus far and the next steps in his life. “You know I never thought I would be working for Adhyaapaka forever. I always thought I would stay for a period before going back into the technology world. I still read tech magazines every week to make sure that I keep up with everything just in case. But I wanted to do this for a time and I managed to make Adhyaapaka grow, I got us far more funding and expanded more quickly than we had ever before.”

We leave soon afterwards, walking back through the streets of Jayanagar in the dark. He promises that we will meet again shortly and I believe him. But it is almost ten months later that we do finally meet in a corporate boardroom trying to assess the future of Adhyaapaka’s programming. There is a haunting refrain that comes up over and over again during the meeting, one that I will discuss in the following two chapters: What exactly does Adhyaapaka do?

**Chapter Summary**

Beginning with the idea of “development fiction”, a critique of NGO-based research that focuses on the NGOs vision and mission and less on the personal histories of those who work
within these NGOs and give shape to how these NGOs intervene, in this chapter I have started an excavation of the contemporary development condition by exploring the personal narratives of Adhyaapaka Foundation’s two leading members: founder Ramaswamy and CEO Prakash. I argue that the transnational networks that allow for my own entrance into my research subject also reflect the types of transnational networks that NGOs utilize, both formally and informally, in creating their particular interventions.

In Ramaswamy and Prakash’s stories we see two very different strands of “digital development” influenced by their previous occupations, Ramaswamy’s based on his work at BHEL and Prakash’s based on his degree in computer engineering and his startup TPSFutures. For Ramaswamy, the moment when Computer Aided Design changed how workers needed to be trained and managed has everything to do with his current work with Adhyaapaka, a set of affectively-steeped values that remain embedded in how he imagines his role in relation to headmasters, teachers, and students. Perhaps most importantly, Ramaswamy believed that he did not need to have experience in education in order to intervene. In fact, educational know-how, in his narrative, would have been an impediment to making the necessary changes in the system, changes that would occur if his particular engineering and management experiences were integrated into the educational system, especially if directed towards “motivating” teachers and students.

Prakash, too, has been shaped by his experiences with Transaction Processing Systems, in his idea that sometimes the best solution was the simplest, whether when dealing with technological problems or educational ones. In Prakash’s case, his affective (and legal) entanglements with the United States also influence how he interacts with his personnel in India, creating boundaries as to how closely aligned he feels he can be with those who have not experienced that which he nostalgically associates with the USA. Indeed, his need to be close to the United States has resulted in him working for Adhyaapaka all the way from Cupertino while he makes sure his daughter is able to get U.S. Citizenship, and he manipulates time as he deems fit using the digital tools he has at his disposal.

As importantly, I’ve tried to show exactly how these values have migrated historically, starting with the story of W. Edwards Deming and the third wave of the industrial revolution, whose ideas travelled to Japan and also into India’s education system in the form of standardized testing models, but also in the PERT charts that began as military tools and the earliest instantiations of TPS that emerged from the needs of the airline industry in the 1950s and 1960s.
Finally, I mark one of the most important “framings” of development in the image of the rural child who is always scrutinized within the “development gaze”, a gaze that circulates online and links Adhyaapaka with much broader issues of how marginal communities are depicted in order to produce particular affective responses by digital global publics that, in turn, justify funding and intervention. These types of images only serve to facilitate the “circuit of poverty capital” and determine who is in-need of development and who should do the developing, which, in this case, are those working outside of the government school system, namely technologists, NGO personnel, and multimillionaire philanthropists.
CHAPTER 3: Pedagogy, Value, and Mentorship

Frame 8: Globalization

One night, I sit and have a beer with Shiva, a ‘mentor’ for the Adhyaapaka organization, who had become one of my closest allies while in the field. Besides driving around rural Karnataka with me, accompanying me as I interviewed teachers and students in Adhyaapaka-affiliated schools, Shiva was my foremost confidante when it came to seeing ‘behind the screen’ of Adhyaapaka’s organizational model. We’d spend long afternoons together, reflecting on why and how Shiva had come to be part of Adhyaapaka and where he wanted to go next.

He was never certain about the organization’s message. He, like many of the Adhyaapaka mentors, had come from an agricultural community, in his case the Yadav caste community, and juggled the organization’s view of educational change with his own, cultivated during his years growing up in Bidar, in North Karnataka, just across the border from Andhra Pradesh, approximately 140km west of Hyderabad. Given this “border” position Shiva was equally adept at speaking Telugu as Kannada, his mother tongue.

Shiva started the conversation, as he had many times before, talking about his aspirations: how he wanted to start his own NGO geared towards the education of gay men, how he wanted to expand the car service his brother had started in his ‘native place’, how he wanted to become a politician back in his village, how he felt compelled to keep attending to his family’s farmland in North Karnataka, and how he wanted to move up Adhyaapaka’s corporate ladder. He always hesitated when he started these dialogues, almost as if voicing them out loud made them less attainable. Would he ever reach all these dreams or would he, in the end, settle for just one life path?

After a few drinks and some goodnatured jokes about my future – would I get married, to whom, and when (Shiva was already married and had a child on the way) – Shiva transitioned to his other favorite topic, strategizing as to how to get his salary increased by Adhyaapaka, from its starting 12000 rupee salary, to 18 and maybe even 20000 rupees, numbers which he mentioned with wide eyes that reflected the value that such a salary carried for him. It was not just what such money could buy, but how it would re-position him within Adhyaapaka’s organization and, more broadly, within the world of Indian development in which he so enthusiastically participated. We would think together, deciding what he should ask for, how to word an email in English, and, when frustration would set in, about whether he should continue to work for Adhyaapaka at all.
On this day he had a different reason for why he should be paid more. He described his last school visit, one in which he was tasked with ‘motivating’ a group of one hundred underachieving students in a small Kannada-speaking school some 65 kilometers outside of Bangalore, hidden away in the hills which separated Ramanagara town from Kanakapura to its east. “I was talking to the children in school and telling them how they needed to study harder, pass 10th. How they need to learn English and Science and Math. But they began to ask my salary. They really look to me. I am their role model. What could I tell them?” Then, more irritated than outright angry, “Globalization?… how, if we are supposed to carry these words to students, how can we be making next to nothing. What can we tell them?”

It wasn’t that Shiva did not enjoy his work. He wanted to work in education, to travel from school to school on his bike, interacting with students and teachers and making an impact on their lives. The problem was that this vision of “doing good” and participating in the world of development was always in tension with his actual socioeconomic circumstances. Shiva always claimed that he could get a lot more money elsewhere, if he just moved to Bangalore and got into a different line of work.

It was this tension that I seek to excavate in the following chapter.

Frame 9: Duplicating Development

As discussed in the introduction, for Gupta (1998), the apparatus and discourse of development is interwoven into the fabric of a “postcolonial condition” in India, especially for those living and working in rural areas. To talk of a condition is to emphasize the ways in which economic and social development policies have shaped the lived experiences of people in rural India, becoming a central part of their postcolonial identity through “the metonymic association of the human life cycle with the growth of the nation…” (Gupta, 1998, 11).

If Gupta’s work theorizes development for a pre-liberalization historical moment in India (his fieldwork was done almost entirely before 1991), Pandian takes up Gupta’s claims and seems to adapt them for a post-liberalization rural subject, in the stories he tells of his fieldwork with the Piramalai Kallar caste of Tamil Nadu. He distinguishes between two aspects of Foucault’s work on governmentality – ‘technologies of domination of others’ and ‘technologies of the self’ – and focuses on the latter in arguing that “it is in the realm of the moral that development emerges as an incitement to work upon oneself” while explaining how “people come to subject themselves to developmental imperatives” (Pandian, 2008, 62). The ethical self and the moral economy that
fosters such an ethics, then, is the locus from which to explore the lived experience of development.

Some of Pandian’s (and Gupta’s) assertions regarding self-development and development-as-identity have been reinforced in my own work with Adhyaapaka mentors, in the kind of moral economies that shape how the mentors identify themselves, what they value, what they aspire for, and what they promote in the schools and communities they work with. In some ways I want to extend Pandian’s theoretical insights and his call for scholarship that focuses on “how people subject themselves to developmental imperatives” in the *affect of development*; that set of emotional registers that works on the body’s potential for future actions (Spinoza, 2002) and are shaped by one’s position within India’s sociohistorically grounded developmental moment. Indeed, by studying the Adhyaapaka mentors I am, at least implicitly, arguing that they themselves represent one locus from which anthropologists can study the migration of values, in the embodied affects of those, like the mentors, who move between global-urban-rural contexts.

At the same time, there are two aspects of these earlier works on the “developmental self” which seem less reflective of the context and mentors who I worked with in Karnataka. First, both Gupta and Pandian’s stories of development begin with the West’s colonial legacy, narrating a simplistic developed-developing model that does not reflect how such categories “are being rearticulated… through new logics under transnational relations of capital and culture” (Shone and Hegde, 2002), which should have been underscored in the discussions in Chapter Two. Second, and as importantly, Pandian frames his study with the question: “In relation to what ideals and expectations do subjects of development imagine themselves as underdeveloped?” The assumption, then, is that those who live and work in rural India see themselves as underdeveloped within particular modernist frameworks (Pandian, 2008). However, what Pandian does not consider is the possibility that those who develop themselves also may be interested in developing others in relation to the same ideals and expectations in which they themselves may feel underdeveloped. In so doing, he inadvertently maintains a deficiency-based model of a particular community while missing an opportunity to diagram a far more complex set of directionalities, no longer just West-East or Top-Down. Indeed, in Shiva’s example above, he is simultaneously seeking to develop himself within the same globalization framework in which he seeks to develop students in schools, even though his feelings of “underdevelopment” are placed within a organizational frame, while his motivation “to develop Others” is placed in rural school communities similar to those in which he once lived and still works.
It is likely that Pandian’s line of questioning reflect the specificities of his ethnographic encounter, given that his focus is on a South Indian caste group who have been traditionally characterized as ‘thieves’ or ‘bandits’ and therefore been subject to particularly brutal forms of oppression. Moreover, in the late 1980s through the early 2000s, humanitarian aid and developmental intervention was still largely generated and imposed upon rural subjects from the outside, in a manner which allowed for simplistic understandings of who the ‘developers’ were and who the ‘underdeveloped’ also was. Indeed, these kinds of framing were powerful tools for early political critique by those scholars of development – Escobar (1995) and Ferguson (1994) for example – who wanted to reveal the inherently colonialist and imperial logic of those from “First World” nations claiming neutral and altruistic goals in their “Third World” development interventions.

And yet, the 21st century Indian developmental ethos, in my ethnographic encounters, seems to have taken a different turn, one which has been shaped by (1) the complex networks of socially-aimed private (and quasi-private) interests which have proliferated in globalizing India over the past twenty years, “a time of constant re/placement and reterritorialization as global capital connects, disconnects, and reconnects spaces in new ways and through constantly shifting lines of power” (Shone and Hegde, 2002) and many of the examples below start with the mentors’ technologically-enabled global imaginings; (2) by an ethics of participation which re-framed how development interventions are undertaken in the past fifteen years (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Part of this shift in developmental logic has been a recognition that earlier ‘top-down’ approaches, presumptuously assuming a priori knowledge of communities, were neither sustainable or effective models for change. At least rhetorically, empowerment and participation (and to some extent an ethnographic approach advocated by a group of anthropologists working as part of development organizations) have taken a foothold as the primary methods by which development organizations conduct their work (Sharma, 2009; Bradley, 2006; Kilby, 2011). Indeed, this is why Adhyaapaka as a “national” and “regional” NGO is especially significant, given that their interventions reflect the shift away from direct West-to-East interventions, towards ever-more local models, tied to global financial capital, but still advocating for grassroots intervention based on the needs voiced by those on the receiving end of development.

One of the striking consequences of this approach to development – in which bottom-up necessarily involves bringing the ‘subaltern’ into the inner-working of development intervention – and one which has become ever more visible in my own ethnographic encounters with members of Adhyaapaka, is the process by which those who have traditionally been considered “in-need-of
“development” also become the primary suppliers of a development model that works at the behest of global capitalism. This process is largely pedagogic, in the dissemination of organizational values that become the basis for the mentors’ own work in schools.

Pandian (2008) notes a particular paradox of self-subjection to development in that “developmental practices have clearly entailed, first and foremost, work upon others.” But this paradox is further complicated when the developer and the developing are a single person. Indeed, in the 21st Century, the developmental subject, at the least the class of subjects who I am interested in this chapter, is always juggling that which is felt as having already been developed with that which has not yet been developed. In many cases, it is the very same subject who is developing himself/herself and others in contradictory and affectively laden ways. These “affects” provide the grist of the present chapter, revealing the relation between sociocultural change, societal position, and phenomenological experience.

Nearly all the Adhyaapaka mentors have families who worked in Karnataka’s villages as farmers, though only some were landowning while others were not. In fact, part of their cache as grassroots educational mentors is their knowledge of these ‘native’ places, in both the socioeconomic factors that shape village life and the educational challenges which children in these villages face. Yet, they have come to take a role in the formal development apparatus, as employees of Adhyaapaka. In one sense, the incorporation of the mentors stems from the idea that their particular “funds of knowledge” are valuable, a term that has been used widely in the anthropology of education to “denote a strength-based perspective, seeing a richness of history within economic marginality and the contours of a fertile cultural landscape along streets marked by perceived scarcity” (Gonzalez, Wyman, and O’Connor, 482). While an essential critique of earlier paradigms, when taken up as a guiding principle for development organizations like Adhyaapaka, the “funds of knowledge” approach takes a further deleterious step: it considers the value of personnel only for their supposed local-specific funds of knowledge, limiting their perceived capabilities, what they might aspire for, and what positions they can hold in any organization, an almost “native informant”-like positioning.

In Shiva’s case, his aspirations were not confined to a particular prescribed role as native-informant or merely about his self-development. They cycled outward, in his dreams to help children, gay men, and promote social reform. Shiva assumed his work as vital and obvious, even though his work was reproducing values that had not given him the satisfaction he had expected, a satisfaction based, at least partly, on monetary rewards. It was not that Shiva did not see the paradox; that he was somehow blissfully ignorant of his complicated positioning within the world
of human development. It was that, despite its failings, he could not help but imagine his place in the world as part of the globalization narrative; the values worked on an affective register as much as on his intellect (the aforementioned link between value and affect), facilitating a praxis which generated a commitment to globalizing India and its possibilities, even as he did not see its benefits in his own material conditions.

These contradictions, I want to argue, reflect the massive shift in connectivity in late liberal India, one in which developmental subjects like the Adhyaapaka mentors are in multiscalar networks of global communication, along with their concomitant structures of power, not only judging themselves in relation to those who they work within schools and in their organization but also with those working in developmental organizations across the globe. In the rest of this chapter I will draw upon the stories of Adhyaapaka’s mentors to unravel how development is “duplicated”. What follows, therefore, are slices; glimpses at mentor perspectives that together give an impression of an NGO while also contextualizing (and conceptualizing) development within the particularities of South Karnataka and the area surrounding Bangalore city in particular.

* * *

Frame 10: Gatekeepers

Adhyaapaka considered its intervention “motivational” rather than pedagogic, a way of speaking about their work that de-emphasized direct intervention into curriculum or teaching, and, as discussed earlier, highlighted its affective character, a means by which to change values by inculcating a slew of emotions connected to the Self, namely in cultivating the belief that one was capable and had potential. They believed that scores would increase if students were more invested and enthusiastic about their learning and saw a lack of motivation as one of the primary failings of the government school system in India. Small “spot prizes” – pencils, sharpeners, paper – and select trips to Delhi for the highest achieving students (based on ACER and SSLC metrics) comprised the bulk of Adhyaapaka’s intervention, with Adhyaapaka mentors giving bimonthly motivational speeches to students in “failing schools” (those with a large number of students who had not passed there annual SSLC exams) about the importance of education, passing their 10th standard Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) exams, and finding opportunities for jobs in non-agricultural sectors, the premise being that traditional agricultural occupations were becoming untenable, under attack by the shifting policies wrought by neoliberal urbanization. In many of these schools more than one such education NGO worked (at
Adavisandra, my focal school site, there were three), each implicitly or explicitly reifying the same relationships between educational success and expected job prospects.

It was during these motivational sessions that Adhyaapaka’s mentors would ask about and influence students’ aspirations and through which students learned to perform an alternative aspirational identity within their educational contexts. It was the mentors, therefore, who were the integral connection to the schools and communities, the legitimate purveyors of organizational values given their sociocultural positions. The mentors were all Kannada speakers who had lived and grown-up in villages in Karnataka and/or Andhra Pradesh. While not all of them worked in their “native places” (as they termed their homes), they worked in areas whose demographics they could understand, at least to some extent, both linguistically and culturally (which was part of the reason they were hired by Adhyaapaka).

Importantly, all the Adhyaapaka mentors were Hindu, and most of them (with few exceptions) could not speak Urdu, which limited their ability to work in the large Urdu medium schools in South Karnataka (Ramanagara, Channapatna, and Kanakapura) that were under their supervision. In many cases, they either did their work in these schools mechanically, just as a bureaucrat would (as if to tick off a box on their checklists), without forging the strong school connections they did elsewhere or, in some cases, they steered away from these schools altogether, even though these schools were the lowest performing schools in the region, at least based on SSLC pass rates.

I had always been baffled by the fact that Adhyaapaka had not hired even one Urdu-speaking Muslim from around Karnataka to join their intervention, especially given the fact that the organization’s strategy had always been to partner with communities and intervene with the help of those who had a stronger understanding of particular local contexts. This was a critique I brought forth to Ramaswamy, Adhyaapaka’s founder, on several occasions, and it was readily acknowledged as a problem with the organization’s overall structure and employee demographics. However, this tacit acknowledgement never resulted in any major changes during my time working with and observing the organization. This lack of action or change was the most damning indicator of the organization’s praxis: in the people they did (and did not) value as contributors to the organization’s vision as well as in what they believed a valuable intervention might be and for whom.

I say all this to sketch the boundaries of an imagined local context reified in Adhyaapaka’s hiring strategy and reflected in the mentors themselves; it was a ‘local’ organized less by the physical presence of ethnic and religious populations living in a particular space, and
more by an imagined set of ‘authentic’ cultural identities related to Kannada, Hinduism, and agricultural. It was not that Adhyaapaka staff or mentors thought that the large Urdu-speaking populations did not exist or did not require intervention, it was simply that the majoritarian, generalizable, quantitative terms that they used to measure success or failure necessarily resulted in an emphasis on the largest segment of the ‘local’ population first, most of whom invariably attended Kannada medium schools. Further, by selecting only Kannada speakers whose families had worked in the agricultural sector, it was assumed that those who could help develop others were not from Karnataka’s Muslim communities, but were from Karnataka’s Kannadiga population.

It was this categorical inclusion and exclusion, in both who could be developed and who could develop, which provided the basic framework by which mentors identified with Adhyaapaka’s development mission. They saw themselves as part of something both meaningful and exclusive, “gatekeepers” to a privileged space in which those like themselves could and should participate.

The philosophical position had direct effects on how mentors interacted with Urdu medium schools in the area. Take, for example, a conversation I had with Sarathi (another name for the Hindu god Krishna, which would prompt him to make prideful jokes, such as: “You are Arjun, and I am your charioteer”, a not so veiled reference to the Mahabharata), as he took me to several of the Urdu medium schools in Channapatna, a town in Bangalore Rural District, approximately 60km South of Bangalore city.

The idea of a ‘Bangalore Rural’ always fascinated me. This was Bangalore performing the village city, bringing these areas into its grasp by ever so slowly re-branding the entire area, boasting signs of the manufacturing industries – automobile, tire, textiles – that had been pushed out of Bangalore during its process of transformation into the “world-class city”.

As one drives down the Mysore Road, which connected Bangalore to its closest neighboring city, Mysore, some 160 km away, green signs, written in both Kannada and English dot the way, announcing our entrance into each re-branded town: “LAND OF AUTOMOBILES, BIDADI”, which boasted the Toyota manufacturing plant, “LAND OF SILK, RAMANAGARA,” which boasted the largest number of Silk factories in the region.
Sarathi and I stopped after passing a sign for, “LAND OF TOYS, CHANNAPATNA.” There are stores on both sides of the street selling colorfully painted wooden toys – tops, ferris wheels, dolls, and decorative scenes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana sold in road side shops of all sizes.

Channapatna’s toy industry, unlike the others on the Mysore Road, was started sometime during the rule of Tipu Sultan (“The Tiger of Mysore”) in the 18th Century, when he brought over Persian toy makers to train local artisans. The industry has remained ever since, providing the outward facing character of the town, and being protected by the WTO as a “geographical indication” (GI), a trademark that creates a special market value for products from particular regions and provides a strong example of how market’s influence rural development strategies in India today.24 Partly due to this early influence of Tipu Sultan and the Mughal Empire, Channapatna continues to have a Muslim population of over 60%, mostly of the Mahdavia sect of Islam, linked closely to a Sunni tradition that was founded in India by Muhammad Jaunpari in the 15th Century.

As we entered one of Channapatna’s large Muslim schools, Sarathi warns me in advance that the students in the school were “difficult” and that they did not take their education seriously. Sarathi listed the many ways in which those from the Urdu medium schools in Channapatna were

---

24 The “geographical indication” has a similar logic to that behind the now pervasive microfinance movements in rural India, creating institutionalized methods to tie communities to markets.
“backwards”, explaining that boys from these schools dropped out early to join family businesses, that girls were expected to marry and leave school before completing tenth, and that none of the students bothered to learn Kannada ‘properly’. These sketches sounded eerily similar to those I would hear when discussing other underperforming schools, in which the medium of instruction was Kannada. And yet, in Sarathi’s telling it was very much an issue specific to Muslim populations.

Sarathi and I spend about thirty minutes at the school, during which Sarathi encouraged students to “do well”, handed out pencils and erasers to a few students who had answered correctly the math questions he had written on the board, a cause for momentary excitement, and introduced me to the class, my usual token entrance as a person “from a foreign land” (America) who had come to encourage them towards better and higher aspirations.

We leave too soon, before any of the students have an opportunity to adjust to my presence, and certainly before Sarathi can provide any sort of classroom instruction that moved beyond the motivational rhetoric of “doing well” and working harder to achieve success.

On the way back, Sarathi begins talking about the students again, this time trying to describe his perceptions of the sociopolitical world that Muslims in the area inhabited. He starts by assuring me that in these South Karnataka regions there are little, if any, Muslim-Hindu problems. However, in Mangalore, a city on the West Coast of Karnataka, there had been a lot of problems since the BJP and the Hindutva was strong there, and that even in his hometown in North Karnataka there had been some problems of “Muslim boys harassing Hindu girls.” In trying to highlight how he saw the issue, he told me in a matter-of-fact voice, as if it was a simple and straightforward idea, that “Not all Muslims are terrorists, but if it is a terrorist then it is a Muslim.”

I knew this was not the position of every Adhyaapaka mentor. In fact, Shiva had a diametrically opposite feeling, affectionately posting photographs of himself wearing a taqiyah and wishing his Muslim friends “Eid Mubharak” on his Facebook page. Still, the extreme case presented by Sarathi reflected the kind of pedagogy the Adhyaapaka mentors were not getting as much as what they were. They were not getting instruction on religious tolerance nor were they able to see similarities in student populations that lived proximally very close to one another. They viewed educational possibilities through the lens of both religious and linguistic difference; a position which manifested affectively, in their feelings towards particular students in particular locales, and in how they played their roles as the gatekeepers of development: in who they
decided could and should access the values they had been given a ‘privileged’ role in disseminating.

* * * * *

Frame 11: Travellers

About two months into my time in Bangalore, I got a call from Ramaswamy inviting me to a retreat he had planned for some of Adhyaapaka’s mentors in Hubli, “Chotta Mumbai”, a smaller city near the coast of North Karnataka and bordering Maharashtra, approximately 450 km from Bangalore to its East and 550km from Mumbai to its North. Hubli was the second fastest growing city in Karnataka, now considered a single conurbation with its neighboring city of Dharwad, whose center was some 20km away. It was another example of the material changes wrought by late capitalist urbanization, expanding and connecting second-tier cities to one another even as first-tier cities, like Bangalore, went “global”.

The retreat, Ramaswamy told me, would be about organization building, pushing the mentor’s to be more disciplined in their implementation of Adhyaapaka’s programming. Ramamurthy feared that mentors had lost sight of the organization’s mission and direction, and he wanted to remind them of their roles while developing their managerial talents. “Right now, “ he told me, “They don’t understand how to make their own decisions and problem solve. Those are the skills they need in order to be effective. I do not see them very motivated to do that.” Ramaswamy articulates a very straightforward delineation of value in his references to the mentors. He lamented the fact that they are far too concerned with money and capital accumulation, salary dreams that he believed were unrealistic given that these demands were far more than “the market would bear”. The more important goal should have been to “develop their value” through the cultivation of skills, which included those he discusses above but also was glossed to include learning English, the language of management. At the same time, Ramaswamy bundled these values with others, perhaps best reflected in his statements that those mentors from North Karnataka had not yet “been corrupted”. The idea of corruption was another a reference to the kind of monetary aspirations discussed by Shiva above but which when mapped onto region implicated the city, in that mentors who had lived or been influenced by their proximity to Bangalore in South Karnataka had had their aspirations “corrupted”, now overly concerned with money and material gains.

I accepted the invitation and bought a 10PM bus ticket from Bangalore to Hubli, curious as to what it was that Ramamurthy had planned for the mentors during this retreat. Six-hours on a
sleeper bus can feel like an eternity and I stared out the window, trying to get glimpses of the landscape as it flew by: flatland primed for farming, rolling hills dotted with bushes and trees. It was the middle of May, a time when the rains were just starting to change the earth from brown to green. I wanted to take in the new ecology that surrounded me, snap some photographs and do my due diligence as an ethnographer. But it was too dark, so I looked without seeing much of anything at all. I was reminded of Ruth Behar’s re-memorialization of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s Tristes Tropiques: “Travel and travellers are two things I loathe—and yet here I am, all set to tell the story of my expeditions” (Levi-Strauss on Behar, Savage Minds). It was this comic position, as ignorant and partially self-loathing traveller that I could not help but feel staring into the darkness.

After six hours in the bus, I reached Hubli station awaiting Suresh, the Adhyaapaka mentor who had promised to pick me up. I text him and he assures me that he would be there shortly. I had known Suresh for three years, having met him during my first trip to Karnataka before he had moved away from South Karnataka and back to his native place. Suresh had been the Adhyaapaka mentor responsible for taking my research colleague and myself from school to school, exposing us to the particular sociocultural milieu in which students were engaged. When we left in 2011, Suresh was a bachelor of twenty-four, just getting ready for marriage. Back then both his English and my Kannada were terrible. Now, his English and my Kannada had improved, though his English more than my Kannada (itself a testament to the differential global value associated with the two languages). I hadn't seen him since and was very much looking forward to catching up with him.

Suresh drove up on his motorbike and I jumped on. (The motorbike was an icon I associated with my fieldwork, hair blowing in my face, shouting to reach over the roar of the wind, filming the bumpy roads as we passed through.)

On the way Suresh and I caught up as best we could and he told me that he had taken charge of all Adhyaapaka schools in Hubli-Dharwad and Pune, a city approximately 450km to the north. He seems unfazed by the added responsibility, telling me that he was becoming more and more interested in training and expansion. “I am working with Anand (a member of Adhyaapaka’s upper management) on professional development,” he says, “I want to find ways to get headmasters invested in Adhyaapaka and in changing the way they think about their schools and children. But I am still not used to meeting HMs and teachers and presenting our vision. I want to develop this.”
It’s clear that over the three years since I’d seen him last Suresh has identified a set of soft skills, mainly those associated with public-speaking and communication, which will make him better at “developing” others. His own self-identified inadequacy in these areas limits how he can interact with teachers and headmasters and he actively seeks opportunities to master these skills, paying special respect to Anand, who, as a former lawyer working in Bangalore, purportedly possessed these necessary skills. The paradox is, of course, that Anand knows almost nothing of the rural schools or village communities that Suresh has known intimately, and yet, in order to ‘communicate effectively’ Suresh must separate himself from these very communities; “developing away” in order gain legitimacy in the places he has always lived, a circumstance that almost all of the mentors expressed in some fashion.

Suresh tells me he is excited about the retreat, and then asks me about my family. I tell him that my mother and sister are both doing well (both of whom he knows from my previous trip to Karnataka) but that they miss me terribly while I am here, far away from home.

As we drive, we leave behind the vestiges of the town, and move onto dusty roads, surrounded by farmland. I see a pack of dogs fighting, then a drove of wild pigs that, I think, look much meaner and dirtier in real life than I had imagined.

When I ask Suresh about his family, he tells me excitedly, “I have just had a baby, a baby boy!” I congratulate him, then ask what his child’s name is. He tells me that his family doesn’t know. “Here,” he explains, “We don’t decide on the name until after birth, in discussion with the priest and our parents. But we must think of a name that starts with ‘S’. But my wife is not home right now, she is with the baby at her parents house for the next six months.”

I know that this arrangement is the norm for families, especially rural families, in this part of Karnataka, but I cannot help but ask Suresh if he doesn’t miss his wife and if he isn’t wishing to see his son. He admits that he misses them dearly, but that he will make a trip the following week after finishing some of his work with Adhyaapaka.

We start thinking together of names beginning with the letter ‘S,’ as we pull up to the Adhyaapaka office in Hubli.

The Adhyaapaka field office in Hubli is the downstairs two stories of a house, along a street of residential homes all built in a similar style: cement walls, white or off yellow, grey stairs which remain unpainted, lacquered wood doors a touch darker than cedar (though I can’t claim to know the wood type), and gates in the front. A row of seven motorbikes lined the narrow driveway, leaving almost no room to scoot by and into the house.
Suresh leads me past the bikes and into a narrow set of rooms behind the house. There are several mattresses in one room and Suresh tells me that some of the mentors (all male), including himself, are staying there at the moment. He will continue staying at the Adhyaapaka office until his wife finally comes back from her parent’s house some six months in the future.

All of the Adhyaapaka field offices had this same dual function, being used both for the day-to-day administrative work of the mentors, but also being used as makeshift hostels where the staff could stay on a temporary basis. The advantage to being in the office was computer-based internet access, something most of the mentors did not have in their own homes; instead gaining limited access on their phones.

The lack of demarcation between private and public in these quasi-home, quasi-work spaces was a visible challenge to simplistic Western-centric discussions that start with an assumed separation of the private from the public that may or may not be challenged. Simultaneously, it also reflected the role of the NGO itself, an entity never quite sure of its status between the private sector and the public sector. On the one hand, Adhyaapaka worked in government schools, regulated by the stipulations of their MOUs with the government. On the other, their funding still came largely from the private sector, limiting the scope of their work to that which funder agencies decreed. There was a hypervisibility for the mentors which came with this dual scrutiny, and it reflected in these types of spaces that kept the mentors in ready reach of administrators: to Ramaswamy and the other Adhyaapaka upper management, to donors who wanted to know what their funds were being used for, and to government officials who wanted to make sure that Adhyaapaka never overstepped its agreements.

I finally reach upstairs, where seven men, between the ages of 24 and 28, sit together, drinking coffee, eating biscuits and idlis, and watching the TV9 Kannada news. There is no doubt that this office is a male space. By my last count there were a total of three women out of over forty mentors who had been promoted to ‘head mentor’ status and none had been invited to this particular professional development event.

When questioned, the staff reasoned away the problem, saying that the women mentors couldn’t come because they didn’t have cars or bikes and therefore had to take the bus, which, given the fears of harassment in public spaces all over India, was not safe or advisable. Whatever else Adhyaapaka was, its ‘pragmatic’ politics was not one that explicitly challenged gender norms.

I went around with handshakes for those who I did not know and hugs for all of those mentors who I had met again after a long while. There was Shiva, Manoj, Sarathi, Sharanappa,
Suresh, and many others who would become important members of my Adhyaapaka mentor community.

We stopped at Sharanappa’s home – a small three-room house whose outside was painted the electric blue I’ve only seen in these parts of South India – for a more elaborate breakfast, which his wife and mother served as all eight of us sat along the walls of the main room on the grey stone floor of his house, eating multiple courses of dosas, idlis, sambar, and pongal (a South Indian rice). His wife was scrambling around in a style that reminded me yet again just how slowly gender roles were changing in these mentors’ households. (Though, as my future interactions with the mentors would show, there were many explicit and self-conscious attempts at change.) Sharanappa’s one-year-old son stayed close to his mother, peeking his head out from time to time and only coming closer when I found a small ball to throw to him, though when I went to hold him he started crying so loudly I had to hand him back to his mother. This was a blow to my ego, as I’d always considered myself especially good with children (a pretension cultivated during my past life as a teacher).

I generally gravitated towards children in new situations, a way of mitigating the anxieties that accompanied my ethnographic personality, hiding nerves behind the playful banter, cute mishaps, and innocuous jokes that naturally arose when a child was the center of interaction. But here, without that cushion, I sat silently, eating and watching as the mentors shared stories from their lives. Almost all of them, like Sharanappa, were married and had a child on the way.

Eventually, we made our way out of the house, and crammed into a mid-90s Suzuki “Carry Van” that was far too small to carry ten grown men. I nearly suffocated during the drive and was only saved by being the closest one to the window.

We travelled the twenty minutes from Sharanappa’s house to the Taj Gateway Hotel-Hubli (one of the most famous hotel chains in India started by the Tata family in the early 1900s), where the meeting was to take place; a distance of less than 15 kilometers that felt like thousands.

The Taj Gateway was a masterpiece of hotel construction. It was built along the 400-acre Unkal Lake, in the middle of seven acres of palm trees, and included the most ‘world-class’ of accommodations: meeting rooms, a lavish ‘Western’ cuisine (pancakes, pastas, salads) with an ‘Eastern’ touch (idlis, sambar), a gym, an Olympic size pool that glistened blue, and high-speed wifi throughout the premises. Inside was as marvelous, marble floors reflecting light and windows that spanned full walls.
This was the mentors’ exposure to the fruits of India’s economic development and the lesson was not so subtle: this is what you should all aspire for. None of the mentors had ever seen, much less been to, the Taj Gateway Hotel and when we arrived there was a real excitement. We walked into a large meeting room that overlooked the pool and sat down. We all shivered inside, the AC turned too high for those not used to anything but a fan in the dry months of summer in Karnataka.

Speaking in Kannada, Ramaswamy asks each mentor to explain what the organization’s mission is. That they fail to duplicate one another’s answers is, for Ramaswamy, damning evidence that the mentors have lost sight of Adhyaapaka’s vision. The next six hours are a cacophony of discussion, mentors shouting ideas, Ramaswamy interrupting and critiquing: “The problem is headmasters”; “We don’t have time to travel to so many schools”; “Adhyaapaka should be working with the community”; “We have too much paper work, so we cannot spend as much time in the schools as we want”; “What new projects should we implement?”; “Plant school gardens – do a village case study – run a reading program”; and so and so forth until Ramaswamy comes to the center of his pedagogical purpose. He takes out a copy of the text, *Turtles, Termites, and Traffic Jams: Explorations in Massively Parallel Microworlds*, written by Mitchel Resnick (1994). “You all need to read this book. I know it will be difficult. But even if you read fifteen pages, slowly it will come.” The book had a strong following in the mid-90s, during the computer revolution, and advocated a decentralized mode of software design. Secondly, he takes out a copy of Dale Carnegie’s (1936) *How to Win Friends and Influence*
People, a book he believes is still relevant for good business and leadership and one that Lukose (2009: 67) also mentions in her own work, one which has become synonymous with a particular kind of globality and bourgeois aspiration for men in India.25

These were the ideas that Ramaswamy expected the mentors to duplicate, a mix of an early-stage digital sensibility and traditional management ideology that neatly captured the organization’s version of a “pedagogy” for global development which was tied, finally, to the ‘culture’ of globalized development: lunch at the Taj’s famous buffet with a mix of pastas, salads, soups, and desserts which the mentors poked at and ate politely, though slowly and without much enthusiasm. Shiva confessed that he had never had pasta before, and kept saying the taste was “interesting”, what I interpreted as a polite euphemism for “not very good”.

Ten months later none of the mentors had read either of the two books, finding the style and the language too difficult to read, indicative of the distance between Ramaswamy and Adhyaapaka’s pedagogic undertaking with regards to the mentors, challenging them towards greater aspirations through the introduction to new texts in new environments, but never systematically developing their skills enough to help them move beyond that, expecting that these experiences would themselves motivate the mentors to develop their skills on their own.

When the meeting finally ended, we jumped back into the van and ran to the nearest local bar (what the mentors’ termed a “hotel”), where the mentors ordered chicken biryani, vegetable biryani, chicken masala fry, and kingfishers while talking about the days meeting. The bar was dark, large screens covering the windows, and musty, from smoke, but no one minded, happy to be in a much less foreign and more comfortable space. The mentors joke about how they could finally eat real food and I was reminded that while they may see themselves in need of many forms of development, a change in palette is not one of them.

After an all-night train ride we say goodbye at 5am, somehow already returned back to Bangalore. The mentors continue on to other locations outside of Bangalore, to Ramanagara, Kanakapura, or Anekal. On this night, Bangalore is a fleeting, but necessary node of connection, having quietly facilitated the mentors’ entrance into this particular narrative of global development.

* * *

---

25 Lukose (2009) writes, “He was affectionately known as ‘Mr. Quote’ because, as I found out, he punctuated much of his speech with quotes in English, from sources as divergent as Dale Carnegie’s How to Win Friends and Influence People and Gandhi. Explaining the effect of falling in with the wrong crowd, Devan said, ‘You are the company that you keep.’... Caught between his bourgeois aspirations and his desire to have fun, Devan presented a humorous, anxious set of observations on his life and meaning of being young” (67).
Frame 12: Pedagogical Prerogatives

I am sitting in the Adhyaapaka office in Ramanagara waiting for Shiva and a few of the other mentors to get done with their weekly progress reports. Admittedly, I am bored, having imagined that we would be out by now, talking in a local hotel or wandering in the surrounding farmland.

But instead, five of us sit in a room, not larger than 80 square feet, staring at a Google doc that the mentors have been required to manually fill out. The task is mundane. The mentors are required to log the number of ‘diary’ pages that students in each of their schools have filled out.

The idea for the diary arose when one of Adhyaapaka’s Board of Trustees, Ganesh, went on a school visit. The story had become a kind of organizational myth, and Ganesh would never lose an opportunity to tell it:

“I went to a school, which was like most others I had gone to. And I was trying to figure out what we should do in these schools, how we could help. One boy in particular got my attention. When I asked him one question, ‘If I could give you one thing in the world, anything you want right now, what would it be?’ And the boy looked at me for a while, thinking very hard, then holding up his fingers, told me, ‘I want three pieces of paper.’ And I was shocked, I had thought that he would ask for something big or unattainable, but it was just a few pieces of paper that he was asking for. So I told him, ‘Forget three, how about ten pieces of paper? What about that?’ And I could just see the boy’s enthusiasm and excitement. These are the simple things which make a huge difference.”

I must have heard the story at least ten times, and always found its simplicity both evocative and very problematic. It was impossible to believe that students in rural schools would only want a few pieces of paper; a feeling which my own experiences in schools seemed to substantiate and will be discussed further in Chapter five and six. In any case, the result was this diary project, in which Adhyaapaka staff distributed paper to schools and encouraged students to write as many pages as they liked, in any form, about any subject.

The byproduct of the project, implemented in two hundred schools, was an enormous amount of data collection tasked to the mentors during their school visits, which they then were required to log in the aforementioned google doc once every two weeks. Most of the mentors had some kind of informal log notebook, which they used to keep track of each schools page use. But even still, the numbers were always vague, at best.
Because there was only one computer in the office, each mentor had to wait his or her turn, slowly looking through each of there twenty odd schools, and inputting the number of pages onto the correct box in the spreadsheet. They were all visibly frustrated as six o’clock extended to seven and then eight. They were even more frustrated when they looked on their google doc and saw Manoj, one of their fellow mentors, typing from another computer and having nearly completed his logging for the week. Eventually, Shiva started urging the other mentors to fudge the data, calculating random numbers of pages – 5, 12, 3, 0 – that seemed logical based on previous data inputs and which showed progress.

Practically, he and the other mentors felt the data was useless; however, they knew that if they failed to have completed the log sheets the folks at the Bangalore headquarters would admonish them. Their entrance into the digital script, therefore, was largely bureaucratic and menial. The mentors were never expected to develop higher order computer skills or given training that would help them streamline their computational work. Instead, they followed a much older assembly-line approach to production slightly updated for the digital context in which they worked (now they systematically filled in boxes to complete a computer-based task rather than a factory one).

While waiting, the mentors entertain themselves by watching random Telugu and Kannada films. Shiva, bored even of this, starts talking to me about his previous internship experience with the Deshpande Foundation, a philanthropic organization started in 1996 by Gururaj Deshpande and Jaishree Deshpande, two Boston residents with affiliations to MIT, to encourage, as per their website “the use of entrepreneurship and innovation as catalysts for sustainable change in the United States, India and Canada.”26 I remembered the foundation from an earlier visit, when a member of the organization had come to observe some of the Adhyaapaka schools that they had funded in Kanakapura, some 50km east of where we were sitting now. The Deshpande “global” philanthropic vision was an example of India’s new development model, promoting the best practices of contemporary business in those who were working in education and healthcare.

Shiva had proudly told me on previous trips about his internship with the Deshpande Foundation, during which Adhyaapaka mentors were taught how to be global leaders, develop organizational vision, and gather funding. “We had one very good exercise. We had to develop our own idea for an organization. I was working on a team and we developed a NGO project for

---

schools, where we sponsored some programs in each school. For that we had to go and get some people to give funds for it. In two-weeks we collected 25000 rupees and won the competition. It was great learning. After that Deshpande Foundation has told me that I can get a job with them anytime I want.”

It was the contrast between where Shiva was sitting, what he was now tasked to do, with what he imagined he could be doing after his internship, that caught my attention. He envisioned himself as a global leader, one who had the skills to start and run his own organization if he so chose. In fact, this belief that the mentors could start their own NGOs or businesses was not specific to Shiva alone. When we sat together with the other mentors, talking about what they all wanted to do, the joke was always that “everybody wants to have an NGO”, absurd because it was so true. That Shiva was still sitting in an office, doing ‘paperwork’ (albeit in a digital form), was his constant source of resentment.

As Shiva related me his story, a 19-yr old boy knocked on the door and then walked in, carrying in his arms two large boxes filled with plastic tupperware. He was selling these Tupperware containers door-to-door, a version of the travelling salesman (or boy) that still existed in these parts of Karnataka. The mentors started talking to the boy asking what he wanted and what he was selling. The boy had passed 10th standard but had never attended the university.

They grabbed the tupperware, thankful for the distraction, and started heckling the boy, speaking in Telugu, Hindi, or (to a lesser extent) English, all languages the boy did not understand, and throwing the dishes in the air to ‘test’ the boy’s claim that the tupperware was “unbreakable”. When he tried to bring up the price of anything, they made counteroffers that were absurdly low – 100 rather than 1000 rupees – until finally the boy grabbed his stuff in frustration and started walking out. The interaction unsettled me, but there were two things that were clear: first, that the mentors saw their position as somehow above that of the salesboy; second, that none of the mentors in the room could afford the products as currently priced.

“You guys are just making fun!”

The boy’s accusation changed the tenor of the conversation. Shiva especially felt bad and grabbed a few of the tupperwares in a feigned attempt to realistically consider them. They asked my input and whether I wanted any, to which I gave an emphatic ‘no.’ And so Shiva handed the tupperwares back and apologized before deciding to give the boy a few last pieces of advice: “Listen, if you want to sell you have to change strategy. You should not be afraid and you need to speak clearly. Stand up straight. You will sell much more.” After a few more gestures, comments, and a word of encouragement, the boy left.
It was a moment when Shiva could be an authority, teaching this boy using a similar register to that which he used during his school visits. Given his training, including the professional development he had been given with the Desphande Foundation, Shiva was “already developed” in relation to those, like the salesboy, who had not ‘reached’ the educational and professional positions, which were, at least implicitly, perceived as more valuable and a mark of upward mobility in the Bourdieuian sense of social capital.

Jeffrey (2010) writes of a youth population in rural Uttar Pradesh who are “waiting for development”, having achieved higher degrees that differentiate them from others in their community, but remaining jobless afterwards, suspended between their expectations and the actuality of their circumstances. In Jeffrey’s telling, these men express incredible anxiety about their positions; positions that are singularly shaped by the fact that they do not have the jobs they aspired for. In situations like Shiva’s, there is a similar sense of anxiety about the tasks they have been required to do and the lack of ‘progress’ that they expected. And yet, the crucial difference is that for those who hold development jobs, like Shiva, there is always another set of social relations in which they can demonstrate development, and, as importantly, reinforce their distinct position within a rural set of relations which they are always simultaneously inhabiting, something which I venture to guess, those in Jeffrey’s study also do. More importantly, their ability to distinguish themselves is itself a byproduct of their pedagogical prerogative, interactions – both formal and informal – in which they are afforded the opportunity to show their learning, not just in a strictly discursive sense, but also in an embodied sense. It manifests in how Shiva carries himself, in the strength of his voice, and in the flippant playfulness with which he can dismiss jobs and people who do not fall into his sense of value.

* * *

Frame 13: Educational Bureaucracy

The government education bureaucracy, it might be said, comes into focus as the surface upon which all of Adhyaapaka’s interventions are conducted. Without agreements with the government, Adhyaapaka could not work in schools or with any communities at all. In order to legitimize their relationships they signed MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) with the Department of Primary and Secondary Education, located in Bangalore, one which they proudly include on their website, signed by CEO Prakash and G. Kumar Naik, then the Commissioner of Public Instruction, dated July 1, 2009. These types of agreements with the State government are part of a broader push towards NGO-public partnerships in India’s social sector, in which the
government divests much of its direct intervention in education to NGOs, and takes only the responsibility for oversight. In the agreement, Adhyaapaka outlines ten programs they will implement in schools with the “BEO, who will officiate as the Nodal Officer under the above referred circular.”

BEO stands for Block Education Officer, a local level administrator who worked directly at the school level.

The Indian educational bureaucracy is extremely complex, and below I provide a “sociological portrait” of the Karnataka education department as developed by Mukhopadhyay (2011):

Figure 3.1: A sociological portrait of the education department

---


28 Mukhopadhyay (2011) sketches the basic framework of the bureaucracy as follows: “The bureaucratic hierarchy prevailing in the delivery of elementary education in most states, as also in Karnataka, is seen explicitly at five levels at least: the state level Secretariat
On Mukhopadhyay’s chart one can see the place of NGOs on the left, outside of the formal educational structure, yet linked to the bureaucracy at every level, from the CPI (commissioner of public instruction) to the District level. And, to extend Mukhopadhyay’s chart based on the MOU signed by Adhyaapaka, NGOs are connected with the bureaucracy all the way down to the block level as well. Indeed, Adhyaapaka was always trying to maintain positive relationships with government officials at every level, seeking “to work with” the government rather than against it or despite it. The strategy they deployed whenever possible was that of hyper-positivity with regards to their relationship. For example, on their website they write:

We have had a very rewarding partnership with government. The excerpt below [by Ramaswamy]... is just one example of many such interactions: “... The next step took me to the Block Education Officer, who has the unenviable task of overseeing a thousand schools. He informed me that the Karnataka Government has a scheme under which an individual or an organization can officially adopt a school and be responsible for its upgrade. This needed a legal document to be signed, for which he took all the steps immediately. The entire process was over in less than an hour and I was accorded VIP treatment during the entire proceedings! Copies of the document were sent to all the concerned schools promptly and we were able to start with our program in these schools within three days. It was altogether a surprisingly pleasant experience!”

The story is meant to show sympathy for the education bureaucracy, whose work is so difficult and “unenviable” given the number of schools under their oversight, and who were kind enough to work with NGOs despite all of their work, unexpectedly cutting through a bureaucracy that was notorious for its red tape and inefficiency. Ramaswamy mentioned many times the need to show deference to the government if one wanted to get into schools. To show disrespect to these officials, he would remind, would mean a death knell for the organization’s future.

Towards this end, one of the mentors most important roles in the organization beyond going to school sites was to maintain positive relationships with the local education officials, showing appropriate respect when they were at school sites, making sure to have government officials as special guests at any Adhyaapaka sponsored events in schools, and meeting the BEO
whenever any paperwork needed to be signed. Because the mentors’ “fund of knowledge” included a much stronger understanding of the rural areas within which block and district level officers worked, the organization had, over time, determined that they were well-equipped to speak to these local government officials, though they were not privy to the dialogues between Ramaswamy, Prakash and those Department officials headquartered in Bangalore, like G. Kumar Naik, a not-so-subtle boundary between the urban and the rural that was paralleled in both the government bureaucracy and in Adhyaapaka.

One day in April 2013, I met Shiva and Manoj to go on one of our usual school visits when, during our trip, they asked if they could take a detour to the education office in Ramanagara, where they wanted to speak with the Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI). They would not tell me why they wanted to meet him and so I accompanied with a bit of confusion as we waited in the lobby of a red building inside of which were three floors of high-ceilinged large grey rooms, some of which were divided into smaller cubicles for staff.

After about 10 minutes the DDPI officer came out and ushered us in, recognizing Manoj and Shiva immediately and giving them warm smiles and hugs before turning to me quizzically. Not wanting to cause suspicion Shiva quickly explained that I was only a researcher with Adhyaapaka and that there was nothing to be worried about, after which with a nod the officer paid me no mind for the rest of their interaction. He called for three chais and asked them why, exactly, they had stopped by. First Shiva covered a few school related issues, one school outside of Ramanagara, for example, that was still struggling, and which they were eager to get his opinions on, to which the DDPI said he would absolutely look into it, though when and to what end remained unstated. Then, Manoj reached the ultimate purpose of their conversation, explaining that they wanted to say thanks for all of his help in working with schools and to show their gratitude they would like to invite him to “Discovery Village”, a private retreat on Kanakapura road on the peripheries of Bangalore. The village was founded by the wife of one of Adhyaapaka’s Board of Trustees, and its primary purpose was for corporations to sponsor team building in a “perfect getaway from the urban rush”, another example of re-branding the village moniker for the tastes of the urban elite. Its clientele included Infosys, IBM, HP, Dell, Wipro, and many of the other technology giants that had branches in Bangalore. However, because of Adhyaapaka’s connection with one of its founders, it had used the space for several retreats for the mentors as well, retreats that the mentors still discussed with pleasure.

29 http://www.discoveryvillage.in/corporate_day_out.html
Clearly flattered upon hearing of the request, the DDPI looked at his calendar and asked when they were thinking, if he could bring his wife and child, to which Shiva gave an enthusiastic yes. He quickly agreed to join them and within another five minutes Shiva and Manoj left the office.

The interaction was very brief but I include it here to illustrate the kind of informal interactions with the bureaucracy that were a necessary part of maintaining Adhyaapaka’s programming. At the same time, these interactions were always saturated with value, in this case mediated by the symbol of discovery village, physically located at the interstices between the city and its surrounding villages, and whose deployment by Adhyaapaka as part of these interactions was highly strategic, one of the “perks” that those working in the bureaucracy would be privy to if they continued in their relationship with Adhyaapaka. This particular perk was one that allowed them to experience the urban, techie, corporate lifestyle that they otherwise could not afford or partake in, and was thus a means by which Adhyaapaka could deploy its particular form of social capital in other contexts and an example of how values migrated from the organization into other spaces.

For their part, both Manoj and Shiva were especially proud of their own role in these communications, explaining that they felt that being given these responsibilities showed there own increased importance and significance within the organization. The fact that they were able to share these perks with those within the government only highlighted their standing, an indicator of just how far they had come and how much they had developed. This despite the fact they were very clearly limited in their roles, messengers who did not, for example, have unfettered access to the discovery village, and therefore their ability to be “developed” remained within the confines of the area outside of the city.

* * *

Frame 14: Digital Contact Zones

I meet Suresh after almost five months. The distance between Bangalore and Hubli has steadily increased since my first trip there, everyday life, new friends, and many more hours of work making the five-hour bus ride to and fro impossible to consider.

And yet, here Suresh was, at 4pm in the afternoon, smiling as he stood just in front of the Jayanagar bus stand, only five minutes walk from my house. I run across the street, still not-quite comfortable with the idiosyncratic traffic patterns of Bangalore– its not as if the roads are always
intensely packed, its merely that one-way signs, stoplights, and pedestrian crossings are all treated as suggestions rather than rules – and greeted him with a handshake and a long hug.

It was good to see him after such a long silence. Only twice had we even had time to talk on the phone. The first time he had asked me to send him some “good readings”, which I glossed as meaning “in English” and “about education”. The second time he wanted advice on his attempts to implement Adhyaapaka’s “Phase II”, a set of programs for schools who had achieved a 100% pass rate on their exams; programs which, it seemed to me, were so diffuse, ambitious, and unfocused to be practically impossible to implement effectively. The parameters of the program kept changing, at first the organization wanted to exit the schools completely, then it wanted to find a way to increase students’ reading comprehension skills beyond merely having them pass the SSLC standard examinations, and sometimes it wanted to start a completely new program that they were still trying to imagine, asking mentors to find out exactly what schools wanted and/or needed going forward. It placed Adhyaapaka mentors in a Sisyphean paradox, at least those who bought into the vision, pushing towards utopian goals that were never achievable, but so ethically binding that mentors kept working towards them.

Suresh looked tired, bags under his eyes, and his usually well-ironed shirt creased from hours sitting and sleeping on a bus. We talked on our way to a tea stall just across from the bus stand and I paid 5 rupees for our teas and brought them over. For the first time since I had started meeting Suresh in Karnataka, I had taken on the role of host, and with that came an implicit understanding that he was coming to my home in my part of the city. I knew this place better than he did, these specific streets in a ten street radius, in this part of Bangalore, and that was, in and of itself, a new position for my ethnographic Self to experience.

We caught up while sipping on tea and I found out he had come into Bangalore just for the day to attend a meeting and was leaving back home on the 5:30pm bus. It left us only a little more than two hours to talk, a fact that I complained about for the entirety of his stay.

We finished our tea and started walking towards my house passed the sign for the ‘More Store,’ a Walmart-style Indian national supermarket chain, hanging just above the busstand. As always, men and women sold food, drinks, toys on the side of the road, trying to get our attention as we passed. A girl, of about eighteen, stopped us, and tried to hand me a piece of paper that I instinctively refused. Suresh, on the other hand, grabbed the paper immediately and started reading it. “INTERESTED IN MAKING MORE MONEY, CALL US.” A call center was looking for people with English and basic computer skills interested in working for them.
I watched as Suresh read the advertisement, carefully folded the paper, and put it in his pocket. “Why keep that?” I asked, before thoughtlessly blurting, “It's a waste.” Suresh chuckled and confessed, “I need one extra job. Do you know of anything Arjun? Something which I can do from home in the evening?” I told him I didn’t know of any jobs, but asked why he needed another job when he was already working for Adhyaapaka.

“The pay is only 12000 rupees and its not enough. When I was a bachelor it was fine. But now I have my wife and also a child. It is not sufficient, so I need to find something. It is much harder for me now. I don’t know what job I can find.”

We talked about what kind of jobs he might want, to which he did not have a clear idea, and I asked him why he didn’t just change jobs entirely. His response was quick, direct, and, to my surprise, more aggressive than I expected. He clearly resented my line of questioning and its implications.

“I’ve made a commitment. For at least five years I want to do my work and improve schools. I cannot leave it just like that. They have made me the coordinator for all of Pune as well, and that is a big thing. I don’t want to leave just like that.”

This was the perplexing dilemma that I found many of the Adhyaapaka mentors facing. They were committed to the cause, and needed to see their work as purposeful. Yet, the pragmatic limitations of family and finance were always looming just under the surface. It was the basis of a development affect experienced by those ‘in-between’, not participants in the upper management level of organizations nor the recipients of humanitarian interventions.

Suresh was completely beholden to the cause of educational change, at the grandest scale, without which his past seven years of work were rendered meaningless. This unquantifiable feeling of moral responsibility to the (unachievable) cause, the organization, and the schools and communities he worked with overshadowed the financial hardship. To fail in this responsibility by leaving before he had completed his work would have been a serious strike to his self-identity.

This particular affect is one necessary for the continued success of developmental capitalism: rather than seeing the rewards of labor as necessarily financial – the ultimate goal of capitalism in its traditional sense – the social and voluntary sectors displace and occlude this agenda through a rhetoric of altruism and selflessness; a rhetoric ultimately geared to affect those who work at the non-managerial level – “on the ground” personnel – preventing them from leaving positions which had little to no potential for upward mobility and, in essence, maintaining a population of development workers.
When we got to my house, Suresh wanted to know more about what I had been doing in Bangalore in the months between our two visits, and I tried to explain all that I’d done during that time: the course at the university, my work with schools in Adavisandra village. “When will you go back to the US?” he asked, another reminder that my fieldwork time was nearing a close, only a few weeks away.

I had no idea when I was really going back, and the thought made me tense, so I steered the conversation away, talking about the curiosity conference I was doing with some of my students at the university. I invited him to come, even though I knew he would have an impossible time making the trip from Hubli, and he said he would try. (In the end, he never made it to the conference.)

During the conversation I mentioned a few NGOs that would be coming to the conference, one which was founded by Chaand, a UPenn undergrad, and who Suresh had recently met. “I’m starting my own NGO too,” Suresh exclaimed, and he went on to tell me about it, though even at the end of the discussion I remained unclear what the organization’s mission might be. Suresh seemed to want to replicate much of what he was doing with Adhyaapaka, except instead of being a mentor, he wanted to be in charge. “We started it a few years back, but the problem is we are all busy, we have other jobs right now. There’s no time, but I will start it again. Will you join it, you can be on the board!” I tried to be as enthusiastic as possible without giving a commitment, balancing my research prerogative with those bounds of friendship that had developed as we’d gotten to know each other beyond the confines of work and research.

As we tried to think through how Suresh might go about developing his NGO our conversation returned to Chaand and his NGO. “Maybe you can put me in touch with him again. How was he able to do everything that he did?” Suresh inquired as he pulled up the NGO’s website on his phone. I started to tell Suresh his full story: about how he had taken a year off of school to start his organization, about how he had raised thousands of dollars of funding through a KickStarter campaign, and how he had managed to get his organization off the ground and running by the age of 23.

“23!” Suresh was almost in shock, before getting noticeably more somber, his shoulders slumping and eyes averting to the ground for a moment before returning my gaze. “He’s 23 and already has his own NGO. I’m already 28. And still… nothing.”

It was the shame that caught my attention first; a shame tied to a feeling of inadequacy—an emotional expression of underdevelopment—that Suresh perceived in himself. However, this inadequacy was not free-floating or random, but generated because of his position within global
development. On the one hand, Suresh’s aspirations had been re-shaped during his time as an Adhyaaapaka mentor, the possibility of creating his own NGO representing the ideal end to his work. On the other, Suresh’s slowly developing digital subjecthood allowed him to connect and compare himself to people and organizations from across the world interested in initiating development projects in India, indeed he mentioned three others beyond the one started by Chaand during our conversation – an emergent digital-development “contact zone” (Louise Pratt, 1991)30. This particular contact zone created the perception that Suresh was on an equal playing field as Chaand, an illusion that obfuscated the major differences in economic, cultural, and social capital tied to a web of financial, educational, national, transnational, and ethnic power relations. Indeed, Suresh defined difference only in terms of age, which created a paradoxical deconstruction and re-construction of power: Suresh could imagine himself in terms that were comparable to individuals all over the globe and yet practically he could not achieve these same goals. The locus of blame, then, rested with him alone.

“You shouldn’t compare yourself,” I reasoned as Suresh started to gather himself to rush back to the bus stand.

I’d discussed my relationship with Suresh with one of my doctoral colleague, who was also working in Indian schools. Describing my festering anxiety about how mentors like Suresh perceived me, whether I was right to persuade him not to compare himself, and how I should characterize my relationship with them. “Why shouldn’t they compare themselves and aspire towards the same goals?” she asked, to which I had no ready reply, realizing that I was imposing my own moral framework onto the ideas, values, and actions of the mentors. “You can never be friends. At the end of the day you can leave. Your relationship with him is tied inextricably to an extreme class difference. That power differential cannot be negotiated, and in that sense you’re not much different from Chaand.”

When I look back I cannot help but agree with her, especially after I received a Gchat message from Suresh a few months later asking if I could help him find a funder for his project.

* * *

Frame 15: Happiness

Shiva has made a plan for us to spend a Sunday together near the Ramanagara Adhyaaapaka office, where he was living and staying while his wife was giving birth back at her

30 Louise Pratt (1991) describes contact zones as “social spaces where cultures with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (33).
family home. Shiva is clearly bored and in-need of an adventure. He meets me in front of the office, wearing a pair of grey jeans and a white polo shirt. He has posted several pictures of this particular get-up on facebook, with the addition of a pair of sunglasses; a picture that shows him sitting fashionably on a hill overlooking the sea. This was how Shiva distinguished himself from the other mentors. He never dressed in the standard slacks and long sleeved collared shirts that the other mentors wore, nor did he shy away from contact with Ramaswamy and rest of the Adhyaapaka management team. I’d always been impressed by Shiva’s smooth delivery, in his ability to smilingly bring people into conversation and in his sharp understanding that networking was a necessary part of upward mobility.

These abilities were itself a byproduct of his relative class privilege within the ranks of Adhyaapaka mentors. Unlike his fellow mentors, whose families owned no more than 3 hectares of land, Shiva’s family owned over twenty and was generally prospering in his native village located at the Andhra Pradesh-Karnataka border. His family’s economic stability had allowed Shiva to try his hand at employment beyond the agricultural sector, without the stress of having to tend his family’s land or having to give up the aspiration towards a future in agriculture. For Shiva, unlike most of his fellow mentors, agriculture was not a dying industry, it was and continued to be flourishing, as much an opportunity for financial success as any other occupation. When he became frustrated with his work he would tell me casually, “It doesn’t matter for me. I can always go home to my native and work.”

Shiva would speed down the roads at 85km per hour on his bike, my eyes watering uncontrollably, and my breath caught in my throat for the entirety of my trip. There were never any helmets on these trips, a fact that concerned me to no end.

“I want to take you to the top of one of the hills close by,” Shiva tells me, explaining that we would first go on a school visit before heading out on our day together. I was excited, since anytime I thought of the hills in Ramanagara, I thought of the famous Bollywood film Sholay, which had been filmed in one of the many hills that dotted the land, and of which people were reminding me at almost any possible opportunity. I would be standing outside, trying to find something to eat, and someone, noting my foreignness, would ask my name, why I was here, then transitioning smilingly into, “Oh… you know, Sholay is filmed here.” I could almost see Gabbar Singh shouting at the top of his lungs as we passed through on Shiva’s bike.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} M. Madhava Prasad (2010) develops a beautiful line of questioning by juxtaposing the village in Sholay and the village in M.N. Srinivas’ Remembered Village. He writes, “\textit{Sholay}, the legendary blockbuster of the 1970s, was set in a village called Ramgarh. Although this Hindi-speaking village oppressed by dacoits was supposed to be located somewhere in the northern region comprising
On this day, Shiva is in a reflective mood, he is thinking about his wife, who is twenty years old, eight years his junior, and living away from home. He tells me that it has been hard for her to adjust to South Karnataka since she is most comfortable speaking Telugu and has not been able to find many friends close by. But mostly, he is telling me about his life before marriage, about the women he met and the love affair he had had. He tells the story with a dramatic flair, trying to convey a nonchalance that hides the deeper feelings that remain, “During my bachelors I was very much loving one girl. She was beautiful, very smart. We had met in the university. We were serious and actually we had decided to get married. But there were problems, still the caste issue was there and her parents were not going to approve. So one night we left in the middle of the night. I had set everything up for us. We found a place to stay a bit further away from here and we were staying together that first night. But then she became disturbed and started missing home. We called her parents and her father had told her if she did not come home he would kill himself. And after that she was too worried. So I told her, listen, if you do not want to do this, then we will not. I will drop you back home right now. And then, after some time, she started crying again, and so I took her home and we decided we should only be friends. She calls me even today. And I am nice and friendly, but that is it. She is also married now but she is still missing me.”

This particular articulation of love stays with me, an instance in which Shiva suspends himself on the precipice of cultural change, and then stays within his traditional caste confines, which, in this case, were forged along the boundaries of his Yadav caste and her Vokkaliga caste. And yet, the story, especially in conversation with me, is spoken as if a badge of honor, having traversed into the world of modernity. “Your girlfriend speaks Urdu, right Arjun?” Shiva asks, and when I reply yes, he starts to recite an Urdu poem that he has learned.

He is able to speak in Urdu-Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, and Lambadi, a local tribal language. One of Shiva’s special

---

the states of Madhya Pradesh-Uttar Pradesh-Rajasthan, the actual location where the film was shot is in south India, near a small town called Ramanagaram, about an hour’s drive from Bangalore, on the Mysore highway... If you get on to the highway and resume the journey, you will soon reach the charming city of Mysore. From here, if you venture past the city limits, you may well find yourself in a village called Ramapura, only this is not its real name. For somewhere in Mysore district is that village where the sociologist M.N. Srinivas did his fieldwork, and to which he gave the fictive name of Ramapura. This poses an interesting problem of signification. What is the difference between fictional village with a fictional name and a real village with a fictional name? ... One point we can recognize right away about such fictionalization is that it is usually applied to entities that are substitutable. The fictional village is a metaphorical substitution of the real village, which means that the village as such is conceived in metaphorical, rather than metonymical terms. In other words, it is possible to fictionalize a village only because it is already a fiction! The metaphorical elevation simply adds to the named village the connotation, “any village whatsoever. And the name Ramapura, like the name Ramgarh, seeks to ass a further inflection of quintessentiality to the entities they name” (256-257).
hobbies is the learning of languages and he is especially eager to spend time with me so that he can improve his English.

“Some girls from Belgium came to see Adhyaapaka’s program. They were studying education from the university, like you. And while they were here I learned some French.” He tells me how pretty the girls were and later shows me facebook pictures to prove his claim, showing me a girl with blonde hair and blue eyes wearing an apron and holding a plate of food, with the caption: “Belgium meets India #tikkamasala”.33 Then he adds, “Now if I go to Belgium, they are there. They have already said that I can stay with them anytime.” It was not that Shiva would ever actually go to Belgium. Rather, it was in how he imagined himself as someone who could go to Belgium, a global possibility forged through physicalized contact and sustained over social media, in facebook’s ability to re-generate memories of friendships distant in both time and space.

We reach the large school of over 300, located near the base of the Ramagiri Hill, just East of the Ramanagara town. The school was nearly empty, but for 60 ‘failing’ students who Shiva had ‘motivated’ to come to school on Sunday in order to get extra academic help. Shiva was extremely proud of the attendance and mentioned that he had convinced them to stay by telling them a special guest (see: me) would be coming. He was even more excited because a journalist from a local Kannada newspaper would be coming to document the event.

I walked into a classroom of students, sitting silently and waiting for a grand speech. Unprepared I began as I always did, asking them about their aspirations, what they enjoyed doing, and asked them if they had any questions for me. The students were most interested in “America”, having been prepped by Shiva earlier in the day, and so they asked about what kinds of foods were eaten, how far a way it was, and what sports we played. When they found out I was a teacher, they were more interested, and asked specific questions about the education system in the US, how different it was, and if I ‘liked’ America or India better. These questions and answers did not last long, and eventually the classroom went silent, Shiva would get anxious, “Listen, he has come from far away, you should not waste his time. Ask questions.”

The insistence that students ask questions, in an impromptu and unstructured manner, was one of the ways that Shiva ‘taught’ development. The problem was that students in most of these Kannada-medium classrooms had been socialized to remain silent within classroom spaces,

33 The image itself and the hashtag is especially interesting given that the woman had come to Bangalore and Karnataka, a region whose culinary culture is not at all associated with chicken tikka masala, and that the dish itself, though associated with North Indian (specifically Punjabi cuisine) is a dish that may actually find its roots in an Indian restaurant in the UK.
to answer when questioned, but never otherwise. And so, when Shiva forced students to “speak”,
without any scaffolding, it only created more anxiety and awe in the students. Not only were they
unused to asking questions, but they were also now speaking to someone whose importance had
been exaggerated.

And yet, the goal of this type of intervention was not necessarily about student learning.
Instead, it was about making Shiva’s intervention visible to a public beyond the school site. In so
doing, he reasoned, the school would also flourish, having been recognized in the larger
community as one in which students were motivated to improve their educational possibilities.
Shiva’s own self-development was tied to this kind of promotion: receiving public recognition
beyond the school or organizational contexts reinforced that his work was indeed benefitting
those around them.

Sure enough, a few weeks after our trip, Shiva called me excitedly, and said, “Arjun, you
and I are in the newspaper!” And, much to my own chagrin, there I was, pictured talking to
students with a caption that read, “Adhyaapaka organization motivates students towards success.”

As we left, one of the schoolteachers, Ragu, started to speak with Shiva, inquiring as to
where we were going and why. Upon hearing that we would be walking to the top of the nearby
hill – which I later came to know was the site of the Revana Siddeshwara Swamy Temple, a
sacred pilgrimage spot for Hindu Shaivites (Shiva worshippers) – he eagerly asked to join. The
temple’s founder, Revana Siddeshwara, was said to be the re-incarnation of Jagadguru Sri
Renukacharya, the founder of Shaiva Dharma or Shaiva Siddantha, and was said to have done
penance on this particular hill.

We walked up the hill together, a massive single stone, some 3000-feet high; the sun
beating on our heads as we climbed a jagged staircase from which the entirety of the Ramanagara
taluk was visible below. The scene was breathtaking and for a moment I forgot the research tasks
for which I had come.

Near the top Shiva and Ragu began talking about work and Shiva, as he had discussed
with me in the past, told Ragu of all his many aspirations. Ragu was taken aback and impressed
by all the many ideas, only stopping to question whether Shiva could, in fact, do everything he
said.

Ragu himself had a very different story to tell about his path towards teaching in rural
Karnataka. He spoke eloquently in both Kannada and English, revealing an educational pedigree
that exceeded even Shiva’s or mine (if one considered an engineering degree the highest form of
educational achievement, which most in this region seemed to believe). He told us, after a bit of
hesitation that he has been a chemical engineer working with a pharmaceutical company in Bangalore. After working for five years, he had quit, disillusioned with the work he was doing. “How could I go on working there when I could see what was happening. Just polluting the environment, making money, and for what? When it comes to drugs, I know how many cause horrible problems, and if I know what is happening how can I continue working there? I don’t want to live in Bangalore, I am resisting that. I would much rather stay here, away from the smartphones and all of the junk there. Everyone is just looking at their phones all day.” Then a bit later in our conversation, “See, no offense, but the Americans don’t want to test their drugs on their own people, they won’t want that. So they come here and do it here.”

Ragu’s critique is not merely about Bangalore’s biotechnology industry. Instead, it is a critique that bundles Bangalore city, the overreliance on technology, capital accumulation, with US-India power relations.

It had been ten years since Ragu had left his job in Bangalore and started working as a teacher, and yet he told the story as if it had happened just a day before, his struggle with his decision still evident so many years later. He repeated the same statement six times during our ensuing discussion: “People keep asking me always, even my mother, why I had left. How I could leave such a job. But I could not stay, I tell them ‘I don’t give a damn.’” Ragu spoke with a tone that modulated between that of resistance and self-pity. He had made what he deemed an altruistic sacrifice, only to have been questioned by his friends and family. His self-pity seemed to morph at times into resentment at his family and regret that he was forced to become a teacher. Throughout our conversation he would tell me how ‘backwards’ the students were and how difficult it was to teach them. In one sense, he is taking out his frustration on his students, articulating his own sense of self-worth by suggesting, if only subtly, that he is not like his students, too good to be teaching those who were so backwards.

Ragu had eschewed these same values and now felt himself a kind of alien within this system of valuation, ridiculed by those closest to him and working at a job he still did not find completely fulfilling, partly because of the system of valuation that simplistically hierarchicized engineering over teaching and forced him to constantly justify his choices. If anything demarcated the relation between economic transformation, their concomitant moral economies, and affective states, it was in this contrast; in how happiness was produced or diminished based on one’s willingness to accept these valuations.

* * *

103
One day in late August, I stepped off the bus and looked around, awaiting Manoj. “Hi Arjun, how was South Africa?” he yelled, bringing his motorbike up alongside me, looking as well-dressed as ever in a white collared shirt and brown slacks. I had never seen Manoj dressed any other way, a reflection, I thought, of his dedication to his work. Shiva, another Adhyaapaka mentor, once told me, laughing about his relationship with Manoj, “I love him, he is my friend, but he is too serious. He does not like to have fun.” He explained that by fun he meant that Manoj never drank or smoked with his colleagues, never stayed out late, admonished anyone who slacked off on the job, and also disliked most of the films (Kannada or otherwise) that the other mentors watched, telling me that they had to many bad elements, drinking, sexuality, and the like which he did not agree with; none of which endeared him to his colleagues. It was one thing to care, but it was entirely another thing to care so much that colleagues and friends had to care as well. Manoj would later tell me that he had given up eating meat, part of what Srinivas terms Sanskritization i.e. “a low or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant class by the local community...” (Srinivas, 1962, 48). For Manoj, his vegetarianism and the fact that he did not drink was a means by which he differentiated himself from his native village community, agriculturalists of the Vokkaliga caste.

I got on Manoj’s bike and started on my way to Adavisandra. Manoj was quiet on the way, asking a few questions and responding to my questions rather abruptly. Usually he was asking hundreds of questions about the United States, about my research, and about my family; questions which always reminded me exactly how I was positioned in this context. On this day, however, I didn’t really notice, lost as I was in my own overwhelming sensory experience, trying to remember the sights, sounds, and smells of my chosen fieldsite. It was still shocking, the contrast between the bus ride out of Bangalore – the noise, traffic, pollution, construction, congestion – and this final 20 minute journey on the back of a bike, breathing clean air, watching coconut trees, jackfruit trees, fields of raagi (a local grain) and reshmi (silk/mulberry leaves) go by, making our way up the winding, bumpy, unpaved road into the hills where Adavisandra was. It was an ecology that tricked me into binding this place in an idealized space-time disconnected from the chaos of the emerging “world city”, as so many anthropologists had done before (Nair,
This despite the fact that I knew better than to do so: neither was this “world” any more ideal than any other, nor was it disconnected from the city only 40km to its north.

It had been a few weeks since I’d been to Adavisandra. I’d gone to South Africa and was now eager to share some of the film footage from my trip with my eighth and ninth standard students. After six hours in which teaching took over I returned to Manoj’s bike and we started back towards the bus stand.

I began filming on the way back, letting the bumps of the road jostle my small handheld Sony, futilely attempting to shoot footage that would, during viewing, somehow seem more akin to that moment of lived experience: the beating of the sun against our uncovered heads, the quick swerves that kept us from hitting especially large potholes, the slowing as we passed a goatherd leading his goats or as a group of schoolchildren left school. I was a clumsy, timid cameraman, holding on to the rear handlebar a bit too hard, and squeezing my legs tightly against the sides of the bike until there was a slippery filament of sweat against my thighs. At least Manoj was a careful driver; he rarely, if ever, went more than 40km/hr on any of these roads.

Just before we reached the bus stand Manoj stopped his bike and turned around. “Arjun, I want to tell you something.” “Haan Manoj, tell me.” “My father died.” I put down my camera, the interest in capturing lived experience instantaneously evacuated from my mind. “Manoj, what?? When? Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” “Just a few days back, when you were gone.” “What happened? Was it sudden?” “Yes. It was suicide.” Manoj let out the last word – su-i-ci-de – slowly, as if his mouth still hadn’t gotten used to using the term. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner? We have spent the whole day on other things. Why are you here working still?” “It is okay. It is my job, my duty.” To me, it also seemed like the best distraction from the thought of death.

We rode slowly for the last half-kilometer to the bus stand, stretching time to experience this solemn intimacy together for a few moments longer. I asked a few more questions about his mother, about what he needed to do next, and reassured him as best I knew how, tapping into my own small cave of past experience: “Don’t keep thinking about why. You will never have an answer and it will only drive you crazy.”

Manoj’s father was a farmer who had worked his entire life in a small village in Ramanagara District, between the towns of Ramanagara (to its west) and Harohalli (to its east), and 35km south of Bangalore. His father’s death was, categorically speaking, a farmer’s suicide,

---

34 This I’ve mentioned in the introduction as the difficulty Nair faces in trying to “bind” her study of Bangalore.
an addition to the ever increasing numbers that have become as much a part of the development story in India as the glistening apartment complexes and flyovers of the expanding city. Farmer’s suicides has taken on a special role in the collective imagination as the starkest example of social disparity and suffering in India, a “ghost” (to borrow Arundathi Roy’s term) which unsettles the congratulatory tones accompanying India’s supposed emerging world power and ongoing economic development (Roy, 2012).35

Yet, traumatic events, especially the experience of losing a loved one, seem to carry with them a kind of affective immediacy that makes explanation and theorization seem insensitive or impractical. Indeed, my own interaction with Manoj reflects this need to experience death in its affective immediacy: in my instinctive closing of the camera in an attempt to somehow connect with Manoj beyond the lenses mediating gaze, in my hesitation to accept Manoj’s insistence upon

---

35 The issue came to prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s after a slew of journalistic undertakings, not the least of which were those of activist-journalist P. Sainath, whose writings from Vidarbha, Maharashtra and Wayanad, Kerala, amongst others, linked suicide to an agrarian crisis in which farmer’s saw the prices for their crops drop precipitously due to market fluctuations and the monopolization of markets by multinational corporations, in both production and consumption. Such explanations emphasize India’s liberalization and the “opening” of the economy to global markets, linking these economic policy shifts to the systematic disenfranchisement of farmers in the major agricultural belts of India. 31 districts in four states (Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala) have been characterized as suicide-prone districts, itself a highly controversial claim given that definitions with which the government used to determine a “real” farmer’s suicide was based on title to land, which left out all (women farmers, sons of farmers, or those who did not themselves own land) but landowing male heads of agricultural households (Nagaraj, 2008, 5-6).

The set of images and discourses associated with farmer’s suicide predetermine how consumers, whose engagement is largely ‘digital’ or virtual and constructed primarily through the circulation of online news media and film, make sense of the farmer’s suicide issue. For example, Munster (2012) remarks, “Prior to coming to Wayanad I was already acquainted with the problem of farmers’ suicides. Like most people in India, I had been informed about it through the Indian media.” What, then, are the characteristics associated with the category of the farmer’s suicide as they circulate through mediatized images and discourse?

In Capitalism: A Ghost Story, Roy (2012) mentions farmer’s suicides only in passing, as part of a list of atrocities brought on by the slow, steady penetration of free market capitalism into every aspect of Indian life, exacerbating social suffering for those already living in poverty. She writes, “From the poisoned rivers, barren wells, and clear-cut forests, to the hundreds of thousands of farmers who have committed suicide to escape punishing debt, to the hundreds of millions of people who live on less than two dollars a day, there are ghosts nearly everywhere you look in India” (Roy, 2012). It’s a passing reference within a list, a token nod to an issue that has become a ubiquitous explanation for capitalism’s negative effects. In an earlier version of the chapter, published as an online article in Outlook India, below a picture that shows an anonymous farmer hanging lifelessly from a cord into a well, reads the caption, “Microcredit has been the bane of many a farmer. Many have been forced to commit suicide.” Just underneath the photograph she summarizes her view in three sentences: “Microfinance companies in India are responsible for hundreds of suicides—200 people in Andhra Pradesh in 2010 alone. A national daily recently published a suicide note by an 18-year-old girl who was forced to hand over her last Rs 150, her school fees, to bullying employees of the microfinance company. The note said, “Work hard and earn money. Do not take loans.”

Roy’s example in this instance is two levels removed, recounting a girl’s words through a newspaper article—only described as a ‘national’ daily—which is implicitly linked to farmer’s suicides by the photograph, though the story itself is not described as such. Her strategy might be viewed as a useful example of Spivak’s “strategic essentialism”, objectifying the farmer and highlighting particularly heart wrenching aspects of the farmer’s suicide phenomenon in order to set the foundation for the critique of neoliberal capitalism she intends to make. It is the specific issue of microfinance in Andhra, one of the bastions of the late liberal enterprise in the guise of “poverty capital” (Ananya Roy, 2010), which is the basis for farmer’s despair and subsequent suicides, again generalizing these instantiations to the “escape of punishing debt”. In other words, such activist work has brought attention to the issue of farmer suicide’s while also beginning to congeal the farmer’s suicide archetype around a set of generic explanations, despite the highly local-specific nature of farm work and reasons for farmer’s suicide.

Munster (2012) writes, “In both academic and government literature on farmers’ suicides, the semi-dry Deccan heartland regions of India—Maharashtra’s Vidarbha region being the most infamous suicide area—are treated as the prototypical suicide zone and the majority of academic publications exclusively deal with the Deccan states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. These regions have a specific agrarian environment that revolves around issues of drought and rampant poverty combined with a massive involvement of multinational agri-corporations aggressively promoting genetically modified (GM) seeds.”
working, and in my declaration that Manoj need not think about ‘why’ his father’s death had occurred. And yet, as Ramos-Zayas (2012) reminds us, because emotion and affect carry the “illusion of immediacy and intimacy”, especially with regards to affectively intense events such as death, they can function “as powerful tools in advancing neoliberal objectives”. Indeed, to see how values migrate necessarily means attending to material changes brought on by neoliberal economics, including the loss of life – in this case in the form of farmers’ suicide – and tracing their related psychosocial changes in what we aspire for and dream about i.e. to attend to changes in value. These types of changes work not on the intellect, but on the affective, directly influencing (or affecting) the potential for particular types of action in the future; creating a “persistent way of being” in the world that is always mediated by changing social processes (Nouvet, 2014; Povinelli, 2010).

Two weeks after Manoj first told me about his father’s passing I met him again, this time to visit some of the secondary schools (8th, 9th, and 10th standard) that Manoj oversaw as part of his work with Adhyaapaka. We talked casually the entire trip, mostly about the children in his schools, their low exam scores, and his own attempts to motivate them to achieve better results. Our conversations were always a mix of Kannada and English, Manoj stumbling as he tried to communicate in English with me and I, in turn, muddling through my own questions in English, using Kannada as necessary.

While we rode from school to school, taking in the expanse of farmland along the way, I ask about Manoj’s family. “My family has a very small plot of land,” he says, “Only about half a hectare where we grow raagi. We used to grow reshmi (silk), but no longer.” He asked me if there were villages in America like the ones in Karnataka. I reply that there wasn’t anything like these Indian villages in America, but then doubt myself– I had no more knowledge about farming in America than I did about farming in India.

Eventually, we end up at Manoj’s family home. Both his family, and his uncle’s family live in the house, his family in the front three rooms and his uncle’s family in the back three. My eyes always take a moment to adjust when entering these village homes, dimly lit and with few windows, a sharp contrast to the overwhelming sunlight outside, but effective in keeping the inside cool.

As we walk in, he points to a small, closed room just inside the front entrance of his house: “This is where my father died. He hung himself here.” He lifts his hand to his throat, a gesture that I would see more than once during my time in Karnataka. Manoj himself never
characterizes his father’s passing as a farmer’s suicide. For Manoj, the category that matters is father, and for others the categories that matter are those of husband, friend, or child.

I don’t know how to reply and we continue with the tour of his home, the room in which he and his wife slept, the toilet, the small kitchen, and the large communal room with a television where his mother was lying down on a cot. She gets up for a second to say hello, but then for the most part she lays silently. I tried to make conversation once or twice, but she wasn’t able or willing to engage. Manoj and his wife, Suma, had been staying with her for the past few weeks since his father’s passing to keep her company. He is still trying to make sense of his father’s death, why and how it happened, while taking care of his mother and the family’s land.

We sit together on two chairs, just adjacent to the cot, drinking water silently while his mother dozed off. Finally, Manoj suggests that we take a walk around the village before lunch. We walk to the back of his house to see their patch of land. Raagi seeds are planted but not much is growing at all. We stand for a while and Manoj tells me that they have just sold their two goats. It was one of the first acts since his father had died, a mark of loss and change.

As we walk through his village Manoj tells me about it, “There are 80 families in the village, like my own. It has been very difficult for the farmers here, costs are high and profits are low, even for silk. The people are going through a very difficult time, they have very few educational possibilities, and most of them are not interested in changing at all.” Manoj always differentiates himself when he talks about his village and his community, always referring to “they” or “them” rather than “we” or “us”. “Only four members from my class had ever left the village for a B.Ed or BA,” he continued, “and then another five or six left to Bangalore to work as laborers. Most of the people here need two jobs, they do their agricultural work and also other jobs as well.” When I ask if he knew whether any other person in the village had committed suicide, he says no. I ask him how it was that he ended up wanting to get an education and move out while most of the other students hadn’t done this at all.

Manoj answers, “At that time there was a lot was pressure from my family. We were told it was best to get money faster and help financially rather than continue with education. My brother had gone to Bangalore to become a driver for that reason even though he had also wanted to go to school. I fought with my father about that, even though the cost for PUC college was only 500 rupees my father wouldn’t pay. My grandmother finally gave me the money to go to school. But then my sister had to get married so expenses were too high. She was married at

---

Raagi is a finger millet unique to South Karnataka.
eighteen and now she has an eleven year old daughter already.” He chuckles sadly, wordlessly conveying his disapproval, then continues, “But that is why first, before getting my B.Ed I worked at an industrial plant for four years.” Manoj shakes his head looking at his wife, who is sitting on the front steps of his house, “Dowry is very bad. I never asked for a dowry, ask Suma. Dowry never. It's a terrible thing.”

We stop to watch a friend of Manoj’s work, one of the few members of his village who had also gotten his B.Ed, slowly taking the silkworms off a bed of mulberry leaves and placing them, one by one, on the chandreki – the woven bamboo platform upon which the silkworms will spin their cocoons. A small boy walks out and smiles at us. Manoj introduces me and says, “This is Arjun from America. Do you want to go to America?” But before the boy has a chance to reply, his friend cuts him off, refusing to look over as he replies, “Yes, yes, but what good is that to us? Who will give him a job there?” There is form of defiance in his tone, as if to ask why he should care one way or the other that I am from America.

We leave soon after and return to the house.

Before we walk in I ask him if he would ever think about going into farming and he bristles. “No. No. No. Never.”

We eat lunch in a somber mood, Manoj mentions his father again in passing, remarking on his father’s resistance to his education once again, then wondering why he had to pass. Despite the somber tone of conversation I eat with pleasure, famished and enjoying the sambar and rice that are staples of lunch in South India. In the corner of the room, Manoj’s nephews are watching a cartoon on TV, a Kannada-dubbed version of SpongeBob Squarepants.

As we finish, Manoj perks up. “Arjun, have you heard of Charlie Chaplin? You know Modern Times?” I am a bit confused by the question but I reply that, yes, I know who Charlie Chaplin is and the ending to one of my favorite Chaplin films, Limelight, flashes in my head. “Do you know about his life?” I admit that I know very little about him beyond his films.

Without notice Manoj jumps out of his chair and runs into his room. I follow him and he looks for a book in his bookshelf. He pulls out a book, written completely in Kannada. He shows it to me, “This is an autobiography of Charlie Chaplin.” I look it over, a book of about 90 pages with a blue cover with a black and white picture of Chaplin from one of his films, as he explains that he bought it a while back on a trip to Sapna Bookstore in Bangalore. “You know Charlie Chaplin’s life was so hard. He suffered a lot. Even he struggled as a child. He never had a father and his mother she became crazy. He had to put her in an insane asylum. He got divorced three
times. He saw two of his children die. The government forced him to leave the United States.”

Manoj paused and thought before he continued, “One thing that is the same everywhere, stay home or go far away, everywhere you will find hardship. Always hardship.”

Soon after I take my leave, promising that we will meet again soon.

A few weeks later, Manoj comes over to my house in Bangalore with one request: he wants to watch the show *Planet Earth*, which he has been recommended by Ramaswamy and which he pursues because of his love of nature. Luckily for Manoj, I have all the episodes burned on a harddrive, so we sit together and watch the first episode. Manoj is incredibly pleased and I burn the rest of the episodes onto a DVD for him. We do not speak about his family at all.

The next time I visit Manoj’s family home is five months later, after meeting Manoj at the Adhyaapaka office. We sit in the Adhyapaaka office making small talk with the some of the Adhyaapaka mentors. Roopa, one of the only female mentors who works for Adhyaapaka, and who grew up in the same village as Manoj, tells me she wants to move to Bangalore and get a job there. I ask her if she is interested in a teaching job, but she says no. She wants a job in the private sector with a “company”. I ask her in what exactly, and she says computers. After which I ask her if she knows about computers well, she says yes. But, she says, first she needs to learn English well to get these jobs.

Manoj, who I had accompanied me on many school visits, wants to ask about the USA, as he usually does. He starts naming places - Niagara, Chicago, Washington DC, Snake River (a place I myself have never heard of) - that he wants to go. Roopa remarks, “Oh Manoj, your ambitions!” We joke that Roopa’s dream is to go to Bangalore, Manoj’s dream is to go to the USA (at least to visit), and mine was to come to Kanakapura. The interaction reminds me that aspirations and value migration are inherently gendered (Moore, 2011; Chua, 2014), and that Roopa’s and Manoj’s aspirational trajectories are shaped by their differential position in this Karnataka development story.

After leaving the office, we ride together on the now familiar road to Manoj’s house. On the way we strike up a new conversation about his village, but mainly about his father. “We owned only very little land so my father had to work as a day laborer.” I notice he doesn’t use the term *coolie*, as I expect based on my conversations in Adavisandra with my students’ parents. “He would pick reshami leaves from other peoples land, climbing trees and pick coconut, etc. For this he would receive 200-300 rupees. But in the end he would use a lot of it on alcohol.” He pauses to talk more about alcohol in his village. “Younger folks now go to wine shops in the
towns, but the older folks, like my father, drink ‘sarai’. It is the local drink. I have thought many times, Why? What is the need? But my friends, colleagues all are drinking. You should tell them not to.” “My father didn’t drink too much when I was in school, but soon after I started my job my father’s drinking increased a lot.” When I ask why, Manoj says he doesn’t know. He concludes the same thing when asked about his father’s suicide, “Many times with suicide, we never know the reason.”

When we arrive I greet his mother and wife. His mother seems to be doing much better now, having adjusted to life without her husband. She talks to me for a bit, though our conversation remains limited as she has not yet adjusted to my broken, poorly pronounced Kannada. When I see his wife, Manoj tells me that they are expecting their first child. I congratulate them both and after lunch Manoj talks about his ambitions for them. Manoj says he insisted on marrying a degree holding girl. “My parents had no education,” he explains, “But with me and my wife both with degrees, it will be much easier for my children. I have always been interested in space travel,” he tells me, “I want my children, either girl or boy, to become astronauts.”

Manoj grabs his computer and shares a clip that he has downloaded off of Youtube, a clip from TV9 News, a local Kannada television network, about Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian-American astronaut and the first Indian woman to have gone into space. Chawla was born in Karnal, India before migrating to the United States to complete her master’s degree in aerospace engineering from UT-Arlington in 1982. The news story is about her tragic end, her death as part of the 2003 space shuttle Columbia disaster, in which seven crewmembers died. After her death, she was memorialized both in India and in the United States. 74th Street in Jackson Heights, Queens, was re-named after her as Kalpana Chawla Way, a dormitory at UT-Arlington was named Kalpana Chawla Hall in 2004, the MetSat series of Indian meteorological satellites were renamed the Kalpana series, and, closest to Manoj’s home, The Kalpana Chawla Award was instituted by the government of Karnataka in 2004 for young women scientists.

I asked Manoj afterwards whether he wasn’t afraid that his children might die like Kalpana if they became astronauts. He looks at me with no concern at all. “We all die somehow sometime,” he says, “Some at 60, 70, some earlier. But even now 10 years later, I remember her. Do something great even if death follows.”

There are few ideas that I’d like to reflect upon as I return “my anthropological subconscious” (Jackson, 2013) to the sounds, images, and smells associated with Manoj’s home.
First, is the great extent to which my interactions with Manoj are mediated by a number of markers of belonging – in our roles as educators and researchers interacting with the same students and the same NGO, in the language mixing necessary to speak, and in the acknowledged nationally-mediated cultural difference that influences what Manoj chooses to speak to me about and how Manoj chooses to do so. Mostly, it is the very fact I have an (American) passport and can travel ‘freely’ as a “global citizen”, which separates us and sets the stage for much of our relationship and discussion. It isn’t surprising that Manoj chooses from signs and symbols that he associates with globality and assumes that I will understand, given that I have traveled from the United States. This is, of course, the interactional framework from which my particular anthropological imagination, and its scholarly possibility, begins.

Second, I realize that my persistent need to know why Manoj has strived to achieve upward mobility is a vestige of liberalism’s influence on my thought, in my subtle interest in “the difference of the will” and perseverance, what Povinelli argues is “a way of holding those who suffer accountable: ‘Look, this one had the will to lift herself up by her bootstraps’…” (Povinelli, 2010, 33). By framing Manoj and his story as one of success and willfulness, one runs the risk of missing the real structural inequalities which shape both Manoj’s life and, for example, that of his neighbor, who also completed his bachelor’s degree in education, but failed to land a job and returned to his village to continue in his family’s traditional agricultural occupation. These two paths, along with the values and affects that accompany these divergent paths, must be seen together as part of what late capitalism produces, without imposing a value-judgment on one over the other, as Nouvet (2014) reminds in her work.37

Third, and most importantly, I am struck by how much the experience of suffering associated with his father’s death has changed for him, and for me, even over just a short period. Suffering is never static when it is experienced individually, with new notions of life accompanying the experience of suffering as Manoj tells and re-tells his story, which reflect what Han argues are “the work of time in reweaving life again: the very modes of relatedness that emerge from and through suffering” (Han, 2013, 233; Das, 2007). These modes of relatedness are themselves complexly situated in sociohistorical contexts and, in Manoj’s case, the experience of

---

37 Nouvet (2014) writes, “As affect theorists such as Butler (2004), Braidotti (2007), Ahmed (2010), and Cvekovic (2007) have warned, there is no natural correlation between positive social or personal outcomes and specific affects. Hope and happiness can facilitate structural inequalities and violence (Ahmed 2010), but these can also negate an apathetic resignation to the status quo (Hage 2002). Shame can reproduce oppressive social divisions, but it can also empower us “to repair the failings or limitations of our human endeavors” (Braidotti 2007, 200). Pain can suck us in, produce a collapse into oneself—disconnecting us from the world and therefore from the possibility of political action. But pain is also often, if not normally, an indication of connection to the world” (97).
suicide reflects his own changing mode of social life.

Manoj’s characterization of his father’s passing is not couched in any language of individual pathology. Rather, Manoj displaces his father’s suffering (and his own) onto the social, framing it— as an anthropologist or sociologist might— within a set of agricultural social relations in a manner which does not isolate his father’s mental illness or render it “to be the exclusive fault of individuals who are sociopathic, criminal, or, at best, irresponsible or organically sick” (Bourgois, 2010: 18). By making his father’s suffering social, Manoj himself makes links to and implicitly theorizes suicide within a set of economic, political, and social processes he witnesses within his community. Not only is his father’s death a byproduct of the slowly deteriorating condition of agriculturalists and agriculture in Karnataka, its part of a larger set of co-occurring processes: lack of financial opportunities in agriculture, lack of education, alcoholism in the community, stereotypically patriarchal gender norms, etc.

Yet, Manoj readily distances himself from these social processes, “they” differentiated from him by his education, occupational aspirations, and re-defined cultural sensibility, best reflected in the idea of dowry that he finds deeply problematic though characteristic of the “mentality” of those still living in his native place. These distinctions are themselves a part of a “developmental common sense”38 associated with globalizing Bangalore that Manoj readily embraces in trying to make sense of and differentiate himself from those who have remained in his home community. Indeed, Manoj’s identity as a Adhyaapaka mentor, whose task it is to spread educational values derived by managers working out of Bangalore, means that questioning these urban values would directly affect his sense of Self, much the same way that pathologizing his father would. Manoj bristles when the idea of returning to farming comes up in conversation, he shakes his body in sadness when the thought of dowry comes up, and stands proudly when he reminds himself that he has eschewed those particular cultural markers. Even Manoj’s interactions with his neighbor obviate this divergent set of identities as Manoj’s aspirations come in direct and immediate conflict when they speak of “America” and the dream of visiting someday. In other words, there is a “falling out”, to use Han’s (2013) characterization, facilitated by Manoj’s changing aspirational values and social position, that makes him a neighbor who no longer finds comfort in those who he perceives as his kin group and which is central to his suffering.

This is one sense in which development-based values produce a form of “close-distance”

38 In this characterization I’m drawing from Ramos-Zayas’ (2012) idea of “urban common sense” as it is articulated during her fieldwork in Newark.
(Mazzarella, 2004), creating a class of people within a community whose birth might suggest they are from a place, but whose education and occupation push them further away from these places as they develop values which work to affectively facilitate their own “othering”. “The close”, at least physically, becomes distant as a global aspirational identity emerges and, in this case, re-mediates how Manoj can experience the death of his father.

At the same time, “close-distance” works to make the distal feel more proximal, with the sharpest examples of this being in Manoj’s ability to identify himself with both Charlie Chaplin and Kalpana Chawla. Of course, Manoj does not randomly draw upon Chaplin or Chawla, nor are these signifiers somehow free-floating (Rockefeller, 2011), but rather are based upon historically constituted categories of “gender, age group, class, ethnicity, and, of course, subjectivity – as well as the penetration of global processes into local worlds” (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1997, 2). Manoj draws upon these particular figures partly with regards to the specific networks of circulation and consumption to which he has access in Karnataka and partly based on other moral economies in which Manoj participates.

First, the ideas of hardship, toil, and suffering have held a central, if constantly changing role, in South Indian moral traditions, since, at the very least, 15th Century (Pandian, 2008). Pandian (2008) sees one moment of change in the idea of toil in “[t]he rise of a colonial capitalist order rewarding the exertions of certain individuals with property and greater wealth” (178). In some sense, Manoj’s characterization can be seen as another iteration, a conceptual understanding of hardship directly influenced by the more recent workings of globalization. To see himself in relation to these two figures and their life histories is to change how Manoj conceives of himself as a global subject even in his understandings of life and death, a powerful method by which the subject remains tied to values associated with global development even, as in this case, if these same values have been the reason for hardship and suffering given that the reasons for economic despair are tied directly to the changing economic policies that place primary on global-urban development at the expense of the rural (Nagaraj, 2008). His remark, “Hardship is everywhere” rationalizes and occludes the particularities of hardship in his community, de-politicizing and therefore allowing for the continuation of structural inequalities which beget such hardship in rural Karnataka. It is the “bootstrap performativity” of neoliberal subjecthood that becomes the basis for Manoj’s own self-identity, one in which he can be an “anywhere” political agent – best illustrated in his inclusion within the innerworkings of an education NGO whose job it is to develop those within communities like his own – as long as he has eschewed the political critiques of neoliberal functioning in his particular sociocultural context (Povinelli, 2010; Nouvet,
As Manoj begins to see his particular social conditions of life as part of a global narrative, rather than a local one – in future aspirations that link both his familial decisions, current occupational trajectory, and his children’s life possibilities – his sense of community belonging, neighborliness, and identity are all re-framed such that Chaplin or Chawla or even I can be “the outsider who is my neighbor”. Drawing from Han (2013) once again, these figures serve as a kind of “communal other [that] rests not on identity and difference, but rather on common conditions of life, in which life is both past and future” (236).

At the same time, these ideas of community and the globe are heavily mediated by local categories of linguistic and national belonging. His introduction to Chaplin itself comes through Kannada-dubbed versions of his films that show on television and the autobiography he purchased, written entirely in Kannada and sold in a Bangalore bookstore, hinting at the complex web of global-urban forms that draw upon specific identity markers not traditionally associated with the global, in this case the Kannada language itself, to draw a heterogeneous set of publics into a global conversation.

As importantly, Manoj’s ability to identify with the figure of Chawla is linked to an understanding of an Indian diaspora constructed upon a sense of ethnic-relation tied to national identity in a globalizing context, what Shukla argues, “conveys an affective experience in a world of nations, through its proposition of global belonging as a means of self- and group representation” (Shukla, 2003, 4). The circulation of Chawla’s image on Kannada media networks, as an “Indian-abroad”, facilitates the creation of a global diasporic identity which does not merely affect those who live in migratory contexts, such as the United States, but has an equally powerful affect on those who continue to live within localities within India as well, in this case those who live in rural Karnataka. For Manoj, a sense of community is re-shaped forging linkages between himself and those living in Jackson Heights, New York, which are constitutive of how he makes sense of death and loss. In this case, Manoj juxtaposes his own father’s death with that of Chawla to underscore what might be considered a “valuable death” in a mass-mediated globalizing world. For him, like many others, memorialized death is no longer confined to traditional physical sites of burial and cremation in public shrines or private homes,

39 Jackson (2012) references Peters (1999) to argue “that new media technologies, from telegraphy to the telephone, radio to television, photography to film, have always been predicated on an attempt to beat back death, to transcend our own mortality” (Jackson, 2012, 482).
but also includes virtual places (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010). Chawla’s death is a ‘worthy death’ because she “has done something great” – gone to space and died in the process – remembered by a global digital public through both mediatization, in the local and national media coverage of the shuttle crash and Chawla’s death, and digitization, in the news reports upload onto (and download from) youtube, accessible to anyone who has the internet. This framing obviates, of course, the class-based inflections of such value- formations, taking as a given that access by a global digital public is of more import than access by those who live only walking distance away.

These sentiments are another refraction of the kinds of value-affects associated with development that drive future actions of Adhyaapaka mentors like Manoj. For example, twelve months later when I return to Bangalore and meet Manoj, he is happy to report that he has finally received approval of his passport application. Not only for himself, but for his wife and his new baby. He cannot stop talking about his excitement over receiving his passport and he requests my presence at a pooja at the temple near his home. Afterwards he wants to think about where he might go first, still a far-away potentiality despite his new documentation. First, he remembers he will need a visa for most countries, and we eliminate most of them one by one on this basis alone. Then he starts to search for plane tickets on his phone, something that he has not done thus far despite his aspirations to travel. When he sees the prices he is again dismayed, not knowing if there will ever be a time when he can afford a plane ticket. Finally, he decides, “I can go to Bangkok, they will give me a visa immediately when I land.” In the end, it did not matter where Manoj went, just that he could go, the “spatial imaginary of hope” that, as Chua (2014) writes, shapes “possibility in ways that informed… everyday endeavors and projects of worth” (134). Projects of worth which, in Manoj’s case intersected with his need to go elsewhere, join an imagined global community that was not just about travel, but also about the development of his Self and that of Others, and which ultimately kept him rooted in his work with Adhyaapaka.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have tried to continue with the idea of “development fiction”, except this time focusing on the lives of the mentors of the Adhyaapaka organization, those who work directly within school sites and who have been hired, at least partially, because of their particular knowledge of the communities in which they have been tasked to work. What I argue is that their particular “funds of knowledge” are considered static and, in turn, limit how upwardly mobile they can be within the organization.
Within this frame, I began with Ramaswamy leading a mentor retreat in Hubli in order to show the types of bundled values that Ramaswamy sought to impart to the mentors, ones which were exemplified in the opulence of the Taj Hotel and the text, *Turtles, Termites, and Traffic Jams*, a continuation of the discussion of digital development and value that I began to excavate in Chapter Two. At the same time, each of the mentors’ stories are refractions of the overall idea of “digital development”, the mentors values and aspirations shaped by their own positionings within the global-digital future they imagine for themselves and those who they seek to develop. Broadly, what I have sought to show is the relationship between these aspirations and the material realities of their lives, which constrain just how far they might be able to go in actualizing their aspirations and, in turn, the particular affective states in which they find themselves.

As a starting point, I show how the mentors’ self-development is linked to aspirations towards the creation of their own organizations rather than merely remaining low-level participants in Adhyaapaka. In Shiva’s case, his aspirations have multiplied, in wanting to maintain his connections to his home and family while also partaking in the possibilities that have emerged as he has worked with Adhyaapaka. Specifically, he imagines himself travelling to Belgium, an aspiration facilitated by his continued friendship on Facebook with students from a university in Belgium who had come to observe Adhyaapaka’s programming. At the same time, Shiva differentiates himself from those who he deems in-need-of-development, not having achieved the social capital that himself has achieved. Still, Shiva’s sense of development is always tied to capital accumulation, in constant attempts to make more money. This need for monetary reward was also reflected in Suresh’s narrative, one in which he seeks to learn from Anand, the former lawyer turned COO, whose skills he believes will give him an opportunity for upward mobility. At the same time, Suresh’s ability to compare himself with others on digital contact zones, leads to his feelings of inadequacy, at once seeing himself in a comparable position, yet not having achieved his aspirations, namely that of starting a successful NGO. In Manoj’s case, he has chosen his occupational path as an alternative to a future in agriculture, one that he is viscerally against because of the hardships his family has experienced. He places the sufferings he has faced, and specifically the suicide of this father, in relation to his global aspiration, which has congealed in relation to the figures of Charlie Chaplin and Kalpana Chawla. These figures hold special sway given their memorialization, and Chawla’s death is especially powerful given her memorialization in virtual worlds, only heightening the significance of her death, an important manifestation of digital development.
I have included in this section two other important moments of ethnographic interaction: first, the mentors interactions with a government official who they invite to “discovery village” and which I argue is a way of understanding how officials are incentivized to participate in development interventions. Second, I juxtaposed Shiva’s story with that of Ragu, a teacher who gave up a job in the technology sector and is now facing the constant pressure to justify his decision given the over-valuation of engineering jobs in Bangalore and its surrounding regions, a valuation that has direct effects on those in schools, both for students and teachers.
CHAPTER 4: Bureaucratic Dissatisfaction

Frame 17: Charismatic and Bureaucratic Dissatisfaction

Its June 2014, I’m ambivalently scouring my facebook page, as I always do, checking out updates from friends and the many articles that pop up on my newsfeed. It’s a ritual that I cannot break, no matter how much I tell myself that I am wasting time. It’s those few instances when I find something important, hidden within the thicket of pictures, captions, articles, updates, that keep me coming back for more.

On this day, for example, I see a new post by Adhyaapaka CEO Prakash, reflecting on newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Swachh Bharat or “My Clean India” campaign, intended to bring about a total change in Indian sanitation by (1) building individual latrines for those under the poverty line, (2) constructing sanitary latrines for women in villages, (3) constructing drainage, (4) soakage pits, and solid waste disposal, and (5) initiating a massive health education plan to spread awareness of personal and household hygiene. Riffing on the “Quit India” movement, the iconic civil disobedience movement Gandhi launched in August 1942 to spur on the withdrawal of the British colonial government, Modi is quoted as having said, “Bapu gave us the message ‘Quit India. Clean India’, but his ‘Clean India’ dream is still unfulfilled,” Mr. Modi said, speaking in Hindi. Referring to the winning logo, which features Mahatma Gandhi’s round-rimmed spectacles, Mr. Modi said, “When I saw that logo, I felt as if Gandhiji is looking at us through those spectacles to see if we have made India clean yet.” He asked his countrymen to give Gandhi the gift of a clean India for his 150th birth anniversary. ‘I am confident that Clean India will give us as much joy as Quit India,” he said.

Modi’s goal is said to be to make India “clean” by October 2, 2019, the day of Gandhi’s birth, hyperbolically linking himself to India’s most iconic figure and projecting an incredible significance onto his own campaign. Perhaps as importantly, Modi strategically brought in nine prominent Indian celebrities, including Aamir Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Salman Khan, Anil Ambani, Kamal Hassan, Kapil Sharma, Sachin Tendulkar, and Shashi Tharoor⁴⁰ to help him with his campaign, filming all of them sweeping the streets along with Modi and taking advantage of the celebrity culture of political and social change initiatives in India – the Indian equivalent to the Bono effect in the United States – overdetermined by the hyperreal, to use Baudrillard’s term, in which entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the scenes of banal everyday life, why Baudrillard argues that it “is a

⁴⁰ Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, Kamal Hassan, and Priyanka Chopra are some of Bollywood’s biggest film stars. This year, Priyanka Chopra is also starring in the American TV Show Quantico, an illustration of the East-to-West transnational crossovers occurring more frequently in the entertainment industry. Anil Ambani is the chairman of the Reliance Group. Kapil Sharma is a comedian and Indian TV host. Sachin Tendulkar is considered the “greatest” Indian cricketer.
principle of simulation, and not of reality, that regulates social life” (Baudrillard, 2002, 120). The celebrity, not surprisingly, takes on an added signification in the age of the hyperreal, making the everyday act of sweeping, for example, more intense and worth taking seriously by their very participation in the acts. The celebrity becomes, therefore, an integral method by which change can be initiated in the digital age, a point I will return to later in this chapter.

What catches my attention on this morning, however, are Prakash’s thoughts on the subject:

Waking up early morning in Cupertino, California... seeing pictures of so many celebrities and politicians including our PM cleaning streets with a broom takes me back to 2007. During my first week in Adhyaapaka when we went to a school in kanakapura, the teacher was proud to show that the kids all come early and clean up the classrooms. In one room where they were cleaning it was mostly bits of paper! Our founder [Ramaswamy] asked a very simple question why is there so much garbage in the first place? Why can’t you (the teacher) keep a waste basket in the corner! I wish Modi had asked such a simple question and got the entire country thinking! Instead of the broom cleaning video I wish he had eaten a chocolate, kept the wrapper in his pocket and then later on thrown it in a garbage can when he came across one. I wish he talked about buying products with minimal packaging, composting, recycling, etc... etc...

These words are written some two months after Ramaswamy’s ouster, a nostalgic reflection about the man who founded the organization which he can no longer take part in. I’m especially drawn to Prakash’s evocative description of “seeing” Indian celebrities while in Cupertino, he, like me, waking up to the cycle of his own newsfeed and the affective entanglements to place – in this case India – and people – in this case his former mentor – it produced.

Perhaps more importantly, I’m also imagining Ramaswamy making these comments in front of a group of silent teachers and students who listen without replying, a scene which I myself had witnessed many times before. It’s the cult of personality that had surrounded Ramaswamy during his time with Adhyaapaka, a cult of personality that, at times, had made the organizational structure itself suspect. Was it merely Ramamurthy’s charisma that had gained Adhyaapaka its success or was there something beyond the figure that had led to its success in increasing student scores in Karnataka schools?

Recall Ramaswamy’s own story of his first school engagement and the headmaster’s response to the school’s new found success in Chapter 2: *It was you who made us believe we could do it*. These type of statements from teachers and, now on facebook by Prakash, who inadvertently relates Ramaswamy to the Prime Minister of India, slotted Ramaswamy in the category of the charismatic leader along with its concomitant instability and potential for deterioration.
In Weber’s classical delineation of authority, he outlines three particular cases of authority: the bureaucratic, the traditional (feudal and primitive), and the charismatic. He defined the last as “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary” (Weber, 1978, 241). And it was this kind of exceptionality that defined Ramaswamy from the moment I met him – older, more energetic, and stronger beliefs – in contrast to anyone else in Adhyaapaka’s organization.

At the same time, for Weber, charismatic authority was inherently unstable, antithetical to formalized power and “methodological rational acquisition, in fact, all rational economic conduct” beholden as it was to its own ideals. With Adhyaapaka, for example, there emerged a clear fissure between the bureaucratic authority cultivated in the formal Adhyaapaka structure – a Board of Directors, CEO, COO, field managers, and mentors working in the field – and Ramaswamy’s role as founder who did not have any organizational functioning, but instead went from school after school, spreading his version of Adhyaapaka’s mission wherever he went with an almost mystical zeal.

And yet, Ramaswamy was himself a kind of paradox, dismissing much of the routinization of functionings in the organization, even as he pragmatically wanted to see Adhyaapaka grow beyond his own role; growth which necessarily meant more funding, more bureaucracy, and more systematization. It is in this sense that Ramaswamy’s role in Adhyaapaka was highly unstable, “opposed not only to structure but, almost paradoxically, ultimately to [himself]” (Hansen, 2001, 103-104). These are the paradoxes which I would like to turn to in this chapter, outlining the affectively laden debates over funding and the direction of Adhyaapaka that eventually result in, what Eisenstadt terms, the “attenuation of charisma” i.e. the slow deterioration of charismatic authority in the face of rational bureaucratic routinization, which, in this case, also reflects the global urban development framework, along with its concomitant set of valuations – technological, moral, spiritual, economic, and political – within which education NGOs like Adhyaapaka struggle to maintain a coherent mission and vision (Eisenstadt in Hansen, 2001, 105).

I glance through the comments underneath Prakash’s post and find embedded after some twenty comments a remark by Ramaswamy himself, “A good point and thanks for remembering me.”
One of Prakash’s biggest points of pride was that he had managed to procure large amounts of funding for Adhyaapaka, his transnational connections in the technology world paying immediate dividends in his current social justice endeavor. Over his first seven years with the organization he had forged new relationships with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, NDTV and Coke, and the Deshpande Foundation, a transnational philanthropic organization whose global influence and philosophical bent might be best symbolized by the MIT Deshpande Center for Technological Innovation, founded in 2002 to “increase the impact of MIT technologies in the marketplace”, an explicit and intentional mapping of market logics onto the technology sector. These funding sources had resulted in a total Adhyaapaka annual budget of 5 crores (approx. $1.25 million US dollars) making it one of the largest NGOs in India which was not directly linked to a parent corporation (for example in the relationship between Wipro, the India-based tech giant, and the Azim Premji Foundation, to which Wipro founder Azim Premji pledged $2 billion in 2010).

Most often Prakash would affectionately talk about his relationship with “MSDF”, the acronym seeming to imply an especially intimate relationship with the organization, akin to calling a friend by his or her pet name. The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation is the philanthropic organization started by billionaire Michael Dell, Founder and CEO of Texas-based Dell, Inc., one of the largest computer retailers in the world, and his wife Susan. MSDF was one of the many foundations, both in the United States and in India, whose founders had made their money as technologists, and were giving shape to the mandates of digital development in India.

MSDF has focused its support on urban education, childhood health, and family economic stability, though almost 65% of their total budget of $1 billion went exclusively to educational development. The foundation had projects focused in only three countries: the United States, South Africa, and India. The choice of South Africa and India, while seemingly arbitrary, was not nearly so confounding when viewing the two nation-states through the prism of the BRICS logic, a moniker intended to group the nation-states Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa and mark them as particularly fast growing economies with significant involvement in global affairs as members of the G-20. India and South Africa were especially important in the

41 http://www.deshpandefoundation.org/
42 A few others include: the Gates Foundation, Azim Premji Foundation, Gill Foundation
BRICS model given their embrace of neoliberal economic policies, loosely defined here as the opening of markets and borders to free trade.

This economic openness was bundled together with the social inequality in each context. Take this explanation by Susan and Michael Dell on their website:

“In India, an estimated 47 percent of children, many of them living in the country’s urban slums, suffer from malnutrition, while an estimated 85 percent of school children drop out of school before grade nine. In South Africa, less than one in 20 black students ends up with a post high-school qualification or degree, compared to one in two white students.”

The seeming paradox between economic openness and social inequality actually provided both the possibility and impetus for foundation-based development interventions like MSDF’s, these two nation-states being the “right” nation-states for development interventions given their economic and political foundations and developmental needs, only further constraining where the aforementioned circuits of poverty capital might flow in relation to the migration of particular values, moral and political.

Prakash’s connection to MSDF was a result of his own career in Texas, during which he had traveled in many of the same tech circles eventually forging the relationships necessary to procure the promise of funding. These relationships were forged despite the fact that MSDF has explicitly characterized its programs as urban-based, seemingly in contradiction to the almost exclusively rural interventions of Adhyaapaka. Indeed, part of the constant negotiation for Prakash in procuring this funding, and eventually, funding from other agencies, was how to appropriately re-frame Adhyaapaka’s programming to fit the stated goals of funding agencies. In this case, Prakash navigated the urban-rural divide through the mediating variable of technology, arguing that teaching technology would produce students who were capable of joining the global-urban workforces situated in Bangalore, a workforce that explicitly needed more workers with computer skills and implicitly facilitating the rural-urban migration patterns that would further integrate the rural with the urban. These logical contortions, necessary to procure funds, were the first moments where I noticed a kind of fissure of the Adhyaapaka model, a small compromise of Adhyaapaka’s vision of smallscale, bottom-up rural school empowerment for the procurement of funding, justified because MSDF’s cause, whether it was aligned with Adhyaapaka’s or not, was still directed towards social change in India and, presumably, only helped Adhyaapaka continue its own interventions in the field.

43 http://www.msdf.org/founders-letter-2013/
The first initiative Prakash embarked on with MSDF was a project to give a USB drive to every student in his network of schools in Karnataka. The project was an outgrowth of a longer set of experiments that focused on technology-based development in India, perhaps most prominently instantiated in Dr. Sugata Mitra’s “Hole in the Wall” experiment. Mitra, a professor Newcastle University in the UK, devised a simple experiment: he placed a computer in a wall and watched for the results. Over time, he (supposedly) discovered that students were learning how to use the computers on their own, independent of teachers, creating peer-based learning communities that seem to have the added advantage of allowing for learning processes that have been stifled by the rote memorization and standards based learning models perceived as the bedrock of the government school classroom. Concurrent with Mitra’s findings were a slew of other tech-based initiatives modeled around this idea, for example the “One Laptop per School” idea, implemented most expansively in Peru, but was also a part of a new initiative by the “One Laptop per Child project” India, which provided a $100 laplet, a hardware that they claim is “suited for children in India who live in some of the most remote environments. It is flexible, ultra-low-cost, power-efficient, responsive, and durable. It has been devised keeping tough Indian conditions in mind.”

Previous to the USB project, Adhyaapaka also had a version of the same project, which it began in 2006, implemented by one of the Adhyaapaka board of directors, KK Subramanium, an expert in opensource computing, who selected 46 schools to integrate a laptop with FOSS (Free and Open Source Software) into their classroom learning. Blogging about the program, Ganesh wrote:

“Only two of these schools had computers (three months and six months) but the desktop computers were rarely used due to power cuts and brown outs. Most of them knew very little English and the system was not localized in Kannada. The schools were located in remote areas. Their only source of support were two field Mentors, Asha Rani and Roopa, who would visit them about once a week or fortnight. It would be a miracle if they managed to integrate computers into their classes under such conditions... A miracle it was!”

---

44 http://www.olpcindia.net/hardware.php
The critiques of Mitra’s model and the broader technology-as-development ideology have come from all quarters, perhaps most directly from Michael Trucano, the ICT specialist of the World Bank no less, who stated sarcastically, “Dump hardware in schools, hope for magic to happen.” Indeed, Ganesh’s description of the success of the laptop project as “a miracle” only highlights this tendency towards mythologizing technology’s possibilities for social change which Ganesh continues on to compare to “the way schools of yore used microscopes and telescopes to open up worlds from the tiny atoms all the way to the magnificent objects in the heavens.”

Scholars have critiqued these idealized notions of technology-based educational change, finding (1) the need for computers in areas that have far more pressing and immediate concerns; (2) an urban-transnational elitism in the surprise that rural children could learn a technology, (3)

46 http://www.geekculture.com/joyoftech/joyarchives/1034.html
47 http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/node/654
48 https://larrycuban.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/no-end-to-magical-thinking-when-it-comes-to-high-tech-schooling/
49 Kensington (2004) writes, “Several years ago, when I mentioned to the great scholar of India, the late Myron Weiner, my interest in IT in India, he asked whether I meant the use of computers in Indian schools. I allowed that this was indeed an interest. He burst out, ‘Are you insane? Don’t you realize that there are 60 million Indian children who are not in school at all? For the cost of a computer, you can have a school!’” (19).
the idea of a non-facilitated learning model superficial and limited – perhaps allowing students to learn basic technology skills but not much beyond that – and decidedly anti-education. Prakash had heard all of these critiques and, at least partly, he sought to justify the USB project in relation to them. “You see,” he told me, “the problem with the one laptop model and all is that they are too expensive, not scalable, and, even more importantly, they don’t really have a connection to the technology. It stays in the school and that’s all. But with the USB Drive they get to keep it, create their own projects on it, and they have a sense of ownership, even though they are still working with their teachers in classrooms.”

In other words, Prakash’s view was always that technology could never be a magic bullet in and of itself, but had to be considered within the broader school communities in which students were educated. However, what I found more interesting in his explanation was the sense of ownership that Prakash pointed to in his discussion of technology and the affective relationships that it was intended to forge between the technology and the students’ sense of Self. The term “ownership” situated the project within the constellation of economic determiners of value i.e. to own the means of production, in this case the USB Drive, and mapped it onto technology, what I think is one instantiation of how an “emotional techno-capitalism” – to riff on Illouz’ (2007) conception of an emotional capitalism as a dual process by which emotional and economic relationships come to define and shape each other – is cultivated through projects like Adhyaapaka’s, in which technological and economic relationships come to define emotional relationships and vice versa. In other words, emotional techno-capitalism and the urban values associated with it are another set of registers upon which digital development is built.

Emotional techno-capitalism was not just cultivated at the student level, but at the teacher level as well. Prakash singles out and announces the accomplishments of one of the teachers in Adhyaapaka’s network of schools on Facebook, hailing the feat of translating a version of GCompris, an education learning software, into the Kannada-language.

Please meet Shambu, one of our star teachers from Kanakapura who embraced our open source computer initiative since 2007 and after being with us for over 5yrs was transferred out of Adhyaapaka schools. But he has kept up with his passion for open source computing and kannada and has now proudly contributed back in the form of http://gcompriskn.blogspot.in as his gift on Rajyotsava day. Adhyaapaka is proud of him and wishes him the best and hope it inspires other teachers.

GCompris’ major feature was that it was free and open access, which meant that there was no restriction on use, improvement, and ability to adapt it to any context. In a sense, it seemed to
reflect the opposite of an emotional techno-capitalism, free for anyone, anywhere. In Ramaswamy’s response to the Adhyaapaka facebook post he suggests as much:

The credit goes first to Ganesh who passionately pushed for OS SW in SF against odds from commercial interests. Then to Shambu who absorbed it all and put it to use. A great combination of a good Guru and an equally good disciple:) A footnote: Ganesh himself is history now in SF.

The reference to commercial interests seem to be a slight jab at Prakash and Adhyaapaka’s changing model for growth, one heavily reliant on corporate funding, in the guise of, for example, Michael and Susan Dell Foundation.

And yet, the GCompris project was not floating independent, but embedded in an emotional “common sense” (to borrow Ramos-Zayas’ term) that sees technology as the driver for upward mobility and success and, indeed, the pride that Prakash felt at this teacher’s success was not merely because of the successful completion of the technology project but because of the symbolic implications for student educational possibility. In other words, the framing of success and recognition around technology was itself a part of Adhyaapaka’s techno-capitalist logic, despite the fact that the technology itself was, seemingly, free and open access.

Other markers of belonging mediate this affective merging of technology and Self, in this case markers of regional and state belonging. Rajyotsva Day literally translates to “Karnataka Formation Day”, celebrated on November 1 of every year to commemorate the day in 1956 when Karnataka state was created by merging all the Kannada-speaking regions in Karnataka.

Language politics in India has a long and affectively dense history, the creation of Indian states upon linguistic grounds cementing the tie between state-language-Self, especially in the Southern states of India (Mitchell, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1997). Mitchell argues that the emergent devotion to language in the late 19th Century should be seen as a byproduct of a myriad of pedagogical practices linked to an emerging print capitalism. And, in a sense, the linking of softwares that promote the learning of the Kannada language with the celebration of one’s Kannadiga identity re-animates these discussions of region, language, and affect. Now, the means by which the affective ties to regional identity and language are produced are through regionally-specific computer-based technological innovations, a means to show ones allegiance to place and identity while simultaneously assuming the value of technological innovation towards the development of the Karnataka state.

In response to Prakash’s post, Shambu himself replies. He says, “I miss my guru Ganesh sir... Can I have his contact details...” This last statement places the entire set of interactions and
technological products within a Hindu frame, relating the act of technological discovery back to the guru-shishya relations common in Hindu scholarly teachings, reflected, for example, in the work of Shankaracharya, one of the greatest sages of Hinduism, the founder of the advaitin (non-dualist) school of Hinduism, who wrote in the Vivekachudamini, a text which, admittedly, is still under dispute as to its authorial authenticity, that:

Know that death quickly overtakes the stupid man who walks along the dreadful ways of sense-pleasure; whereas one who walks in accordance with the instructions of a well-wishing and worthy Guru, as also with his own reasoning, achieves his end – know this to be true.

These types of Hindu doctrines have taken on their own common-sense value in predominantly Hindu spaces, facilitating everyday relationships, technological or otherwise, and providing the foundational structuration of feelings for NGO personnel in Adhyaapaka and many teachers, though not all, within Adhyaapaka’s network of schools. Shambu’s affectively laden statement that he misses “his guru Ganesh”, only highlights the deep religiously-mediated connection forged between the two actors, another lens by which to see how 21st century development affects are produced in India, not in a simplistic religious-technology dichotomy, but rather by mapping technological values onto preexisting values, in this case both religious and state. In sum, multiple values – technological, state, religious – are bundled in this short interaction between teacher and NGO on Facebook, together producing the types of products that are constitutive of digital development in some, if not all, Karnataka state schools.

* * *

Frame 19: Polymediation

I’m driving with Ramaswamy on a day in March 2013, up the same Kanakapura Road that remains the most active member of my fieldwork, the ever-present connection between every actor, place, and idea I’ve undertaken to study.

On this day Ramaswamy has asked me to accompany him on one of his school visits to a government school in the town of Harohalli, approximately 100 meters from the Harohalli bus stand. This is part of his routine, what I’ve started to notice has become an insatiable duty. In some ways, if Ramaswamy does not keep going to schools, stops thinking of his work as grassroots, it will bring down the entire edifice of his mission. In Weberian terms this is

---

50 Amrute (2008) writes about the “salience of religious discourse and practice to regimes of production in software and related services” noting specifically that German IT managers reference Bangalore’s spirituality as a reason for its particular success in the IT sector (206). One manager remarks, the spirituality of Bangalore, “gives to the operations there an entirely different feel, conducive to broad thinking and to world-encompassing ideas” (208).

128
Ramaswamy’s “calling” one of the primary characteristics of pure charisma, akin to a mission or spiritual duty (Weber, 1978).

He is in the midst of implementing his new pet project, a primary education reading program that he wants to prove is both extremely effective and extremely scalable.

Earlier in the day I was walking through the Harohalli primary school, just 7 kilometers from Adavisandra. Unlike my own school site, nestled in the heart of agricultural land, Harohalli was very much a town, bustling in the midst of vegetable markets, small hotels (see: restaurants), facilitated by the economies of the Harohalli Industrial Area. In January 2011, Indo Nissin, a subsidiary of Nissin Foods, the world’s leading Japanese noodle manufacturing company, started the set up on a manufacturing facility in Harohalli, with an investment of 160 crore rupees. Then Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa approved it alongside 55 development projects, including in the iron and steel sector, 5 in energy, 4 IT parks and 9 infrastructure development projects, coming to a total investment of almost 39, 583 crore rupees. Other global companies included Toyota, Pepsico, and Target, each which was expanding its current manufacturing outputs. It was part of his broader project to lure companies to the outskirts of Bangalore, into its Southern rural districts – namely Kanakapura and Bangalore Rural – providing massive tax exemptions on electricity in order to facilitate their movements, another manifestation of the private-public partnership model that had become a mainstay of Karnataka’s development model.

These industrial towns intermittently spot the landscape along the Kanakapura road. It’s hard for me to imagine the area around the school as agricultural anymore, changed as it has been by the precepts of industrial development. And yet, I know that just beyond this small two-

---

51 Goldman (2011) does a fantastic job of outlining how these industrial areas have emerged, writing: “Under the law of eminent domain, based on the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the government can acquire land from farmers if it is for a project that is for the “good of the nation,” but it must offer a fair market price (D’Rozario n.d.). The state-level Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB), however, offers a relative pittance to the non-elite members of rural communities, exercising its right to choose the depressed rural market price and not the upscale world-city market price as its marker. The difference comprises “the rent” that shapes and fuels the new urban economy and its governance structure. The rationale for offering farmers a low price relative to land’s new urban value is based on the belief that many of Karnataka’s farmers have become quite poor, in debt, and judged as uncompetitive. But this is true less because of the failure of the land, the people, or the crippled rural economy than because of the post-1991 liberalization shift in priorities by the government in price supports from the rural to the urban service sector. Whereas, in the past, the government would subsidize agriculture in order to keep both a national food surplus and some of the 70 percent of the nation’s population engaged in rural work employed and compensated (some political moments have been better than others), since the early 1990s, the policy has shifted from rural subsidies and supports, and away from social welfare provisions in general. In other words, world-city investments depend upon widespread disinvestment from other local economies, such as the diverse rural, and the urban informal. Significantly, most of the urban and rural population works for the multifaceted “informal” economy (including textiles, apparels, silk processing, mechanical fabrication, plastic parts manufacturing, floriculture, food processing, and a varied service sector), which employs most of the population and generates between 55 and 75 percent of Bangalore’s GDP (Benjamin 2000a,b, 2008). World-city projects, with their large appetite for land, devalue these small and medium-sized enterprises, as the latter’s political clout has diminished by comparison” (244).
kilometer wide commercial center and the wider three kilometer radius of the industrial center, lies silk producing land, physically proximal but distal in economic, political, and social terms.

There are over three hundred students who attend the Harohalli primary school, a large number, packed into classrooms of over thirty, half which stand without a teacher. The HM greets us and shows us around, she complains about the school about how poorly the students are performing. Her first explanation is a simple one, perhaps one of the most ubiquitous phrases I hear when I’m in the field, especially in towns like this one: “Its just the students. They are not interested in studying and their parents don’t help them. They are all more interested in roaming around in the town than coming to school. Many of the good students have moved into private schools and only the failing students are entering our school. But we have a very high strength, almost 450 students, and it is too much for us.” It's a phrasing that is always juxtaposed with the unspoken Other, the rural child, docile and easily manageable, not yet corrupted by the growing urbanity of these towns.

Verstappen and Rutten (2015) argue that a “middle-sized town in an agricultural region acts as a node of interconnection between rural-urban and local-global mobility… Besides being a regional hub, the town is also a nodal point of international migration, providing a platform for departure and arrival of various forms of return flows from abroad of people, goods and money” (232). I find as I continue through my research that these towns play important mediating roles between the village and the city, facilitating both values migrating from the city to villages – in, for example, facilitating filmic consumer cultures like the buying of filmstar trading cards – and in providing the physicalized middle point for those moving in both directions, the bus stand functioning as a node for these movements.

Because of the increased population concentrated in this area – Harohalli’s population was close to 12,000, almost twenty times that of the neighboring villages52 – hoping to take part in the growing commercial economies, which in turn resulted in the high population of students in each school.

Ramaswamy tells me to stop at one classroom where two Adhyaapaka mentors are watching over some twenty students who are participating in Adhyaapaka’s newest reading program, sitting together and reading in groups of two. The program was intended to have the lowest performing students, who had not yet acquired literacy in Kannada to begin acquiring these skills through a peer-based learning model, in which the student with a higher reading level

---

52 http://www.onefivenine.com/india/villages/Ramanagara/Kanakapura/Harohalli
would help the lower performing student. The script was simple: the lower performing student would attempt to read a sentence, if they could not read it, the higher performing student would read the sentence, and the lower performing student would mimic it. Through this process, Ramaswamy claimed that the lower performing student would learn to read in 30 days or less and he claimed to have the research to back it up. In 2012-13 he had run a pilot study of the program with over 18471 7th standard students in the Adhyaapaka network of schools and had found that, by the end, over 17904 had “learned to read”, a rate of 97% that, on its surface, seemed to indicate astronomically significant gains in comparison to the 67% State average.

By learning to read, Ramaswamy frankly acknowledged that he only meant de-coding, that is, the ability to read words by sight without necessarily comprehending what they were reading and that he saw reading comprehension as a linear process, from de-coding to comprehension rather than a simultaneous process of de-coding and comprehension. This was a particularly archaic version of literacy education that had been roundly critiqued within current educational literacy discourses that argue that the creation of a linearity between phoneme awareness/decoding and higher order comprehension skills such as the ability to summarize texts is not advisable given that “research shows budding readers can learn new information as they are developing their reading skills and even skillful readers can develop new strategies to increase comprehension” (The Reading Comprehension Guide). In other words, according to educational scholars, decoding and comprehension should be seen as simultaneous skills and should be self-consciously regarded as such when teachers teach in classrooms.

Ramaswamy knew of these scholarly findings, but was not overly concerned. He justified his own methods using his general pragmatic logic: when students were as far behind as those he was working with and if he wanted quick results at scale, then another approach, more practical, and less dedicated to theoretical understandings of learning would have to be employed. Yet, he was also pragmatic enough to know that he needed academic buy-in and legitimacy in order for his project to be legitimized. Initially, he had tried to procure the interest of university’s in India, for example the Bangalore-based Azim Premji University, at which I had taught during my fieldwork. And, later he would admit that his main reason for replying to my initial emails was because he had wanted to have a stronger relationship with the University of Pennsylvania, knowing that in-practice a partnership with UPenn would provide him a high level of cache in the Indian national context. He craved these partnerships despite the fact that he did not put much stock in the knowledge produced in these spaces, especially as it pertained to Indian education. “They [university scholars] don’t know anything about what is going on at the ground level,” he
would tell me with some level of self-righteous indignation. It was a paradox that continuously emerged in Ramaswamy’s discourse and one which Ramaswamy could not extricate himself from because he was so invested in the kinds of scalable models of growth that could only be justified through an association with a particular constellation of powerful figures within the knowledge economy as was currently constituted. It was why, in other words, Ramaswamy’s pragmatism was fatal, leaving him to make small concessions that would ultimately leave him in a completely compromised position.

But at this moment, while showing me his new program, Ramaswamy was not at all concerned with these pragmatic compromises. In fact, he was rather proud of them and when he would talk to me about my own relationship with Adhyaapaka, he would frankly tell me, “See, I don’t mind telling you, actually we are just using one another. Right now you being here is very useful, so we want you. And of course we you want to learn about education here, so we can help with that.” This particular approach to our relationship was fraught as on several occasions Ramaswamy asked me to help validate his own research findings, in particular the aforementioned reading program by writing an article about it. It was the difficult position that I, like other anthropologists working in the development space, found myself navigating constantly: how was I to maintain my scholarly integrity while I was developing relationships which had moved far beyond mere participant-observation, affectively entangling me in the inner needs and desires of the organization and its members?

Ramaswamy’s attempts at leveraging his connections did not stop with me. Just a year earlier he had gotten into a conversation with Wharton students, a relationship which I had facilitated during a 2012 trip to Penn. He had asked three students to develop an “exit strategy” for Adhyaapaka from schools which they had already helped reach a 100% on the SSLC exam as part of their required field application projects. The question of exit was always a problem for NGOs who sought to scale, given that funding was limited and to expand to new spaces meant that already existing school sites needed to be divested of resources. For Adhyaapaka, the question was how to know whether a school in which they had been working could now sustain itself and continue to get the same results.

I sit in on several of these conversations between Wharton students and Ramaswamy, conducted over conference call from a small office space in Huntsman Hall. The entire set of mediated interactions, conference calls, emails, powerpoint presentations, and skype chats, was an important instantiation of polymediation, what Tyma, Herrmann, and Herbig (2015) argue “not only signifies the many forms that media take, but the many different interactions we can
have with them” (xx). In this case, the interactions were centered on the premise that these media forms could facilitate Wharton students virtual space-time travel to Karnataka, hearing from Ramaswamy and the Adhyaapaka mentors as a proxy for real on-the-ground observations of the organizations programming.

At the same time, Miller and Madianou (2012) argue that “the situation of polymedia is one in which the media are mediated by the relationship as well as the other way around” (148). In this case, the relationship is constructed upon the premise that the Wharton students are “managerial experts”, thanks in no small part to the Wharton branding, while Ramaswamy played the role of the humble, respectful, grateful NGO novice partaking in the insights of those more knowledgeable than himself. These interactions would always make me bristle, hearing 21-year old business students talking authoritatively to a 70 year old man who had spent almost thirty years of his life in upper management, both absurd and reeking of American imperialism. At the same time, Ramaswamy himself saw this as a necessary method of interaction in order to achieve the goals he had set out for himself, very conscious of the global power relations in which he was positioned.

I keep a copy of the “deck” which the students create, an artifact of Ramaswamy’s early attempt at university-based legitimacy. In it they outline three abstract models for exit: phase-out, phase-down, phase-over. For each they provide an example from the not-for-profit sector, though the examples are not drawn from the Indian context and two of the three selections were not doing work in education.
Their final recommendation to Adhyaapaka: try a mixed approach.

Ramamurthy’s final email to the professors involved was overly optimistic and while I cannot include the email here, the gist was that 1) the recommendations would be of “immense value” to Adhyaapaka; 2) The venture should be expanded to included Wharton more formerly in future Adhyaapaka ventures; 3) Ramaswamy was more than willing to have any number of meetings to make this happen.

And yet, Adhyaapaka never used any of the recommendations, still struggling to find a way to exit the schools that they were working with a full three years later. But, as the email indicates, Ramaswamy was never really intending to use the recommendations at all, but rather to use the relationships built with Wharton through the field application project to solidify a longer, more robust relationship that would include Wharton professors and, perhaps, some kind of funding possibilities. “The immense value”, in other words, was never the project itself but its instrumental value towards a longer, more sustained relationship. In this sense, Ramswamy’s interactions were a tactic, in the de-Certeuian sense, manipulating “events in order to turn them into "opportunities." The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them.
is achieved in the propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements…the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is ‘seized’” (deCerteau, 1984, xix).

However, Ramaswamy never got a response from anyone from Wharton after the end of the course, the endless possibilities fizzling out as soon as the students had gotten the version of “field” experience they were required to complete before they could graduate from their program. In this instance, “using” one another produced only limited results.

It is striking the difference in register that Ramaswamy employs now, walking around the school and commanding attention wherever he goes, from headmasters to students. He pulls a few students aside and asks them direct questions that he expects quick and correct answers to. Sometimes students respond and sometimes they don’t. When they don’t, Ramaswamy is quick to begin expounding the need for confidence, creative thinking, and the ability to ask questions. His method is intimidating to say the least and I can see students hesitate to respond, perhaps further silenced by the barrage of commands.

For example, Ramaswamy wants to show me just how much difficulty the students are having generating their own thoughts. He asks the Adhyaapaka mentor who is accompanying us on the trip to pull two boys aside. I record their interaction on my small handheld camera, framing the interaction and hiding behind the lens as the scene unfolds. For the first five minutes Ramaswamy instructs them: “You should talk. Talk loudly. Talk more than what is asked. I ask little, you talk so much”. As he tells them he opens his hands widely to indicate just how much he wants them to say. He then implores them to create a story on the spot and recite it to him. The students tell a story about a magical stone that allows an ascetic to make delicious food, completing it within two minutes with a final, “That's all sir.” Ramaswamy is sufficiently satisfied at the students’ story, and turns instead to motivating the students in their studies, wanting to know why they have done poorly on their social science exams. He and the Adhyaapaka mentor who has accompanied him ask the students about their test scores:

AP: You got confused?
Boy1: Yes sir
AP: Madam will have told you right? That such type of questions will be asked, right? Why didn’t you listen that time? What happened that time?
Ramaswamy sir: did you understand when it was told to you?
Boy1: Sir we understood that time
Ramaswamy sir: Then you forgot later?
Boy1: yes sir. Made a little mistake sir.
Ramaswamy sir: Why will you make a mistake? You are a good boy, you have made a mistake because you had forgotten. You will write Ramaswamy. You know that my name is Ramaswamy right? Even if someone asks you after 2 months you will tell without hesitation. Will you forget?
AP: ...in this you have lost 20 marks less. Why? Didn’t you listen to social science with interest? Where was your concentration when it was being taught? Or their teacher did not teach well? If you tell us why then we can tell you something.
Boy1: It has been taught well sir, but I .. got confused a little sir...
AP: You got confused means you had not listened to the class properly.
Boy 1 nods his head
AP: Why? Where was your mind then? Was your concentration somewhere else?
Ramaswamy sir: See, when we are humans, we do make mistakes. Only if you tell us where you have made the mistake we can correct it. if you keep saying there was no mistake then what can we do?
Boy2: Sir, when the lesson was being taught, we did not pay attention.
AP: Why didn’t you pay attention? What other things were you interested in? Were you thinking about something else. We’ll do this, we’ll do that?

The tenor of the entire dialogue is slightly accusatory – “why didn’t you listen?” “Were you thinking about something else?” – and I can see the students hang their heads in shame, trying as best they can to justify their failure while still trying to pay respect to their teachers and the two men who are bombarding them with questions. They refuse, for example, to say that the teacher failed to teach the lesson well. Instead, they blame themselves for not remembering the information.

Ramaswamy uses these kinds of interactions as the empirical basis for assessing the academic enthusiasm, motivation, and capacity of students in schools during his field visits; evidence which is always confounded by the inherent power differentials of the interactions. And yet, Ramaswamy believes that this approach to students is the best method to motivate them and he systematizes it in his reading program. Before he starts the 30-day program, he tells me that the students need only three simple instructions that will drive their growth: 1) Not being able to read own language at this stage is unacceptable; 2) This is perhaps the last chance for them to acquire this skill before they move on to High School, since there will be no more interventions of this type; 3) The students must attend for thirty days straight. If and when they commit themselves for a period of 30 days, there is a high probability that they could acquire this vital life skill, something that they have been unable to get so far in spite of spending years.

It's the dictatorial quality that marks Ramaswamy’s particular form of charisma, a belief that sheer force of will, force of words, and absolute mandates will produce the results he imagines. As importantly, it's the way he changes his personality and maintains a particular hierarchy of power in who can speak where and how that ossifies the boundaries between the global-digital and the rural, pliant and subservient in the polymediated global-urban space while
confident and demanding in the rural one; an empirical example of the development condition as it differentially positions him across these contexts and dictates the type of action he chooses to undertake in each and a clear reminder that affects are always about our potential for action.

* * *

Frame 20: #DigitalDevelopment

I am surfing again, this time looking through the many pages of the NDTV/Coca-Cola “Support My School” Campaign website, a philanthropic collaboration between NDTV (New Delhi Television Limited), one of India’s largest broadcast networks, with a revenue of over $78million US dollars and Coca-Cola, the global beverage giant who had 56 bottling plants in India an expansion into the Indian market that started in 1993, during India’s liberalization. Coca-cola’s practices in India have been controversial, in, for example, protests against them for extracting excess groundwater over the legal limits and polluting the environment with toxins. Perhaps as a response to these controversies and to manage its social image, Coca-cola has undertaken a series of sustainability projects, what they state as a focus on:

...initiatives that reduce our environmental footprint, support active, healthy living, create a safe, inclusive work environment for our associates, and contribute to the development of the communities where we operate. Some its Company’s flagship community development programs include the “Support My School” program, the “Parivartan” retailer training program, women empowerment program as a part of the global 5BY20 campaign etc.

On its website, the Support my School campaign has its own brand, the words Support My School all in white, but for the first three letters that are in Yellow, Neon Green, and Light Blue, and the “o” in “Support” modified with a smiley face that seconds as the head of a kite, that lags behind a silhouetted girl, running out of the borders of the square. Scrawled in lettering meant to resemble the writing on a chalkboard are the words “500 Schools Revitalised / #Supportmyschool Mission: 1000 Swachh Schools”. The term “swacch” means “clean” in Hindi and should be seen as part of the broader set of national development campaigns encouraging a clean, hygienic India, as I referenced earlier with Modi’s “Swacch Bharat” Campaign. The reference to “revitalised schools” is meant to reference the success of NDtv/Coke’s intervention, in their ability to find failing schools and help rejuvenate them. The campaign focuses on 5 key impact areas: 1) Access to Toilets for students, especially girls; 2) Access to water; 3) Access to sports; 4) Library/Rainwater Harvesting; 5) Environmental Upkeep.

---

On the right side of the website, a small picture of three schoolchildren hold up pictures they’ve (presumably) drawn with the caption: “Thank you. Your contribution will help shape the future of many children,” then “CLICK HERE TO DONATE.” The campaign is but one instantiation of the contemporary human development model, in which a private corporation – in this case two, NDTV and Coke – partners with mediating charitable trusts – in this case Charities Aid Foundation-India, SRF Foundation, and World Vision – whose job it is to determine where and how aid should be provided. At the same time, neither entity actually funds any of the interventions themselves, relying instead on the donations of private individuals who feel compelled to donate because of the affective entanglements driven by the site design, a version of Zizek’s idea of “capitalism with a human face”, in which the act of consumption is made more acceptable and palatable when associated with philanthropic giving (Zizek, 2010). In this case, buying from Coca-cola or watching shows on NDTV are made more palatable because they sponsor philanthropic possibilities from the comfort of your own home, just a hyperlink away, shaping the viewers ethical imagination.

I am most struck by the polymedialed worlds that together facilitate development aid – the hashtags of twitter providing links to the “Support my School” facebook page with videos and images, but always leading back to the main site, with simple captions like “Here is how you can help”. The strategy relies on a knowledge that web enabled individuals do not function on a single platform or within a single media world, but rather traverse across them. Therefore, while one can begin in any media space – for example, on twitter – the campaign’s marketing strategy is actually intended to mitigate against choice, despite the interactive possibilities associated with polymediaion, strategically advertising on each to lead back to the originary website and its request for donations. “#Digitaldevelopment” merely mobilizes users towards funding rather than providing the rich array of collaborative, interactive self-making possibilities that has come to characterize scholarly discussions of, for example, twitter and instagram (Shipley, 2015).

The whole design of the site is carnival-esque, to borrow Bakhtin’s (1941) phrasing, an earlier version of the site included a scrolling top bar that moves between pictures of celebrities – in this case Anil Kapoor (a Bollywood filmstar who gained global notoriety for his role in Slumdog Millionaire), Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (Former Miss World winner and Bollywood megastar mostly known for her roles across from Shahrukh Khan in Devdas and her English film debut, Bride and Prejudice (2005), a Bollywood-ized remake of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice), and Sachin Tendulkar (perhaps the greatest Indian cricketer of all time), standing with school children on a stage, smiling and saluting, on a huge brightly colored podium.
The photograph is taken from a live telethon hosted on NDTV. When I click on a link to the telethon video I am faced with an immediate sensory overload: Bollywood music blasting, children dancing in unison and Sachin Tendulkar standing in the middle smiling amidst the music, till the end of the song when a burst of sparkles envelopes the stage to signal the launch of the campaign. There is a montage of journalistic-like reporting in which a narrator explains the many challenges that children face all over India. Two puppeteers mimic Sachin and a cricketer teammate, imploring the viewers (and Sachin, who watches slightly uncomfortably) to join the movement. Later Sachin teaches a few children how to swing a cricket bat, followed by Adnan Sami, an Indian composer and musician, who sings one of his original songs, Bheegi Bheegi Raaton Mein. Aishwarya Rai joins Sachin on stage to provide a check to Hema, described with a caption as a “Rickshaw Driver’s Daughter” who “Couldn’t Even Afford School Fees.” That’s followed by a musical performance by a three-year-old music prodigy who plays the drums for Aishwarya, who he apparently idolizes. There is a long and very serious discussion of school playgrounds between Sachin and Rahul Bose, Indian rugby player and film actor. Bose argues, “I was thinking about what NDtv is doing… I learned more on the playground than I did in the classroom… I learned in the playground that everybody is equal. These are things you can talk to in a classroom, but if you give a playground facility in a school you are actually creating… your telling the children to go out there and discover the things that they won’t.” The telethon ends with a stylized rendition of the Indian national anthem, with all of the participants, actors and children standing together at attention.

While I am watching this footage, I cannot help but forget, just for a moment, the schools that I have myself seen, that have, supposedly been revitalized by the NDtv/Coke campaign. Instead, I am taken by the spectacle of the campaign, the celebrity speeches, the singing, all of which only add to the hyperreality produced in this particular digital development space.54

For Eco, hyperreality was “a phantasmic creation of the means of mass communication, but as such it emerges as a more authentic, exact, ‘real’ reality than the one we perceive in the life around us” (Epstein, 1996, 10-11). He writes while remembering the experience of walking through a re-creation of the Oval Office that the aim is to “supply a ‘sign’ that will then be forgotten as such: The sign aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement… (Eco, 7) and later elaborating “the… imagination demands the real

54 I characterize this as digital not virtual because it has implications, as this section will eventually show, for reality “outside” of the virtual space.
thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred… and falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of ‘fullness’” (Eco, 1986, 14).

In the case of the Support My School campaign, it's the image of the schoolchildren themselves, clad in their school uniforms, on screen for almost the entirety of the telethon, and certainly on every single page of the website that tethers the campaign to the ‘real’ school and children that are in need of help, the “sign that will then be forgotten” in the deluge of other signs, also ‘real’ given that the live broadcast, testimonials, and the direct addressing of viewers, produces those affects associated with telepresence (Virilio, 2002, 42). This deluge of overlapping images paints a picture that feels more complete, more full, better than the reality itself, sullied as that is by actual hardship and educational inequality. And it is this hyperreality that's offered to viewers as possibility, potentiality, what the real world might be, and, perhaps, what the real world has already become under the guidance of the NDTV/Coke campaign. Of course, the production of the hyperreal is still singularly focused on one end-goal i.e. to get viewers to donate funds to the campaign, the market-centered orientation (hence “production”) that still drives this particular form of digital development, and blurs the line between social justice and advertising. Moreover, in this instantiation, the carnival-esque is devoid of the rebellious and counter-hegemonic motivations in Bakhtin’s original commentary, as the subversions that take place on the telethon are only intended to “liberate” the viewer from necessary action in social justice endeavors beyond the donating of funds.

And yet, the empirical reflection upon the NDTV/Coke campaign complicates a theory of hyperreality, at the very least as it is instantiated in the work of Baudrillard. For Baudrillard, the effect of hyperreality is the disappearance of intensity, a dystopian view of the cybernetic turn in which all of our affective intensity is “cooled”, meaning we are apathetic, disillusioned, uncommitted to any particular cause. In a sense, he suggests that this cooling leads to the deterioration of directed political ideology and “the humanist criteria of value – from morality to truth to aesthetics” (Robinson, 2012). In this sense, all value is bundled and demolished in the face of hyperreality. But the aim of campaigns like the Support My School campaign seem to be exactly opposite of this “cooling affect”. Instead, the campaigns goal is to produce a frenzy of affects – hope, dismay, possibility, anger, determination, awe – that will drive one’s actions, and renew one’s commitment to the social cause NDTV/Coke are advocating, if only in the neutered form of donation. And these moral and economic valuations are bundled with other forms of valuation: nationalist values, in the singing of the Indian national anthem at the end of the telethon, and in educational values, in the explicit focus on school infrastructure instead of
pedagogy and classroom-based interventions, together which only increase the affective entanglements produced by the campaign.

What is still ultimately true is that these conceptions of value are migrating almost exclusively in this virtual space, determining what digital publics believe are just development causes and how these causes can and should be imagined, what might be termed the “unreal circulation of values” (Robinson, 2012). The effects of such virtual imaginaries are felt not just in the online space by those who are consumers of the campaign, but also offline, by the organizations who partner with the campaign. Indeed, the reason that I spend so many hours sifting through the website for the Support My School campaign is because Adhyaapaka agreed to partner with NDTV/Coke to implement the campaign’s revitalization programs in eight of its schools in the Ramanagara District of South Karnataka beginning in 2012.

I find out about this partnership one afternoon while sitting with Ramaswamy at his home in Bangalore in January of 2013, previous to his move into a retirement village, during a pre-fieldwork trip. We are talking about all things Adhyaapaka, where he wants the organization to go and what he wants to see the organization do, when we come to the issue of funding. I start to ask Ramaswamy how Adhyaapaka has grown so fast and how they’ve managed to procure funds to sustain these efforts, but before I can finish he cuts me off with an immediate response, spitting out words that are so full of emotion that I just sit and listen, not exactly shouting but excessively forceful nonetheless: “Prakash has agreed to some partnerships that I hate. I cannot stand them. You know he has partnered with NDTV/Coke, that ‘Support my School’ campaign? You must have heard of it, the commercials come on television all the time. I don’t know why he has agreed, but when I asked Prakash he just said it is not such a problem, we will only try it for a year. And besides he keeps asking where will funding come if we don’t accept these offers. But I tell him, so what if we lose this funding, we’ll find other sources that will match our vision.” The campaign has worked with Adhyaapaka ever since its start in 2012, now three years running.

Ramaswamy is critical of the entire campaign, from its focus on school infrastructure to its model for funding. “I don’t understand what they are seeking to do or what they have to do with us. Shouldn’t they at least talk to someone on the ground before building more toilets? Why are they asking for donations when Coke and NDTV have so much themselves? I refuse to go to any of these schools. I will not set foot in them [emphasis added].”

Clearly, Ramaswamy sees these types of funders as a particular form of “selling out”, placing the ideals of the organization and its particular model of intervention below pragmatic economic considerations, a point he makes clear in his direct critique of the NDTV/Coke model.
for intervention – top-down, rather than bottom-up perhaps going against his dearest ideal. But its his last phrase, the visceral emotional response to the continued relationship with NDTV/Coke that I cannot forget, even two years later while sifting through the images on the campaign’s website. No matter the pragmatic benefits of getting funding through the program, the resultant fracturing of Ramaswamy’s vision for Adhyaapaka is more than he can bear and renders him unable to move within the set of schools which he has spent his past ten years working with, perhaps unable to face the contradictions inherent in these relationships. This is no longer a mere feeling but rather another affect of development, in the kind of affections on the body of individuals who work at the highest level of NGOs and are placed at the mercy of corporate-led trusts, restraining and diminishing the power for their individual actions towards their organizational and personal goals, literally diminishing the body’s vital force in cases such as Ramswamy’s, a man who has made his entire life about his social change ideals.

Despite all of his misgivings, Ramaswamy does encourage me to go to these schools, and eventually I visit three of the eight schools that were initially selected for the program, accompanied on my trip by two of the Adhyaapaka mentors, Vishwa and Shiva. At first they wonder why I want to go to the schools at all, explaining that they have hundreds of pictures taken during the few days when NDTV/Coke showed up at the schools to “revitalise them” through their particular form of infrastructural beautification. They scroll through pictures on their laptop, celebratory faces that resemble the carnival-esque functions I witness on the Support My School website. And it seems, for a moment, that the mentors too have been drawn into the hyperreal, through the two day event that doubles as authentic school transformation.

But the mentors are too connected to these schools to be deluded quite so easily and they start to explain to me what is actually going on in these schools. “Why do you want to see?” asks Vishwa, “We just stood for a few hours and they came, we did not do anything much with them. There is nothing there, they come, then they went. If the school was already good, then they stayed good. If the school was not good, then they were still not good.” This idea of the “good” and the “bad” school came up all the time with the mentors and at various times it meant high test scores, low teacher attrition rate, high teacher motivation, an enthusiastic headmaster, and/or a strong relationship with the students’ parents. More importantly, Vishwa’s absolute lack of motivation to go to these schools only revealed the kind of diminishing affect that the particular NDTV/Coke intervention had on these mentors: not only did they see the intervention as having very little positive effect, but they also saw these interventions as having almost nothing to do with their goals as part of Adhyaapaka.
Still, Vishwa and Shiva take me to the schools and show me around. We talk to the headmasters and when I ask explicitly about NDTV/Coke they nod their heads and smile, but don’t say much else but vaguely acknowledging that yes, some people had come, and they had left a few things at the school.

I’m taken by one school we visit in the heart of Ramanagara, a two story school building with murals painted on every wall, one especially beautiful painting of a river flowing through a valley just in front of a mountain landscape, birds flying in the air in front of pine trees. I am not sure who chose the mural, but I am quite sure that it could not have been anyone who went to this school at all, so completely opposite was the landscape to the flat agricultural land speckled by small hills in which this school was set. This was the doing of NDTV/Coke, along with a number of other small pieces of school beautification: a jungle gym, a garden, a water filtration system to get clean water, new toilets both for girls and boys, and a new recreation room furnished with a table tennis table. On two pillars of the school are a set of pictures of great sports stars in India, one of women and one of men, one of which is the smiling face of Sachin Tendulkar.

The headmaster shows me around the school. He is especially proud of a garden in the back that includes cages for birds and trees and flowers which have been well-maintained. He also points over at a jungle gym that students are happily playing on, what also seems to be a useful addition to the school site.

Then he points over at the two bathrooms, though he does not venture over to them, so I saunter over to them and look in, only to find them unused, the toilets covered in mud, the smell so suffocating I can barely set my foot inside to snap two photographs before I run out, what seems to be the opposite of “swachh schools” advertised by NDTV/Coke. The headmaster grabs me as I come out and directs me back towards the main office, but I notice in the neighboring classroom water leaking across the floor. I ask him about it and he takes me inside, explaining that they were also given a water purification system intended to make sure that students had clean water to drink. And they had, explained the headmaster, for two weeks, before the system had failed, instead leaking water all over the floors. He did not know how to fix it and he said he had tried to find someone to contact to help him but to no avail. “I think we will have to throw it,” he says with some finality as we walk out.

Vishwa explains the problem with the NDTV/Coke in two sentences, mimicking his earlier comments. “See,” he says, “If the school was already good, then they maintain the new infrastructure. If not, then they don’t.” He continues to tell me that the school we are at is, in fact, a good school, as evidenced by the well manicured garden and the jungle gym that still sparkles.
cleanly some one year later. Yet, even at a school that aims to maintain its infrastructure, there is only so much that can be done. For NDTV/Coke “revitalizing” a school meant coming for a few days, making it over by dropping off a few new shiny toys, and leaving, none of which developed a longer term, sustainable model for development which would have included, at the very least, check-ins with the schools and educational programs that could help schools understand how to sustain new infrastructures.

The headmaster finally takes us upstairs to a room, locked so that no one can come in unless given explicit access. I notice seven students peaking just behind us, wondering who we are and why we are at their school, so I call them to come and join us as we enter the room. Inside, along one wall is a row of books in steel cabinets, a typical government school library, and the students run over and grab some books to read when we enter. At the far end of the room, as brand new as the day it was given, stands a table tennis table, ready to play, though it does not seem to have ever been played.

I love table tennis and I want to play so I ask a few of the students if they would like to join. They stare gingerly, eager but also hesitant. When I ask the headmaster why they don’t play, he tells me simply that they don’t know how, that they have never been taught, and that table tennis is not a sport which they have ever heard of. Table tennis, then, is not a sport that is at all a part of the imaginary for a rural student population like the one at this school. Instead, it is a sport that the global-digital class imagines should and can be relevant to those living in rural areas, a simplistic mapping of such imaginaries onto rural space.

But it is not as if the table tennis table does not do any work within this school space at all. It sits as a showpiece and is meticulously cared for, carrying a high symbolic value for the school in that it represents a kind of potentiality; a potentiality that the school can and should aspire for, defined and imposed by NDTV/Coke. In a sense, the table tennis table is experienced as hyperreality for this school community just as the website might be for those who view it: the table tennis table, while still potentially usable as a table tennis table, functions instead as a facsimile of a table tennis table for those who do not know how to use it. As a playable piece of equipment it is nothing better or worse than any other equipment that the students might use to play a sport that they know. But as a facsimile, “it emerges as a more authentic, exact, ‘real’ reality” than the everyday functionings of the school, ‘real’ reality equated with the lives of those who left the table tennis table behind.

I search around and find the paddles and a few balls hidden in a corner of the room, still within their original casings, precariously rested on a cluster of computer monitors and CPUs that
have been discarded. I pass over a paddle to Vishwa, who also has never played table tennis before, and we play for some fifteen minutes, the students looking on from the table at which they’re sitting and reading books. Eventually two of the students come over and ask to play, and we hand off the paddles to them and leave the school.

![Table Tennis Table](image)

Photo 4.1: A photograph of the table tennis table, unused and sitting in the locked office space on the second floor of the school. If you look closely to the left of the photograph you can also see a computer monitor, one of three that are lined up against the wall of the room.

_Frame 21: Centralized Bureaucracy_

Ramaswamy is in an especially critical mood on this day, December 03, 2013, discussing the sweeping changes that Prakash has enacted over the course of the year, which include randomly moving the mentors to new locations (not that Prakash believes this is random at all, instead characterizing it as an efficient method by which to share ideas across schools and to maintain quality across regions), decreasing the resource allocations to particular schools that he has deemed ready for “exit” (the first attempt at actual school exits since Ramaswamy’s discussions at Penn in 2012), and, what he is most concerned about on this day, the promotion of
some twenty mentors to new managerial posts, creating a whole new “class” of employees. These mentors have been given titles, such as “Karnataka secondary school manager”, “North Karnataka primary manager”, “South Karnataka regional manager”, which Ramaswamy believes both goes against the organization’s philosophy and has no practical utility for the future growth of the organization.

“The stupidest thing Prakash could have done was to give the mentors these titles. They do not know what they mean, what new tasks they have, and it is only giving some mentors ego, that they are separate from the rest of the mentors. I kept telling him [Prakash], you should keep them all with the same title, no “head mentor” or “this manager” and what not. It won’t do you any good. He didn’t listen. You know, I had mentors coming to me and saying, ‘Sir, I have been given a new title, ‘Quality Control Manager,’ can you tell me what I should be doing?’ I couldn’t believe it, you mean to tell me they have given a new position without explaining what they should do!”

This was the type of fissure, seemingly minor at first, that had started to crop up throughout the organization’s practice, Prakash attempting to make changes to the organization’s practice as he deemed appropriate and Ramaswamy remaining adamantly opposed to any moves away from the core principles and practices, including, it would seem, promoting mentors from their current roles.

It takes me a while to understand exactly why Ramaswamy is so opposed to the new titles being given to mentors, but I find out during one of my visits to his home in Bangalore. Simply put, Ramaswamy saw the direction of Adhyaapaka moving towards the type of centralized bureaucracy that he hated, a centralized bureaucracy that he would constantly critique both in its government and private manifestations. For Ramaswamy, the current state of Indian governance was deplorable, with power resting almost exclusively at the federal level.

“Today, “ he laments, “the revolution of Delhi politics is driving the politics of the states. Take Orissa, they don’t like anybody in Delhi, Take Tamil Nadu, they don’t like anybody in Delhi. Take Bihar, they don’t like anybody in Delhi. Every state they are driven by hatred of Delhi... because these guys are totally insensitive, they collect money from everybody. Then they say, we’ll keep 60% for the federal government and give 40% to the states. Then sometimes they will decide we’ll give 50, some state will get 70. Everything is played by their rules, they frame the rules, they play the game.”

In this particular commentary, “Delhi” is a stand in for any federal functionings, a reminder that the “city-state” is still a useful imaginary by which individuals understand centralized governance. Ramaswamy’s characterization of the States – Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Orissa – as driven by hatred, is not so different from his own stated hatred of the centralization taking place in his own organization. Money, of course, is critiqued, in the central government’s power
to collect from and redistribute to the states as it pleases since “they frame the rules” and “they play the game”.

All of this worries Ramaswamy immeasurably and he starts spiraling into a vortex of words and ideas, as he is wont to do, spewed forth with little context or pause, the highlight of which is a sudden evocation of Russian communism that I am absolutely riveted by, and perhaps that deep interest is reflected in the bulky text below, a transcription that is as much about evoking that feeling of being a captive audience to an unending, piercing dialogue:

See why I am worried... you see the Soviet Unions evolution and total demise. The Soviet Union did not collapse because of communism, communism may be good may be bad, nobody knows, even today nobody knows. I was there in Russia twice when this was happening. The hatred was not for communism, the hatred was for the centralized bureaucracy. They centralized everything to a level where... there is an excellent example given, if you were making a bicycle, there is a factory somewhere in the Soviet Union that makes wheels, there is another that makes seats, there is one which makes handle bars, and one which assembles the bike. All of them have their annual plan and they get rewarded according to bonus or whatever it is according to their production. So the seat fellow he doesn’t care how many seats are really required, so he will make 100% more because he gets a bonus. When you come to the end you will find that you can’t make a bicycle. There are a lot of seats sitting, some handlebars waiting, but you have committed your funds...

But centralized bureaucracy doesn’t understand that, they deal with you, this guy says you want me to make 200,000 wheels, I’ll make 300,000. He gets an incentive. But the remaining people are not producing. And they don’t ask if anyone actually wants a cycle. It’s a crazy economy. I tell you, the people sitting with me, honestly I am telling, even today at heart we are communists. But we hated that system for this, only one reason, the guys sitting in Moscow and managing it, they goofed, they don’t understand a damn. That is what really created the hatred. And conveniently the Americans said, the people did not want communism they voted for capitalism. All bunk. After they started liberalizing, everything became scarce. You can’t get bread. You can’t get butter. You have to stand in line for... earlier you used to stand in line for radio and you know phone and things like that. Now you know even bread and butter you have to stand in line because it is no longer available in quantity. So then people used to say, curse this, at least before we could get this, now we can’t even get these things. They’re all cursing this globalization. (All emphases added.)

I pick up on his mention of globalization, here signifying the move towards a capitalist economic system in Russia that still maintained the key negative feature of socialist Russia, that of centralized bureaucracy, and one which is only expanding as neoliberal economics makes centralization in urban contexts ever more practical.

Centralized bureaucracy has been linked to, not surprisingly, the increased focus on digital tools to facilitate governance. For example, in Benjamin et al.’s (2007) discussion of the Bhoomi movement, they describe the digitization of land records as part of a broader techno-administrative narrative in which these digitization is equate with efficiency, transparency, and
less corrupt practices, termed a “best practice” by the World Bank. What the study found, however, was that digitization only exacerbated urban-rural inequalities, destroying local, informal political and economic formations that gave rural populations the possibility to stake claims to land, and instead made land claims increasingly difficult for those who did not live in urban centers while also creating a new class of middlemen who were able to exploit the system given their increased access to the digital land information. The result was a classic example of how digitality only exacerbated class-based inequalities, and further concentrated wealth in those who had access, what Ramaswamy saw as an example of how Marxist theory still had import for Bangalore.

Ramaswamy elaborates:

But if you go back to Marx’s theory – the system which failed had nothing to do with what Marx preached… what I would have felt is, we should have used a little intelligence. Somebody should have analyzed it a little bit and come up with a more, an answer with greater integrity. How much of it is because of communism and how much of it is… because it was in the interest of the U.S. to say the whole thing is because of communism and as such it is not practicable anywhere in the world. And that's a very wrong conclusion… ya it is bad in many ways... but what are the elements in that political system which failed, what are the elements in that system which even today have some value... if you had done that then you would have done something that would have benefited capitalism. Today you go wholly for capitalism, what is it that’s happening, what’s happening in Cyprus today? People who have more than 100,000 in that bank are told sorry, you may or may not get your money back, which is sick. Here is a sovereign government telling you, sorry you may not get your money back. So what is capitalism about tell me? If tomorrow in USA the government says I will give you 10 dollars for every 100 dollars you have, where is capitalism? Why do you think it won’t happen to you?

The centralized economists in the capitalist system have got problems which are as serious as the communist system. Chomsky talks about it… you may not like it, I don’t like 25% or maybe 50% of what he says. But let us take the good things in what he is saying. Very, very essential things in what he is saying. You can’t brand that guy... You have to look like the valid part of what he says... I can say this much, this system he is all the time he is killing... I think that he is right... you stretched that system (communism) to its limit and it collapsed. When you stretch this system to its limit, you will know its failings. You still don’t know its failings... its slowly coming. Ten years back, twenty years back if you had put a placard at that world conference you would have been arrested. At least now people have the courage to do that, put up the placard in front of the meeting place in Seattle... but there is still a huge lot of people saying there is nothing wrong in it... like people say there is nothing wrong in standing on your own, if you cant then you have to face the consequences. This is the success or failure of the fittest... They also call them names... you know why that fellow is poor? Because he doesn’t want to put in the effort to become rich.

For some, Ramaswamy’s direct reference to Marxism might seem shocking as first, diametrically opposed to some of his market and industry-based views of organizational development. Indeed, the only time Ramaswamy ever hesitated to speak on record was one occasion when he started to talk about these Marxist leanings. And yet, given Ramaswamy’s age, 148
he would have grown up in an era in India when socialist thought still held some sway, influencing, for example, Nehru’s economic policies during the years of non-alignment, especially in its emphasis on state-led industrialization. But Ramaswamy tells me, “even today at heart we are communists”, a phrase he uses on other occasions as well, sometimes boldly and sometimes with a hint of fear, as if someone important might overhear him and permanently prevent him from running any NGO in India. He uses the phrase “even today” to distance himself from the past, so that I will not only see his Marxism in relation to India’s history but also in relation to the current global economic system. He has been reading and watching the news, hearing about the United States housing crisis along with the financial crisis in Greece and these events have only heightened the anxiety he is feeling about his own position in propagating capitalist exploitation; an anxiety that is palpably affective, by his own admission located in his heart and unexpressed in his everyday life.

This affect is linked to value, in his rhetorical wondering about socialism: “What are the parts that still have some value?” Value in this case referring to socialism’s potential political and social benefit that has been eradicated by the hegemony of capital, bringing with it the complex ethical questions as to the efficacy of a system so concerned with, first and foremost, capital accumulation that it could perhaps prevent the social justice endeavor that he has set as his life’s work. In other words, can “capitalism have a human face”? The question itself and the worry it produces are at the center of the affects of development experienced by the heads of NGOs like Adhyaapaka, especially if they are truly committed to their social justice cause.

* * *

Frame 22: Funding

The anxiety over Adhyaapaka’s direction is only exacerbated by the constraints placed on Adhyaapaka by its funders. Within the same conversation on the Russians Ramaswamy begins talking about an on-going audit by Ernst and Young and the impact assessment that will be undertaken by Dalberg, “a strategic advisory firm dedicated to global development” who claim to have completed over 100 projects for over 400 clients in 90 different countries. The Dalberg assessment had been requested directly by MSDF and, in 2013, half of Adhyaapaka’s funds came from MSDF, so they were beholden to most of their demands if they wanted them to continue to fund the thousands of schools in their Karnataka network.

http://www.dalberg.com/
I’m surfing through the Dalberg website, which has an aesthetically pleasing design with brick red lettering on a clean white background. I am confused by the banner photograph on the website’s homepage, a silhouetted image of two fishermen sitting in a boat upon a river throwing out a net to, presumably, catch fish. The image, washed out in orange-yellow tones, is undeniably beautiful, yet seems unrelated to Dalberg’s global development goals, unless, of course, one was to assume that fishermen like these, living and working anywhere in the world, were de-facto in-need-of-development, which is perhaps what the image is meant to convey.

Under the website’s “about” page, there is a section dedicated to their “values”, which, given the conceptual framing of my study, I eagerly peruse. I’m mostly disappointed in the vagueness of their organization value list, which include claim to valuing their personnel, their partnerships, leadership and performance, and innovation. However, two values stick with me: first, that Dalberg explicitly notes that they follow the 10 principles of the UN Global compact and second, that they explicitly prioritize social impact over profit. “Dalberg values social impact,” they state, with the added explanation, “We value social impact above profit but recognize that a sustainable business model is essential to our success.”

I read and read this phrase, which, to me, is a subtle but important inversion of the idea of “capitalism with a human face” to read something like “humanism with a capitalist face”. It is an acknowledgement that ethics is not and cannot be simplified into profit maximization terms, an important reminder that though some still see neo-liberal economics as the key defining characteristic of contemporary social inequality, represented by the Chicago School of economics model and Reagonomics and their influence on global economic policy and market integration, that the model itself has slowly shifted, “trickle down” ultimately replaced with social change, a result of the social inequality that this earlier market regime produced. The new model relies on an a priori ethical justification, that whatever endeavor is taking place should produce a social impact, an impact that can occur if socially-conscious organizations can also understand how to sustain themselves. In other words, organizational development is the gloss for how business, management, and finance can still matter, a method by which to ally and influence the practices of those who work in the social sector.

And within the education-as-development space specifically, Dalberg claims to provide, “NGOs, schools, and other educational service providers with practical tools and systems to measure impact and improve services in the future through changes in concept, strategy,
organization, and partnerships.” It is this particular set of goals that brings some of Dalberg’s personnel to Bangalore, in an effort to help Adhyaapaka re-vitalize an organization that is being perceived as increasingly unfocused, disorganized, and dysfunctional, by funders.

I sit in Adhyaapaka’s monthly board meeting, everyone from the board of trustees present with the exception of Ramaswamy, held in one of the corporate offices of Accel Partners, a venture capitalist firm, which one of Adhyaapaka’s trustee members, Prashanth, works for. The building itself is a sharp contrast to Adhyaapaka’s headquarters, its makeshift office space a constrast to the clean, shiny tile, large-windowed conference rooms dedicated to the global financial face of the organization. I, admittedly, have only come to this meeting on the explicit request of Ramaswamy, the thought of a six hour meeting feeling like a real waste of time in relation to the kind of dynamic experiences I feel I am getting when I am out in the field with students or the Adhyaapaka mentors. I’m also, as usual, nervous, placed in an awkward position as the outside “expert” on Adhyaapaka because of the many hours I have logged with each of its members.

The atmosphere in the room is tepid at best, the board is anxious about what the Dalberg folks have to say and are starting to feel the effects of a real ideological battle between a group of members, led by Ramaswamy, eager to keep the same type of programming and model that they have had since the beginning, and the new group, led by Prakash, having procured funding with the explicit idea that the organization can and should move into a new direction. Across the table from one Prashanth and Prakash sits, Ganesh, the tech wizard who accompanies Ramaswamy on many of his school visits and whose passion for the philosophy of education permeates every single conversation he has, someone who Ramaswamy claims Prashanth hates. As best I can tell, the reason for this hate stems from Ganesh’s utter disdain for the pragmatic structures of management – hierarchy, scaling, and funding – all of which are the foundational elements for Prashanth’s own practice as a venture capitalist. At the same time, there is an unspoken cultural divide at the table, Ramaswamy and Ganesh both Tamil while Prashanth and Prakash are both Kannadiga, an intra-South Indian distinction that seems insignificant except for the fact that personal affiliations have fallen on these lines. Two new members of the organization also attend, Balamurali and Usha, both of whom have taken larger roles in the organization as it has expanded to more schools.

The three consultants, a man and two women: Gaurav, the head of the group and the “Regional Director of Asia”, Shivani, a UPenn graduate who was also a Teach for India-alumni (a version of Teach for America re-configured for the Indian context), and Sweta, a Yale-graduate
who formerly worked for JP Morgan Chase and travels back and forth between Mumbai and San Francisco, which is closer to her hometown of Irvine. And there is something quite striking in the fact that those who are performing these global development services for Adhyaapaka are all brown, a not-so-subtle shift in who can and should be the face of developmental intervention in particular regional contexts, choices that are, at least in part, in response to the longstanding critiques of earlier forms of global development and aid as a West-to-East movement of ideas, capital, and authority that were inherently also understood as white-to-brown movements (See, for example, Escobar, 1995). Indeed, during the entire morning, there seems to be a clear, if superficial, comfort in being advised by those who look like oneself, an implicit idea that there is some unspoken understanding of one another that we must have, even if some have spent more of their lives in the United States or England than India.

They have flown in from Mumbai just to consult with Adhyaapaka for this two weeks, a period of time that is, apparently, long enough to understand the nuances of an organization and give detailed feedback on what needs to change and how. The concept behind a “theory of change”, the basic method by which they conceive of organizational development, is to establish a clear relation between an organization’s mission and practices, a means to standardize how everyone within an organization understands an organization’s purpose, but also a means by which to better define roles and responsibilities for everyone within the formal organizational apparatus. We go around in a circle and give definitions of what, exactly, Adhyaapaka’s mission is and each person gives a completely different answer. Someone says that it is about giving minimal resources to schools, while someone else says it is about motivating students, yet someone else says it is about changing school culture, rural empowerment. The question and answers lead to a heated debate, in which no one seems to be able to agree, deeply committed to their own personal view of the organization, leaving the Dalberg team exasperated but which also shapes the agenda for the next five hours, tedious discussions that always center on what exactly Adhyaapaka does.

After the meeting Shivani and Sweta meet me for a drink. They want to pick my brain about Adhyaapaka and find out what, if anything, makes the organization worth funding. They ask me a few questions, but I answer them gingerly, explaining that my main interest in Adhyaapaka is because of the passion of its founder, Ramaswamy, and that I was merely an interested bystander, eager to see how the organization might progress given the passion it was started with. Beyond that I admit I can’t be of much help and so we instead start chatting about how the two of them got to Bangalore in the first place, a conversation that immediately captures
by ethnographer’s eye. They admit that they left *much* higher paying jobs to join the social sector and they are much less miserable now “doing good” than they had been working in finance. It is the same moralizing rhetoric that seems to have become a standard part of how those who now work as development consultants think about and justify their practice. Yet, as we talk, both Sweta and Shivani voice a kind of malaise, bored with what they’re doing and as we move from one drink to two they begin to voice some deep doubts about exactly how impactful they really are. Shivani, especially, seems emotionally drained as we talk about their jobs, nostalgically remembering her time as a teacher, when she felt she was making a direct impact. She suddenly asks, to no one in particular, “Is anybody really helping at all? Are we really saving the world?” perhaps the most poignant and direct instantiation of the deep anxiety that those who work in the world of global development feel: on the one hand choosing this path over the alternative, more financially lucrative options, yet still feeling that what they have chosen to do is not quite affecting the world as they had hoped. By extension, if the work they do is not helping to being about social good, then why choose this path at all and eschew the greater financial possibilities in the first place?

For Swati and Sweta, these questions are partly about being upper-middle class Indian women working in the development sector, a feeling that they should somehow be doing something different given the positions they have in organizations which would have previously been closed to them. They try to explain how their position should create a different sense of value, though they struggle to articulate exactly how this should look. Swati is clear on one point, “women have to use their power differently” and she starts to explain what this means by, unexpectedly, citing the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, a re-interpretation of the Mahabharata, the Indian epic, told from the point of view of Panchaali, the women who became the wife of all five Pandava princes. The tale is intended as a (pseudo-) feminist critique of the original epic, illuminating the unequal position of women within traditional Hindu society and within the Hindu scriptures, and both Swati and Sweta have fallen in love with the novel, using it as an example of the changing position of “brown women” in contemporary society, in which the privilege to tell their stories is also the privilege to help others. I cannot help but notice the bundling and re-valuing of several categories – gender, religion, and social change – in this telling, all of which together set the stage for the kind of impact Swati and Sweta want to make.

They finally return to the question of Adhyaapaka near the end of our night together, confessing that they are struggling to find any way to help the organization at all. “We’re doing this as a favor, actually we’re basically doing this pro bono. In education there aren’t the same
direct returns as in other sectors and so it limits growth and amount of funding potential anyway, so we aren’t really in this to make any money,” they tell me, explaining that it was only because MSDF had asked that they were there at all. They ask me what I think about their recommendations for Adhyaapaka, namely that they are going to suggest Adhyaapaka restructure the entire organization and eliminate a number of the mentor positions that were currently held and get someone to join as a pedagogy consultant to help Adhyaapaka think through specific educational interventions in classrooms. “MSDF wants stuff on pedagogy and that's not what Adhyaapaka does, is it?” they ask, still unclear if they’ve understood Adhyaapaka’s program correctly.

Ironically enough, funding had been procured partly because the answer to that question had always been a moving target, and what Adhyaapaka did could be catered to the particular parameters of each funding source. A situation that seems to have finally come to roost in both the Dalberg consultancy but also in a stronger insistence that Adhyaapaka directly link its practices to its funding. Not two weeks later, I am sitting with Ganesh and Ramaswamy as they are desperately trying to figure out a way to justify Adhyaapaka to MSDF and Deshpande Foundation, who are beginning to threaten a cut to their funding in the next year, a situation they blame completely on Prakash.

The issue is one of categorizing Adhyaapaka’s work: MSDF only funds projects that are either fall in the category of “literacy” or “education”, both categories which, strangely enough, seem to leave out Adhyaapaka entirely. The problem, however, is that Adhyaapaka has claimed to do neither of these things, only recently having begun to initiate a literacy program that is peripheral to its primary functionings and having always maintained that they do not intervene directly in education defined as implementing new curricular tools or changing the pedagogical practices of those who work in classrooms. For three hours Ramaswamy and Ganesh sit together, spinning ideas in a circle and trying to find a way to argue that what they’re doing does actually fall into one of those categories, a situation that is both thankless and frustrating. Eventually, after these neverending debates they admit defeat, stuck as they are in a Kafka-esque situation, language, funding, and practice forming a black hole from which they cannot emerge. At the end of it all, in frustration Ramaswamy blames anyone he can think of, Prakash, the Board, and the funders, explicitly pointing a finger at Abhijeet, the MSDF employee who has been tasked with overseeing Adhyaapaka’s program,

Abhijeet is an idiot. He doesn’t know anything about education. I think Abhijeet is in some trouble with his boss, he very often has conflicting messages. One time it’s, ‘I dont care literacy,
but only results’ and he says that only the exam scores on ASSET scores will be taken and as long as he sees improvements on ASSET he will be happy. But even then you can’t expect an increase in ASSET scores without some educational intervention and some attention to reading comprehension. If you are testing on concepts, you need to admit that you are making some intervention into education or literacy. But you know, they (the Board of Trustees) tell him, we can improve ASSET scores without thinking about comprehension and that it will be ‘no problem’ we will have a plan in two weeks. Nobody understands the fundamentals at all. MSDF wants the program to be run in their own way, but I held a stance that you are helping me, but they don’t. Abhijeet is four years out of business school, but everyone says don’t speak back to them. They are afraid that we will lose our funding. But suppose another donor comes again, should we keep changing our program? They tell me I’m very old-fashioned; you have to work with them, and do what they say.

Ramaswamy’s biggest issue is with the changing parameters of funding: sometimes its based on the ASSET scores, a standardized exam for students in standards 3 through 10, and sometimes its based on how those exam scores are obtained, if they are obtained through particular kinds of pedagogic intervention or not. At the same time, Ramaswamy also takes issue with the incompetence and lack of knowledge from all of the people in the hierarchy, a person four years out of business school, who knows nothing about education, creating the stipulations by which Adhyaapaka should run. What Ramaswamy does not admit is his own role in creating this situation, in his brazen neglect for any kind of formalization of his own processes that might have prevented the quagmire of bureaucratic questioning that he now faces or in the pragmatic micro-decisions that he had made – trying to partner with the University of Pennsylvania, deciding that test results were more important than following a set of basic principles, letting the prerogatives of capital and scaling to take priority over the grassroots, quasi-Marxist ideas that had led him into the field in the first place – which eventually had proven fatal to both his own role and the foundation of the organization.

Within two years Ramaswamy and the MSDF funding will be gone, representing half of all the funds that Adhyaapaka had to run its programming, and with it a number of cuts in resources will also take place. Roopa, one of the Adhyaapaka mentors, shows me the board of schools under her supervision, and shakes her head sadly, telling me that they can no longer give the promised number of notebooks or paper to any of the schools and that these material changes have led to widespread disgruntlement. “Look at the chart,” she says, a list of schools color-coded to show their overall success rate on standardized exams, red being a low performing school, yellow being an average performing school, and green being a high performing school, “It used to be that all of the schools were green. Now see, some have dropped to yellow and even some to
red. They used to be motivated to succeed but now, with all these changes, they don’t believe in Adhyaapaka anymore. What can I do?”

Prakash has a very simple explanation for why these funding cuts occurred. “They [MSDF] refused to work with Ramaswamy anymore,” says Prakash. “I begged them to keep funding us for one more year, and they did, but they would not continue if we followed Ramaswamy’s path. They were adamant that his approach was not fundable, results or no results.” In the end, it seems, bureaucratic rationality had won the day.

* * *

Frame 23: Devoted to Development

It’s a hot day in late May 2013 and Adhyaapaka is in a celebratory mood, about to announce the scholarships for college given out for the top girl students in the tenth standard, a program that has been funded directly by Dell. It’s a crowded event, conducted at a Adhyaapaka affiliated school in Ramanagara town, mentors, Prakash, Ramaswamy, students, parents, a few government officials sitting in a courtyard in the middle of the school and one by one announcing the prizes.

The event is a strategic one for Adhyaapaka, a moment when they can make their own successes visible through the success of students in their affiliated schools, showing government bureaucrats and parents alike that Adhyaapaka is a program worth having around. At all of these events Adhyaapaka makes sure to give time and space for the local BRP (Bloc Resource Person) to speak, another means by which to show deference and therefore massaging the egos of a local bureaucracy whose approval they need in order to continue working in schools.

During a short reception the students and parents who have come along are given some snacks, a few biscuits, a banana, some lemon rice, and some tea. But, as luck would have it, the food runs out too soon, and a few students are left with nothing to eat. Ramaswamy instructs some of the mentors to see if they can find some snacks from a local store to give to students, and a few of the mentors go off to see what they can find.

As the morning turns to afternoon and the day continues to get hotter a student falls down, and suddenly the entire event is in frenzy. Some are calling to get the student water, some create space in the middle of the covered, shady section of the courtyard for the student to lie down, and the rest stand and watch, a natural gravitation towards the sideline as chaos ensues.

For Adhyaapaka, this is perhaps the worst case scenario, an event intended to celebrate their students and their successes suddenly morphing into a situation that, at best, is an
unfortunate circumstance and, at worst, reveals either negligence or incompetence on the part of the organization in setting up the event. Ramaswamy is worried about the students and is trying to figure out what to do next and in the midst he is confronted by Anand, the former lawyer who was hired as a COO to take some of the burdens of day-to-day activity off of Prakash. Anand tries to calm Ramaswamy down, reasoning that “There is nothing to worry about. It is a public event, they can’t bring any legal claims against us.”

Even a year later, after his time with Adhyaapaka is up, Ramaswamy cannot stop telling this story, a moment of crisis which is exacerbated by the cold-hearted calculations of a lawyer whose words make obvious the lack of any ethical or empathetic dimension to his practice. “How can you say these type of things? A student has collapsed and he is talking about whether they can bring some suit?” By this point, Ramaswamy is able to identify several moments of this type, when members of the organization are no longer driven by the high-minded goals of the past.

Another which he cannot stop talking about is a debate that occurred in the very last board meeting, just before he unsuccessfully attempted to disband the entire Board and start anew. During the meeting Ramaswamy is told that he can no longer go to any school sites, that by going he is confusing the school community, providing contradictory messages to that which the mentors and the other day-to-day personnel are providing. He still can’t quite understand why this was ever a problem, wondering even after the fact, “Why do they benefit by getting me out? All I did was go to schools, encourage the mentors.” As a response, Ramaswamy accused the rest of the board of never going on school visits and having lost touch with the day-to-day realities of education and schooling that the organization had to know about, from top-to-bottom, in order to effectively intervene. “You know what they told me in response? ‘I don’t have to go to schools, I just talk to mentors to control things. Ambani controls hundreds of things right from his office.’ Can you believe it? They want to commercialize, they think it’s marketable and better to think of everything as ‘social entrepreneurship’ so they can continue with a revenue generating model.” Ramaswamy is making reference to Mukesh Ambani, the billionaire business tycoon and the chairman of Reliance Industries Limited, whose businesses in India covered in energy, petrochemicals, textiles, natural resources, retail and telecommunications, and who gained recent notoriety for his $600 million, 34-story home in South Mumbai, names “Antilia” after the mythical island in the Atlantic, the iconic figure of India’s privatized growth and opulence (Roy, 2012). Reliance, also happens to be one of UPenn’s School of Engineering’s largest donors, a
sign announcing the Reliance Industries Limited Courtyard placed just in front of Penn’s nanotechnology building.\textsuperscript{57}

For someone in Adhyaapaka to compare himself to Ambani is the final straw for Ramaswamy, the starkest indicator that the organization has placed the precepts of capital and business above the ideals of social change and educational reform. In other words, it was the moment when financial values had migrated into the core of Adhyaapaka as an organization, influencing every aspect of how they chose to run their organization and intervene in schools.

A few weeks after these words, Anand was ousted from the organization, fired as COO even as Ramaswamy himself was on his way out. He had alleged that Ramaswamy had misappropriated funds from the organization, an accusation Ramaswamy will not stand for, demanding his immediate ouster. He is let go, albeit very very slowly, another example of what Ramaswamy alleges was the undoing of Adhyaapaka.

“If employees see that anybody can talk like this about the board, forget me as the founder... I think it’s not at all a good thing... It’s not good for Adhyaapaka... The board asked for some time. But suppose someone had accused you of doing something unthinkable, how would you react?? Do you ask for time to take action?... I put money into this organization. If this had happened at BHEL the guy would not have been there for fifteen minutes, I would have sent the security guy to escort him out of there. But everyone was taking it lightly...”

In trying to assess Adhyaapaka’s incompetence, Ramaswamy refers back to his time with BHEL, this time not to describe his educational agenda, but instead to critique the functionings of the organizational apparatus.

Anand’s ouster is an absolute mess, the board announces that he will no longer be a part of the organization in public, in front of all of the mentors, who watch as Anand accuses the members of Adhyaapaka of gross misconduct, yelling at the trustee members during one of their monthly mentor meetings that he “wanted his honor back”, yelling that he knew the “skeletons in the cupboards” of all of the board members, that he was a lawyer, a “street fighter”, who would show everyone what was really going on.

A few weeks later, Ramaswamy receives a call from the inspector of the Jayanagar police station during a trip to Coimbature, asking him to return to Bangalore immediately. He has been accused of caste-based discrimination and SC/ST harassment under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, an accusation that startles him.

Monitoring caste has always been a debated topic within Adhyaapaka. Prakash tells me that he had wanted to collect data about students who came from SC/ST backgrounds but was

\textsuperscript{57}http://www.seas.upenn.edu/corporate-partners/
blocked from doing so by Ramaswamy and Ganesh. “The funny thing,” Prakash tells me, “Is that we would find out anyway. When we took students on the Delhi trip, the SC students would get 75% of their tickets, so we would get to know after the fact.” Prakash would have preferred to know ahead of time so that they could have better assessed whether their programming was working effectively for students from different backgrounds. He says all this despite the fact that he has a hard time talking about his own caste position, telling me that he could see very clearly how his own social situation had given him a lot of benefits without stating explicitly that he was an upper-middle class Brahmin.

With regards to the mentors, the organization also does not keep track of caste, and Ramaswamy admits that he has no idea which mentors could possibly be SC/ST. The vagueness of the letter to the police department only adds to the mystery, given that the SC/ST Act is the one provision under the Constitution under which accusations can be leveled anonymously, a provision intended to protect those who would otherwise not come forward for fear of retribution at the hands of their victimizers. The names on the letter, according to Ramaswamy, are either non-existent or so common as to be anybody, the name “Suresh”, for example listed several times, all of which makes it more and more obvious to Ramaswamy that this was Anand’s final act of spite on his way out the door.

Ramaswamy is filled with anxiety, he has not had to go to the police station before and he knows that if he goes to the station he will be required to show up in front of a magistrate within 48 hours, meaning he will most likely have to stay in a jail cell over night. He gets a lawyer who helps him through the process, talking to the inspector, and conveying the message that “this guy is part of a genuine organization, spending three or four days in village every week, and he has been working for these children in government schools for years.” Eventually he goes to the police station and signs a statement saying the same, and the officer explains to him that it has become a standard practice for people to misuse the SC/ST act to harass others. “In all my life,” he admits, “I never knew what it means to be in that situation. It is the one case where I am guilty until proven innocent. I have to prove that I am innocent, the other guy does not have to prove that I am guilty.”

Perhaps it is the first time Ramaswamy has been placed in a position of powerlessness, the man whose role has always been to manage or develop others, now experiencing the extreme of disempowerment, at the mercy of the law despite the fact that he has, according to him, done nothing wrong at all. It is an ignominious and bizarre end to Ramaswamy’s time in Adhyaapaka,
one in which he was not given any help by the other members of the organization as he sorted out how to deal with the complaint against him.

A year later I ask Ramaswamy if it was all worth it, despite how everything ended. And he answers unequivocally,

“Of course, I would do this again. We have to do whatever we can do in whatever small capacity that we can do... It is in the capacity of every single individual to make this country better. Everybody should do that. Before I say that everybody should do that, I should do that... See one thing, good causes don’t die off. It can be Maoism, it can be anything. Good causes never die off... When I started with three schools I was 65. The chances of me doing anything with that were remote. I had a very close friend, Gautum... He told me, I don't think you should do this... you are already 65. To make any meaningful impact you must continue for atleast 5 to 7 years. What are the chances of you being able to physically do that over a seven-year period? Odds are against you. Basically just short of saying you will be dead in a few years... But I told him, people may die at 6 months, one year, whatever. But we don’t sit around waiting for that day... Maybe I will take these 3 and make it 15 or 20, and maybe I won’t be around, so at some point of time if this program is good it will continue...

You know but not just me. There are a lot of heroes. Shiva could have gotten double the salary but he stayed with this. To me he is a hero... Even foregoing thousand rupees is not a small thing... I have not taken any risk. At the best what will happen, I will have a good name. At the worst I will be forgotten. But I will be okay either way...

I learned that the kids who are out there are as good as any. All that they need is an opportunity. One thing I’ve learned, you know, nobody is asking you for a guarantee... All every child wants, every parent wants is a reasonable opportunity for their children to come up in life... They think that the window of opportunity is open to only city children or rich children. You have to prove to them that even though you are poor, even though you are in a village you have a school that will give you that window of opportunity to come up in life. You do that all of the problems of the country will be solved. Not easy... The emotional things we do, they are easy, tokenism. If you go beyond from tokenism, you have to make hard choices.

You know the failure. After ten years, we got only two and half people who believe in Adhyaapaka. That number is very significant. Two and half. That's all we have. I look at it as a swarm, like quantum theory you know. This swarm, in which the core is where the bulk of the mass is, I'm getting only two people. If only it were ten, Adhyaapaka would have worked wonders. We can’t even get a third... but I don’t find somebody who has that passion they should feel. That feeling that ‘how can someone write about government schools like this...’ I am committed to a cause. I want three or four people to be committed to the cause.”

First, Ramaswamy provides one last reminder of the urban-rural divide that shaped his own praxis, highlighting what he has seen as the general perception by those in villages as to who gets opportunities and the importance of changing that perception through intervention. This overly generalized statement should be regarded with skepticism as this dissertation moves into its second half: yes, while rural students do see their disadvantage, the idea that they do not have belief in their future possibility, runs counter to what my students themselves demonstrated in their aspirations and belief that it was indeed possible for them to achieve these goals regardless
of their particular socioeconomic position. In other words, perhaps cultivating a “belief in their capabilities” was never quite as easy an assumption and justification for intervention, especially when others, including teachers, were also helping students towards the same goal.

A few other details that come out here in Ramaswamy’s discussion that are perplexing, yet intriguing. There is his reference to quantum theory and particle swarm optimization method (PSO) in trying to make sense of how his organization should function, a concept which emerged in computer science and whose best metaphor is that of a swarm of fish, who exhibit a collective behavior of decentralized and self-organized systemic behavior. While the metaphor may not be as easily mapped onto an organization as Ramswamy might suggest here, the reference reminds us that scientistic and digital thinking has influenced and continues influencing how he makes sense of development, whether at the level of organizational structure or intervention.

Early on in this dialogue he mentions that we need to move beyond our emotions and tokenism, what I interpret as a call to move beyond smallscale philanthropy and charity that might make us feel good, but which does not help to fix the deeper social issues that he sought to fix (Zizek, 2010). At the same time, by the end of the dialogue he is almost exclusively rueing the fact that he was not able to find even three people who were as passionate about his mission and organization as he had been, a direct call for an emotional drive, passion towards the cause of education-based social change. This contradiction illustrates Ramaswamy’s own confusion, and the fatality of his pragmatism. On the one hand, his pragmatic rationality forbids the overreliance on emotion-based reasoning for intervention. On the other hand, his deep commitment to the cause is entirely based on a passion that he ultimately cannot hide, and which has placed him completely outside of the framework of his own organization with no peer with whom he can share it.

Still, Ramaswamy is driven by hope, a hope that he has done something of value in all of his development work, and believing in the ethical foundation of what he has done regardless of the results. Despite the obstacles to doing anything at all – age, structural inequality – he has still continued on, learning about the communities he works with and developing himself in the process; another moment in which the developing of Others is also always about developing one’s Self.

This passion never leaves Ramaswamy even after his ouster from Adhyaapaka. Instead, he sees his ouster as an opportunity to start afresh, founding a different NGO whose mission remains to work within the education system in India. He is in the midst of finding able educationists to fill his board of trustees, this time refusing to let his newest organization get
corrupted by the precepts of financialism. He has learned at least one thing clearly in the past ten
years: one cannot create change within the education-as-development world if one decides to
disregard or condemn all of the knowledge within the education sector itself.

* * *

Frame 24: Goo-ru

I am in Northern California on my way to meet Prakash. I drive down 280 N and turn off
at the first stop in Cupertino, just a minute away from one of Apple’s main headquarters. It’s hard
for me to wrap my head around the fact that Prakash is living and working from this space, so far
away from his purported job and I spend ten minutes in the car, even after I’ve found his
apartment complex and parked, preparing myself for the affective dissonance that I was now
experiencing. Northern California was my home, at least in the sense of where I had grown up,
and where I came to remove myself from the world of ethnographic research, immersed instead in
the worries associated with taking care of family. Yet here I was, again followed by my work, try
as I may to be “on vacation” as I began the arduous and sometimes exasperating task of writing
about my fieldwork.

When I finally see Prakash it takes us a few minutes to get adjusted again, sitting together
in the three-room apartment that he has rented. “Did you know,” he starts, “that when we tried to
move here there were literally only five apartments available in the entirety of this area.” They’ve
furnished the place without much thought to the aesthetics of the setup, the only piece of furniture
of note being a synthesizer in the far corner that he proudly tells me his daughter is learning to
play, a significant part of her new education in the United States. “Back in India, she didn’t want
to learn any instruments, mainly because no one else there did that. But here, everyone plays
instruments or sings or something, and she loves it.” The small talk settles us both down and we
get down to catching up on how exactly Prakash ended up in California.

He confesses that he took a year long hiatus partly because he wanted to make sure his
daughter got her US citizenship but also partly because he was ready to move on from
Adhyaapaka. “I was planning on quitting,” he tells me, explaining that he had agreed to stay on
for one more year and work remotely from the United States as they transitioned someone else
into his role. Unfortunately, Ramaswamy’s antics had completely derailed his plans, making it
impossible for him to hire anyone for longer than a few weeks. They had tried to get three
different people to join the organization, and all of them refused to stay when they witnessed the
internal chaos. “Ramaswamy tried to liquidate the board. When you do that you’re not going to
be able to do anything well.” And from there he can’t help but share his shock that it had gotten so bad. “You know, Ramaswamy would keep talking about 90% results on tests, but when I started looking at our data, I found that the results were meaningless. Even if they were getting results, our students couldn’t read or do division after one year. So I felt like, what am I doing? I can’t lie to our funders or pretend that everything was okay,” then, after a moments pause, “I think the reason Ramaswamy had a problem with me was because I was adamant that we needed to change the direction of the organization at risk of failure.” He stresses these last few words, trying to emphasize that it was Ramaswamy’s overzealous attachment to an archaic model that was having little real impact, and that failure would have been a better result than the kind of meaningless intervention that had been taking place for the last few years. Prakash is trying to wrap his head around how to change the direction of Adhyaapaka now that he has time. My workday is from “7pm to 2am” he says with a smile, “I have a ton of time to read and think, so I’ve been reading a lot by John Holt.58 Do you know him?”

Prakash has been feeling out the job opportunities in California, mainly in the educational technology area; in other words, he is still very much ensconced in the discourse of #DigitalDevelopment. He was working, for a time, as a consultant for Gooru, an educational learning platform developed by former Google employees who decided that they wanted to dedicate their lives to “honor the human right to education”59. The name evokes the idea of the Hindu spiritual ‘guru’ and, not surprisingly, the founder, Prasad Ram, was an NRI who Prakash had gotten to know as part of the Indian American technology circles he had been a part of prior to and during his time at Adhyaapaka, and the company had created an educational platform that they believed would change how teachers could teach in the classroom and how students would learn in the classroom. “I’ve been visiting a ton of schools in the United States, mostly in East L.A. where these guys started to implement their programming. I’ve learned a lot. One, I really don’t know if the challenges in India are that much different than those in the USA, same problems of social inequality, lack of resources, and standardized curricula.”

I ask him why he decided not to join Gooru full time and he answers frankly,

---

58 Prakash is referring to the education theorist John Holt, most commonly associated with unschooling and youth rights theory in the United States.
59 http://about.goorulearning.org/about/
“You know the problem with technologists; they want everything to be how they imagine it in their heads. Gooru has a ton of funding because of their relationship to Google and they’ve created an incredibly sophisticated platform that no teacher will ever use.

I wondered, at first, why they hadn’t been able to get into schools right here in Palo Alto, but then once I saw what was happening it was obvious. I went into classrooms and started observing teachers and it was absurd what was happening, one student would have a question while they were looking at the screen, the teacher would go over and answer and before she was done, another student would have the same question, then another, and another. Finally, the teacher would have to stop the entire class, explain the problem all at once and then have them go back to their computers. But half the time because they were all so focused on the computers they wouldn’t pay attention anyway. I suggested a small change, have an administrator button, where they can pause all of the computers at once. It was really simple. But nobody would really listen. And there were a ton of things like that. The scrolling bar wouldn’t work properly, so you couldn’t see it and students were getting totally confused. When I tried to talk to the teachers and principals, they would tell me flat out: ‘I don’t think it’s worth your time or my time to come all the way down here and meet. We really just have no use for the program.’ They are right, you have this sophisticated program and a lot of teachers don’t know how to use it and it’s so complicated that they feel like all of their fears of technology were justified in the first place. It’s the same old story no one goes and actually talks to the teachers.

You know, before I probably would have been incredibly excited about this type of opportunity and what they are doing. But now I can’t. If it goes against what I believe, then how can I do it?”

Listening to Prakash, I am struck by how much he is noticing by studying the “Other”, in this case an Other located in under resourced classrooms in the United States, where he can see examples of his own “faraway self”, in those who push for technological integration into classrooms without a strong foundational understanding of education. In observing the mistakes of others in the education-as-development space, Prakash has a renewed zeal to learn about education itself, as evidenced in his eager reference to John Holt above, who was, amongst other things, a great proponent of child-centered education.

It’s all to say that Prakash himself has been changed by his time with Adhyaapaka, his ten years working towards educational reform in India having left an indelible mark on how he thinks and feels about any attempt at intervention. He says it himself, in his admission that he simply can’t work with Gooru, even though it would satiate his urge to be back in the technological sector. Instead, his time with Gooru has made him more certain that he will go back to Bangalore in another year and try harder to find a strategy to make an impact on schools and communities that Adhyaapaka works with. He tells me he has ideas aplenty and asks that we meet again soon to think about them. I promise that we will and bid him goodbye.
After I leave his apartment, I drive a few miles before pulling into the parking lot of a local grocery store. I write one statement, perhaps obvious to those of you who have been reading from the beginning: Prakash, I write, will be forever entangled in the affects of development.

Chapter Summary

This chapter continues the style of Chapter 2 and 3, using the call for a “development fiction” to outline the online and offline ways that Sikshana sought to imagine its organizational vision. As part of the conceptual framing of this chapter I have sought to outline the dissonance between the formal bureaucratic structure that the organization had created with the charismatic, ad-hoc movements of Ramaswamy. This dissonance is, I argue, the basis for the fissures that emerge in the organization and result in the turmoil that I’ve outlined throughout this chapter, but especially culminating in Ramaswamy’s dealings with the police just before he is forced out of the organization.

I outline a few forms that digital development had taken in Adhyaapaka’s organization, starting with the idea of emotional techno-capitalism that bundles Prakash’s reference to the creation of a Kannada-language version GCompris as a valuable intervention in Adhyaapaka network of schools with regional and religious identities. Second, I use the concept of the hyperreal to make sense of Adhyaapaka’s NDTV/Coke partnership and its implementation in particular school sites, showing how the hyperreal effect of the website for a digital urban public functions similarly to that of the table tennis table in the rural scenario. Third, I juxtapose Ramaswamy’s polymediated interactions with Wharton students half a world away with an example of his interactions at a rural school proximal to Adavisandra to highlight the global-urban-rural boundaries that are created in his perception of his own role in each space. Fourth, I provide a final example of the constraints placed on Adhyaapaka given their global funding, namely the precepts delineated by MSDF in which none of their education programming really fits, a dilemma that emerges because of the pragmatic push for more and more funding, a push that proves fatal to the values originally espoused by the organization, and a crystallization of the concept of “fatal pragmatism”.

I end by returning to the experiences of Ramaswamy and Prakash, highlighting once again that the development condition is not just one that focused on Others, but is also inextricably tied to ones Self development, a part of one’s identity that keeps both of them affectively entangled in the development cause even as their work has not yet born the fruits they
once imagined, a distance between hopes and reality that is one of the central tenants of the development condition in India, whether one is the founder of NGO, one of its grassroots personnel, or, as we shall see in the next two chapters, a student in a school who is still perceived as ‘in-need-of-development’.
CHAPTER 5 – The School

Frame 25: Being Chosen

I sit on the back of Shiva’s motorbike and we zoom down the Kanakapura road towards our next set of destinations, two schools in Harohalli hobli. Shiva drives way too fast for me, weaving in and out of traffic at 80-90km/hr. There are potholes everywhere and I hold my breath as we barely avoid each one. We squeeze past the red Volvo buses that stop to pick up crowds of people, so close I can lean my head against its side. My eyes water and I can feel beads of sweat forming and then flying off of my forehead as we go.

When I ask him to slow down he just chuckles, speeds up, and tells me there is nothing to worry about. To prove it he jumps off the bike when we reach a relatively secluded strip of road on the outskirts of the city and directs me to get on. “Today, I will teach you biking,” he says confidently as I gingerly hold onto the hand brakes while trying start the bike, not nearly as confident in my ability as he is. He instructs me to slowly accelerate, and so I try, edging the bike forward… until I lose control of the bike entirely, myself and the bike swerving right then left until I finally trail off the road and into a small ditch as Shiva comes running behind.

I crawl off the bike unscathed but for my ego and Shiva can’t stop laughing as we pull the bike out of the ditch and start on our way again, both of us deciding that now may not be the best time to rectify my ignorance regarding the motor bike.

We turn off the main road onto the Anekal Road, jammed between the Harohalli busstand, which is overcrowded with people and buses – red and grey, green and yellow, orange and blue – and small shops selling anything from vegetables to snacks (sandwiches, pakoras, sweets) to drinks (both soft and alcoholic) to flowers to cigarettes to gasoline.

The road empties as we move a few kilometers inland, changing slowly from the noise and squalor of town to the quiet of a village; a shockingly rapid transformation. The road itself changes as well, far less well-paved with more potholes that need to be navigated. We pass goatherders with their flocks and small trucks making their way at a leisurely pace as we move further into agricultural areas, making a left turn onto a completely unpaved road, marked only by two village homes to its right and left, the final stretch on our journey to Adavisandra school.

During my first five months of fieldwork this final stretch of road remained unpaved, dust thrown up off the ground as I wove my way up the road in a bus, bike, or car (depending on the day) into the hills on the outskirts of the Bannerghatta forest and to the school site.
approximately 5 kilometers away. However, about sixteen months after my first visit to Adavisandra, the road has been completely paved and there are now green signs which announce Adavisandra and its neighboring villages, a material reminder of how rapidly Bangalore’s peripheries are being connected through a growing number of infrastructures, roads being the most visible and obvious facilitator of connectivity. Later, I began to see this kind of connectivity in relation to digitally rendered visibility, in, for example, my ability to find Adavisandra on Google Maps, these intersecting infrastructures – digital mapping and road building – producing new global-urban-rural imaginaries.

There are fields of raagi (a local grain) and reshmi (the name for silk leaves), coconut trees standing in lines as we move further away from the main road. We pass by a school to the left – Dyavasandra school – a larger school of over 300 which I had once visited while trying to choose a school site. After turning a bend to the left, at which a small cemetery has been constructed, I reach the center of Adavisandra, a village with a population of less than 1000, mostly of the Vokkaliga caste, like Manoj, a mostly agricultural caste which has been categorized as OBC (Other Backward Class) by the government of India, but who have also had a strong voice in Karnataka state politics, especially in the Janata Dal (s) party. There are rows of colorful village homes on both the right and the left, with small porches upon which women sit, a few washing dishes outside or playing with young children. They look at me as I pass, directly and quizzically, a new face entering a community in which I clearly do not seem to fit.

As I pass through the village towards the school I cannot help but notice the stacks of chandrike, bamboo frames used for breeding, stuffed with silkworms, having eaten their fill of mulberry and ready to spin themselves into cocoons over the next 25 to 30 days. Its this monthly cycle that makes silk farming so intriguing for farmers, providing year round income as long as they can grow enough mulberry to feed the worms.

Adavisandra school was right in the middle of the village, surrounded on all sides by village homes, painted, like most government schools in Karnataka, in the orange, white, green of the Indian national flag, a not so subtle hint of the nationalist ideology inherent in the government school system in India.60

---

60 Yazgi writes: “The choice of the primary school building as the place to hold elections should be understood as part of a global agenda designed by the state to operationalize a democratic process, the more so in a remote and decentralized area, historically insubordinate and refractory to external ascendancy. The space of the school marks the physical presence of the nation-state within the local community. The cement walls themselves embody the spirit of the nation: painted images of the goddess Bharat Mata,
The main building has two rooms, one that serves as both the tenth standard classroom and the Headmaster’s office, and which I enter in order to speak with the school personnel. Shiva has already told them to expect my visit, so the teachers and the headmaster are not completely surprised when I enter and they all warmly shake my hand and ask me to sit down.

At every single school visit I have ever been on, it has been impossible to leave without having at least one cup of tea, some biscuits, and a small banana, and the more I refuse, the more insistent everyone becomes that I must have at least one and that I must stay a little while longer. It was in this context that I had already had three cups of tea in the past three hours, a situation that made my nervousness increase as my bladder slowly filled.

It was a pleasant surprise when no one offered me any biscuits at Adavisandra. Instead, they pulled up eight seats, for myself, Shiva, the two headmasters – Pallavi madam who was secondary HM and Purushottam sir who was primary HM – along with four of the teachers, Prakash sir, Reddy sir, Sulekha madam, and Nikhil sir. The room was, at first glance, a typical government school classroom, with barred windows, greenish cabinets stuffed with books, two desks that were used by the two HMs. Yet, what made the room and situation so unique was that, due to lack of space, there was an ongoing social science class in the back of the room, separated only by a steal cabinet on the right, led by Nagraj sir, the secondary students’ social science teacher.

It’s a situation that makes me especially uncomfortable as I am naively still trying not to impose on or interfere in the ongoing school processes, despite the fact that every time I have entered a school building I have done nothing but interfere, an object of curiosity for teachers and students that cannot remain hidden from view. I can see students in class craning their necks, stretching to see around the cabinet and find out who this new person might be, showing up completely unexpectedly.

In the first fifteen minutes, sitting in the middle of these skeptical teachers, I begin to explain who I am, partly in Kannada and partly in English, that I arrived from Bangalore, that I was here in Karnataka for research, that I was interested in learning about schools in Karnataka. Wherever I stumbled, Shiva would fill in, legitimizing my presence within the school with his presence, a member of a NGO that worked in the school and was therefore recognizable.

I suddenly felt extremely underdressed, the black t-shirt and grey jeans I was wearing to stay comfortable in the heat now feeling absurdly inappropriate in a room of teachers who were portraits of heroes from the independence struggle, and aphorisms in hindi and Sanskrit, the non vernacular standraized languages partaking in the homogenizing process of nation construction.” (Yazgi, 2010, 73)
dressed in slacks and collared shirts (if men) or in sarees (if women). On most days thereafter I wore a short kurtha – a somewhat more recognizable form of dress, although I could never say that I was anything but slightly underdressed during my time in Adavisandra, perhaps the best indicator of my privileged position in that space.

Every teacher scrutinized me, asking me more about my family, my background in the United States, where I was living in Bangalore. My brown-ness was the most puzzling mark, especially when related to my accent and stumbling Kannada, and I could not help feeling that in some way my presence in this context could be construed as no less strikingly strange than Sahlin’s description of Captain James Cook’s landing and eventual death on the Hawaiian islands in 1779, a story he uses to posit his concept of the “structure of the disjuncture” i.e. the culturally specific rationality through which the indigenous people of Hawaii understood the moment of disjuncture, that is the moment of Cook’s landing. Of course, the problem with Sahlin’s characterization was always in this notion of bounded, radically different cultures, in which intersubjective interaction was seemingly not at all part of how relationships arise and create new constellations of cultural meaning, a point of view that led easily to Othering and deficiency based characterizations of those who were not “Western”, a critique leveled best by Obeyesekere in the early 90s (Moore, 2009).

But perhaps more importantly for me, sitting in front of a group of schoolteachers awaiting their questions and addressing their concerns, was how clearly the ethnographic encounter seemed to deconstruct this idea of radical cultural difference, especially in our ability to speak and create a shared framework by which to understand the differences which did exist. It was this act of dialogue, the back and forth and give and take of interaction, speaking then listening then speaking, which did the work of creating those affective entanglements which precluded any simple reading of me and them, which precluded the possibility of seeing cultural difference and only cultural difference. In other words, yes there was a disjuncture, but no there was not a closed logic within which that disjuncture was rationalized.

On one level, the teachers’ and headmasters’ questions about me were almost so logical as to be obvious. If I were to walk into a classroom in New York City or in Philadelphia or in the UK or South Africa, I would encounter similar inquiries about who I was and why I was so interested in studying that particular space, a kind of scrutiny that accompanied the intrusion into a new context; a scrutiny that was even more logical given that I was ultimately coming to scrutinize them. On another level, the types of inquiry was indeed quite specific, in, for example, discussions of where exactly my native place was – which I stumblingly explained could be
Chennai and Tamil Nadu (since that was where my parents hailed from as Tamil speakers), Delhi (since that was where my parents grew up), or America (since that was where I was born and grew up). These were never stable categories of belonging, but continued to be re-configured over the course of my twelve months in the field.

After about twenty minutes of back and forth, I finally came around to the fact that I was a teacher, and that I had once taught 9th grade Biology in New York City. When I did, all of the teachers suddenly perked up, asking me about the differences between education in America versus the India. This was an expected question, a curiosity that came up over and over again when I talked with educators and students, but one which I still struggled to answer given the sheer magnitude of the question. “Actually, there are not so many differences…” I start explaining as best I can that there is a similar system to the Indian government school system in the United States called the “public” school system and that the public system faces many of the same resource problems that they themselves were facing. But as luck would have it, the social science class was finishing just as I was mentioning my background as a teacher and, without giving me a chance to refuse, Nikhil sir got up out of his seat and excitedly pointed to the chalkboard in the back of the classroom, “Oh you are a teacher Arjun, correct? Good… then go teach something.”

I was frozen for a moment, not expecting such an abrupt request and, of course, being totally unprepared to teach any lessons during the course of an introductory meeting. And yet there I was, suddenly forced in front of 20 tenth standard students, a position which I had been in before, several years prior when I first started working with Adhyaapaka, but whose stakes were far higher now that I had returned as a researcher, eager to ingratiate myself to these teachers who were my would-be collaborators.

I taught a geography lesson, explaining that I was from the United States and using that to begin helping students identify countries on a map, to ask questions about the United States – where and how I lived, and to get a better idea of the distance between contexts. Thirty minutes passed in this fashion, and I worked up a sweat feeling the teachers’ gazes, clearly evaluating my ability and potential as a member of their community.

It was a pivotal moment in my research, the moment when Adavisandra chose me. By the time I finished my lesson the students and teachers demeanor had visibly changed, no longer scrutinizing as much as discussing how I could be a stronger part of the school as well as the broader community. Nikhil Sir and Reddy Sir walk with me around Adavisandra, to introduce me to the parents in the community and to get me acquainted with the layout of the village. I learned
quickly that the school was overcrowded despite the fact that there were only 120 students attending the school. All of standard K-10 were taught in one building as they awaited a new larger building to be constructed and dedicated to secondary education i.e. for students in sixth through tenth. The school was also understaffed, with many students spending at least part of the day without a teacher and, therefore, my sudden entrance to the school, as someone who was willing to teach without being paid, seemed a blessing. “You must come as frequently as possible,” Nikhil tells me when I am trying to describe my schedule and how I want to conduct my fieldwork. And as we pass parents, some of whom I would come to know over the course of my time at Adavisandra, we say hello and Nikhil sir does most of the explaining as to who I am and why I am there, the slight variations in his story reminding me of the popular American game, ‘telephone’. “Arjun is from America,” he starts, “But he is living in Bangalore, and he is working at university. But he is a teacher and has come to help us.”

This (thin) description, while heartening, also frightens me, placing me within an old developmentalist paradigm of “outsider help” that I was trying hard not to reinforce. And yet, these were the markers – American, Bangalore, teacher – that rendered me legible and allowed for the ease by which I was accepted. And, in fact, it was this idea that I could contribute something that was so starkly different about my entrance into Adavisandra versus nearly every other school I had attended thus far. Here, I was not merely a participant-observer, gazing upon those who were somehow different than myself, but a (developmentalist?) agent amongst agents, all re-producing the context in which we were all differentially positioned.

Suddenly, as we walked and talked, now squarely in the middle of a reshmi field which Reddy sir was eager to describe, the sky burst into rain and we ran frantically to find a tree under which to wait until the rain passed.

We sit quietly for a few moments, staring out onto the reshmi fields, a jackfruit tree standing alone in the midst of these fields, a large yellow school building still under construction, and a few village homes speckled in the distance. I take out my audio recorder and start recording hoping I’ll remember this moment twelve or fourteen months later while listening to the sound of the rain against the trees.

Nikhil sir and Reddy sir look at my recorder quizzically then stop talking so as not to “intrude” onto the recording, an instinct that would, within another few short weeks, dissipate.

When I re-listen to these recordings, I do indeed have memories: of sitting on the wet ground, of feeling the excitement of a new beginning, of the expectation that comes with an
infinite number of questions. And a silence is all that accompanies all of this affective potentiality; just the rain and the four of us under these trees, waiting to return to school.

Twenty months later Nikhil remembers this first meeting vividly as well. He describes running in the rain, sitting and discussing my research, how I was dressed. He smiles and remarks on how different it all is now, interpersonal distance closed over our months together. “Arjun, everyone needs an introduction,” he says, “That's all it is.”

Frame 26: Theorizing School

I can’t help but feel a strange dissonance at this point in my fieldwork and writing, in this sudden, almost complete break from the NGO to the school, despite the fact that in my anthropological imagination they were always connected, both (re)structured within India’s current development paradigm and as importantly, the latter (the school) being ever-more influenced by the prerogatives of NGOs. At Adavisandra school no less than three NGOs were “intervening”, including Adhyaapaka, claiming to provide assistance despite the fact the school was already a school that had 100% of its students passing it SSLC exams. This is not counting a fourth NGO, Akshaya patra, who the school wanted to intervene, and who I discuss later in this chapter.

Practically, however, I rarely saw any of these NGO personnel at Adavisandra, but for the biweekly visit by the Adhyaapaka community mentor required to make sure the school was reaching its stated (and already achieved) accountability measures, the Adhyaapaka mentors who came mainly to see how I was doing at the school, and a monthly visit by another NGO whose intervention was to provide science education to the Adavisandra students. And indeed, some of these moments of interaction are made visible in these following sections, if only peripherally, an intentional, if implicit, method by which to critique the over-zealous importance given to NGO interventions into schools that are themselves situated within sociocultural contexts that have a strong influence on what and how values migrate both into communities and out of them.

Sriprakash (2012), for example, speaking specifically about particular child-centred pedagogies, sponsored by international aid agencies, that have taken hold in Indian schools, argues that “teachers and administrators interpret and re-contextualize policy with relation to local knowledge, interests, and resources. The intended frameworks of education programs are not always reproduced or sustained in local contexts; there is a need to pay attention to the conditions and possibilities articulated by those working at local levels” (2-3). First, Sriprakash’s
notion of the local is perhaps overly simplistic, missing, as will be a recurring theme in this chapter, the highly differential positions of various actors, whether it be the headmaster, teachers, those who cook the midday meals, students, and parents, that make any singular category of the “local” untenable in the ethnographic encounter within the school context. On the other hand, her insight as to the less than ideal uptake of development programs in schools mimics my own ethnographic observations even during my very first days at Adavisandra.

In a sense, then, this chapter (and the following as well) serves to ground the discussion of education-as-development, especially given that education NGO intervention is executed within schools, and allows for an alternative excavation of values as they are mediated by the school, inclusive of the curriculum, personnel, and physical school buildings, that are as much a part of how the affects associated with development are produced. Simultaneously, teachers and students are especially important loci by which to study what affects are produced in the migration of values through the school and is, in general terms, what the rest of this work seeks to excavate, by situating their aspirations, dreams, anxieties, sufferings, and hopes within the broader schooling context of which the NGO was but one part.

In the study of schools in India, much of the attention has been focused on the construction of a modern, postcolonial national imaginary in the wake of transnational globalization, a discussion that has, almost inevitably led to an overemphasis on English medium schools (given its status as the language of the global economy) and the role of schools catered to the urban middle classes in India. Srivastava (2005), for example, focuses on the Doon School, a private school catering to India’s elite, the class who has, traditionally, been some of the most influential producers of the Indian nation. Advani (2009) focuses on the national English curriculum, excavating the ties to “wider discussions on the purpose of education, the ideology which animated a newly decolonized nation, and the ways in which this was and continues to be visible in the position of various education commissions, in textbooks over the decades, and in classroom practices” (4). In so doing, globality is inadvertently linked to the learning of English, something that the practices at my own school site challenged, as Adavisandra was a Kannada medium government school whose teachers and students had an equally global frame in which they imagined their lives and work.

While Advani rightly notes that the study of education in India must effectively illuminate the “collision between the national and the regional, the rural and the urban, the political and the professional” (3), works that begin with the frame of the nation tend to already overdetermine the arguments that ensue, preordaining exactly how significant national level
policies are in specific school contexts. As Advani nicely puts it, “Education is, after all, both policy and performance, both state pronouncement and the teacher in the classroom” (4). In the rest of this section, therefore, I will explore how development feels from the point of view Adavisandra school, a Kannada medium school of 120 students, showing the idiosyncratic and differential relationships between changing technological, regional, religious, national, economic, and gendered values as they intersect in the lives of a few of the individuals in Adavisandra school.

To attend to when and how the Adavisandra school community “worlds” is especially useful in this context, a means by which to analyze how the school and members of the school community produces their versions of globality in a moment of increased digital engagement, both how they imagine the world beyond the village and how the school projects these imaginaries of the world through schooling practices, in classroom pedagogic undertakings, celebrations, extracurricular activities, and the like. This does not always involve direct engagement with technologies of any sort (although sometimes it does), but instead can manifest in the feeling that one is connected to “a world beyond” that is itself a byproduct of the digital age. Again, even the phrase “how they imagine the world beyond the village” suggests that the possibility of worlding is in relation to the urban-rural, both as boundary and as linkage, and what I intend these brief frames to highlight.

* * *

Frame 19: Independence Day

It’s August 15th, Indian Independence day and about two months into my fieldwork in Adavisandra, and I am about to participate in the celebration of the Indian nation with my students and fellow teachers. Celebration days are incredibly important parts of a school’s culture, non-curricular undertakings that illustrate exactly what kind of values a school and its staff – teachers and headmasters particularly – want to bestow on its students; values which, as I will illustrate below, are its own particular type of worlding practice.

Since my first encounters with the teachers, I’ve been coming to school, teaching English, speaking with anyone – students, teachers, and parents – curious enough to inquire into who I am and what I’m doing in the village and really just trying to acclimate to my new position in the community as best I can.

I had settled into a strong relationship with the ninth standard students, who were, at the time of my arrival, being taught in partially broken down red brick building across from the
school building, awaiting the building of a large brand new school building just for the secondary school students, which was still in the process of construction, and which I will talk about in more detail later.

The ninth standard students were, in some ways, the most convenient choice for my engagement because first, they were not preparing for the upcoming SSLC exams that overdetermined much of the instructional possibility for tenth standard students; second, they were almost always left without an instructor, given the additional focus on the tenth standard; and third, their slight physical remove from the rest of the students and teachers gave me a bit of freedom, allowing me to teach and learn from them without the interference of the other school teachers, who, though very enthusiastic to help, could, at times, usurp control of lessons and produced a rigid disciplinarity when they were in class, restricting what and how students would move in the school space with me.

It was crystallized for me in a simple act each time a teacher would come into the room. Students would stop everything they were doing, stand up straight in unison, lift their arm to their heads in salute, and, again in unison, shout, in English “Good morning Sir!” or, as an alternative for the afternoon, “Good afternoon Sir!” These salutations are some of the only moments when English is used between students and teachers outside of English class, a kind of mapping of discipline, status, and the English language that subtly hints at the position of English in these village schools.

I have clip after clip of in-class footage that unexpectedly captures these sudden shifts in classroom relationships, a messy class of students yelling over one another, asking questions, and gesturing, and later, as I introduce my participatory film project, circling around each camera and excitedly discussing new photographs and film footage together, immediately shifting into quiet, rigid attention. For example, in one clip I am standing in front of the classroom, quizzically looking down at an audio recorder with two students craning their necks to see over my shoulder, trying to understand why files are not deleting. In one corner a group of students film one another singing and dancing to Kolaveri Di, a Tamil-language song that was a smash hit all over South India and eventually became a global phenomenon when it went viral on youtube, one instantiation of a rural-urban-global public digitally connected and partaking in a shared musical experience. Another student captures all of these interactions, jumping amongst the chaos in order to film all that is happening. Suddenly, he whips the camera to face Reddy sir whose round smiling face consumes the entire frame for a second before the camera is wordlessly shut off. Its that instantaneous moment of shutting down and the magnificent metamorphosis in student praxis
that it represents which ultimately leads me to stay as far away from the other teachers as possible, at least at the initial stages of my research.

I find that the Adhyaapaka mentors can be just as stifling. On my first three days working with the ninth standard students Manoj joined us, documenting the proceedings from the back of the room and chiming in whenever he felt that something wasn’t going as planned. He knows these students, albeit only in a superficial way, coming to the village once every two or three months just to oversee how the students are performing and whether the school is still following the Adhyaapaka model. However, because Adavisandra is one of the aforementioned, “high performing schools” he comes less frequently, having other schools with lower SSLC scores to focus on and not having been given any mandates from Ramaswamy or Prakash as to how to proceed once schools had reached their optimal exam scores. On this day he has come to the school almost exclusively because of me, wanting to know exactly how I am getting on in my new school site. I did not realize then, but it would be one of the very few times he came to join me, eventually losing patience with my insistence on staying at the same school for the entire day, and always asking why I did not want to join him on school visits elsewhere instead. I had explained the ethnographic process to him many times, and he was always interested in trying it himself, but ultimately the stipulations of his professional position would take precedence, and leave him in a rush to see more schools, “motivate” more students, and check off his list of accountability measures. Adhyaapaka’s role in the school has become one of quick gains, entering into a school to create maximum short term exam results, after which there is no time for further interaction.

I start my lesson, but add a twist, I take the students outside and we stand in a circle. I throw a ball and the student who catches it says a sentence in Kannada after which I translate it in English. Then, to complicate the game, I say a sentence in English that they translate and then ask me a question in Kannada that I have to answer in both Kannada and English. It’s a game that I learned during my time teaching in New York City, albeit it was towards the learning of biology and exclusively in English. Everyone is highly self-conscious, myself included, some students avoid catching the ball completely, others giggle, and a few boys push one another as they try to catch the ball, though once they have it they stare silently, sometimes confused by the English statement or having never listened to the statement at all in their enthusiasm to catch the ball. When they do get answers correct, for example translating, “I speak English well” as “Naanu English channagi maaduthenne” they all celebrate in unison, an enthusiasm I am always looking to cultivate as I try to both teach them and learn from them. However, as the circle gets louder,
more boisterous, and, in my estimation, less reticent, Manoj becomes agitated at the commotion, reading their actions as undisciplined and disrespectful to me, their presumed instructor. “Listen,” he starts admonishing, “He has come here to teach you, and you should show respect. If you don’t then he will leave. Now listen.” The threat silences all of the students and the game, intended to create a shared, safe space for me and my students and a relationship that was different from their other school practices, now re-framed as part of their normal classroom relations and their expected etiquette.

With or without interventions by others, teaching was always tricky, given that there would always be words and phrases that I could not understand during conversation. Sometimes students would run out of class to ask one of their teachers about a word which we could not seem to decipher on our own. My favorite instance was our attempt at translating, “existing” into Kannada, which they, with the help of Nikhil Sir, decided was best understood with the word vyaavaharika, though later they refined their understanding to jivisu, which means something more akin to “to live”. But ultimately, these were the kinds of negotiations that comprised my first few months with my ninth grade students.

But by August 15th the teachers and students are all happy (enough) to have me around, teaching classes from time to time, wandering around the village, learning about the local industries, and, always, taking photographs and shooting film on my camera. The camera has become a ubiquitous part of my time in Adavisandra and on this day the teachers want to take advantage of that fact, insisting that I bring my camera on Independence Day to shoot the goings-on.

I am there bright and early, 9AM about an hour before the event is officially supposed to start. The students are all restless. The younger ones are clustered in the courtyard in front of the school while the older students have already lined up just across the street, ready for their part in the celebration. I’m shooting as much as I can, students up close, far away, smiling, shouting, playing, laughing. They’re all in their best uniforms, the ninth and tenth standards in red collared shirts and white pants or skirts, the sixth and seventh standards in yellow, and the youngest children in green. Sometimes I hide behind the many small trees that are scattered across the school building, framing my students between large green leaves that hang down till just below my head. I get an especially lovely shot of some of my ninth standard girls, standing in a row, just prior to the start of the ceremony, pigtails drifting forward as they whisper something to one another and giggle under their breath. They are all wearing white gloves, wristbands in the color of the Indian flag, and berets with bright yellow and green feathers sticking from the top, a small
pendant on the front announcing, “Silver Jubilee Year, 1993-1994, Kuvempu University”, the hats purchased by the teachers at a small stall in the middle of Bengaluru Pete, the largest market area in Bangalore.

The teachers welcome me from a far, waving and returning to their tasks, busy as they ready themselves for the days event. I see Nikhil Sir in the front along with the primary school HM, Purushottam Sir, lighting some candles and incense in a small steel plate, and draping flowers over a photograph. I peak around and see that it’s an illustrated picture of Gandhi, in his iconic loincloth, smiling broadly from inside the frame.

As they’re finishing Nikhil Sir calls everyone to attention and, in a voice meant to harken to a military official, he barks out the command to sing the Indian national anthem. They start to sing the national anthem in unison, followed by the Karnataka state anthem, and ending with Sare Jahan se Acha (1904)\textsuperscript{61}, a ghazal written by poet Muhammad Iqbal which he originally recited at the Government College, Lahore, in present-day Pakistan, and which became one of the iconic anthems of opposition to British rule in India. Iqbal himself disavowed the version of the song that my students were singing. He penned a version entitled Tarana-e-Milli (1910) (Anthem of the Religious Community), in which he wrote that “We are Muslims, the whole world is our homeland” changing the lyrics of the earlier version which said, “We are Hind, our homeland is Hindustan”, de-linking his vision from the physicalized space of India, and imagining a pan-Islamic globality unrecognized in the earlier version. The song has remained incredibly popular in India, especially given the mythical tale of Gandhi singing the song over one hundred times while he remained imprisoned in the 1930s.

Once they’re done singing, Nikhil sir stops them and shouts commands in English which I can only partially understand until he yells, ALL LEADERS, TAKE THE CHARGE, after which four students lead two lines of students to begin a march, swinging their arms back and forth while chanting left-right-left, left-right-left, followed by variations where they hold their hands to their heads in salute as they take smaller steps. The students’ march down the main lane in front of the school, past houses on the right and left where smiling parents look on. The march

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}{61}
The lyrics: Better than the entire world, is our Hindustan, / We are its nightingales, and it (is) our garden abode / If we are in an alien place, the heart remains in the homeland, / Know us to be only there where our heart is. / That tallest mountain, that shade-sharer of the sky, / It (is) our sentry, it (is) our watchman / In its lap where frolic thousands of rivers, / Whose vitality makes our garden the envy of Paradise. / O the flowing waters of the Ganges, do you remember that day / When our caravan first disembarked on your waterfront? / Religion does not teach us to bear animosity among ourselves / We are of Hind, our homeland is Hindustan. / In a world in which ancient Greece, Egypt, and Rome have all vanished without trace / Our own attributes (name and sign) live on today. / Such is our existence that it cannot be erased / Even though, for centuries, the time-cycle of the world has been our enemy. / Iqbal! We have no confidence in this world / What does any one know of our hidden pain?
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
is saturated with emotion, the ninth and tenth standard students’ discipline and seriousness mixed with the festive, awestruck looks of the younger children and the pride-filled stares of their parents and teachers, encouraging them on as they pass by.

The march is part of a broader push by the school to begin the process of socializing students into the practices of the Indian military. Manjunath Sir explains that getting into the military is one of the easiest and most practical ways for rural students to receive a stable, non-agricultural job after their schooling, especially since students can join the Indian army, for example, as junior commissioned officers directly after tenth standard if they have received a 45% aggregate score on the SSLC and 32% on each subject test, a score which is only moderately higher than the 150 out of 500 marks necessary to pass the exam itself. This small scale training, amounting to not much more than the ability to dress like a cadet, salute, march, and follow commands, gives them a slight leg up when it comes time to apply to the military at the end of tenth standard. More than the practice, however, it’s the production of affective fervor that does the work of directing students, shaping their aspirations and making the military a viable option.

In fact, what becomes clear as I spend more time with students at the school is that this affective production is not tied to a strong understanding of what exactly someone in the military does. When I ask students about why they want to join the military the answers I get are vague, generally centered around wanting to defend India’s border from terrorists, and when I ask what they would do if they join the military, the answers are almost exclusively again about defending the border from Pakistan and/or China.

Pradeep, an eight standard student, is one of the loudest voices when talking about his military aspirations. Two months after this Independence Day celebration, he narrates, during a journal exercise in which I asked students to tell a story about their dreams for the future:

It is my childhood dream to become a soldier... I watched Yodha movie when I was in 7th grade. Then I believed that I should study well, join NCC [National Cadet Corps] and become a soldier. Thanks to all the teachers for helping me become a soldier. Thanks to my parents for helping me study. Thanks to the bank who helped me with money that was required for my studies. I took up the gun to become a soldier. I joined NCC.

By the end of Pradeep’s written reflection, he has already become a soldier, imagining that he has joined the NCC and giving thanks for those who helped him to get there. While Pradeep conflates joining the NCC with being a soldier, the National Cadet Corps, or NCC, is not the actual Indian army at all, but a voluntary organization that prepares students both secondary and university...
level, “To Develop Character, Comradeship, Discipline, Leadership, Secular Outlook, Spirit of Adventure, and Ideals of Selfless Service amongst the Youth of the Country” and “To Provide a Suitable Environment to Motivate the Youth to Take Up a Career in the Armed Forces.” And, indeed, the uniforms that the teachers have prepared for the students are meant to mimic the NCC uniform wherever possible, the baret being the most prominent feature.

As importantly, Pradeep’s five-sentence explanation as to both why and how he wants to become a soldier, relies on four elements: the media, education, home, and banking, each of which would come up in almost every one of my students discussions of their aspirations, both in how they were shaped and how they could come to pass in the future. The school’s role is highlighted on Independence Day, in the explicit teaching of skills that are intended to help students, like Pradeep, eventually reach their aspirations.

The film Pradeep references, Yodha (2009), is a Kannada language film starring Darshan, one of the biggest filmstars in Karnataka, and who I will talk about in more detail in the next chapter. For now, what is important is the content of the film, in which Darshan plays the role of Ram, an Army officer who becomes the personal bodyguard of Patil, Karnataka’s tourism minister, after rescuing him during a kidnap. However, the minister turns out to be a terrible man, attempting to rape a young dancer, Asha, but is thwarted by Ram (Darshan), who during the struggle shoots Patil. The rest of the story transpires in Bangalore, with the minister attempting to kill Ram for having thwarted his plan. The film includes several references to prominent Indian news events including the trial of Afzal Guru, one of the men found guilty and given the death sentence for his role in the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament in Delhi, and the Mangalore Pub Attack, in which a group of extremist members of the Sri Ram Sena, a right wing Hindu nationalist group, beat up a group of women and men who were at a pub, claiming that the women were violating traditional Hindu Indian values. The film is intended, at least at one level, as a critique of the violation of women’s rights in India, and in this sense transmits a set of moral values mapped onto the military, something that is not explicitly articulated in Pradeep’s words.

As importantly, Pradeep explicitly thanking the bank only serves to highlight the hyperawareness that capital is a necessary precondition for him to reach his aspirations. It can never be enough for Pradeep to decide on a future life trajectory, study hard in school, and get encouragement in home. He will also need loans from a bank if he wants to complete his studies.

63 http://nccindia.nic.in/aim-ncc
for example if he wants to go to PUC college, and eventually get the opportunity to train with the NCC. And this explicit referencing says as much about the ability to dream and imagine in Adavisandra, a kind of pragmatic guiding that already constraints just how far and how much a student is willing to dream, situated as he or she is within the material realities of life in the village. ‘What I would like to be’, ‘what I am now’, and ‘what I will need to do’ are always entangled in stories like Pradeep’s, perhaps one of the guiding boundaries of his particular rural imagination.

Back during Independence Day, the students finish marching around the village, keeping stern faces as their parents wave and look on. The march is followed by an even larger and more raucous procession through the village. Seven students each who carry a different instrument lead the procession: drums, a conch, etc. They are followed close behind by a tractor, brought in by one of the farmers in the village, upon which stand five students, dressed up as five historical figures, some mythical and some not. I start shooting the tractor and the students posing on it, when I am confronted by an older man, perhaps around fifty-five, who asks me why I am filming. “Are you from the media?” he asks, not with any sort of ill-will, but more out of curiosity, knowing just by looking at me that I am not from any village nearby. I reply that I am working with the school, studying for my PhD and he smilingly gestures that I should keep shooting, “Study, study…” he trails off as I get back to the camera. It's the first of many references to ‘the media’ while I am in the field, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, but which always forced at least some attention to the popular media practices in the village, one instantiation noted above in Pradeep’s reference to *Yodha*.
I can only tell two of the costumed figures, that of Santa Claus, shown here on the far left, and Ganesha, shown here on the far right, who stand on the tractor and pose as they slowly move down the main village road, an in-built entertainment for parents who stand by and watch. Later, I ask one of my students, Nagraj, about these costumes, who they were and what their significance was. Nagraj, who also happens to be wearing the Santa Claus costume, lists the characters from right to left as Ganesha, Rama, Tipu Sultan (a happy reminder that earlier, seemingly tangential references to the historical presence of the Muslim ruler was propelled by his ethnographic presence), a British official, and Santa Claus. He is not sure exactly why they’ve been asked to wear these costumes though he does have a vague idea that children love Santa Claus (though not any children in Adavisandra), that he gives gifts and chocolates, and that he is especially important to Christians. I ask Nikhil sir the same question and he responds quickly, as if me asking such a question was itself a slight, explaining that of course they want all of the students to “experience the world” and have knowledge about all religions and people, not just those within the village.

Despite the terse response, or perhaps because of it, this last expression “experience the world” sticks with me over the course of my fieldwork, shaping exactly how I saw a school that,
by most accounts, would be, given the metonymic relationship between the rural, the local, and the traditional, viewed as a place in which globality was *not being produced*, reserved for the urban in the near-hegemonic ideal of the global-urban future. And yet, in Adavisandra, as in all localities, specific worldlings are taking place, as important in the production of globality as the global imaginaries produced in cities. Indeed, what should be stated first, and is obvious in the example here, is that *all* localities are global and participating in worlding practices, a point that Piot (1999) makes clearly within the quite different context of rural Togo in West Africa on the very first page of his book, stating explicitly that it, “has long been globalized and is better conceptualized as existing within modernity” (1). Second, and more importantly, what makes the practices in Adavisandra different, if still indicating globality, is the explicit and conscious production of globality, in the common sense desire that students should have an awareness of the world beyond the village and, in turn, in the educative processes that teachers were undertaking to produce just such a consciousness, examples of global-rural worlding practices as relevant to understanding development as its urban counterparts.

Nikhil’s terse response, one of the few times he was not completely jovial in my presence, also presented an affective register by which to understand the Independence Day costumes: he was unhappy because he felt my question assumed that the school was somehow seen as *not able* to participate in this ubiquitous global consciousness, a feeling that linked Nikhil’s own sense of Self worth, his own potential globality, to his ability to develop his students’ globality as well. In other words, one’s own sense of value was linked directly to the possibility of (1) having a global sensibility and (2) being able to propagate this global sensibility in others and it was in this first set of remarks that I was able to understand the desire to produce a global Self as one of the affects of development made visible within the educational space.

Of course, the specificity as to what, exactly, globality looked like is as important as the meta-consciousness itself, and in this case the teachers had physicalized a religio-global imaginary, in which Hindu, Muslim, and Christian were all given representation, if only in caricatured form, Christianity, for example, represented by Santa Claus, whose relationship to Christianity is, at best, dubious.

In front of the line of students, two walk with framed photographs in hand, one of Ganesha, the Hindu remover of obstacles, and the other of Mahatma Gandhi, both garlanded and paraded around the village with stops along the way so that the community members can give their blessings to the passing students. Each time we stop, the parents touch the photograph of
Mahatma Gandhi and pray, treating Gandhi as God and receiving Darshan\textsuperscript{64} from him just as they would from any Hindu deity. As I watched, I wondered how to make sense of the fact that the Gandhi they worship is also the Gandhi who sought to eliminate the very silk economy sustaining many of them and much of the community in which they live. Thousands of silkworms are killed in the silk production process, before they are able to metamorphose into a moth, a process justified because the silk is believed to be the finest at the stage before the cocoon opens naturally at one end to release the moth, which destroys the continuity of the silk fiber. Gandhi criticized the sericulture industry for this cruelty as part of his \textit{ahimsa} philosophy, a reminder of just how extreme Gandhi’s form of nonviolence really was, nearly post-human in its ethical instantiations. This criticism of silk and the silk industry eventually became part of his argument for a move to cotton-spinning machines, a less known explanation within a dominant discourse that saw handspun cotton as a challenge to the exploitation of British colonial economics. I never brought this contradiction of Gandhi worship up with anybody at Adavisandra, partly because I only made the connections later and partly because it didn’t seem necessary to do so.

Finally, after four hours walking in the sun, everyone walks back to school, this time to the new school building, still unopened, approximately seven minutes walk away, just past the end of a small road off of the main road, and onto a dirt path leading beyond a small, dry pond surrounded by foliage and to the new school. Everyone sits out front under a small, makeshift tarp that gives enough shade from the sun. My students are starting to learn how to use the photo and video cameras I’ve brought with me just around this time, and I watch them stand to the side importantly, snapping photos and shooting film footage of their own choosing, a directorial ownership that I want to encourage as much as possible and which I will discuss directly in the next chapter.

I realize while I sit in the back and take in the proceedings that this truly is a “community event”, parents sit all around the perimeters of the assembly, watching the ongoing proceedings and it is a moment when the school can speak directly to parents and share the values which they hope their students should learn. First, the students put on a performance, dancing, singing, and reading poetry, choosing from Kannada film and folk songs as well as popular Bollywood songs to the amusement of everyone who watches. Afterwards, each of the teachers gives a speech.

\textsuperscript{64} Pinney (2002) citing Eck (1981) writes, “Darshan is a practice of Hindu visuality predicated on the mutuality of ‘seeing and being seen’ by the images of the deities one worships” (Pinney, 2002, 358).
specifically about Indian independence, the meaning of the day, and their hopes for the students’ futures.

Of all of the speeches I am most struck by that given by Manjunath Sir, the students’ social studies teacher, whose voice rises above the frenzy of children and adults talking to one another distractedly, paying very little attention to the preceding dialogues. He is already one of the most important figures in the school community, the majority of the students choosing him when asked who their favorite teacher was and, given his influence, when asked what their favorite subject was choosing social studies. He is decidedly handsome, broad shoulders and a strong jaw line, well-groomed and with kind, interested eyes. When I first meet him we connect after he hears that I am an anthropologist, which I have translated to sociologist, given that sociology and anthropology are a single discipline in the Indian context. He explains that he got his MA in Sociology and he starts talking immediately about Auguste Comte, “the father of sociology”, a name that I would never have expected to hear in Adavisandra, and yet is prominently discussed in one of the first lessons in the student’s social science text as well. It hits me during that first interaction that sociology around the world has congealed around a single originary figure, presented as such in my own cultural anthropology doctoral classroom in Philadelphia and in Kannada medium schools in Karnataka, a reminder that Western scholarship, because of its historical dominance over the social sciences, still holds sway on how postcolonial social scientific knowledge is constructed today.

Manjunath sir’s interest in sociology makes him exceptionally interested in my study and he asks me many questions about what I seek to learn. He is full of knowledge about students and their families, having developed trusting relationships across the standards and I was always thankful for his help in trying to understand where a student’s family was from, what hardships might be preventing a student from succeeding in the classroom, or the local economy in which students were growing up. At the same time, because of his understanding of the field, he was also slightly suspicious, protective of students who he did not want to be exploited by an outsider sociologist.

As he starts speaking students finally begin to listen intently to words that he drives forth like bullets from microphone to loud speaker and directly into their ears. The Kannada is fast and I grab my audio recorder, eager to make sure I capture every word that Manjunath sir says. He speaks for a full 20 minutes, a speech that I wish I could transcribe in full given its affective impact. He begins with three unassuming sentences, “We have been celebrating the national festivities with much grandeur. Today’s function has been rather different but has been filled with
pomp. So I would like to speak about the significance of Independence day…” followed by an intensely nationalistic description of India’s past up till the moment of British rule:

India is one of the leaders among the greatest nations of the world. When we see India’s ancient traditions, there is no other country as rich in resources and as vast as India. Humans have their evolution and have learnt all their culture from India. Today, Europe’s nations proclaim themselves as great, but they came to know what the world is just 500 years ago. Whereas we had constructed a model village, the Harappan Civilization, 5000 years ago. Since the Harappa civilization, our nation has preserved and nurtured it’s culture and the ancient traditions. The world’s first literature was created in India, the Vedas. Also, our kings have never fought wars unethically. India has never declared war on any other nation unnecessarily. When we consider people coming here from other nations, we have actually allowed for them to live here. One can witness all of the world's languages and religions in India. It is true that India has allowed people from all over the world to observe (practice) religion of their choice.

These grand, sweeping, essentializing statements read quite similarly to those espoused by Western colonial powers two hundred years earlier, only now it is India and Indians who stake claim to this unblemished and golden past, a hallmark of nationalist thought in India, one which is summed up by Chatterjee in one simple phrase “ancient glory, present misery” (Chatterjee, 2013).

And indeed, Manjunath sir continues into the story of India’s demise, explaining in vivid detail the 150 years of the British colonial era, which lasted so long because of the “slowness” of the Indian state of mind. There is little reference at all to Muslim rule, surprising given that Tipu Sultan sits only a few chairs away, and instead, Manjunath sir proceeds to re-invent the moment of Independence when Gandhiji, Rajguru, Sakhdev, Chandrasekhar Azad, and Bhagat Singh fought for freedom, describing in gruesome detail the final moments of the latter two, when they were tricked and found out by the British, eventually killing themselves rather than be taken prisoner by the British.

This history is but a setup for the real demise, the contemporary moment when India’s leaders have truly failed:

If such great souls were alive today, our country would not be in this condition (/state/situation)... But you are the youth of tomorrow, should develop selfless patriotism, selfless politics, but not involve in bunkum politics. We should support those who work selflessly for the nation. If we support someone just because he is from the same caste, same religion, or from Karnataka, our country will not rise up even in another 500 years. We are celebrating the Independence Day today but we have actually not got our independence. Where are we called independent? We are independent to eat and work, but we have not learnt to think independently. We have not gained independence to fight against injustice in our country... This country is in the hands of a very few people... Our state’s Chief Minister gives away 1kg rice for 1rupee, and gives away milk, uses our taxes to build bungalows... and settle abroad. Our country is not safe though we are being attacked from both the sides... Pakistan invades from here and China invades from there. Our Prime Minister does not have the daring to talk about this. This shows the faint-heartedness of our Prime Minister. Today...our soldiers are dying every day on the Pakistan border... our soldiers live in China’s 0.40 centigrade... means less than zero...
sacrificing their lives, fighting and protecting our borders... they do not have any kind of security. Our nation doesn't even have the mettle to bury the dead soldiers with dignity. A minister from Bihar says, “Soldiers are meant to die.”...

We should never respect such worthless leaders; our country has superb scientists, superb, superb teachers, police officers, DCs (district commissioners), lawyers, judges, but we don't have superb politicians. All I ask for on any stage is that the country needs superb politicians, superb selfless patriots. The country’s independence gets its meaning only when we have such patriots. We just celebrate 26th January and 15th August, hoisting the flag and declaring India as independent. We have become slaves in the country, we’ll become independent only when every citizen gets his freedom, develops thinking and has an access to opportunities (emphasis added). People with talent are not getting any opportunity in our country. These people are going to America and settling down there, we are losing our talent-pool. The talented people are not getting opportunities in our country, only people with recommendations and with money are getting a position and status in our country. We talented people are working in meagre jobs and roaming around giving speeches. Talented people should become the Prime Minister of the country, the Chief Minister of the state, talented people should own the leadership, should become the presidents. All of you pursue your studies with this view, and then the independence of this country will have a meaning. Your studies will be fruitful and our teachers’ efforts will be fruitful. With this talk, making you understand your work, for the country’s independence to have a meaning, I thank all of you...

In a quieter moment Manjunath sir would soften his words, admitting that the force with which he had lashed out at the ruling politicians in India during his speech may have been too extreme and that yes, some of those in power were not completely “worthless”. Still, there is much to be learned in the frenzy of his speech, especially if we take seriously Mazzarella’s (2009) reinvigoration of crowd theory, whose perceived regressive and immoderate potentials, in for example the work of Le Bon, make them antithetical to the modern, civilized liberal subject. However, Mazzarella (2009) suggests that such collective spaces teem with “affective effervescence… members… indiscriminately amplifying each others impulses and impressions” (296-297). And it is in these moments of affective intensity that reason is subsumed, not just in the members of the crowd, but in the orator himself or herself, as he or she works up to a moment in which individual emotion is collectivized. In this respect, Manjunath sir’s use of “we” at particular points during his speech is telling, especially in the phrase “We talented people are working in meagre jobs and roaming around giving speeches,” a statement that when juxtaposed with the earlier phrase, “All I ask for on any stage” indicates quiet clearly that it is not just about his students that he is speaking of, but about himself as well. He is, after all, the one on stage giving a speech, and is also one of those talented people who is working in a “meager job,” in this case the teaching profession. He also is speaking in the “we” when he claims that, “We have become slaves in the country, we’ll become independent only when every citizen gets his freedom, develops thinking and has an access to opportunities,” an absolute, if overzealous
statement of his own feelings of dissatisfaction at the lack of opportunities for those like him in contemporary India; the lack of opportunity, in turn, equated with a lack of freedom, in turn, equated with slavery because all they are really free to do “is eat and work.”

But his critique is also related to a world beyond the village, Karnataka, or India, in all of those who are leaving to get jobs in, specifically, America, the place where those of talent can go to find jobs aplenty, not restricted by the cronyism that defines who and how someone can get positions and status in India. India’s independence is only of value if, and only if, the flow of people and ideas is curtailed, and those who imagine America as a place of prosperity and opportunity can, instead, view India as that place, which he increasingly experiences as a place of gross social inequality. This, for Manjunath sir, is the basis for his version of education-as-development, what will make his job as a teacher have meaning and how he sets out to develop his students in the wake of India’s contemporary misery.

* * *

Frame 27: The Secondary School Building

Photo 5.2 The secondary school building at Adavisandra

This short section is about the “vagaries of infrastructure” which “shows not only who has access to resources, but how access is mediated by social/cultural power dynamics” (Anand, 2011). As
has been covered in the introduction, part of India’s push for development has always been through the production of infrastructures, whether it be roads, airports, hotels, apartment complexes, medical facilities, or restaurants, each intended to function as their own worlding practices and producing India’s newfound globality, though, as stated earlier, usually within the boundaries of its cities. In this case, I will focus on a single structure, namely that of the new school building that had been erected previous to the beginning of my research in Adavisandra but remained unoccupied and unused for nearly the entire year, finally opening in January 2014, just before I left the school and only two months prior to the end of the school year.

It was the question of why this building had remained unused for so long that kept poking at me, pricking my ethnographer’s eye every time I saw it, whether it was while passing by on the way to meet one of my students’ parents, whether it was during a school function that took place just in front of the school but never inside of it, or whether it was during one of the many moments when the teachers complained about how overcrowded the primary school building was, evidenced by my own teaching engagement in the building across the street.

The building itself is a sharp contrast to its primary school counterpart, painted completely yellow with none of the nationalist markings generally associated with the government school. Its also an especially large building, two stories, ten rooms, and a large function hall creating more than enough space for each of the secondary standards, sixth through tenth, to have their own room, while also providing a large enough office space for the teachers and a separate library.

The school building plays a particularly important symbolic role in India’s education-as-development narrative, especially in the wake of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (The Education for All Movement), established in 2001, which made free and compulsory education to children of ages 6-14 a fundamental right, meaning for students up to the 8th standard. The result was a huge increase in the number of primary schools in India, rising from 712391 in 1990-1991 to 1042251 in 2005-2004 such that students would not have to walk any more than 5 kilometers to reach a school (Mukhopadhyay, 2011, 7). Perhaps not surprisingly, the initial impetus for SSA and the building of schools was spurred by global pressures as “India became a signatory to different international conventions—the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by India in 1992, the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000; all reinforcing the agenda of universalisation of elementary education” (Mukhopadhyay, 6). Simultaneously, in 1993-1994, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was initiated, 85% of which was funded by a number of external agencies,
including the World Bank, DFID and UNICEF. By 2001, more than US$1500 million had been committed to the programme, and 50 million children covered in its ambit.  

Enrollments in primary education increased drastically as a result of SSA, hailed as a huge success, even if these successes were still met with some criticism by those who found that the infrastructural expansions did not address issues of quality education, which would have meant improving and equalizing the curricular and pedagogical opportunities within each of these government schools.

Moreover, this expansion in the primary school sector did not include ninth and tenth standard, both of which were considered lower secondary and, therefore, despite the huge increase in primary school enrollment, student attrition rate between eight and ninth standard has still been high, with about 50% of students who initially enroll in school dropping out by standard eight (Lewin, 2011, 382).

As a corrective, in 2007 a new 11th Five Year Plan (GoI, 2007) was initiated to complement the SSA, with a program designed specifically to universalise access to secondary schools called Rastriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), which, according to Government of Karnataka’s RMSA website, “is a unique educational programme which has been designed in such a way to respond effectively to the emerging demands of our society and rapid developments that are taking place due to liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization. This is clearly the next step after universalizing elementary education.” In other words, the building of more schools was and is directly related to the precepts of globalization-era development, in which rural students are expected to possess a particular set of skills that will allow them to join the global knowledge economy, including ICT training, emphasis on Math, Science, and English, and an education that was “holistic… touching upon physical, emotional and aesthetic development in addition to academics.” The new school building in Adavisandra was built under this initiative, as part of the RMSA’s push to create more of these “model schools”.

According to the RMSA, “Basically a model school will have infrastructure and facilities of the same standard as in a Kendriya Vidyalaya.” While initially Kendriya Vidyalaya schools were started to educate the children of those in the Indian Defense Service, now the schools educate the children of Indian central government employees who are posted all over the country.

---

and, in some cases, overseas. The main office is headquartered in Delhi and has established a
standardized model of education across the country reliant on the Central Board of Secondary
Education (CBSE) curriculum. In Karnataka, there are 35 of these schools, all of which are in its
major cities and 14 of which are in Bangalore itself. By modelling rural schools on the image of
these Kendriya Vidyalaya schools, the RMSA not-so-subtly enforces the migration of values
from center-to-periphery, establishing standardized norms that take for granted the need to create
rural schools modeled on national and/or urban valuations of education, actualizing these values
in the school buildings themselves, which literally mimic the two-story structures associated with
urban schooling.

This move towards standardization is complicated in its implementation, decisions to
build or not to build always related to the functionings of local political bodies. In this case,
Adavisandra school was built with the help from the SDMC President, who provided the land for
the building. SDMC stands for the School Development and Monitoring Committees, which:

were mandated decentralised school level structures to institutionalise processes of
decentralised school administration and participation of parents. At present school funds are
managed by an account at the school level that is managed jointly by the President of the School
Development and Monitoring Committee, who is elected from among the nine parent members
who in turn are elected from parents of all school going children, and the school head teacher
who is the ex-officio member-Secretary of the School Development and Monitoring Committee.
(Mukhopadhyay, 2011, 43)

The purpose of the SDMC was to give parents and those in the community a means by which to
hold individual schools accountable to a local body, making sure that the school was meeting the
needs of those who were actually affected it. The SDMC was the body that controlled the
distribution of funds that came through state governments and Adhyaapaka for example had all of
its own resources channeled through the SDMC. On their website they write,

“All grants released from the government flow through the SDMC account and one of the SDMC
members, along with the school Principal, are jointly responsible for the utilisation of funds.
Issues faced by the schools are discussed at SDMC meetings, held mandatorily every month and
attended by SDMC members and school staff. The school-community involvement also permits
the benefit of sensible decentralisation. Adhyaapaka uses the SDMC channel to route the funds
that are earmarked for schools. With this step, Adhyaapaka is able to ensure that SDMCs and
their respective schools work closely with each other to improve the quality of education in their
school.”^69

And it was through the discussions of this local body that the need to construct a new school was
voiced and eventually taken up through the RMSA initiative.

---


192
It was after the construction was finished that disagreements began. During the time of construction, H.D. Kumaraswamy, a member of the Janata Dal (S) party and son of former Karnataka Chief Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, one of the three major parties in the Bangalore Rural and Ramanagara Districts of Karnataka, had been the Member of Parliament (MP) from Bangalore Rural Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) constituency. However, in May 2013 Kumaraswamy ran for and won in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly (lower house) election for the Ramanagara constituency, taking a minority seat in the Indian National Congress party led state government. As a result, he left his seat in the Lok Sabha, leaving it to be filled during a bypoll election (an election to fill unfilled seats). In the bypoll election, Kumaraswamy’s wife, Anitha, ran against D.K. Suresh, a Congress party member and brother of Minister of Energy D.K. Shivakumar, and lost. The entire episode is, undoubtedly confusing, but at the very least should quickly outline the deep nepotism of state level politics in Karnataka.

The majority of Adavisandra and especially those who were on the SDMC committee were strong Janata Dal supporters, a party that has been mocked as "thande-makkala paksha" (father-son party) and "Vokkaliga party", the second of which was indicative of how deeply politics intersected with caste affiliation in Karnataka. As mentioned earlier, almost everyone in Adavisandra was from the Vokkaliga caste and, in some cases, had personal affiliations with Kumaraswamy himself. The grandfather of my ninth standard student Suresh, for example, while claiming that he did not get involved in party politics, boasts that, “Kumaraswamy is close to me. I have got him a job in Toyota with a salary of 1lakh,” a claim that I cannot verify, but which only reflects the status that he associates with having influence over the political leader.

The awkwardness arose for the SDMC because they had wanted to inaugurate the school’s opening by inviting one of the local leaders, initially and happily thought to be Kumaraswamy. However, after the election they were faced with a dilemma: should they still invite Kumaraswamy, who was the MP who oversaw construction and was still a MLA, or should they invite D.K. Suresh who was the current MP, or should they invite both? The last option was an awkward option indeed given that D.K. Suresh has just defeated Kumaraswamy’s wife in the elections.

---

To hear the students and teachers at the school tell the tale, the situation was a stalemate, with some wanting to invite Kumaraswamy, others refusing to even consider inviting Suresh because of their party affiliations, and nobody able to agree on what exactly should be done.

What did happen was that the secondary school was not opened for a full eight months as they tried to determine the best course of action and when it did finally open there was a notable absence at the festivities:

Chandan: He [Kumaraswamy] said he wouldn’t come and he did not. Then D.K Suresh was to be invited but he wasn’t.

And it’s in this story that I found the complex bundling of values that were reflected in a school building; values framed in centralized and decentralized bureaucracies at odds, determined by local politics, and ultimately shaping how and when an infrastructure for development was finally opened for use.

* * *

Frame 28: Physical Education

My phone buzzes as I’m walking towards Penn’s campus on a windy day in late April 2015, planning to spend my day writing the very document that you’re in the process of reading now. I click through my phone and see that it's a WhatsApp message from Nikhil sir, the fourth he has sent me this week. While previously he would send me brief greetings, “hello, how are you Arjun” or a query about whether my PhD was completed (which it never was) or how my job search is going (which was always ‘in progress’), this week he isn’t sending me any kind of textual greetings at all. Instead he sends a series of photographs and films: first a photograph of a dimly lit road with trees overhanging it with the caption, “This photograph had won the national award!!! It is on Highway between Bopal and Indore.. You can see map of India in this photograph. Forward it to maximum”; second, a humorous video of a bull drinking from a water faucet and using its snout to pull the lever to get more water; third a photograph of a hand resting against a wooden sill painted in blue with a man and women hugging one another; and fourth a mobile video of a building slowly crumbling as bystanders look on and take photographs of their own, until suddenly the entire building falls down, a caption reads “Earthquake in nepal. About 25000 people died.”

I struggle to make sense of this series of images, to understand the content in relation to what I know about Nikhil. On the one hand, the messages seem only to perform a particular phatic function, to use Jakobsen’s term for these particular types of speech acts not necessarily intended
to convey information but whose form fulfills a social task (Makice, 2009), the transmission and circulation of these images being WhatsApp’s particular method of “small talk” by which we are continuously acknowledging that yes, we are still in conversation through the sending and receiving of these fragments of visual information. On the other, the content of Nikhil’s messages are not completely devoid of specificity, the images congeal around a set of semiotic markers that indicate Nikhil’s particular affiliation to village, nation, and globe. In a sense, the transmission of such messages are themselves a unique kind of “worlding practice” facilitated by the digital apparatus that allows him the broadest imagining of his Self in the world, an imagining that, in its own way, creatively and ambitiously produces an alternative social vision and configuration (Moore, 2011). Indeed, what strikes me is that Nikhil sends me these images because he has, at this point in our relationship, assumed that I too understand the particular markers of belonging he deploys when sending these images. Presumably, I get why the first image won the national award for photography in India. Presumably, I get the humor in the bull drinking from a faucet and understand how the image is situated in broader village life. And presumably, I am also part of the global community that is aware of just how devastating the 2015 Nepal earthquake has been for those who are, at the time of this writing, still experiencing its aftereffects. However, in channeling his practice – in this case through the WhatsApp message – around this imagining of a global connection saturated with the particular markers of belonging Nikhil associates with himself, Nikhil is actively producing this alternative social configuration.

And this perhaps is one way to start the story of Nikhil sir, the physical education instructor at Adavisandra, one of the two de-facto English instructors (there are no instructors hired exclusively for English in Kannada medium schools like Adavisandra), and one of the teachers who is most eager to help me with my research during my time in the field. Nikhil was tall and athletic, nearly bald, and usually kept a thick, well-maintained moustache. He would alternatively wear brightly colored shirts – purple, green, blue – with tight fitting khakis or tracksuits depending on what he planned on teaching that day. Most days I would watch Nikhil take the students through exercises – jumping jacks, pushups, running in place – or one of the sports activities determined in the Karnataka state physical education (daihika adhyapaaka) curriculum.

Even as Nikhil tries to teach his students the curriculum, he is dissatisfied with the school infrastructure. “No school playgrounds are here in Adavisandra,” he tells, “So it is difficult to do any sports activities.”
Yet, some of the best times that I had with my students was when Nikhil would organize cricket matches near the end of the school day for the eighth and ninth standard students, dividing the teachers and the students into two teams to play eight over matches, each team batting for four. Given the excitement to play cricket, I am somewhat surprised to find that not a single student, girl or boy, who I interviewed during my time at Adavisandra imagined a future as a cricketer or any other sportsstar for that matter.

We play on a large patch of land in the front of the school, what used to be a lake before the current drought along with an excessive drilling of bore wells in the village had left the area completely dry and barren, but for a few trees that struggle to grow on its peripheries.

The sun beats down overhead as we play, and I stand amongst students eagerly readying themselves to bat or bowl as the tenth standard students remain in their classroom, getting extra preparation time for their upcoming exam as the rest of us play. “It's okay, they already got to enjoy last year,” Nikhil tells me, “And next year the ninth standard will have to be more serious and prepare.” These standardized tests render the tenth grade students as ghostly figures during my research time, always sitting quietly in a room and working, a furtive glance and smile through the barred windows of the building before quickly turning back to their lessons so that their teacher will not see them distracted. The anxiety attached to these SSLC exams, both for the teachers and the students, in the incredible value attached to passing the SSLC, especially in the potential to go to a two-year college, to get a job outside of agriculture, its own affect of development.

There are times when I get slightly nervous during the cricket matches, partly because I am not that skilled with either batting or bowling. The students are always encouraging and want to be on my team, and they take a great pleasure in explaining the rules to me for the fifteenth time or telling me the scores of the match. But what makes me more uncomfortable are the kind of interactions between the teachers and students during the matches, some of which can be slightly violent and are always highly gendered.

During the matches, the teachers get especially competitive, wanting to ‘one up’ one another. Generally four of the teachers play – Reddy Sir, Nikhil Sir, Prakash Sir, and Nagraj Sir – and never any of the female teachers. If the female teachers do join, they sit on the sidelines passively, talking with one another while shielding their heads from the sun.

To their credit, the teachers do attempt to include all of the students, boys and girls, in the game. However, the outward show of inclusion only works to get an equal number of girls and boys on both teams. Practically, as the game goes on, inclusion becomes less important than
winning. The games are structured such that a girl must bowl at least one over. But I never witnessed a case in which any girl got the opportunity to bowl more than one over as the teachers were always concerned that a girl bowler would give up too many runs and therefore lose the game for them. It was always an endless negotiation as to exactly when they should allow the girls to bowl, trying to hide their presence in plain sight. Batting is as significant a negotiation, with many of the girls asking and wanting to participate but always given last right to bat, at best two out of the seven girl students on a team ever getting a chance to bat. The girls do try to stake a claim to space on the field, and they request, “Please sir, let me go next…”, and complain, “I have not even got a chance even once”, and out-right protest, “Sir this is not fair!” Eventually, they go silent and sit on the sideline or stand in the field, awaiting a turn that is likely to never come, though even in this there is stratification between those girls who are considered more athletic and more capable and those who aren’t.

Other times, the teachers grow angry when students make a mistake, if they throw a ball that gets hit for a six or drop an easy catch in the field. Reddy sir is especially harsh, yelling at students with, “Aaaayyyy kothi, what are you doing” – kothi, an insult that translates to ‘monkey’ in English, but also can be used as an insult for feminine men – or smacking them on the head just hard enough to show his displeasure; insults and physical force reserved exclusively for the boys. No one seems overly phased by these moments, mostly laughing when a teacher hurls these insults, considered a harmless part of the competition that is taking place.

When Nikhil sir comes to bat the entire field is re-shaped, students move at least 2-3 meters further back and everyone awaits his swing with expectation. Reddy sir or Prakash sir will try their best to get Nikhil to swing and miss, but inevitably within two or three attempts Nikhil sir will swing and hit the ball over the heads of every fielder, past the far edges of the make shift field, and, on a good swing, hit the side of the new school some 100 meters away. Everyone looks on in awe, stands and stares, congratulating Nikhil sir on his swing, and he in turn smiles widely with satisfaction as he sets up for another swing.

Nikhil has told me on at least three different occasions that, “P.E. teaching is my dream.” Yet, as I learn more about Nikhil, I find that he did not always want to be a physical education teacher or even a teacher at all. We sit outside of the school after one of these many cricket matches talking about how he became a teacher. “I was thinking of going into engineering, but then after I passed PUC, some problems happened and I had to move back home. Then I thought I would go into farming, but when I was home I decided to apply for teaching degree.”
I pry into Nikhil’s family history, always an uncomfortable proposition for the nervous ethnographer, trying to understand how and why he made the decision to get into teaching, and that too physical education. He finally admits that he left engineering because his father was sick and he needed to go home to help out with his family’s land. The aspiration towards engineering is particularly marked as one manifestation of digital development, a desire to join the ranks of technologists working from Bangalore’s urban center that many in my own research sought, but cut short due to the pragmatics of Nikhil’s sociocultural position.

Nikhil’s family owns ten hectares of land in Badami, approximately 450 kilometers North of Bangalore, where they grow mostly cotton, groundnuts, sunflower seeds, and maize. Nikhil is the youngest of three brothers, the oldest has become a police officer back in his native place and his middle brother tends five hectares of the ten hectares of land, the other five still being owned and operated by his parents. Nikhil finally confides that he would have stayed and tended to his family’s land, but that if he had stayed, the land would have been divided yet again given the logic of land inheritance between children, five hectares turning into 2.5 hectares each, so small an amount as to be economically unsustainable, a lesson echoed in Manoj’s earlier story as well.

It was this practical reality that spurred him towards his eventual decision to become a teacher and his role at Adavisandra:

“But I did not want to become a subject-wise instructor. I chose physical education because sports is entertainment. And so that is why I chose this. When I passed the CET I had some three or four choices for schools I could go to, but I wanted to be in a small school, and wanted to be in a village. I love nature and in the city you cannot see any nature. And in the village you can find the most learning. In the village you can learn about people, about the nation.”

Nikhil’s love of the village comes up all the time in his decision-making process, including his decision to join the Adavisandra school instead of any other, in his affective ties to places which are more reflective of his own home. Nature is what creates the boundary between the urban and the rural, defining exactly where Nikhil chooses to move in his particular kinds of migration, a rural-to-rural migration that is clearly defined by what he considers valuable.

Nikhil is eager to tell me about the history of his native place, a place he misses terribly. He starts, but then hesitates to say more, asking if I know much about Indian history. I admit that I don’t know much, and he gains confidence in his telling, realizing that I will not be able to correct any issues of facticity that might come up.

Surrounding my village lot of historical places is there. Lots of caves are there. Badami is popular for caves. Chalukya was a very famous emperor. [chalukya was a dynasty actually]. Badami was
their capital. He was a good administrator. He was well-known for education, culture, there were many good poets in his palace. So he was popular. Other historic places are Aihole, Pattadakallu...

I do notice, while discussing the transcript with Sripriya, an error in his telling, specifically in his characterization of Chalukya as a famous emperor rather than a dynasty that ruled over the Deccan Plateau from about the 6th to 12th Centuries.

He trails off and then remembers something more important. “Arjun, you have not seen my marriage album yet!” He runs into the school’s office and come back carrying a thick album, in a garish red and yellow color, plastered on the front with his and his new wife’s face, a girl of nineteen, fourteen years Nikhil’s junior, who hails from the same Lingayat caste group and his native village. I flip through the book, noticing the phrases in English – “Sweet Memories”, “A Divine Love”, and “Together Forever” – and that his new wife is not smiling in even one photograph. I cannot help but wonder what she must be feeling and what she must have felt as she was bequeathed to wed, another set of questions that fall on the peripheries of my research, just outside of the purview of what I am able to study from Adavisandra.

Nikhil has been married for some six months now, yet he has only seen his wife for approximately two weeks during that time. Even fourteen months later, when I see Nikhil after leaving the field and returning, he has still been unable to bring his wife to Adavisandra and he is trying to manage to find a way to get back to his native by transferring between schools. His home here, a room of no more than 100 square feet in Harohalli is not big enough to support his family, and he continues to wistfully think about returning home. However, it is incredibly difficult to get a transfer through the educational bureaucracy and so Nikhil explains that he has to find a teacher who wants to move to South Karnataka and to then exchange positions, an informal process that makes it far easier to then eventually formalize through the educational bureaucracy.

I spend a few afternoons at Nikhil’s home, watching clips from the previous Olympic games that he has asked me to download for him. Nikhil is thankful given that otherwise he would search and watch these clips on his mobile phone, never getting through much more than 15-20 seconds before the feed would stop buffering. Nikhil is not overly discriminating, but he wants me to procure as many sports from the 2012 summer Olympics – gymnastics, swimming, running, basketball, volleyball – that he can then show to his students during their classroom discussions about different sports. The problem, of course, is that Nikhil does not have internet in his home and so he is completely reliant on me to pick and choose appropriate clips for him out of the infinite number of choices provided on youtube.
Eventually, we set up a time for him to join me for an evening at my home in Jayanagar, a trip he has been looking forward to for some time and which also has the implicit purpose of allowing Nikhil to sift through and choose whatever clips he wants me to download and burn onto a DVD for his use as part of his lesson planning. We sit on my couch, watching the London Olympics opening ceremony and Nikhil tells me about his absolute love for the Olympics, a construction that I identify as a particular *global-rural imaginary* as much a part of the development condition as potential aspirations towards the urban:

One thing I want to say Arjun. The Olympics shows the unity of the whole world. I want to say, it is a *global village* [emphasis added]. So from this the feeling of integrity is developed. Because the world wants peace, man wants to live in peace, so *co-operation*, *fraternity* and *relations* grow because all the countries play together. The relations grow...brotherly/sisterly feeling... all wars go away... 164 countries are participating in the Olympics.

The idea of the Olympics as the “global village”, one in which harmony, justice, and peace gloss over the realities of war and global inequality is not a new one. In another variation of the moniker, McLuhan (1964) has associated it with the proliferation of digital technologies, contracting the globe into a village, an association which is the foundation for why Uday can imagine the Olympics at all. However, what is essential to understand Nikhil’s narrative is the juxtaposition of his love of the physical villages in which he has lived i.e. his belief that the village is the place where one can learn “about people and the nation” with his belief that the Olympics is a global village in which all countries play together, a moral sentiment linking the global, national, and rural unmediated by the city and forging its own “close-distance”.

As we watch countries march by, Nikhil is fascinated, wanting to tell me facts about each one. For example, when Jamaica passes, he says poetically: “Here is an interesting thing, Jamaica is a small country but its achievements in athletics are evergreen. The whole world salutes them. Usain Bolt…” Then, he starts explaining how much he wants to train his students properly, to give them a chance to succeed in the State athletics competitions that are held annually in February and March. He is proud that a few of his students have made it to the district level competitions, but dismayed that none of have won anything there or had a chance to compete at any higher levels.

He asks me to stop the ceremony and to search for “American training videos”. I’m not exactly sure what he means, but I dutifully put the terms into my youtube search. I ask him why he is interested in American training specifically. He tells me matter-of-factly:

*I like American style of training... They do everything by plan, and they get success. Now they are training the athletes who are selected for 2016 Olympics... comparatively America is better than China at this moment. Because they are training for Olympics now for 2016. Comparative to*
American it is tough [for China to take over]... they [the Chinese] can’t achieve in team sports (gumpuaatagalu). It depends upon the environment and the genes of the citizens. Because Chinese have a flexible body, compared to Americans, Chinese/Japanese have flexible body, so maybe better for gymnastics.

Nikhil’s insistence on American training regimens only highlights the hold that the United States has on his imaginary, one way that the American soft imperialism permeates through their success in the Olympics. His comparison of China to America is fitting, given that in the 2012 Olympics they were the countries who gained the most number of medals, China with 88 and the United States with 104. However, what I find most important is the mapping of “genes” onto “citizens”, the nation imagined as related to fixed primordial ethnic identities residing in the very body of its inhabitants and, in this case, impacting ones ability to move ones body more or less flexibly and/or one’s ability to compete capably at team sports. Of course, the idea of genetic predisposition to athletics and Nikhil’s dream to train his own students sit uncomfortably with one another, a seemingly untenable contradiction, except perhaps in the fact that Nikhil sees the training of Americans as its own distinctive culture, not so different from Anthony D. Smith’s own views on the nation as reliant on earlier ethnic community bonds, or ethnies, regulated by myths of common descent, a sense of shared history, and a distinctive culture (Smith, 1999). In any case, the “nature versus nurture” dilemma than Nikhil grapples with here remains one of the limit-questions of any anthropological excavation.

Importantly, Nikhil’s America-directed gaze is not universal, but specific only to the training of his students, a reminder that any overdetermined theory of globalization as American imperialism does not appropriately reflect the complex heterogeneities of the ethnographic encounter. Nikhil confesses that he hopes to travel all over the world, to see many of the countries that he watched during the Opening Ceremonies, though he has not yet had the opportunity to fly on a plane before. When I ask him what country he would go to first, he tells me without hesitation and with a slight chuckle, “I would go to Switzerland. I love their constitution…

Olympics is the biggest tournament in the world, no other tournament is bigger than this, and it is a non-corruption tournament. So its main branch is in Switzerland because Switzerland is a neutral country. So I always wanted to go there.” Then he tells me that I must also go to Greece because “…you have to see, in Greece you have to see Athens…The first philosophers were born in Greece.” I do not challenge him on the notion of the first philosophers being born in Greece, but I cannot help but notice just how deeply the colonialist legacy is ingrained in what he says, in his instinct to mark the beginning of civilization and philosophy in the West, despite the fact that,
when prompted, he readily and pridefully acknowledges the many contributions of Eastern thinkers as well.

“It is the purpose of man to dream,” Nikhil finishes philosophically, sighingly acknowledging that his 25000 rupee salary will not allow him to reach Switzerland, Greece, or even America, while unawares that his words are highly gendered to begin with. “Maybe Malaysia,” he continues with a hint of hope, “I have a cousin brother there, so maybe I can go and see.” The physical migration of family gives these dreams some substance, makes them a tangible aspiration rather than sheer fantasy (Massey, 1994). It is as if Nikhil is imagining that when home travels elsewhere – home in this case represented in direct blood relations – that he too might travel, despite the limitations of economic capital, a classical instantiation of social capital as it is derived through “resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support” (Bourdieu, 1986) and also an example of the “constitutive tensions that generate capitalism’s daily life” (Appel, 2015).

This last fact is what I think is a key in Nikhil’s story and binds the otherwise seemingly divergent juxtaposition of his aspirations to return back to his native place and to travel the world, possibilities which must be seen in relation to one another in order to deconstruct the notion that global aspirations somehow preclude or take priority over other less spatially far-reaching and culturally divergent aspirations and dreams. Instead, it is this simultaneity that is one basis for the development condition in India, at once generating the grandiose dreams of somewhere else, while simultaneously trying to tie these grandiose dreams closer to home and cultural affiliations that make one feel safer and more secure. Indeed, Nikhil himself seems to intuit this simultaneity, reflecting on his heterogeneous dreams in a simple, “Change is important. But not too much change [emphasis added].”

This perhaps is another affect of development, in acknowledging, balancing and dreaming about change while risking the potential loss of a sense of belonging to a place and a people who you want to call your home. Even Nikhil’s rural-to-rural migration seems to place him on the precipice of this loss, now a fourteen hour train ride away and dreaming of traveling across the globe while his wife awaits him, yet to start the family life that would create that sense of home which he misses while living in Adavisandra.

Frame 29: Mid-day Meals
School is a place of routines, a morning routine, a classroom routine and, of course, a lunch routine. At around one o’clock each day we would go through a similar process: a bell would ring signaling that it was time to eat, students would take out their steal plates – some of which were supplied by the school and a few which were brought from home, and finally, stand in line and ready themselves to be served by three students who had been selected to bring and serve the freshly made food from the kitchen in the back of the school. The teachers, in the meantime, would congregate in two groups, one all female and one all male, safely separated into two rooms and spatially maintaining the gendered ordering that remained emplaced in the school. The unequal gendering of roles was only reinforced during our mealtime, as it was always female students who were called upon to serve food to the teachers and to wash their dishes at the end of the meal. I could never become comfortable with the setup and so I’d try and wash my own plate, each time meeting resistance from the other male teachers, who did not like their guest troubling himself to clean, and from the students, who were eager to please me by taking my plate.

These lunches were made possible by the Midday meal scheme, implemented by the central government in 2004. The program was designed to make sure all children would have access to nutritional meals after the Supreme Court of India ruled in the case People’s Union for Civil Liberties v. The Union of India & Others (2001) that the “Right to Food” was a fundamental right based on Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Birchfield and Corsi (2010) write,

Drawing on constitutional precedent defining the Article 21 right to life as “the right to live with human dignity and all that goes with it, namely, the bare necessaries of life such as adequate nutrition,” and a history of activist, human rights-oriented judicial interpretation of this Article, the Supreme Court in PUCL interpreted the right to life with dignity to include the right to food, thereby affirmatively incorporating the right to food — originally an aspirational Directive Principle — into Article 21 and transforming it into a justiciable and enforceable fundamental right (16).

The midday meal scheme provided funds for schools (1) to hire members of the local community and buy the necessary resources to cook meals for their students daily or (2) to have meals shipped in by not-for-profit or private organizations tasked with cooking and transporting meals to schools. When I arrived in Adavisandra, they were still working with the first model, three women from the village coming to school each day to prepare the meals.

I’d sit with my students, plates in hand, eating one of many staple dishes in South Karnataka – rice, dal, rasam, green-leafy sambar, pulav, lemon rice, bisibele bhath, puliogre, or, on special occasion, sambar with raagi mudde (literally: raagi lump or raagi ball), a dish specific to the South Karnataka region and, especially, to rural communities like Adavisandra. During the hot season, we would finish off our meals with a bit more rice mixed with majjige (buttermilk),
perhaps my favorite part of each meal, as the cool, fresh, salty buttermilk would soothe my GI tract, which was, admittedly, always slightly on the verge of total combustion during my time in Karnataka.

The texture of raagi mudde is unique, a round, pasty ball meant to be broken into smaller pieces and swallowed without chewing after being dipped in sambar. It’s made by mixing raagi flour with water until it has become a thick, almost black paste, boiled over a medium flame and beaten into a smooth doughy substance molded into “balls” while still warm and malleable. Raagi was thought to be much healthier than rice, and my students would constantly tell me that I should be eating more raagi as they saw me get thinner and thinner over my year with them, flexing their muscles as they’d massage the black paste into edible bites to eat.

For those who have not been conditioned to enjoy the flavor – even those like me who were a bit more accustomed to South Indian foods and flavors – it can be difficult to appreciate the (lack of) taste and rubbery texture of raagi. The first time my research assistant, Sripriya, a girl who had grown up her whole life in North Karnataka, albeit in an upper caste urban home, tried raagi mudde, she could eat only half of one ball served with love by Aadarsha’s grandmother during one of our visits to my students’ homes and embarrassed me as we waited for a full hour for her to try and finish. “You should have told me and I would have given you rice instead…” Aadarsha’s grandmother scolded Sripriya as two of my students laughed and commented on her bumbling attempts to stuff another small bite into her mouth.

When I had the chance to eat these meals at the school, it was hard not to romanticize the process, affectively entangled in a web of ideas regarding locally grown food, freshness, health, and purity that were hard to break. And so it made me quite sad when I heard from Purushottam sir, the primary school headmaster, that they were hoping to move away from the locally made midday meal to midday meals trucked in by Akshaya patra, a national not-for-profit that supplied school lunches to over 10,000 schools all over India, with Karnataka state being its largest consumer, over 2,500 schools receiving the Akshaya patra midday meals. I passed the Akshaya patra headquarters, just off the Kanakapura road on the outskirts of Bangalore, approximately eight kilometers south of Jayanagar where I was staying, each time I would head to Adavisandra, a small green sign announcing a huge factory on its right hand side where the midday meals were cooked.

If one is in Bangalore, it is hard to miss other signs of Akshaya patra’s immense reach and influence. At Café Coffee Day, a national coffee chain that’s India’s answer to the growing global coffee culture, best iconized by Starbucks in the United States, there are small signs at the
counter, requesting donations as low as 1 rupee to help the Akshaya patra program. On the roads, it will be near impossible not to encounter one of the many blue Akshaya patra food delivery trucks, plastered with pictures of smiling children and branded with one of the many corporate and non-corporate vehicle donors – Philips, Kudremukh Iron Ore Limited, Elizabeth and John Dobson Jeffords, State Bank of Mysore, Applied Materials Foundation, Lakshmimarayana Mining Company, Auma, just to name a few. The organization’s exploits had grown to the extent that Barack Obama, for example, sent a letter praising the organization in September 2008 for using “efficient and innovative business practices to scale up in just a few years” and ending by stating that the Akshaya patra model of “using advanced technologies in central kitchens to reach children in 5700 schools” was “an imaginative approach that has the potential to serve as a model for other countries.”

Akshaya patra, then, provides one mechanism by which to see how values migrate – what values, for whom, and how – and what developmental affects are produced in the process?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ramaswamy was always complaining about Akshaya patra’s slow takeover of Karnataka’s midday meal scheme, what he saw as another instantiation of an insidious form of centralization, in this case buttressed by a private-public partnership model that was overwhelmingly the method by which developmental interventions were taking place in India. Why, he would argue, should the state government outsource the serving of meals to an organization based out of Bangalore when there were perfectly good cooks, supplies, and ingredients in individual villages. In other words, outsourcing to the organization only served to create redundancy and to take away local job opportunities.

Akshaya patra had its own convoluted history, connected to the Bangalore chapter of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), commonly known as the Hare Krishna movement, a sect of Vaishnavism (Vishnu-worshippers), who understand the Hindu faith through Krishna, one of the reincarnations of Vishnu who is brought back to earth in the Hindu epic Mahabharata to remind human beings of the precepts of Hinduism, most directly in the Hindu holy-text, the Bhagavadgita.

The Hare Krishna movement has been seen as an early form of East-to-West faith based missionary movements, what has been termed “global missionary Vaishnavism”. ISKCON’s founder, Abhay Charanarvinda Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, grew up in Calcutta in the early 20th Century and graduated from the Scottish Church College in 1920, the oldest continuously running Christian liberal arts and sciences college in India. Soon after graduation he met Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, a prominent spiritual guru of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.
(Gauda meaning from the “Gauda region” aka the present day Bengal/Bangladeshi region, and Vaishnavism, a term used to describe the Hindu religious sect devoted to Vishnu, one of the Hindu gods) and Prabhupada was tasked with spreading the faith’s message in the English language. Over forty years later, in 1965, he would travel to the United States, establishing centers in both New York and San Francisco and working to promote the ISKCON faith over the next twelve years until his death in 1977. The success of the Hare Krishna movement was one instantiation of 1960s Western counterculture – most notably the hippie movements – and has continued ever since. Today, the organization claims to have distributed over half a billion books authored by Swami Prabhupada globally.

And it is this very globality that has created its particular import in India as well. In 1996, almost thirty years after its start in the United States, ISKCON inaugurated a new cultural center in New Delhi. The then Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee noted:

If the Bhagavad Gita, the holy text of the Hindu traditions, is printed in millions of copies and scores of languages and distributed in all nooks and corners of the world, the credit for this great sacred service goes chiefly to ISKCON. For this accomplishment alone, Indians should be eternally grateful to the devoted spiritual army of Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the Hare Krishna movement, and to his followers...

The arrival of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in the United States in 1965 and the particular popularity his movement gained in a very short span of twelve years must be regarded as one of the greatest spiritual events of the century.

— Atal Bihari Vajpayee – April 1998

The Akshaya patra website narrates a history tied closely to ISKCON and its founder:

Looking out of a window one day in Mayapur, a village near Calcutta, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, saw a group of children fighting with street dogs over scraps of food. From this simple, yet heart-breaking incident, was born a determination that no child within a radius of ten miles from our centre should go hungry.

His inspiring resolve has helped us in making The Akshaya Patra Foundation, as what it is today.

In June 2000, The Akshaya Patra Foundation started the mid-day meal programme in Bangalore, Karnataka. The initial days of implementation were not smooth sailing for the organisation. But soon came the helping hands of Mohandas Pai, who took the initiative of donating the first vehicle to transport food to the schools; and Abhay Jain, who promised to bring in more donors to contribute for the further expansion of the programme.

The humble beginnings of the Foundation started with serving of the mid-day meals to 1500 children across five Government schools in Bangalore.

71 Full speech can be accessed here. However, the date given is incorrect: http://web.archive.org/web/20080517042620/http://www.vnn.org/world/9804/07-1732/index.html
The programme embraced the vision that – 

“No child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger.”

Today, through the partnership with the Government of India and various State Governments, as well as philanthropic donors; the organisation runs the world’s largest mid-day meal programme. Built on a public-private partnership, Akshaya Patra combines good management, innovative technology and smart engineering to deliver a nutritious and hygienic school lunch.

The origination tale is evocative if nothing else, the sad plight of these poor street children providing the de-facto justification for Akshaya patra’s version of meals towards education-as-development and intended to produce sympathy in the reader. On the website you can download a version of this story in the 2014 Annual report told in animated form, in which Swami Prabhupada is the central comic book character, one image of which I have included below.

![Figure 5.1 Comic of Akshayapatra founder Guru Prabuphada](image)

The entire annual report is written in this comicbook form, even sections outlining financial data illustrated with colorful characters. For example, in a section on annual donations, a child standing with his father choose from a row of different colored candies, in jars labeled with the amount of donations given in lacks and the years of donation. The playfulness of these comic-financial pages is striking, and seems to be an attempt to make transparency “fun”. And yet, the tactic here seems duplicitous, when the reader is focused on just how fun and playful the documents are, they also, in turn, are less focused on the nature of the documents themselves,
ones which obviate that Akshaya patra’s goal and mission, however purportedly altruistic, is all about funding: how much, from whom, and to what end. Even the illustration of their donations shows an increase from 5,628.67 lakh rupees in donations in 2009-2010 to 10,680.26 lakh rupees in 2013-2014, an incredible doubling of funds over a five year period, figures which “hide in plain sight” within the larger comic story that is being told.

These affective tactics are not, of course, limited to the Akshaya patra annual reports. As Akshaya patra has grown it has needed to take advantage of another one of its core donor-bases, the NRI population, eager to stay connected to India and give back to their imagined home country. In a 2007 newsletter, they write in response to a question about NRI charitable giving:

The NRI community can play an important role in supporting Akshaya Patra and the work of charitable organisations in India. NRIs have strong ties to India and have a deep desire to see Indians get the same standard of living that we have here in the United States. In addition, they want to see Indian culture continue with the second generation. Supporting charitable organisations is one way for the NRI community to give back to India and involve their children as well. Akshaya Patra is a testimonial for what Indian organisations can achieve when they use their new-found global perspective and experience to benefit their fellow human beings.72

The donation of money by NRIs is not purely altruistic. Instead, charitable giving is bundled with an NRIs affective tie to place, in their “deep desire” to see India at the same quality of life as that which they have in India. As importantly, the direct reference to the second generation, children born abroad in the USA, and parents’ worry that their children may not continue on to be invested in an Indian culture, a phrasing that is as broad and nondescript as it is inclusive, becomes a justification for giving, a means to invest children in their homeland through the act of giving itself (the efficacy of this reasoning is another thing entirely). In this case, as with many others discussed in earlier chapters, capital does not flow freely, but can only move along paths constrained by other forms of cultural and moral value, which migrate along with financial capital and dictate where and how it can flow. And to reiterate, these value migrations are affective, driven by the desire for NRI parents to connect with their children (at least in the narrative detailed by Akshaya patra itself) and in the process facilitating the new midday meal scheme in which Karnataka state schools are already participating or are eager to participate.

One day, I set about trying to figure out why, exactly, Adavisandra school has decided to shift from the local meals to the Akshaya patra meals. I, along with two of my students from APU, who were especially interested in the midday meal program, ask Purushottam Sir, the

72 https://www.akshayapatra.org/sites/default/files/issue_feb_07.pdf
primary school headmaster, about the shift, what I identify as an important instantiation of value migrations as they are mediated and facilitated by the school as institution.

Standing on the front steps of the school building, he answers authoritatively:

More than teachers, it will benefit parents, [the] public and students. It’s hard to find labour here. Sometimes what happens is...if all the responsibility is on them [the local villagers], they fear to take it. They see it on TV, or through some other media...something like this happened...so when they get scared they suddenly refuse to come to work. Here, we can’t stop giving food because they are not coming to work. This is an everyday process, it has to go on.

I have listened to Purushottam Sir’s words many times now, thankfully documented on my trusty H2Zoom, and each time I am taken aback at how easily he blames the Adavisandra community for the change: in their inability to take responsibility, in their fear of working. At the same time, I am always surprised by the vague, yet purposeful reference to the “media” as an explanatory variable for the community’s fears, which only serves to advance the overall narrative of community deficiency that he wants to tell. Purushottam Sir does not see himself as a member of the Adavisandra community and this distinction is itself important in analyzing the school-as-institution and critiquing ideas of the “local” that group everyone in a village space as if they had a single collective agenda. Moreover, Purushottam sir creates his own boundary around the village, imagining its deficiencies in contrast to what he imagines will be the efficiency and predictability of the Akshaya patra scheme, implicitly and indirectly mapping these ideals onto an NGO-based urbanity that will allow “everyday processes” to run smoothly in the village.

Later that day I watch as Bhagyamma, Parvatamma, and Jayamma, the three head cooks, make the meal in a small room, no more than 20 square meters, cluttered with pans, utensils, and plastic pots to carry water. The pots are especially mesmerizing, lined up neatly in a row on one side of the room, the bright pink, green, blue, yellow, orange contrasting so completely with the steely grey-ish tinge of everything else in the room. There is a large steel pot, big enough that one of the fifth standard students could fit easily inside, that sits atop a small gas stove, steam rising from inside it as sambar is slowly cooked. The three women sit around the pot and Bhagyamma gently stirs it as the other two women cut and throw a few more vegetables into the pot. After a few more minutes, Parvatamma and Jayamma grab two of the plastic pots, fill them both with rice, and walk to the back of the school, where they rinse the rice – once, then twice, then a third time – readying it for cooking.

Of the three women, Bhagyamma stands out, perhaps twenty years older than the other two women and clearly taking an authoritative role in deciding what, when, and how to cook the meals. Her hair is completely white and her skin creased with wrinkles, her eyes hard and sharp.
She does not smile at me once during the time I sit and watch, nor does she ever really look up from her task. For a few moments I wonder if she has forgotten that I am even there, but she gives me a sidelong glance once or twice just to see what I am doing.

Bhagyamma takes her work very seriously. In fact, there is very little overlap in how Purushottam sir and Bhagyamma describe the problems of making the midday meals. In Bhagyamma’s narration there is no hint of fear, no hint of anxiety or hesitation and as we talk to Bhagyamma longer, a different story emerges. Speaking to Sanjana, one of my APU students, she explains, with Parvatamma and Jayamma by her side, that they receive only 1000 rupees a month, an increase from an earlier 700 rupee salary and an even smaller sum of only 350 rupees when Bhagyamma had started cooking the midday meals some ten years back. Without prompting they tell us that their pay has not been received for over six months, a situation that is beyond desperate given each of their family situations as none of their husbands make enough without the additional income to subsist. Bhagyamma is the best off, her husband makes about 3000 rupees salary as a lorry driver, and so they are able to cobble together around 11000 rupees each month though he must leave for three week stretches at a time to do so. Parvatamma lives alone with her husband, who is a shepherd that makes approximately 5000 rupees by selling an adult sheep, a growth process that takes about 30 days. Parvatamma’s daughter has been married and in order to pay the dowry they were forced to sell their land, which has left them only with their home and nothing else. Jayamma is struggling most to make ends meet, her husband has left her for another women and she lives with her two children in Adavisandra. Her son has opened up a ration shop in the village and is able to bring in less than 3000 rupees a month, making their lives barely tenable even with the income from her work at the school. Both Bhagyamma and Jayamma own half an acre of land on which they grow the aforementioned raagi, a staple that can help them sustain themselves, but that does not bring with it much additional income. When I ask if they had thought about growing reshmi, what I know is the best income-generating crop in the region, they shake their heads and say they can’t grow it on their land though they had tried. “We had dug a bore well, but there is no water,” Bhagyamma explains as she hurries to finish the sambar before the children start to line up to get their meals.

Bhagyamma is resigned to the way it is, eventually telling us after many questions about their salary that, “It is difficult to lead a life, madam. In this age, only if we have income we can be alright. Otherwise it’s a lot of trouble.” The phrase reminds me of a similar sentiment expressed in Nouvet’s (2014) work halfway around the world in rural Nicaragua, in a title that sums up the plight of those working in the agricultural sector as “Neoliberal Life is Hard” (83).
And Bhagyamma seems to be suggesting the same thing here, a global-rural commonsense that life “in this age”, an age marked almost completely by the need for increased incomes even in villages, is “difficult to lead”. She makes the point even more clearly when describing just how meager the salary really is:

“We can’t do anything with the 1000rs. If we take our children to a hospital when they’re sick then a 1000rs is spent. What we will put in the bank!”

The reference to sickness is not by accident, but rather reaches to the heart of the concerns felt by those living in villages. Life is precarious, and the moment when this precarity is felt most deeply is when someone gets sick, when one realizes that to continue living is constrained almost completely by one’s ability to pay (or not) for treatment. My students’ families, as I will discuss more in Chapter 6, also experienced this form of precarity in their homes, experiencing significant shifts in their lives when, for example, their father’s alcoholism finally did in his life or, in another instance, when a father’s motorcycle accident meant he could no longer attend to the family’s land. Moreover, the precarity of sickness is related directly to the bank, the institution which they know symbolizes prosperity, accumulation, and savings, and that also symbolizes the ability to take care of a sickness without worrying that all of one’s income will be exhausted in the process. If “life in this age” is hard, it is not only because income inequality exists, but also because the means for accumulation are part of a collective consciousness, banks now existing just seven kilometers away, physically closer than they had ever been before and yet still very much beyond reach. Yet, the divide is more than just physical, it is also digital, in the fact that those, like Bhagyamma, who work in villages still tend to work exclusively in cash, without partaking in the credit card economy that requires a high level of digital infrastructure and know-how, including access to digitally-enabled ATM machines and the like, a classic example of the link between capital and digital inequality.

Still, the women all do their work with zeal, meticulously moving through the process of cooking and cleaning. There is real pride in their craft, and they tell us:

“...we serve food and wash all the utensils and the kitchen, we keep it very clean, we treat it like our home. We come here and work right, if we don’t keep it clean, who will? What will people say, that we are so dirty how will we cook for the children?”

Quotes like this one show just how gendered the debates over the midday meal scheme and its centralization are. It is not surprising that the three people who work at the school cooking the meals are all women, a fact that, at least across my engagements in schools, was true at every site that still involved local cooks in the process. To return to the idea of “generative development”,

211
the form that development takes in the Karnataka context emerges within a particular configuration of gendered difference, in which the decision to choose local meals is inextricably linked to who can partake in the economies generated within the development space. To return to Purushottam sir’s quote above, the boundaries are not merely urban-rural, NGO-local, but also clearly gendered, the group who is easily fooled by “the media” and fearful, while unmarked in his speech, implicitly alluding to the women who are actually working at school.

At the same time, Bhagyamma’s quote shows how the midday meals are explicitly domesticated, in the direct reference to the home in how she makes sense of her practices. Cleanliness, as has been written about by many scholars of South Asia, has traditionally been associated with the private space, in opposition to a public space that is left uncared for (Kaviraj, 1997). One might consider this an example of the shift in perceptions of public space and the individual citizen’s responsibility for its upkeep in India. However, what strikes me about her statement is the explicit reference to others in the community – “what will people say” – a form of societal pressure that influences exactly how she and the other two cooks think about their participation in the new economy created as part of the midday meal scheme. Crucially, the social relations referenced in Bhagyamma’s statement should not be taken as mere assumptions, a kind of static, apriori, inherent systemic social functioning upon which economic relations are built. Instead, the emerging midday meal economy “actually create[s] and stabilize[s] the supposedly inherent social embeddedness of particular people” (Schuster, 2015). In this case, cooking at the school makes Bhagyamma, Jayamma, and Parvatamma visible in a way that they were not when they cooked in their own homes and forces them to consider how they might be perceived by their fellow community members, which, in turn, manufactures a form of “social collateral” that prevents them from doing their jobs at anything less than the highest level despite the fact that they have not been paid (Schuster, 2015).

When confronted with the fact that the women have not been paid, Purushottam Sir has a simple explanation:

P: The department will give...it has to be allotted by the Zilla Panchayat. They bill it at the Taluk level, that so many people should get their salaries. That goes to Zilla Panchayat. It has to be approved by the Zilla Panchayat and come back to Taluk Panchayat. From the Taluk Panchayat it goes to SBM [State bank of Mysore]. SBM distributes it to the respective accounts. Because of all this process it gets delayed.

P: The system is like this. It's the same with our salaries

S: You haven’t got your salaries?
P: We have. The Zilla Panchayat allots the money once every 6 months, for so many crores. The Taluk Panchayat spends that money for education. Thinking that it will be a problem because it’s a huge amount for a lot of people, and because it will create pressure on elected bodies, teachers will not work if not given salaries. So they will give our salaries faster. This [mid-day meal scheme] is a recent development, so it gets a little delayed, we can’t help it. Actually they have got their salaries for June and July. The people’s accounts are in Harohalli Canara bank. Therefore it goes to Kanakapura Canara head office bank. From there it has to come to the rural bank, and it gets delayed.

Purushottam sir sees the problem as merely a problem of centralized bureaucracy, in the inefficiency with which funds are disseminated from the center, in this case from the state to the district (“zilla panchayat”) to the taluk who then place it in the State bank before it again gets transferred to the town banks and finally to rural banks. His explanation is highly abstract and, therefore, nearly egalitarian in that he assumes that the bureaucracy functions in this slow way for everyone, a sentiment that resembles Gupta’s (2012) discussion of bureaucracy in Red Tape as “machines for the social production of indifference”. When challenged regarding the fact that he, the headmaster, has received his salary while the women have not, Purushottam sir shruggingly chalks it up to the fact that the midday meal scheme is newer and not as important as paying teachers, a kind of “arbitrariness” that helps maintain the unequal power relations between (female) cook and (male) headmaster at the school. And yet, as Harriss points out, in a rebuttal to Gupta’s concept of bureaucracy, “bureaucratic functioning is by no means as arbitrary and confused… Rather, it systematically reflects caste, class and gender privileges” (Harriss, 2014, 12), and in the case, clearly gender privileges intersect with class hierarchies in village schools in determining who and when different groups get pay, if at all.

But Bhagyamma, Jayamma, and Parvatamma are not unawares of the power imbalance that they face and still willfully continue to voice their grievances:

Sanjana: ...why are you working here despite not having got your salaries for so many months?

Parvatamma: We said the same! We refused to come. They say it’s our wish.

Bhagyamma: We say that we will not come and we will not cook. They tell us to talk to the authorities who will come, don’t work if they won’t give you the salaries, otherwise work. No authority came, we didn’t speak to anyone. We are simply working here.

Bhagyamma: Even the Anganwadi chefs would get only 750rs; they went to some office in Bangalore and protested… now they get 3000rs. And hardly a few children come there, they could even get food from home for them, they get 3000rs now and we prepare food for so many children and we get only 1000rs!

Bhagyamma: We told the headmaster that we will not work if this continues. He said he’ll take us to an office in Kanakapura to talk to them. But it’s of no use if only 3 people go there and talk, the workers from all schools should come.
There is a clear sense that they have been wronged, that they should be getting a higher salary, and that they should seek out the appropriate authorities in order to receive them. Bhagyamma explicitly references the need for collective action, knowing full well that three women going alone would not have the impact that workers from all schools could make. The juxtaposition of their own position against that of the Anganwadi chefs, chefs hired to work at the government centers intended to provide basic health services to those living in villages, including contraceptive counseling and supply, nutrition education and supplementation, as well as preschool activities, only highlights their feelings of injustice: “they” cook for hardly a few children while “we” prepare food for so many children. Crucially, this ability to protest and make changes is directly related to Bangalore city, where one must go to make claims to rights and privileges even if they are rights and privileges pertaining to rural livelihood, an awareness that is what Harvey (2012) argues is the particular way that rural people have a “right to the city”, staking their claims in the urban hub that is increasingly the locus of power in centralizing bureaucracies like that described here.

And yet, for me, the most striking example of the women's precarious position is that, despite their awareness that they should protest for more pay, they had not been aware that the headmaster was seeking to move to the Akshaya patra midday meals until we, without knowing that they did not know, brought it up during conversation. In fact, as soon as we told them, they began to anxiously inquire as to exactly when it would happen: “When did the master say the ISKCON food would come?” Then, they begin discussing what they will have to do when the ISKCON food arrives, a foregone conclusion as soon as we tell them of its possibility:

Parvatamma: We shall work as domestic help…or in our fields...
Bhagyamma: What can we do madam…we’ll do coolie work. There are factories here. The factories are very far we can’t go there because we have to finish all house-chores and send our children to school. Either we’ll work in our fields or go to work as coolies.
Jayamma: We’ll go for other work then, labour work.
Parvatamma: we’ll work with the silk worms, removing the cocoon etc.

If they lose their jobs as cooks, they will fall back on their traditional occupations, working the land to make whatever income they can, cut out from the development apparatus that they have joined, but briefly.

When I return to the school some twelve months later, the Akshayapatra meals still have not come to the school. Instead, the secondary school has now built a small kitchen for the midday meals, where Bhagyamma, Parvatamma, and Jayamma continue to cook. I ask
Purushottam Sir why they never managed to get the Akshayapatra meals, what seemed to be quite imminent when I had been at the school before. He shrugs and tells me that they had tried to get the Akshayapatra meals but that unfortunately they had refused to come to Adavisandra because the school was too much in “the interior”, just outside of the radius where they can deliver, a radius that covers even the school just 5 kilometers away. He also informs me that all the cooks are now being paid properly, though in my short trip back I am unable to verify whether this was true or not, and I suspend belief given his previous statements on the subject. What I do take away from the new knowledge is simple: the inevitable transition I had imagined just a year prior was thwarted by distance itself, the push towards centralized development kept at bay by physical constraints that have always been its most significant nemesis.

* * *

Frame 30: Development

I am sitting in Sulekha madam’s class on a day in late October. It’s a surprisingly cool day, only amplified by the small window creating a natural wind tunnel, and the students comment that the wind “feels like AC.” I’m distracted by the breeze and spend half my time during class looking out the window and watching people pass by on their daily errands, women with buckets full of water, men shepherding goats, and the bustle of the kindergarten children just across the way, loudly mimicking their teachers as they stand in a circle, holding hands, and reciting a poem as part of their nalikali curriculum, a surprisingly progressive pedagogy intended for students to learn-through-play (Sriprakash, 2012), a method that continues through third standard after which the curricular transformation is shocking – play being quickly replaced with a regimentalized form of learning that involved a mix of lectures, memorization, and examinations. I can’t help but wonder who and why the transition is so drastic, as if someone had determined that after the age of eight students should no longer experience their education as fun. Instead, it was time to get down to the serious business of learning.

I try to stay as inconspicuous as possible during Sulekha madam’s lecture since she has been less than excited about having the cameras in her classroom, concerned that it will distract her students from the lessons she is teaching, and so now I am sitting in the back row of seats, my audio recorder on the desk and my camera placed on the table unmoving so that she nor the students will notice them. The students, of course, do notice, and turn around from time to time to
see what I am doing or where I am pointing the camera. Thankfully they have learned not to make too much of a fuss about the equipment if they want any chance to use it later.

Sulekha madam is the students’ science teacher and the only female or Muslim instructor that teaches secondary education. I love sitting in her classes, her soft, smooth voice a pleasant antidote to the bombastic pedagogic style of the male teachers. The students have a different kind of quiet focus when she teaches, calm as they learn about the oxygen cycle or photosynthesis (vishi samshaya). Today, however, she is not teaching science at all, but catching up the students on an English lesson that they have missed, not surprising given that the English lessons are conducted ad-hoc by Nikhil sir or Sulekha madam only when they have free periods between the subjects in which they have been conferred their degrees.

The lecture is about Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, and his ideas on the future of the country. If, on its surface, these English lessons are intended to develop students’ reading comprehension and critical thinking skills in a second language, the inclusion of Dr. Kalam’s message in the Karnataka State English curriculum is not an accident, but a direct means by which values migrate through the curriculum itself, an attempt to impact what students believe and what they should aspire for. In other words, it is one means by which values are linked to affect within the educational space.

Dr. Kalam has, in many ways, become a symbol for the vision of India’s future development goals, especially as he articulated them in his book, *India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium* (1998), in which he writes,

“A developed India, by 2020 or even earlier is not a dream. It need not even be a mere aspiration in the minds of many Indians. It is a mission we can we can all take up and accomplish. Ignited young minds, we feel, are a powerful resource. This resource is mightier than any resource on the earth, in the sky and under the sea. We must all work together to transform our ‘developing India’ into a ‘developed India’, and the revolution required for this effort must start in our minds” (9).

Kalam’s views are shaped by India’s postcolonial legacy and the economic stipulations wrought by the former colonial powers after independence and in his writing he emphasizes the move to “developed” rather than “developing” as a final refusal to bow to the economic will of Western superpowers, what he characterizes as the central risk of globalization. He writes:

Globalization, which means integration with the world economy, brings the influence of external forces into our society... We would also like to point out that developed countries have set up several nontariff barriers which strike at the roots of ‘ideal’ competition based on ‘market’ forces. These are mostly aimed at denying opportunities to other countries to reach a developed status. Even when one country prepares to cope with a set of barriers introduced by these developed countries, either through their own laws or though multilateral treaties,
a new set of complex barriers crops up. Even a simple analysis of many of these international or global transactions indicates a much deeper fact: the continuous process of domination over others by a few nations. India has to be prepared to face such selectively targeted actions by more powerful players even when it tries to march ahead to realize its vision of reaching a developed status.

Kalam wrote these words in 1998, before the turn of the century, and yet, in 2014 students in Adavisandra are still reading his words, even as India moves ever-closer to 2020 and the moment when Kalam’s vision should become a reality.

The lesson which Sulekha madam is teaching the ninth standard students is an excerpt from Kalam’s second book, Ignited Minds (2002), a manuscript he wrote specifically for the “young citizens” of India. This focus on youth as the harbingers of social change and development in India has endeared him to those focused on education-as-development, both in the private and NGO sectors. Adhyaapaka, for example, brought Dr. Kalam as the chief guest for its tenth anniversary celebration in 2013, presenting him with a “report card” of Adhyaapaka’s progress in Karnataka schools up till that point, in which they claimed to have reached 100% pass rates in all 1000 of their affiliate government schools in Karnataka. His presence at the celebration is well-documented online (Prakash’s full speech is uploaded on youtube) and is the pride of almost everyone within the organization. Shiva, for example, the Adhyaapaka mentor mentioned quite extensively in the past chapter, had made a photograph taken with Kalam his desktop wallpaper, a visual reminder of his role in the organization’s success.

The excerpt from Ignited Minds is less than three pages and starts with a short biography of Dr. Kalam, describing his “rags-to-riches” story, how he had had very little formal education or much wealth, but had “innate wisdom” and a “true generosity of spirit”. The biography reads in typical bootstrap fashion, in which Kalam’s innate ability and will power allowed him to reach great heights. By extension, the biography implies, if he was able to do such great things, so can each student, structural inequalities be damned:

“All through the book I have spoken about the power of the imagination. It stands at the heart of the creative process and it is the substance of life, allied as it is to the power to attract to us what we most desire. This power makes all the difference between winners and losers.”

The students read this passage out loud and translate it themselves into Kannada, internalizing the message linking the imagination to desire, a message that relies almost exclusively on an affective register, especially in the phrase, “the power to attract us to what we most desire”.

In Appadurai’s Modernity at Large, he spends considerable time on the idea of the imagination as a constitutive cultural aspect of globalization. “The imagination…” he write, “has
a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude of some sort of expression… It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that create ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape” (Appadurai, 1996, 5). And Kalam seems to follow the same logic, calling forth the “power of the imagination” as the means by which “we” – the deictic being especially important in producing a shared collective sentiment73 – can achieve whatever we desire. As importantly, Kalam’s words suggest that we cannot live if we do not utilize our power of imagination, as it comprises the very “substance of life” or, to put it another way, animates our embodied experience. Taking Kalam’s words in relation to Appadurai’s discussions of the imagination means attending to the metapragmatic awareness of the imagination and its possibilities: not just that we can and do imagine differently now, but that we must consciously channel our imagination. It’s this awareness that provides the imagination’s potential power towards action and becomes the de-facto means by which to assess the shift from developing to developed.

But Kalam’s words are still deeply rooted in national sentiment and the propagation of a particular type of imaginary of India, almost akin to the classical form of nationalism produced through print-capitalism’s particular pedagogic capacity (Anderson, 2006; Chatterjee, 1993). Kalam references the late-colonial era – the industrial projects of J.N. Tata, Acharya P.C Ray and the university projects of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan74 – as a reminder that “India can do it” if it merely imagines a greater possibility and dreams of “a system where the work of scientists and technologists is focussed on specific missions driven by goals relevant to the common man.” The technologies that Kalam is interested in are quite specific and he questions his young readers:

Are we in a position to continue that work, revive that spirit of enterprise? Shall we ever see cars designed and manufactured in India dotting the toads in Frankfurt or Seoul? Or Indian satellites launch vehicles place communication, weather and remote sensing satellites of other nations in orbit? Or see India build power stations for the USA, Japan and China? The possibility will remain remote if we stay with the present trend of low aim.

73 Appadurai (1996) writes, ”Part of what the mass media make possible, because of the conditions of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure, is what I have elsewhere called a "community of sentiment" (Appadurai 1990), a group that begins to imagine and feel things together” (8).
74 Note that all of these people are men, the usual implicit means by which leadership and gender roles get reproduced in these curricular undertakings. For quick reference, J.N. Tata was India’s greatest industrialist building the Tata group which is still India’s biggest company; P.C. Ray was the founder of Bengal Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals, India’s first pharmaceutical company; Malaviya was the founder of Banaras hindu University; and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Aligarh Muslim University. Subtly, then, in Kalam’s text is referencing both Hindu and Muslim founding fathers, values bundled with his other, more prominently discussed one.
Today we are witnessing good progress in the software sector but almost all of the hardware is imported. Can we rise higher on the value scale there? Can India design an operating system that will become a household name in the world of computers? Our exports consist to a large extent of low value raw material such as iron ore and alumina. Can we convert these into a wide range of products that find an international market? We have hundreds of defence production industries but why does India not manufacture and market the main battle tank, missiles, aircrafts, guns and other defence equipment? We have the most important core competence in the form of multifaceted manpower and basic infrastructure. What is it we don’t have? ...

The motive force has to be love for the country. We need a vision that is shared by the entire nation... In the drive of development, some states are faring better than others in the country. Bright young entrepreneurs have energized the national technology scene. Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad are hubs of business activities. But even though the IT sector is a very visible area of success and has brought in some capital investment in terms of overall development this is not enough. Even if you take up the IT area as a mission, manpower is the most important need. Those living away from the cities must also have access to a good education to join the talent pool. This should happen fast.

I have transcribed so much of Kalam’s text here so that the reader, much like my students, can experience the entanglement of nation, economic and technological development, and the city that Kalam is invoking. For Kalam, national development within the framework of a global economy relies upon increased exports; exports that Kalam assumes fall on a self-evident value scale in which particular technologies – automobiles, satellites, and hardware manufacturing – are clearly of higher value than the export of “low value” raw materials. I am surprised by the prioritizing of “hardware” over “software” in Kalam’s value scale; however, there seems to be a hint of postcolonial Marxist theory embedded in this idea: “the means of production” being the tangible, material computing hardware upon which “the virtual” i.e. software development can occur, and whose ownership dictates global power relationships.

The city plays a critical role in Kalam’s argument as “IT hubs”, Bangalore included, facilitate national development because they have “brought in some capital investment”. On the other hand, my students, included as part of those “living away from the cities”, have not been contributing members of India’s national development and, in order to do so, must get the type of education that will allow them to join India’s urban technocracy. The further implication is, of course, that agricultural work is much lower on Kalam’s imagined value scale that, in turn, is the rationale for a shift in the rural imagination towards urban dreams and aspirations that will supplement the “talent pool” that the city needs.

When the lesson is over, I ask Sulekha madam about what she has just taught and whether she agrees with Dr. Kalam’s words. She tells me:
S: First of all, superstition is too much here in India. If something happens, they believe that some evil practice is going on. That has to be removed. And communication from one place to another, if we communicate with one another, that will be good. Technology is part of that, it will happen. See we have to be able to communicate with one another, from Harohalli to Adavisandra, once my colleague was there, she worked for 15 years. There was no bus. She used to leave at 7 in the morning, she would reach at 930, after 4, if she walks, she will go by 630. She suffered a lot, a lot lot. But now cars is going. Kaddu means forest, this was a forest

A: But now its not a forest.

S: That is communication, if it is well this one maybe in future India will develop, it will improve.

For Sulekha madam, development has two seemingly related elements, the eradication of superstition and the increase in communication in the broadest sense, both in terms of “technology” a gloss for ICTs more broadly but also, and maybe perhaps more importantly for her, the development of roads and bus systems that will allow for physical movement between places. Her logic falls quite nicely into a common-sense theorization of global communication as “modernity”, whose role is the de-facto erasure of “traditional” cultural understandings, represented in this case by the superstitious Indian. While these types of characterizations of global communication have been thoroughly critiqued by media scholars (Ginsburg, 2002), who show how overlapping social and cultural markers of regional, national, and transnational belonging remain embedded in technological forms, even if reconfigured in the process, what I find significant is the hold that this idea of global communication had on the imagination of those who I worked with. Whether or not the pragmatics of ICT suggests a complex intersection of identities, the metapragmatic characterization of it, at least in Sulekha’s example here, which was quite a common characterization during my fieldwork, remained premised on the erasure of particular cultural identities by technology; an erasure that was assumed as a moral good.

Sulekha remarks on the infrastructural aspect of development, namely road building, after describing her own difficulty traveling back and forth between her home in Bangalore and the village, a trek which takes her almost two hours each way. On many days I would see her on the bus when I myself would be traveling to school, reaching the Harohalli station and transferring to another bus if she was early enough, hopping a ride with a fellow teacher who kept a scooter at the busstand, or, on a particularly late day, taking a 150 rupee auto rickshaw ride the last twenty minutes to school. On occasion, when I began to drive to Adavisandra, I would offer her a ride back, an offer she was glad to take given that it would save her almost 45 minutes to an hour to get home, dropping her just at Sarakki Gate, on the outskirts of South Bangalore. There is a time related concern that is central to her development consciousness, as she feels the effects of her
inability to drive along these roads every single day and literally loses time in the process. Unlike Prakash, whose ability to manipulate time-space is one of the key’s to his development Self, Sulekha remains in the exact opposite role, a gendered and classed development Self that disallows the easy manipulation of time-space and is therefore immediately identified in her discussion of values she associates with development.

On one trip home in the car, she explains how she ended up teaching at Adavisandra, despite its distance from her home in Bangalore.

Here, you know Arjun, nobody was trained that much. The government used to call for jobs, and those who applied, the person who had the highest percentage they’ll be given the jobs. But now, everybody is distinction, everybody is 81%, 82%. From 2004 onwards it’s a CET batch. You will have to take a competency exam, for every job [emphasis added]. Even for a clerical job you have to take a competency exam, because the percentage of education is going very high in India. Especially in Karnataka. And for that, in that whatever the marks that you take, that will be your place. So for some 200 marks I took some 138. So the person who is in the 178 position if he has scored 178 he will be the first one. From that there will be descending order, like that. If there is top candidate then it is Bangalore, from there decreasing, decreasing I have gotten Adavisandra. **laughs** This is one of the best place. My friends tell. Even some remote villages is there where there is not at all bus facilities, not at all any communication with other towns... Atleast here we can reach, get some vehicles...

The CET exam stands for the Common Entrance Test, an exam that Sulekha highlights as the determiner for where one gets placed. Previous to 2004, the test was used mostly for entrance into Medical and Engineering schools; however, as she notes, after 2004 the CET became the benchmark for almost every occupation in Karnataka. In her discussion, Sulekha conflates the fact that there is an exam for every job with the fact that “everybody has distinction” and “education is going very high in India”, a reflection of just how deeply the CET exam has taken hold as the determiner of excellence in India. The exam can be considered a classic form of Foucauldian governmentality, in the bureaucratic segmentation and domination of teachers in Karnataka state based upon a particular knowledge/political economy configuration. Exam scores have quite literal consequences on where and how teachers can move, determining the schools they will work at and how long their commutes might be; decisions that teachers themselves have very little say in. Sulekha makes explicit the mapping of an urban-rural spectrum onto the CET scores, a highest score necessarily meaning a post in Bangalore; a bureaucratic logic that takes the urban as the assumed “best” location for all teachers. And yet, what is as important as this bureaucratic urban-rural determination is Sulekha’s own acceptance of this logic, in her laughing explanation that suggests “of course the highest score should get a job in Bangalore”. It is how it ought to be, a subtle ethical valuation that plays a role in maintaining acquiescence to this form of
bureaucratic overdetermination, and an example of governmentality as “an ‘encounter’ between two domains: ‘technologies of domination of others and technologies of the self’” (Pandian, 2008, 162).

Yet, Sulekha herself did not want to become a teacher. She tells me that she had really wanted to go into a technical field and that her score was actually high enough to go into engineering, but that “my parents did not encourage me to do… Muslim girls are not given that much education. Even both my parents are working, both my parents are well-educated, but they don’t go that higher level. That’s why I chose this.” She clarifies that her grandmother and her mother were both teachers, something which she jokes is her “inheritance” from her family, and that her father was a tehsildar i.e. a tax collector with the revenue department. In response, she promises that if she ever has a girl child (both her children are boys), she will make sure that she gets an education, what she sees as a strong change in her particular community.

5: Now the girls are getting education. That’s the main thing. Those blind beliefs... In our community, you know Arjun, as in Christians and Catholics, like that... in our Muslims also, Sheikh, Pathan, Sayed, only Sheikh will be given to Sheikh, like that now its going...
A: So that internal difference is going.
5: Now it’s going. They’d be married to only Shaif, not now.

For Sulekha, the question of development is always intersecting with being Muslim and a woman in India. Development as eradicating “blind beliefs”, not unlike her earlier reference to removing superstition from the country, is now situated within a discussion of both the ability to marry across Muslim sects – Sheikh, Syed, Pathan – and the possibility for girls to be educated. But Sulekha is very quick to make sure that I do not see this issue of inter-sect marriage as only an issue within Muslim communities, but also that which seems to be a problem in other religious communities as well, in this case with explicit reference to the internal divisions in Christianity; a reference she uses because she assumes I will have a better understanding of that religion given that I live in America and which provides a strong contrast to the view espoused by Sarathi in Chapter 3.

She tells me about her experiences growing up as a Muslim in Karnataka, going to a Christian college in which she was regarded as an outcast by her peers, both Christian and Hindu, who neither wanted to talk to her nor would allow her to speak freely with the other two Muslims who went to her school. In that regard, she is especially thankful to be placed at Adavisandra.
S: We can’t speak with either of them [Christians], neither with them [Hindus]. It is okay, if they let us speak within ourselves, okay. Even that they will not let us do, they will not be willing. “Why you speak you both Muslims?” Like that they are telling. That’s the problem. But now, here even my colleagues, no? They belong to a very “high community.”

A: High community means?
S: High community means, uh, Brahmmins...
S: Brahmmins is a very high religious [caste]. But even though they are Brahmmins, Lingayats, they doesn’t, they didn’t make me feel that I am belonging to a minority community. That, uh, I think I am very lucky to have such colleagues... They gave me equal respect, support.

Sulekha references here to Lingayats, one of the two largest agricultural castes in Karnataka, predominantly in North Karnataka, and Brahmmins, as “high communities” and juxtaposes her own “minority community” to situate herself within the broader social setting in which she lives and works, one in which all of the other teachers are from these two caste groups (Nikhil sir, for example, a Lingayat). But it's the inability to speak that has had the greatest impact on her affective conception of her position, in the explicit memory of the words “Why you speak you Muslims” and that it might be possible in particular situations for that ability to once again be taken away and for silence to be the only acceptable type of action. Indeed, speaking is never a given, but, in Sulekha’s own words, is only possible due to the benevolence of those from these upper caste communities, a clear demarcation of power in the school in the very determination as to who confers and who receives respect.

Everyday as Sulekha moves from the Bangalore to the school, I witness her negotiation of these identities. On the bus, she sits quietly, wearing her full, black niqab-style burqa, covering her entire body, except for her face. As soon as she reaches school, she goes into the office, and emerges sans burqa, usually in a spectacularly colorful sari in green, yellow, or blue. It is a stark shift, but one which she does not hesitate to discuss, explaining that whether or not she should be taking off her burqa outside of her home, that she cannot teach effectively if she does not change her clothing.

As for Bangalore, Sulekha complains that the city is too congested, too polluted, and too big, and that she much preferred Chitradurga, her native place, a town about 200 km north of Bangalore, which she nostalgically remembers was a place in which you “will always get home within five minutes. Ten minutes maximum.” She moved to Bangalore after her marriage in 2003 and her husband spends almost the entire year in Muscat, Oman while obtaining his PhD in Mechanical Engineering and working for Hindustan Aeronautics limited (HAL), an Indian state-owned aerospace and defense company based in Bangalore, Karnataka, and one of the largest aerospace companies in Asia, with an annual turnover of over US$2 billion.

223
Sulekha explains that her husband has originally tried getting his PhD in India, but that he was not getting any of his PhD expenses covered, an undue economic strain given that they were living in a joint family with her two children and her sister-in-law’s three children. She complains about the fact that the government would not provide even a singly rupee towards her husband’s education,

Nobody will provide, nobody will provide and nobody will recognize.... You [Arjun] are doing a PhD know? You know the importance of PhDs!! That’s all, but nobody will recognize. [They say] “What he’s doing PhD?? Let him earn!” **laughs**

S: Yes, let him earn. What is there in PhD? Like that. But he is very studious...

It’s the lack of recognition that seems to bother her most. “Nobody will recognize” is inclusive of her family, friends, and Indian society as a whole, all of whom place value on only “how much he earns”, not so dissimilar from Ragu’s lamentations in the prior chapter. But Sulekha sees this same logic playing out in the lives of her students as well. She tells me:

S: Here, what it is Arjun is that parents are not educated. Some parents feel that if we are not educated let our kids be educated. Like that they feel. Some feel that what is there in education? Let them come with us and do business. What parents think is they have to earn money. If they study well they have to get a good job and they have to earn money. And if they don’t study come join me in the business. We’ll sell, buy anything. So that we’ll run a business and we’ll earn a lot of money. That is the main criteria. They don’t want to make that child to actually educate them.

A: What does that mean actually educate them?
S: Actually means awareness of everything, of social, economic, and scientific, mathematical... but that they don’t want. They want their child to get first class and study well and get a good job. And become an officer.

If there is one thing, then, that transcends any particular community, it is the fact that education is not seen as a social good in and of itself, but is only useful instrumentally, as a means for monetary gain. In a sense, this is quite similar to the pragmatic logic that Adhyaapaka uses in justifying its interventions in schools like Adavisandra, suggesting that the ultimate goal of intervention is producing students who can pass their tenth standard exams and therefore have the possibility of getting jobs that can make them economically stable. And yet, what is problematic for Sulekha is the lack moral import of this monetary emphasis.

A: That’s what it means, what do you want for the students to achieve? What do you want to teach them?
S: Morality. Main thing.
A: Meaning?
S: Morality, respecting elders, social values, behavior with society, and improvement in education. Whatever we teach, learn properly.
When I talk to my students about development they seem to have imbibed some of these ideas, though they do not always aspire to become engineers, a conclusion that these kinds of lessons like that on Abdul Kalam might seem to imply. Rather, when questioned explicitly about their role in this particular narrative of national development, they tell me on several occasions, matter-of-factly, that they are the poor and that they are the ones in need of development, even if how they are in need of development is sometimes quite vague.

And yet, whether or not my students considered themselves as the poor i.e. as those who were in need of development, they also were able to assess wrongs and structural inequalities that did not lay the entirety of India’s problems at their feet. On one occasion, during a focus group we conducted during a Monday when students were off from school, two students describe their aspirations to become lawyers and, in the process, articulate an alternative vision of self-development that is not directly connected to the technocratic version advocated by Kalam. Sripriya and I ask a few of the students in the ninth and tenth standard questions about their aspirations and two discuss wanting to become lawyers:

Sri: Why do you want to be lawyers? Where did that determination come from? What injustice is going on around here?
Krishna: Politicians are bribing....
Indira: It is the rule of the rich here, the poor don’t get justice in the court. They’re buying the law with money, the poor are not getting justice at all.
Jayanti: Corruption... politicians. They’re draining everything.
Sri: Why do they take bribes?
Indira: ...to get their work done.
Jayanti: Suppose 10lakhs is granted by the government for the construction of a road, they utilise 3 lakhs and the rest goes into their pocket.
Sri: Now answer me, what improvements are required in the society?
Jayanti: First, our country should develop.
Sri: How will it develop? Do you know how big the country is? And the population?
Jayanti: 121crores.
Pallavi: ...There should be a law of only 1 child per family...
Sri: and then?
Pallavi: Population will decrease.
Sri: ...and then?
Pallavi: Illiteracy should be erased and everyone should be happy.

Indira connects her aspiration to become a lawyer with the injustice wrought against the poor in India when the rich “buy” the law with money, a narrative about corruption in India that does not equate the rich with success or moral authority. Perhaps most critically when re-reading this transcript is the fact that the students generate the conversation around development
themselves after being asked about societal improvement, indicating just how well-ingrained the rhetoric surrounding development really is. “To develop” the country is the assumed response to any question about change regardless of what that might mean for each individual student.

What it means in this case is the disciplining of their bodies through laws passed to prevent them from having more than one child. In India, the controversy over the number of children that should be allowed date back to at least 1970, during the Emergency, when the Indira Gandhi led government decreed that men with two or more children should be sterilized, a policy that was enforced almost exclusively within the urban slums and resulting in a traumatic history that continues to be mythologized (Tarlo, 2003). And yet, as articulated here some thirty years later in a rural school, this type of disciplining is seen as a moral good, a standard part of the ethical imagination, despite the fact that these students are discussing themselves, a stark example of how the cultivation of a particular moral framework associated with development functions as a technology of the Self to the point that students here will willingly submit, rendering the use of direct force no longer necessary.

Frame 31: The Rural Body

Geertz’ Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight is perhaps the iconic text of modern anthropology, a text that ushered in the interpretive turn and whose ethnographic thickness still feels fresh almost forty years after its initial publication. In it, Geertz tells the story of his initial encounters with the people residing in a Balinese village, encounters which are tepid, to say the least. Geertz describes the villagers’ suspicion, their unwillingness to speak to either him or his wife, or, in the worst-case scenario, the villagers’ complete indifference to their presence.

The climax of Geertz’ story starts during the Balinese cockfight, an activity decreed as illegal by the Balinese state and therefore held in semi-secrecy in corners of the village. Geertz and his wife are listening and watching along with many other villagers when, suddenly, a truck full of policemen armed with machine guns pulls up and scatters the crowd into every direction. Geertz, like everyone else, runs away in a frenzy, what he facetiously chalks up to “the anthropological principle, when in Rome…” (Geertz, 1973, 415). In the aftermath of the event, Geertz describes in great detail his newfound position in the village, in the sudden interest that the villagers take in he and his wife, in their incessant teasing about how awkwardly they ran away. It is the penultimate moment in the anthropological imagination of fieldwork, the moment just
before they “were quite literally ‘in’… a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate” (Geertz, 1973, 416).

Many of these Geertzian ideas have been already amply critiqued elsewhere, not least of which are Geertz’ simplistic renderings of insider and outsider which rested upon a bounded, totalizing view of culture and his continued reference to an imagined “peasant mentality”. And perhaps just to reinforce these critiques, for me, the diasporic researcher, the idea of a complete separation between me and the Other – in this case my research participants in Adavisandra – was unimaginable, the micro-positionings based on my role as teacher, Indian-American, South Indian, Brahmin, urban, researcher, filmmaker, my access via an established education NGO, each building a different, partial relationship with those who I was working with at different moments in my fieldwork.

But what interests me when I re-read Geertz now is the way he discusses the event itself, in the comical mishap that produces his new relationship with members of the village community and the types of new insights which arise out of this set of mishaps. And, indeed, when I reflect on my own fieldwork it is in the mishaps I’ve made, either small or large, from which my own relationships were further developed. Unlike Geertz, however, whose mishap turns out not to be a mishap at all, but rather a moment of immediate shared sensibility, the event I’d like to turn to now was not a minor foible, but one of the biggest mistakes I made during fieldwork, a moment when I did not do as “the Romans do”, and one which illustrated both how those who I was working with might imagine me and provided some of the most useful insights about how the village might “see” the city.

It all started innocently enough, my students and I walking back to the school after playing cricket one afternoon, after which I would soon return to Bangalore. As we were walking, they jokingly told me they associated Bangalore with “burgers and pizza”, culinary markers of Bangalore’s “world class city” status as seen from one of its surrounding villages, which, in this case, was strongly associated with American food culture. I laughed and asked them if they’d ever tried pizza, which they admitted they had not, and from this brief mention we began making our plans to go on a trip to Bangalore together, see some of the sites of the city, come to my home for an afternoon, and, of course, try pizza.

One month later we were finally able to plan the trip for a Saturday in October when they did not have any other plans. I hired a six-seater car and drove to Adavisandra, picked up five of my male students (my girl students were not allowed to go on a trip of this sort with a male adult, especially one who was quite new, even though I had brought my research assistant Sripriya
along) – Aadarsha, Suresh, Naveen, Arun, and Manu – and headed towards Bangalore. As we left, I spoke with a few of the students’ parents, some of whom I had met a few times already: “I’ll be back by around 6:30pm,” I tell them, and Suresh’s grandmother, a boisterous, loud women who could keep talking even if, and perhaps more if, I could not understand what she was saying in her thick rural Kannadiga accent, jokingly tells me, “Bring them back whenever you want!” It’s all very casual and we start our trip to Bangalore with much excitement. I do not, however, get a chance to speak to either Arun or Manu’s parents right before the trip, two eighth standard students who I know about as well as Aadarsha, Suresh, and Naveen, but whose families I have only spoken to twice before the trip.

The day literally flies by, we go to Cubbon Park, one of the oldest historical parks in Bangalore, and Lal Bagh (The Red Garden), a large botanical garden that was commissioned by Hyder Ali and eventually finished by his son, the aforementioned Tipu Sultan. It’s mostly a day of eating, running around, driving in the car, and my students taking many, many pictures while audio recording whatever is on their minds. For example, while I’m listening to their audio recordings later I come upon this gem of a story that Manu records and which I feel compelled to include here because of his heartfelt thanks for getting an opportunity to re-tell it:

Manu: Once there was a rabbit in a village. That rabbit...one day...was living in the forest. There were elephants, lions, tigers, rabbits etc. in that thick forest. Among those, the rabbit was a very clever rabbit. One day the rabbit was sleeping under an elephant apple tree. An elephant apple (fruit) falls to the ground. The rabbit tells the fox, lion, elephant, that an earthquake occurred. All the animals started running. It was not the rabbit but a fox who said to the rabbit that the earthquake occurred. The rabbit says ‘Hey idiot! That was not an earthquake. It was just the elephant apple falling’. The fox ran away shamefacedly. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to say this.

And, on other occasions they insult one another into the recorder, in this case Naveen harshly teasing Suresh:

I have eaten so much and gained a little weight. I am 101kgs. And the grandson is 71kgs. I am like a pig! My name is Suresh. I am so heavy the car is not moving forward. I have eaten and eaten and eaten and bloated up. What to do! I eat 5 times a day and sleep 6 times a day.

Each of my students wants to buy a souvenir for their parents and so they each select one: Aadarsha and Suresh buy a packet of almonds and Suresh and Manu decide to buy a packet of souvenir pictures of Bangalore that they find at Lal bagh. The purchases surprise me, especially the latter, given that Bangalore’s physical proximity to Adavisandra should mean ample opportunities to see these city sites. Yet, the rural-urban divide for my students from Adavisandra was far more than physical distance, they experienced Bangalore as tourists,
symbolized by the purchase of souvenir photographs and reinforcing an imaginary of Bangalore as exotically outside of their lived experience in the village.

Of course, this did not mean that my students never had been to Bangalore before. They had in fact been to Bangalore many times and in many cases had family who lived in Bangalore. Suresh’s uncle lived in Bangalore and Arun’s sister was attending a PUC college in Bangalore and staying in a hostel in Bangalore. Ultimately, however, these travels back and forth between home and Bangalore did not serve to deconstruct the broader narrative of Bangalore as a city bound by socioeconomic status, a place that was, ultimately, only for the rich.

As we walk around Sripriya and I ask them more about Bangalore and Aadarsha and Manu reply frankly:

Aadarsha: Here [Bangalore], everything works on money...in the village, those who do not have much money can also survive... [However] in the village, we don’t get anything... cannot see many places. If we come to Bangalore, [we] can see new things.”
Sri: If you come and stay in Bangalore, this will also get old right?
Manu: Something new will be created right?
Sri: Yeah? That doesn’t happen in the village?
Manu: No. Not so much. We keep seeing the same old things. It keeps changing here.

My students’ imaginary of Bangalore is built upon an awareness of the distinct class-privilege necessary to survive in the City, a perception derived partly from their own families experiences struggling to survive in the City. For example, Suresh’s aunt and uncle live on the outskirts of Bangalore, again along the Kanakapura road, near Konankunte Cross, perhaps the furthest outskirt of the city. Suresh’s uncle works as an independent electrician and his aunt works at home taking care of their two children. When I meet them, living in a single room with a small attached kitchen, perhaps no larger than 200 square feet total, Suresh’s aunt sighingly tells me that she misses her native place, not Adavisandra, but another village close by, and the clean air, light, and family who live so close. They remain in Bangalore, she says, for her two boys, with the hope that living in the city and going to a city school will give them better occupational opportunities, “better” in this case meaning any non-agricultural jobs.

Secondly, and as importantly, is the metadiscourse of Bangalore as place of change in contradistinction to their own village as a place of stasis, where they “keep seeing the same old things”. This was not the first time I heard my students or their parents frame their village in this way and, yet there were hundreds of changes which were occurring and which they were quick to discuss, whether it was their children, both male and female, aspiring for higher educational
degrees, whether it was the new roads that were being built, or whether it was the changing media practices of youth. But, despite the fact that pragmatically change was occurring in Adavisandra and everyone was aware of these changes, they did not truly destabilize a meta-discourse about change and where change can and does occur.

At the same time, each of my students negotiated his own position between the urban and the rural, imagining a future life in which he might still be able to partake in both. As they drive home from our day in Bangalore, they talk about their future occupations, in this case agreeing on “police officer” as the idealized future life trajectory that might allow them to live between their village and Bangalore.

Sri: After your education will you come to Bangalore or stay in the village?
Aadarsha: We’ll do both.
Sri: How will you do both?
Naveen: 1 week in Bangalore, 1 week in the village.
Sri: Will you come to Bangalore when you all become police officers or stay in the village?
Arun: Bangalore
Manu: We’ll go to the village and come to Bangalore as well.
Sri: How will you do both?
Manu: Friends will be in the village… we’ll talk to them, meet our parents, play a while…
Manu: …and do a little farming, make silk, I’ll do all that.
Manu: When I get holidays from the job, then I’ll go home and grow (silk) mulberry.
Sri: Otherwise you’ll stay in Bangalore? You?
Arun: Me too
Sri: You’ll do the same?
Arun: Yes.
Sri: You’ll do the same as he said? You?
Suresh: On holidays…parents…
Arun: When I get holidays, I’ll get my parents to the city. Will take them around the city and familiarise it to them…
Suresh: I’ll take a rented house here and get my parents here.

In this quasi-shared sentiment, there is an imagination of a future in which they might be able to do both, to still maintain their roots to their homes, continue helping with their parents traditional agricultural occupations while also partaking in the benefits of Bangalore’s upward mobility i.e. getting a higher paying job and renting a home that their parents might be able to stay in. This was a kind of occupational aspiration which was intended to forge a urban-rural linkage, to create connections between the village and the city that could facilitate a sense of Self which did not reduce the value of their parents work or their ties to their home. In a sense, then, this dream of an urban-rural connection was itself one of the affects of development, a future
oriented potentiality that produced a new sense of Self in world connected to both contexts simultaneously.

We finally end at my apartment, perhaps the highlight for my students. There we meet Shiva, my friend from Adhyaapaka, who was eager to meet some of my students and to hear about our exploits during the day. I have some forty pictures from their time at my home, pretending to play my guitar, wearing Shiva’s sunglasses, and playing on my computer. They run around the three rooms of the apartment, rooms that are much larger than their own family homes, and as they run around my face burns with the feelings of class privilege that I cannot shake. Later on the way back home, Suresh highlights this clear class privilege as well, telling Sripriya when I am not around,

Suresh: Sir has money in his pocket and he just awaits his chance like this. Poor sir! I get jealous of him.

Suresh: He used his ATM card and spent so much money on us.

And, indeed, Suresh is somewhat correct. During the entire trip I did not want my students to spend money, so hyperaware of the class-differences between us that I only reinscribed much of the same hierarchy, in some ways no different than the well-wishing members of development organizations who only reinscribed ideas of deficiency and difference through their very embodied practices. Even the physical act of going to an ATM and pulling out cash, which I used to pay the cab driver, was read and rightfully critiqued by Suresh for its visible marker of power and privilege within the urban space that we were inhabiting, a means by which I inadvertently disallowed my students from moving and acting freely. In a sense, this is the first inversion of Geertz’ ethnographic encounter: it is one thing to do “as the Romans do” when one has access to places and people that are purportedly not our own. But how does one negotiate these same issues when the markers of belonging and place are inverted, when research participants can, and do, interact with people and places that are the researchers’ home, especially when class difference makes it impossible for their participants to “do as the Romans do”?

We end up at Domino’s pizza around 5:45, it’s getting late but we want to make sure we try pizza before we head back to Adavisandra. We order two pizzas, one plain cheese and one with vegetables, along with a few bottles of Coke. Everyone starts eating enthusiastically and then slowly stop, not one of them enjoying the pizza. Naveen tells me that this was the first time he had ever seen the “face of a pizza” but that he liked everything about the day very, very much, “except for the pizza”.

231
A few months later I’m sitting in the University of Pennsylvania bookstore looking at magazines when an article on the cover of Fast Company catches my attention, “How Domino’s Reinvented Itself to Win in India”. On its website, Fast Company claims itself to be the “world’s leading progressive media brand… written for, by, and about the most progressive business leaders”. The goal is to showcase how business is changing in light of what they term a “global revolution” and, in turn, how business itself produces these global changes. The article outlines Domino’s particular entrance into India, how it identified sensible market strategies to eventually open 806 stores in 170 Indian cities. The article includes vivid images of pizza deliverymen (emphasis on men), store managers, and consumers together creating Domino’s “brand India”.

I’m most taken by the articles direct references to the Indian middle class along with the awareness of the diversity of Indian tastes, with a special attention to the differences in North and South India that must reshape Domino’s menu. “For inspiration,” they write, “its [Domino’s] chefs go on regular ‘food walks’ through markets. A recent ‘Taco Indiana’ dish was inspired by northern India’s kebabs and parathas, for example. In southern India, where pizza is not as popular, research led to a spicy raw-banana pizza.” And yet, the chefs are careful not to make a menu that would feel too much like local cuisine: “Despite its menu’s local flavor, Domino’s is careful not to overlocalize; middle-class India places a premium on ‘Western.’” In a recent TV ad, a young woman tells her brother that he is exactly like a Taco Indiana: Western-looking on the outside but Indian on the inside.”

As I’m reading, I cannot help but remember my students and how they react to the pizza, both in the production of new desires for foreign food and in the clear distaste for the food itself. It’s this distance between produced desire and actual taste that differentiates my students’ position – rural, agricultural – from those who Domino’s is catering to i.e. the consumer whose desire for something new must converge with their tastes in order for Domino’s to sell their product. And I find this particular food practice as one simple means by which to understand how the urban and rural are separated by the production of desires in relation to the potential for

75 http://www.fastcompany.com/3039746/how-dominos-won-india
fulfillment of these desires. No matter the high value of pizza in their imagination, their taste-buds tell them something different; that is, that pizza is decidedly not for them.

Back in Bangalore, it is time to go home and we are getting late. A promise to reach home by 6:30pm is now simply impossible given that we’re only able to leave the city by 6:15pm. The traffic is horrible and it is getting dark and all of us, myself, Sripriya, and the students are tired. All we can hear is the car horns blazing as we inch forward a meter at a time, the bottlenecks at each of Bangalore’s traffic lights only exacerbated by cars moving left and right and straight simultaneously, paying no heed as to whether it was their right of way or not.

I was getting decidedly more nervous as time continued to tick by, getting us no closer to our final destination. As anyone who has ever been a teacher knows, one of the first and foremost precepts of taking students on a trip is to 1) make sure all parents have been informed and 2) make sure to get all students home on time safe and sound. When I left Adavisandra I had not thought much of either of these two precepts and, as I mentioned above, had failed to inform all of my students’ parents appropriately about the trip. Part of my oversight was due to my own tepidity with the moniker of teacher during my fieldwork at all: while I was teaching classes and participating in the school community, I had also tried my best to differentiate myself from the teachers, as much a researcher as a teacher, a champion for the students as a disciplinarian or authority figure. And yet, in moments like this, there was no escaping that I inhabited the role and responsibilities of their teacher, duties at which I was sorely failing at the moment.

Around 6:50pm I got my first call, from Naveen’s father, asking where we were. “Oh we are coming, there is just some traffic.” Naveen’s father listens, agrees, asks us to hurry, and hangs up the phone without much more concern. Next I get a call from Suresh’s grandmother, this time far less gregarious than before, asking with a hint of annoyance when Suresh will be home. I give the same reply and she also agrees, though with slightly more resistance than Naveen’s father had. I might add that both parents were also those who I had also spent a considerable amount of time with, interviewing them, spending time in their homes, and hanging out with their children under their watch. About thirty minutes later I get a call from Manjunath Sir, letting me know that the parents are worried and that they have been inquiring with him about their whereabouts. I gave him the same explanation and asked him to please let the parents know that we were on the way and not to be worried if they called him again. Finally, at around 7:45pm I received a call from Arun’s mother, very distressed, asking where Arun was. I try to explain as I had three times before, and when I do I just get a long pause as a reply. When I try again, hoping that perhaps she just has not heard or not quite understood my words, I again get a long reply, this time with only a
small “mmmm” as acknowledgement. She is clear unhappy and she finally hangs up seemingly and rightfully no more reassured by my words than she had been before the call. Even talking to her son does not seem to help assuage her fears, despite the fact that all of my students are visibly annoyed both by the number of calls and by my own hypersensitivity to the unexpected turn of events, all of which seems, to them, extremely infantilizing since they feel themselves more than capable of taking care of themselves.

It's 8:30 pm before my students finally reach home and I am unbelievably relieved. And yet, even then the weight of my mistake has not dawned on me. It takes another two weeks, after discussions with both the parents and students that I realize the egregiousness of my mistake, inadvertent though it was. Aadarsha’s grandmother tells me when I go to his house to visit a few weeks later that Arun’s mother had come to her crying, running from house to house trying to figure out what had happened, not knowing who to call and not knowing exactly who this man had been who had taken her son away. Arun himself finally gives me the entire explanation:

Arun: She thought you may have kidnapped me and taken my kidney. There were some incidents on the news like this recently.

When he tells me this he and all the other students surrounding him laugh, a seemingly ridiculous thought in retrospect. But I, on the other hand, am much less amused, realizing the amount of worry I must have caused Arun’s mother and beginning to think through the broader implications of this particular association between myself, the city, and organ trafficking.

Later, I look through old articles on the organ trade as it was occurring in Karnataka and Bangalore, and I find a few articles from just a few months before my trip to Bangalore, dated January 6, 2013, that detailed the re-emergence of a organ trade that had been shutdown in 2004 in and around Bangalore, specifically in Ramanagaram town, the town which is also where many of the families in Adavisandra go to sell their silk cocoons. According to the article, despite arrests of some middlemen, the organ trade was still going strong, with some claiming that they could get nearly 17 lakhs for a kidney.

Schepher-Hughes (2000) quotes Cohen, who studied the trade of organs in India in the late-90s and argues that “the kidney trade is another link… in a system of debt peonage reinforced by neoliberal structural adjustment. Kidney sales display some of the bizarre effects of a global capitalism that seeks to turn everything into a commodity.” In Cohen’s argument the desperation of the poor, from either rural sectors or urban slums, forces them into a situation in which they must give up their kidneys as a last means to acquire income, either to pay off otherwise insurmountable debt or, in some circumstances, to maintain cultural practices, like the
giving of dowry during marriage. Indeed, in the 2013 article, much of the same sentiment is echoed, an informant from within the organ trade explaining to reporters that “they were ‘poor people deep in debt who have only two choices — sell their organs for money or commit suicide.’”76 The reference to suicide and debt is a not so subtle hint at the relationship between the rampant farmer’s suicides in India and the organ trade, both byproducts of the increasing concentration of wealth and the increased economic vulnerability of those already at risk in India’s current capitalist configuration.

And yet, as important as the reality of the organ trade, is Arun’s mother’s immediate reference to the possibility of kidnapping for organs when Arun came home late, a very real example of just how deeply rooted this story of organ trade is within the rural social imaginary, a story which also is linked with a more detestable, and yet unproven, rumor of child kidnapping for their organs (Schepher-Hughes, 2000). These sorts of rumors, Schepher-Hughes (2000) argues, are vulnerable populations attempt at protecting themselves and fighting back, the “only resources they have—gossip, rumors, urban legends, and resistance to modern laws. In this way, they act and react to the state of emergency that exists for them in this time of economic and democratic readjustments” (210). Of course, this legend is not merely about the “urban”, but rather links the rural to the urban, the trip to Bangalore and my own position as someone from the city (or at the very least not from the village) setting the stage for the affective intensity of the ensuing event.

The fear and the need to protect oneself in areas like Adavisandra are only exacerbated fifteen years after Cohen’s early study, new infrastructural developments resulting in a kind of connectivity that brings Bangalore ever closer, making the need to set a boundary between the rural and the urban only more pressing. As the city encroaches on its periphery, taking over physical land, there is a concomitant de-limiting of the value of the rural body as “waste”, useful only as a body for commodification and consumption by rich, global urbanites. This, in turn, directly affects the way that those within rural areas can see themselves with relationship to the city and urbanites. Indeed, Arun’s mother’s fear is propelled by the belief that someone from a city might possibly be able to consider her son’s value only in relation to his body and organs. This type of affect, of course, is reserved for those most vulnerable, whose need to develop themselves is also spurred on by this affect, in the constant possibility that they might no longer be considered sentient beings if they do not develop.

Needless to say, if I had been a nervous ethnographer before, I was now utterly twitching with nerves when I returned to the village next time, nearly unable to traverse the imaginary boundary between the safety of the school and the rest of the village. When I did, I went directly to Arun’s home first and tried to apologize as best I could, again, for the mistake, which at this point had spread all across the village, an exploit of mine sometimes met with laughter (as above), derision, disapproval, or, sometimes an apology from those who felt that Arun’s mother being distraught was somehow an inappropriate response to what had happened.

In any case, the fact that I returned after my mistake changed my relationship to everyone in the school and the village. While it did not get me ‘inside’, somehow now privy to the goings-on in their culture that had been hidden from me till before, it did make me a more trustworthy member of the community, someone who, at the very least, was not out to harm their children in any way, something which had seemed to be a given in the six months before, but which only became true at the moment when the worst fears about who I was as an unknown figure from someplace else was entangled with the worst fears of the city and voiced, and were then finally disentangled in the moment when I stepped back in the village, no harm done.

I wasn’t someone from the city participating in the child-for-organ global trade, a seemingly low bar, but still high bar enough for the nervous ethnographer.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I moved away from the direct discussion of the NGO and to the Adavisandra school, and in so doing make an implicit critique of trust-funded NGO claims of impact given the myriad of sociocultural influences on students’ lives in a school. I show moments of urban-rural linkage and instances of worlding as I observed them at the school site. Most important towards the discussion of “education-as-development” and digital development is Sulekha madam’s thoughts on technology in relationship to the passage on APJ Abdul Kalam in the students’ English textbook. While her own aspirations to become an engineer were curtailed given her intersecting positions of marginality as a Muslim and as a women, she staunchly advocates for her own children to enter the engineering fields she was not given a chance to join. Nikhil sir, too, sought to become an engineer before he settled on his current career as a teacher. Still, he dreams of travelling abroad and seeing the Olympics once in his life, what I mark as his particular “global-rural imaginary”. These examples begin to destabilize the scholarly conception,
either implicitly or explicitly, that worlding and globality is limited to those within urban centers or, at the very least, is always mediated by the urban.

At the same time, the school itself has particular “worlding practices”, namely in the construction of the new secondary school building and in their Independence Day celebration, the latter of which not only reinforces Indian nationalist sentiment, but also functions as one moment when the teachers can show its global sensibility, instantiated in the various costumes they have the students wear as they celebrate. The third instantiation of worlding occurs in the attempt at bringing in Akshaya Patra for midday meals, reflective of the move towards centralization, as in the example of the school building, but a narrative that also focuses on those within the school community who remain precariously on its peripheries, an example of generative development emerging in the intertwining of their social and occupational positions, as their visibility in the village ultimately serves as a form of social collateral that keeps them cooking despite the fact that their hold on these positions is tenuous.

I ended with a consideration of the rural body as the sight for development, in the students’ remark that they should only have one child and in the fear that arose after my student trip to Bangalore went awry, but also which revealed how those in villages perceive themselves in relation to those in urban contexts, which in turn becomes one fear-based reasoning behind the “need to develop”.

CHAPTER 6: Student Portraits

Frame 32: Digital Auteurship

Since the reflexive turn of the early 1990s, there is a way in which the anthropological imagination is continuously, almost obsessively gazing back upon itself, seeking to understand the ethical and representational possibilities of our current projects by excavating and re-excavating the projects of our anthropological forefathers (and mothers), returning to their fieldsites and their participants in order to work out exactly how they developed their own anthropological insights and propelled forth the kind of imaginings of people and places which we continue to explore within the discipline today.

Recently, I came across two instances of this kind of re-excavation of two South Indian anthropologists: Louis Dumont, who did his fieldwork in Tamil Nadu with the Piramallai kallar caste in the countryside northwest of Madurai, and MN Srinivas, who did his fieldwork, like myself, in a village in South Karnataka albeit approximately sixty kilometers southwest, closer to Mysore than Bangalore. Pandian (2009) writes specifically about the intersection of his own fieldwork with Dumont’s earlier work, undertaking a reflexive post-facto excavation of villagers’ memories of Dumont over sixty years after his fieldwork ended.

For me, the most fascinating aspect of Pandian’s discussion is a single, all too brief paragraph in which he remarks on Dumont’s use of the camera and villagers’ recollection of the camera. He (2009) writes vividly:

Dumont was known for having travelled through the countryside recording such deeds with a ‘hand camera’, and those who remember him today find him most memorable for this reason. ‘I’m there too!’ several people said to me with a laugh, describing their place in his collection of photographs. Recollections of these images suggest that Dumont had not merely recorded cultural tradition as he found it, but also sought to stage its persistence in particular ways. ‘He would put thanthatti in the ears [of women] and take photos’, Amsu Thevar said, for example, describing the heavy earrings that women in the region had once worn to lengthen their earlobes. And it appears too that people here began to turn their own lives towards the frame of his camera. When an old person had died, for example, Amsu Thevar suggested that some would pose themselves excitedly for its lens: ‘He is going to take a photo, he is going to take a photo, stand, man!’ (Pandian, 2009, 126).

That Dumont’s informants, even sixty years later, remember Dumont’s camera only obviates just how central the camera must have been in shaping his relationships, mediating how Dumont could interact with the Piramallai kallar community and what kinds of insights he could discover. And yet, the camera remained hidden from view in Dumont’s entire opus, its impact only discovered by Pandian many years later.
Pandian calls his short text “The Remembering Village”, whose title is a not so subtle reference to Srinivas’ *The Remembered Village* (1976), a book Srinivas wrote entirely from memory after his notes and photographs were all completely lost in a fire while he was working at Oxford. However, unlike the invisibility of the audiovisual method in Dumont’s work, I am surprised to find a transparent reference to Srinivas’ camera and its effects on his fieldwork, a single paragraph in a book of over 300 pages. Srinivas writes:

My camera also contributed to my popularity. I was a poor photographer but I made up for my lack of skill by my enthusiasm and willingness to ‘snap’ everything I saw. A small percentage of my photographs were, however, successful, and I proudly showed them around. Generally, the villagers loved being photographed, and the examination of the prints provoked much laughter and comment. Somebody had spread the myth that the photographs would be shown abroad, and this added to the pleasure of being photographed. In short, the camera became a passport in every place. Men and women digging the bed of an irrigation canal or repairing a road at the height of summer, or transplanting rice seedlings in the wind and rain of July, all enthusiastically posed for me. (The photography also broke the monotony of their work.) The camera enabled me even to cross barriers imposed by my bachelorhood. Some months after I moved into the village, wealthy landowners invited me home to take pictures of their wives, daughters and daughters-in-law. The fact that I did not accept money for taking pictures and that I was taking them all the time added to my reputation for prodigality. Many a villager knew me as the camera man – only they transformed ‘camera’ into ‘chamara’ which in Kannada means the fly-whisk made from the long hair of yak tails… (Srinivas, 1976, 26).

Srinivas’ writing seems out of place, far too reflexive, transparent, and evocative for how we have come to view this past era of anthropology. Perhaps Srinivas benefitted from the destruction of all of his fieldnotes, his memory necessarily generating a more personal narrative than the objectivized method of fieldnote taking that tends to remove the researcher from the interaction.

When I read his words, I cannot help but imagine an anthropological project that takes this one paragraph as its basis and constructs a new set of insights based on these visual products and the kinds of interactions and experiences associated with each visual product. And, in at least one sense, this chapter seeks to do just that: using photographs 1) instrumentally, as one method to learn more about the students with whom I was working and; 2) as a means to explore the affects associated with the image itself, a direct application of Stewart’s discussion of the affectivity of the “still life”. Unlike during Srinivas’ time, however, when he was able to describe interactions with villagers who looked upon his camera with unfettered pleasure, in my own work there was a healthy skepticism – always questions about what I was doing and why, if I would be sharing any of these photographs and to whom – even if combined with curiosity and excitement;
a skepticism that was a byproduct of an increased awareness of the media, the image, and the potential dangers associated with them.

The method I deploy here is not a wholly new one. In fact, concurrent with Srinivas’ ethnographic encounters in Karnataka, Sol Worth was creating his own experimental model for participatory film back in the United States as part of his *Navajo Filmmakers Project*. Worth was interested in the concept of biodocumentary – the idea that the films that amateur filmmakers produce could reveal their makers’ thought processes, an attempt to ‘see through Navajo eyes’, to de-stabilize the anthropological gaze, and to give the possibility of voice to those who were, until then, marginal and silenced within the dominant anthropological paradigm (Worth, 2013). Worth, like Srinivas and Dumont, lived before the reflexive turn, and so his work suffered from the same assumption of a totalizing, bounded culture (a singular Navajo culture) characteristic of much of the scholarly work from that period (Ginsburg, 1991). And yet, Ginsburg, while pointing out this flaw in Worth’s theoretical understanding of how photography and film might be used, also saw the beginnings of a new paradigm emerging in his work, one which foretold an audiovisual method that could reveal a multiplicity of cultural ontologies, previously overdetermined by the particular concepts – for example, caste or kinship relations in the case of India – traditionally associated with the place-based anthropological imaginings of both proximal and distant Others.

The method and images discussed in the rest of this section start with this revitalization of Worth’s work, each photograph not mapped neatly onto a cultural Other, but rather reflecting the subjectivities of my students in Adavisandra. While their photographs were reflective of the regional, cultural, and sociohistorical context, they were also unique to each of my students’ life experience.

At the same time, the method I have utilized is also part of a tradition of social activism, development intervention, and anthropological research called the “photovoice”, an attempt at applying Frierian concepts of critical pedagogy and praxis, in which those from marginalized communities are given cameras and take photographs of their choosing, after which they discuss exactly what the images mean or tell stories that they associate with these images, a community-based action research method that is intended to empower those who have traditionally been excluded from the use of or expression through audiovisual modalities and have therefore been subject to harmful representations (Delgado, 2015). In the past twenty years, as digital cameras have made access far easier, the photovoice has become one of the most widespread applied visual methods for researchers and developmentalists, especially those working, like me, in educational contexts with youth, an important form that “digital development” takes (Shah, 2015;
Tacchi, 2012). The problem with the photovoice method has been twofold: first, the uncritical use of the photovoice has allowed a kind of reinvigoration of the positivistic tendency towards authenticity, in the idea that now, like in Worth’s *Navajo Films*, we are getting the “true story” through a community’s images and words; second, and as importantly, the uncritical use of the photovoice can lead “practitioners to unknowingly support the neoliberal empowerment rhetoric of the day” (Lacson, 2014). For Lacson, this problem of the photovoice results not from the methods employed during fieldwork itself, but from the uncritical understanding of circulation and its effects, in the kinds of non-participatory interactions that arise when viewers, who have particular apriori ways of seeing communities, consume these images without having their “ways of seeing” de-stabilized.

In other words, those using photovoice tend not to reflect upon image aesthetics and questions of form, both which carry with them particular ideological positionings which, when left unaddressed, only serve to reinforce stereotypic notions of marginalized peoples held by those who view these images when they circulate globally.77 Take, for example, the explanation of the photographs Shah gives in her photovoice project conducted with girls from a village school in Gujarat:

The types of images taken by the girls included rural landscapes; farm labor; homes; kitchens, pots, and pans; women engaging in typical work, such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and caring for children; boys playing and girls working; temples; village markets, shops, and bus stands; schools; classrooms; and portraits of individuals.

Shah implicitly and perhaps inadvertently conjures a traditional notion of the “everyday village”, typical tasks in typical form that, and this is key, are already legible to those who view these images around the world because of the circulation of images from development organizations for the past sixty years and, previous to that, the circulation of earlier colonial-era imagery of village life and people.

The image she provides in the article only underscores this argument, a photograph of a village home with the caption, “This photograph shows a typical house in Gharwal village.” Again, the intention here is to generalize – the typical a gloss for the stereotypic, only now it is someone from the community who takes these images, the knowledge of which provides a weight

77 One way of understanding how this occurs is through the German concept of Einfühlung, which “had been used since the second half of the 18th century to explain how spectators perceive aesthetic objects. The idea was that aesthetic perception involves projection of the spectator’s kinaesthetic experience into the object of perception. As in, as I approach a mountain, I experience sensations of rising and expansion, and project these feelings into the mountain” (Bell, 2013). http://savageminds.org/2013/12/29/empathy-a-short-conceptual-history-and-an-anthropological-question/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+savageminds+%28Savage+Minds%3A+Notes+and+Queries+in+Anthropology+%3F+A+Group+Blog%29
of authenticity and legitimacy to Shah’s words and research project. Shah’s images are strikingly similar in form to another set of images in Johnson’s (2011) article describing her photovoice project in a Kenyan orphanage, in which most of the photographs show children at school or posing together in front of buildings or sometimes playing together. She, like Shah, does not analyze the images themselves, instead taking them as mere description, a view into the lives of Kenyan children through the eyes of one of their own, further legitimized by the captions, which are the “voices” of the photographers themselves.

In its idealized form, the photovoice is a method by which, “to unsettle, fragment, or dislodge other’s gazes—if only for moments in time where young people were able to see themselves and be seen by others in alternative ways” (Lutrell, 2010, 234) because “the participants can use their “voice” to engage in critical discussions and help challenge dominant and hegemonic discourses, even if only in certain contexts, and at certain times” (Shah, 2015; Tacchi, 2012). And yet, despite its good intentions, Shah’s quote serves to illuminate the very reason why the photovoice method is so easily co-opted by neoliberal global development regimes like that discussed in Chapter Two’s section on the development gaze: namely that the attention to “voice” obfuscates an inattention to the image itself, a critical visuality without which the very purpose of the method is undermined (Shankar, 2014). Though Tacchi (2012), like Shah, emphasizes the importance of voice in digital participation, she also argues that “a redistribution of material resources for speaking or voice is inadequate unless there is also a shift in the hierarchies of value and attention accorded different actors and communities” (228). And here I am arguing that a lack of attention to the image, even when voice is considered, does little to shift hierarchies of value.

Therefore, what would make these particular photovoice projects even more productive would be a consideration of the artistry and aesthetics inherent to images, in how the images not only describe reality, but also produce it. Brecht writes, “Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it” (Screening Scholarship Media Festival, 2015). This hammer, as digital artist and activist Betty Yu reminded me during the University of Pennsylvania camra’s 2015 Screening Scholarship Media Festival, is always a tool for political and counterhegemonic change. And in attempting to counter hegemonic discourses that circulate within development space, the challenge is to provide images that function as a form of countervisuality, destabilizing the visual expectations of those who view them. What this means, specifically, is to take the images produced by the youth in any of these studies seriously as works of art, created by
auteurs who are not merely capable of documenting reality, but are always consciously constructing realities at the same time. This, in and of itself, is a political move, changing how we relate to these images and those who are taking them i.e. not merely as “native informants” documenting life so that we can get a more authentic glimpse into a reality that is not our own, but as creative, producers capable of making arguments about life through their aesthetic choices. In turn, this sensibility, must re-shape how we, as researchers, participate in these projects, encouraging not only documentation of the (stereo)typical, but also encouraging rampant artistic experimentation, an extension of what I have termed elsewhere as a “critical visual pedagogy” (Shankar, 2014).

Admittedly, it is presumptuous to posit that those who are taking photographs were not already engaged in this type of artistic enterprise, independent of the researcher’s intervention, especially given the thousands of aesthetic choices that they make when deciding who, what, where, when, and how to take any particular photograph. In fact, my students were constantly experimenting – changing settings, zooming in and out, shooting at different angles – in order to create photographs that better reflected their own aesthetic sensibilities and allowed them to construct their homes, school, and lives in creative and atypical ways, which were sometimes illegible to those, like myself, who viewed them without an intimate knowledge of who they were and where they were from.

Part of the attention to the aesthetic is the reintroduction of affect into the consideration of the image, which inadvertently is evacuated in the particular model of photovoice described above. Auteurship necessarily brings back Stewart’s idea of the “still life”, in which the intentional capture of a moment in time punctuates its affective potentiality; an affective potentiality that changes how we experience the image.

In a sense, what the photovoice does when infused with these aesthetic considerations is creates some of the conditions for my students to claim the “right to look”, what Mirzoeff (2011) argues requires “the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim a right and to determine what is right. It is the claim to a subjectivity that has the autonomy to arrange the relations of the visible and the sayable” (1). This right to look is opposed to the regime of visuality which dictates how the world can and should be imagined, categorized, defined, and seen. In this case, that regime of visuality is marked by the development gaze I discussed in Chapter 2 and which can only be de-stabilized by, as Mirzoeff says, a claim to a subjectivity that can re-arrange how the world is made visible. For my students, what this means is the ability to not just depict but to re-arrange the relations between themselves, the camera, that which they
depict, and the viewer based on the ability to imagine their lives in a way that can “reclaim, rediscover, and retheorize the practices and spaces of everyday life in the context of permanent counterinsurgency” (Mirzoeff, 2011, 309). This is the kind of “new everyday” that the digital photovoice might make possible, a radical break from the hegemonic notion of the everyday that upper middle class global digital publics imagine about the marginal and which is reinforced by the images they usually consume, whether or not they are created by an empowered “native”.

The rest of this chapter tells “thin” stories about my students’ lives using their “thin” digital photographs, partial, incomplete slices of ethnographic experience that are based on their affective-aesthetic sensibilities and that are framed within and re-frame the development narrative told thus far.

*Frame 33: Nagraj and Invisibility*

![Photo 6.1 “The stove” by Nagraj](image)
When I finally decided to focus on Adavisandra school, I found that not every student really wanted to be an engineer (although many did). Instead, they expressed a larger set of aspirations: police officer, lawyer, district commissioner (DC), teacher, dancer, fashion designer when they got to know me better, each with their own reason for their aspiration. I started to see how my students’ identities were always “variable, multivocal, and interactive”, changing as they moved within differing sociotemporal contexts (Holland, et al. 2001). Students were not merely consuming ideas from NGO personnel or media outlets and identifying with them uncritically. Rather they re-fashioned them to describe the particularities of their own changing cultural worlds. More than their aspirations, it was their justifications for their occupational choices that I found revealing.

Nagraj, was one of my favorite ninth standard students. He was skinny, smaller than most of his other classmates, with piercing, intelligent eyes. I’d see him almost always wearing the same bright orange shirt whenever he was not wearing his school uniform, a brightness that would make my eyes naturally gravitate back to him no matter where he was standing or what he was doing. He was also incredibly funny, cracking jokes whenever he could. Sometimes he would walk around acting out different stereotypic village characters, my favorite being his version of an old lady with a cane, hunched over and shaking while moving, groaning with each step she took; a character that all of his classmates could not stop requesting or laughing about.

He also had big dreams, only amplified after he saw pictures of London during one of our short sessions on world cities:

Sri: Tell us one of your dreams. Something you want to see or be or do?
Nagraj: I want to travel the world once in my lifetime.
Sri: What do you want to see?
Nagraj: I want to see all the wonders of the world. And I want to take good care of my family.
Sri: Which wonders do you want to see? Name one or two.
Nagraj: London eye and whole of London.
Arjun: Why did you like London so much?
Nagraj: Because one can see everything from the London eye

The London eye would become a running joke between he and I. We would be standing in the field, playing cricket, for example, and he would see another student with a big circular hole in his sock. He’d point and tell me, “Look Arjun sir, the London eye!” before starting to chuckle to himself.

One day Nagraj wanted to take me to the hill (betta) near his home. So, on one weekend, I met Nagraj and we wandered to the top of the hill together with six other children, and looked
around. It was much greener then, not browning as it was two months later in February, when the
earth really started to dry up. There were patches of coconut trees, small plots of *reshmi*
(mulberry leaves for silk), a quarry factory to the right.

I sat down on a large rock, enjoying the breeze and throwing a ball back and forth with a
few of the children. It was hot, so we each held large tree branches over our heads to shade
ourselves from the sun. Nagraj wandered off, calling me to join. At first I didn’t, happy to relax
for a moment in the self-created shade, and distracted by the fights between the other children,
mostly over who would get to use the cameras. There were never enough cameras for all of them
and sharing was always a point of tension.

When I looked over, I saw Nagraj staring to his left, not noticing any of our commotion. I
went over to where he was sitting and asked him what he was looking at. He pointed to a small
group of houses approximately two kilometers away, and said, “See over there. That was my
village.” It was after this simple gesture towards his old home that Nagraj and I finally began to
speak about his past, starting when he asks me if he can take a picture of his old village from the
top of the hill with the camera.

It had taken a long time for Nagraj to open up about his family and home. Early on he
had stayed quiet in class when I spoke, eyeing me suspiciously. When his classmates were eager
to get to know me, asking me questions about my age, parents, and marital status, laughing at my
poor Kannada, Nagraj was mostly just watching. The first time I spoke to Nagraj he told me he
wanted to be a police officer, mimicking what his classmates had responded just before. When I
asked about his family, he would again mimic his classmates, telling me his father and mother
worked in agriculture just as many of his classmates would say. When I eventually learned more
about Nagraj’s life, I would begin to see these early responses as a necessary safety mechanism, a
means of fitting in and keeping his own unique and difficult story from emerging into the
foreground.

Nagraj navigated himself into the background, staying out of the thicket of enthusiasm
that arose as I began to introduce the cameras into the 9th standard classroom. Instead, he would
tell me, very simply, “I’m not interested”. When he did decide to take photographs, less by choice
and more by compulsion, he took hundreds of photographs of objects – a frothing pot, a stove, a
calendar, ceiling fans, a cat, a pomegranate tree, rice, a window, a spider crawling on the pink
wall, a bottle of pond’s moisturizer, portraits of Hindu gods, spools of thread – but never a single
shot of people. Not one. There was a particular danger Nagraj sensed about the image, a visibility
that the camera brought with it that he was not entirely comfortable with, and he was careful,
therefore, not to depict anyone in his family even as he himself became more and more comfortable in front of the camera.

One of the shots that he took was the photograph of the stove you see above. It is a “still life” in the truest sense of the term, the way Nagraj has taken this shot creating an optical illusion that almost makes the photograph feel as if it exists in three dimensions. The blue walls in contrast with the pot on the stove, capturing a moment when a meal was still being made, especially reflected in the dirty bowls just off to the right of the photograph. There is an entire story here, and it starts with the stillness of this photograph, both in what Nagraj has decided to show us and in what he has not shown us and perhaps the dissatisfaction the viewer might feel in not seeing what they expect to see or not knowing what the viewer wishes they could know.

Three months later, Nagraj knew almost as much about my research as I did. When I was interviewing other students, he would sit by and listen, later asking about the parts he didn’t understand. His confidence started to show when he had taken my audio recorder home and interviewed his grandmother. The entire interview was only three minutes long, and asked only basic questions about his grandmother’s family – how many children did she have, what do they want to become. But his schoolmates loved it when we listened in class, especially enjoying Nagraj’s ‘probing’ question to his grandmother. “Aamailai?... Aamailai?...” (“And another? and another?...”)

There is much lost when we cannot hear Nagraj, the tenor of his voice, his grandmother’s voices slow and cracking as she cautiously, frankly, and tepidly answers him, and the shouts from the background attempting to steer the conversation. The sound of each voice and the memory of my students laughing as they hear the recording for the first time produce, for me, a new affective entanglement. Nagraj’s interview bears transcribing in the full if only to understand the specificities of his family, to respect the seriousness with which Nagraj conducted his interview – a first foray into research that would expand as he learned more about the equipment – and to make explicit the research entanglements this audio recording initiated.

Nagraj: Name?
Hajji (Grandmother): Shantamma
Nagraj: Who are your family members?

---

I’m reminded of a conversation during the Flaherty Film Festival, 2014, about the film From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf (2013), which had little to no explanation for the footage we were seeing, instead all the footage being exactly what sailors on a trip between ports decided to shoot during candid moments on their trip. One of the discussants, a filmmaker, told us that he was angry because we did not learn anything about the people or context in which the footage was shot. But the point was precisely to destabilize the expectation (or entitlement) of the audience that they should get context and explanation about what was going on.
H: We are 5 members. Nagraj, Sunita, Ratnamma, Manchappa.
N: What do they all do?
H: They go for coolie work.
N: What have you studied?
H: I have not studied at all.
N: What will you do by letting your children study?
H: If I make our children study, we’ll let them do any kind of work.

*Nagraj’s mother from a distance: say you’ll make them study*
H: We’ll let them study.

*Nagraj’s mother: We’ll let them study and get them into a good job.*

*Nagraj’s grandfather from a distance: Hey you don’t talk!* 
N: Do you own land?
H: No we don’t own any land.
N: What agriculture?
H: No agriculture, just the house.
N: What’s your salary?
H: No salary, I am a coolie near home.
N: Where were you born?
H: I was born in Jakkasandra.
N: Where was your husband born?
H: He was also born here.
N: What about your daughter-in-law?
H: She was born in Hulisiddayandoddi.
N: Your children?
H: My children...

*Nagraj’s mother: Jakkasandra*
H: Jakkasandra itself.
N: In Jakkasandra...

*Nagraj’s grandfather: You don’t say anything!!*
N: If you had studied what work would you have liked?
H: Any kind of work I would do.
N: If your daughter-in-law had studied would you have sent her to work or make her do only the house-chores?
H: She would go for work.
N: For work? What has your husband studied?
H: He hasn’t studied anything as well.
N: If you grandchildren study then what work will you get them into?
H: Whatever work...
N: How many children do you have?
H: I have 3 daughters and 2 sons.
N: Are they all married?
H: Yes they are married.
N: How many children do they all have?
H: 1 of them has 2 children, a son and a daughter.
N: Another?
H: Another had a daughter who died.
N: And another?
H: Another has a son.
N: Another?
H: 1 daughter.
There are a few things that strike me about Nagraj’s interview. First, there is an ongoing negotiation between everyone in his family about what and how they should respond to his questions, not the first time this would happen when my students took the equipment into their homes. In fact, one of the most compelling forms of data emerged in these slight changes and variations, in whispered corrections that one overheard when re-listening to these audio recordings, corrections that also made me feel like a voyeur, suspicious of the ethics of my methodology. But it does make me smile to hear Nagraj’s mother goad on her mother-in-law, saying, “Say you’ll make them study” as her mother-in-law takes a more passive view that if she makes her children study they will do whatever job they want, not yet the foregone conclusion that her daughter-in-law believes it to be, and potentially itself reflecting the generational shifts in perceptions of educational possibility in the village. Nagraj’s grandmother calls her work “cooler work” to signify that she does not own land and works as a day labourer on other people’s land, in this case picking mulberry leaves for a small sum of money and renting the chandrike upon which they can cultivate the cocoons which they will then sell at the market. Second, and possibly most importantly, for all of what we learn in Nagraj’s interview, there is so much that's left unsaid and hidden in the descriptions that are given, what I would term a purposeful thinness almost akin to the flatness of the image. If the photograph’s limit is in the intersection of that which is outside of the frame and the flatness (and stillness) of that which is seen, the audio recording’s limit (beyond the obvious lack of visibility) is partly in its silences, in words that, had they been uttered, might have taken a dialogue in a far different direction.

While Nagraj now lives with his mother and grandparents in Adavisandra, he had previously lived in Navikaldoddi, a village about 4 kilometers from Adavisandra. Before our betta trip, myself and Sripriya went to Nagraj’s house for lunch, and we ask them about their family over lunch, a heaping plate of chittranna (masala rice) with sambar. They speak slowly and carefully, divulging as little as possible. First, his grandmother says they’re from Adavisandra itself. But when told that Nagraj has already told us they are from another Doddi, she corrected herself, saying yes they used to live somewhere else, but after her son’s (Nagraj’s uncle’s) death they moved to Adavisandra. She will only talk to us about the incident for a few more seconds telling us that he went to the market to sell the raagi harvest and did not return. ‘Later,’ she says, ‘we found him lying dead in a well. Someone had killed him and thrown him in a well’. She tells us, when we ask if she meant Nagraj’s father, that no, it was his uncle who has been killed, but
that Nagraj’s father had “died earlier”. We don’t press it any further, the vagueness a telltale sign that they, understandably, are not interested in telling anymore of this story of their past.

After our betta trip Nagraj tells us the whole story during a sit down interview, during which he explains as best he can what happened; events which he can only discuss vaguely given that his father died when he was very young, and his chikkappa died by the time he was five years old.

Sri: What happened to your father?
Nagraj: Father drank poison
Sri: And then?
Nagraj: Someone killed my uncle and threw him in the well
Sri: How did you know someone killed and threw him in the well?
Nagraj: There were wounds here and there (pointing to neck and chest)
Sri: What happened to your father? Why did he take poison?
Nagraj: I don’t know I was just a child
Sri: Did you ask your mother?
Nagraj: She doesn’t tell me even if I ask
Sri: She doesn’t tell you? What does she say?
Nagraj: She says he took poison and died
**********************************************************************
Sri: Tell us the story of your uncle, what had happened.
Nagraj: He was going to work, someone killed him because of jealousy over his well-being.
Sri: Jealousy over that?!
Nagraj: I don’t know what. They killed him because of spite.
Sri: How old were you then?
N: I was very young. 5 years probably.
Sri: Did you see what had happened? What did your family tell you?
N: ‘Killed him because of spite and threw him in the well’
Sri: What was the reason for the spite? Just because he was well-off? Everyone is well-off.
N: They should not live well. They should always suffer. So they killed him.

To take poison, as Nagraj tells us his father took above, is the telltale sign of a farmer’s suicide and one of several such stories I was told by students while travelling from school to school in Karnataka, one of the most ubiquitous and well-discussed social tragedies associated with contemporary development in India. The issue came to prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s after a slew of journalistic undertakings, not the least of which were those of activist-journalist P. Sainath, whose writings from Vidarbha, Maharashtra and Wayanad, Kerala, amongst others, linked suicide to an agrarian crisis in which farmer’s saw the prices for their crops drop precipitously due to market fluctuations and the monopolization of markets by multinational corporations, in both production and consumption. Such explanations emphasize India’s liberalization and the “opening” of the economy to global markets, linking these economic policy shifts to the systematic disenfranchisement of farmers in the major agricultural belts of India. 31
districts in four states (Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala) have been characterized as suicide-prone districts, itself a highly controversial claim given that definitions with which the government used to determine a “real” farmer’s suicide was based on title to land, which left out all (women farmers, sons of farmers, or those who did not themselves own land) but landowning male heads of agricultural households (Nagaraj, 2008, 5-6).

For some, it has been easy to read farmer’s suicides as a “rural” issue because the end sufferers have been farmers in villages. But, the economic reforms that adversely affected those in rural communities must be seen in relation to urbanization, given that the very same reforms overemphasize urban development and concentrate wealth in the financial and technological sectors of urban centers like Bangalore. It is, in other words, another urban-rural linkage.

When I listen to his mother and grandmother talk about their family, and the loss of the two male figures in their household, there is always a stark difference in the telling of the two deaths. When talking about his uncle (his father’s brother), there is an obstinacy, a rebellion against those who committed a crime. Nagraj makes his feelings visible, speaking boldly about how they had been doing well despite his father’s death and deriding the other members of his community for their jealousy. His father’s death, on the other hand, was always spoken around. Nagraj knows he died of pesticide poisoning, yet does not know why it happened. This lack of knowledge leaves Nagraj with some lack of closure. For example, as part of our interview process, I always allowed students to ask me questions about my life as a means to facilitate a more dialogic process, to help my students feel more comfortable with being interviewed, and to get them to start asking their own questions, a kind of implicit pedagogic undertaking that always co-occurred with data collection. One time, during these dialogic sessions Nagraj asks me about my own father, who he knows by then has, like his own father, also committed suicide. He asks me to explain how and why my own father died, possibly seeking answers that I cannot give, especially with the question of why, an existential question that both connects the two of us but will always remain a limit question.

In Nagraj’s telling, violence is normalized along a spectrum – a continuum of violence – some forms being rendered more or less visible. Das and Nandy (1985) posit that violence functions at the interstice of “silence and the breakdown of signification” (177). For Nagraj and his family, his uncle’s death was comprehensible within the logics of community feud, “the means through which the pact of violence may continue to be executed” (Das and Nandy 1985: 179). His father’s suicide, however, was beyond the borders of signification, affecting his life in ways that were not easily explained by his mother.
Yet, Nagraj’s father does not vanish after his death. Rather, his death is a “slow death” still playing out in Nagraj’s changing family relations and material conditions (Berlant, 2007).

For Berlant, “slow death”:

“refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence. The general emphasis of the phrase is on the phenomenon of mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality” (Berlant, 2007: 754).

In Nagraj’s story, his uncle’s murder and the loss of land are continuations of his father’s suicide, affecting where and how his family now lives. Slow death manifests in how capitalist subordination interacts with the specificities of social and cultural positioning.

For example, Nagaraj’s future aspiration is a byproduct of a chain of local-specific logics of violence intensified by agrarian crisis. Now much more comfortable discussing his aspirations with me, Nagraj tells me that he wants to become a lawyer, explaining his reasons as, “in this country, if people commit crimes then they hide the evidence; I want to become a lawyer to unmask those evidences.” When I ask him where he wants to work, he tells me without hesitation that he wants to stay in the village because “people bribe and deny justice to the poor people.” But later he specified that these were not abstract ruminations, but based on his own experience, “It happened in my own family”, he tells us before explaining that those who killed his uncle were never found out. Yet, when I asked him if he knows what he will need to do to become a lawyer, he had almost no idea.

Sri: Is there a lawyer in your family?
N: No
Sri: No one? So do you know what you need to do in order to become a lawyer?
N: No
Sri: Did you ask someone?
N: No.
Sri: Planning to ask?
N: Yes
Sri: Whom?
N: Someone who knows
Sri: Who knows?
N: I don’t know

It’s the distance between his aspiration and his knowledge of how to reach these aspirations that marks Nagraj as someone from a village with little social capital or the networks that would allow him to quickly learn about these occupations from family or friends. Eventually,
he does ask someone, Sripriya and myself, and we tell him the process from beginning to end to become a lawyer.

And yet, to create an all-too tight link between a particular experience and Nagraj’s aspirations would be wrong, aspirations at the age of thirteen are always changing, mapped onto self-positionings in different contexts. Not devoid of meaning, but not full of the totalizing meanings we, as anthropologists, might crave.

Ten months later, asking Nagraj about his interests again, now in tenth standard rather than ninth, he laughs along with two of his friends, and makes up a new set of answers, partly truthful and partly instrumental. He tells me, “I’m not interested in that,” and points over to where the car that has brought me to the village stands. “Now, I’m interested in cars. I’m learning how to drive. Why not let me drive?” He is joking, but its still a signaling that he refuses to be locked into any single identity and that such aspirations are transient, reflecting the “transience of worlds and truths and… the journeys people take through milieus in transit as they pursue needs, desires, and curiosities or simply try to find room to breathe beneath intolerable constraints” (Biehl, 2011, 3).

Part of finding room to breathe is the potential to move beyond one’s own hardship is to think about the struggles of others. Nagraj’s initial aspiration to become a lawyer does this, connecting his life to those around him, and creating the bedrock of the moral values that will set the stage for whatever social interventions he takes up in the future. He asks both of us, first me, then Sripriya about our path to becoming part of social justice endeavors during one of our dialogic sessions, not the first or last time we would get asked a question of this sort over the course of our time in Adavisandra:

N: How did the thought of social service come to your mind?

The fact that Nagraj thinks to ask this question, to make our social service the focus of his curiosity, illustrates quite nicely the development condition we all work in, at once assuming the moral utility of what we are doing and suddenly being faced with the fact that this assumption was not necessarily true. Instead, everyone wants to know exactly how the need to do good comes into our mind; a curiosity about why one needs or wants to do social good that can only be termed one of the primary affects of development, propagated in the ever more complex interrelationships forged in this particular sociohistorical moment.

* * *
Chandrika, one of my eighth standard students, took the picture above. It was one of the rare weeks during which she, or any of the other eighth standard students, got to use the equipment as my ninth standard students were loathe to give up their opportunity to control the equipment.

In fact, Chandrika got hold of a camera as much by circumstance as by any conscious decision on my part. She, along with ten other students, were forced to stay back in Adavisandra because they could not afford to go on a five-day school trip to Tamil Nadu to visit its famous sites – its beaches and Hindu temples – in Chennai and Tiruchirapalli. So, while the majority of the students were immersing themselves in a new (Hinduized) “world”, in South Indian places still different than their own (linguistically and culturally) – the kind of out-of-classroom learnings that were as significant as those learned within the confines of the school building – the
rest of the students were expected to stay home, a “vacation” from school entirely. These were the class distinctions that still shaped the opportunities provided to different students in the school.

It was in this context that I agreed to volunteer to teach these students, having them come to school with me, to learn about topics outside of their curriculum. Manjunath sir, always conscious of the disparity in how students were treated, especially given his sociological training and consciousness, handed me the keys to the primary school building, an ethical dilemma thankfully averted. For me, the keys held an added weight of responsibility, a moment when I was suddenly entrusted for the well-being of the school building in the absence of any of the other members of the school community and which crystallized a different level of trust not only with those within the school, but with the rest of the Adavisandra community, who now saw me taking responsibility for their children (and the school) independently. Each of the five days I taught a different family arranged to make lunch for myself, my research assistant, Sripriya, and my initial chats over these lunches became the basis for my later, deeper relationships with my students’ parents.

I, along with my research assistant, Sripriya, devised a set of lesson plans with the intention of allowing our students to “travel” around the world, just as their fellow students were doing, albeit virtually. In one sense, our lesson plans were an attempt to facilitate the process of value migrations that the school was producing through physicalized travel. And yet, there was, of course, an immense gulf between physical and virtual travel, in what could be learned and how it was learned, in how “experiential” the learning could be, especially in the semiotic gravitas of actual, physical movements between contexts, the very essence of “being there” that still undergirds the ethnographic imagination and much of the anthropological project (Borneman, 2009).

For our part, we put together a series of powerpoint presentations, using images and film footage, to take students around the world – to New York, London, Chennai, Delhi, Switzerland, Shanghai – which the students had themselves chosen as places of interest, equally “global” as far as they were concerned. Students would get a chance to discuss each place, what made it unique and what made it similar to their own home, and their activity was to tell a unique story of Adavisandra similar to how we had fashioned the stories of each of these other contexts. In this sense, there was a nod to “surfacing” in these lessons, to the thin-ness of descriptions that were associated with each of these digitally enabled travel narratives, the flatness of the images and sounds viewed on the computer screen producing its own productive epistemological possibilities (Jackson, 2014). And, as importantly, it was in the students’ responses to the images – in the
kinds of questions they asked, in the associations they made – which reflected this productive flatness, but also the still very real need to “be there” and engage in dialogic processes – “intensive, intimate, reflexive engagement with the quotidian” – that could connect consumption with lived experience. In other words, for someone like myself, oriented towards the pedagogic possibilities of the ethnographic engagement, there was no real substitution of the digital for the face-to-face, but a necessary relationship between the two; perhaps, even, a new type of “thickness” that was produced in the process.

It was within this framework that Chandrika was given the camera for this one week, instructed to take pictures that reflected her own characterization of her village and her place in it. “The Sun” was one of her shots, taken along with photographs of her family, her home, and her neighborhood.

My favorite quote about “The Sun” photograph came one day when I was carrying it out of my house along with Venu, my housemaid Lakshmi’s son, who had become an integral part of my life in Bangalore. We’d sit together, sometimes I tutoring him in Math or Science, sometimes he playing games on my laptop while I worked, sometimes together looking at the photographs that my students were creating in Adavisandra. On this particular day we were taking the twenty-five photographs that my ninth standard students had voted on as their favorite, now blown up to A2 size (97 x 420 mm / 11.7 x 16.5 in), and framed, ready to be shown in Bangalore at Azim Premji University.

For a second Venu stares at the photograph, admiring it before stacking it on top of three others, and tells me in Tamil, nodding towards the photograph, “No one can say that they don’t like this.” It’s a universalizing sentiment, expressed in the negative; harkening to Barthes’ idea that the images “power of authentication exceeds the power of representation” but reminding me somehow of the phrasing used in the Tao-se-Ching, the holiest text of Taoism, in which one could come into harmony with the great Tao through a kind of nonaction, in the act of negation itself. The opening lines of the great text begin: “The name that can be named is not the eternal name.” And it’s this kind of logic that seems to undergird Venu’s statement. That somehow the photograph’s beauty, its character, is in its irreducibility to any one sentiment except in the negation of any negative sentiment and in the kind of affective entanglement that this negation produces.

---

80 The exact translation of this quote into English is still under debate.
81 In other words, the sentiment that can be named is not the photograph’s eternal sentiment.
Of course, Chandrika was not the only one who took a photograph of the sun. Nearly every student took at least a few, if not dozens, of shots of the sun: the sun in the morning, at night, through trees, setting, rising, orange, yellow, red, hidden from view, or peaking above mountain tops. There were so many, in fact, that I had to create a separate “Sun Series” just to accommodate the many shots of the sun that my students created and/or selected to be part of their photo exhibition. It was the sun, then, which was the first object of ethnographic interest for my students, that which structured life in agricultural areas, in the marking of the day, the seasons, and the possibility of growth. But the camera is what re-awakened the sun—“surya”—to better reflect its mythological quality within Hinduism as one of the nine navagrahas or Indian planets in Hindu astrology—as object of curiosity, and it was in the taking of photograph after photograph, in the inexhaustibility of surya as an object of study, in which the audiovisual method began to illustrate something else, about the inexhaustibility of knowledge and, therefore, the orientation towards an ethnography of infinity that the camera facilitated for my students (Minh-ha in Jackson, 2013).

And yet, Chandrika’s photograph somehow stood out, the shot capturing everyone in Adavisandra who saw it, always a dialogue coming soon after. The most profound dialogues started during the students’ photo exhibition in Adavisandra, when parents and teachers had a chance to comment on what they saw. During the dialogue, two teachers, Murali Sir and Prakash Sir, stood staring at surya, consuming it and commenting, wondering exactly who had taken such a gorgeous photograph.

I walked up and listened for a while quietly, overhearing them remark on the beauty of the image and then asked them to guess who had taken the picture. At first, the two teachers guessed boys from the ninth standard: “Naveen? Umesh?” No, I told them, it was a girl who took the pictures. “Pallavi?” Again wrong, and again I whittled down the pool of students, hinting that it was a girl in the eighth standard, making the total number of possible choices eight. Murali sir and Prakash sir stood staring at me for a while, thinking out loud, trying harder now to figure out who exactly could have created the photograph, “Swati? Supriya? Asha?” They trail off, unable to generate any more names and finally giving up completely, prodding me to tell them who. “It was Chandrika,” I tell them, and they stare back, eyes wide with incredulity. “Chandrika?? No. Not her.” Then after a few more seconds of reflection, when the full weight of the implications dawns on them, “Chandrika? Really. Chandrika. Hmm…”

Chandrika is one of the lowest performing students in the eighth standard, she still struggles to read and write Kannada and is one of the few students at risk of not passing out of the
tenth standard. Her in-class performance had already overdetermined how she was perceived by the Adavisandra faculty, so much so that they were unable to generate her name in any situation in which achievement was a primary consideration. She was a “dull student; “dull” being one of the methods of labeling students, a “social fact of the [Indian] school system… constructed in the practical work of educators in their person-to-person and person-to-text interaction” (Mehan, 1996). The label was pervasive across school contexts and educational spaces, and Manoj (my friend from Adhyaapaka), on one occasion began describing some of the students in a peer learning program initiated by Adhyaapaka as “dull,” only to be castigated by Indu, one of the professors at Azim Premji University, who had come on a site visit to see how the program was running.

The “dull” label, within this framework, constitutes the social identity of the student in question, an identity through which any of their future activities and actions can be understood. Any of Chandrika’s struggles would already be examples of her dull-ness, only reinforcing the pregiven label, even if her struggles were based upon the preconfigured classroom markers of success – passing tests, writing, math, and the like – which did not necessarily meet her learning styles or learning needs.

It is in this sense that the image, and the photography project itself, did the work of destabilizing both the category of dull/sharp, but also reconfigured the way in which Chandrika herself was perceived, the photograph’s sentiment – “no one can not like this photograph” – forcing a recognition of ability and possibility. First, the camera and the image dealt with a different set of modalities and learning processes – the visual and kinesthetic – than students experienced in class – listening, writing, memorizing, etc. It meant that, ultimately, students who were successful in the classroom were not necessarily the ones who would be best at using the audiovisual equipment, destabilizing held hierarchies of intelligence. Second, for Chandrika, like the other students, the camera allowed for a form of expression unencumbered by the dictates of formal educational aims, and given this open-ness, students were able to capture whatever they deemed interesting, a form of exploration that promoted a visual-spatial form of intelligence otherwise left unexpressed (Gardner, 2011).

Chandrika, for her part, took every opportunity to use the cameras despite the fact that she was so shy, especially with me – an older brown male – that it was rare for her to speak in groups in class or even in smaller groups of two or three, bullied into silence by other students in her grade. There was more than one occasion on which I saw Chandrika crying, having wanted to
join her classmates in an activity, but told to stay behind, even by her cousin Ranjita, who was related through their maternal grandmother and were in the same 8th standard classroom.

Chandrika had a round face, huge cheeks, and eyes that were always slightly closed, squinting even more when she smiled, one eye shutting more than the other. She has short hair, most times hastily put into two small ponytails. She came to school with her brother, two years her junior, in clothes that were slightly less clean and slightly more disheveled than most of her classmates. It was true that one could tell a lot about a student’s class position based on the color of their school pants and skirts: the whiter they were the more likely that they had multiple uniforms and time to wash them frequently, the more yellow meant that they had only one, possibly two, sets of school uniforms to wear, many times reused from a previous school year.

While Chandrika was shy in my presence, she had developed an especially loving relationship with Sripriya, asking whenever she saw me if Sripriya would be coming and, if she was already present, asking her when she might be coming again. Unlike most of the other children, who made me their central source of curiosity, especially at the beginning of my time in Adavisandra, Chandrika was far more curious about Sripriya (or, perhaps, far more comfortable being curious about Sripriya), asking about her native place, what she wanted to be, and even what Sripriya wanted to teach her (future) children, a line of questioning that took Sripriya herself by surprise. After some hesitation, Sripriya finally settled on the most general of answers: “…what to teach them? …To make them into good citizens… They should help everyone, they should be what they want to be, I will not tell them.”

It was the starting point for our dialogues with Chandrika about her own family and about how she had come to study at Adavisandra school. She tells us that she has been in the village since the 4th grade, a total of four years, and that previously she had studied at a Kannada medium school further down the road. Her father’s family had migrated from Uddarahalli, a village on the Karnataka-Andhra border, and she, like the rest of her family, speaks Telugu as well Kannada. When we ask about her family’s educational past, she tells us that her father had only passed 5th standard, but then stops, changing her story mid-sentence and telling us, instead, that he had passed 10th standard. We verify later that her father had only passed 5th standard, but the dialogue only highlighted what she thought she should say, an illustration of the value that she expected we would place on her father’s highest level of education and an implicit feeling of shame at her family’s “under-development”.

Now, one of her uncles, her father’s younger brother, lives in Bangalore working as a driver, while another uncle, her father’s older brother, continues to take care of the small piece of
land they still own in Uddarahalli. Her family story always reminded me that to understand change in any particular village was not only to see urban-rural migration, but also to be attentive to these village-to-village migrations occurring simultaneously with travels back and forth to the city.

She struggles trying to explain why she cannot read Kannada, despite the fact that she has gone to Kannada medium schools her whole life.

Chandrika: I am writing but I am not able to read.
Sri: Not able to read? Why?
Chandrika: Headache. From 3 days.
Sri: What?
Chandrika: Headache since a week... It’s aching all over.
Sri: Did you consult a doctor?
Chandrika: Yes we did consult
Sri: And what did the doctor say?
Chandrika: We should go to a hospital in Bangalore it seems.
Sri: Didn’t you go? Why?
Chandrika: No money...

Chandrika perceives her physical ailment – an ailment that worsens during the few seconds of dialogue itself, expanding from three to seven days – as the primary reason why she is unable to currently read and which could be solved if her family had the economic freedom to access medical treatments available in Bangalore.

Later, Chandrika again tries to explain her lack of writing ability in Kannada. This time she has another memory:

Sri: Why can’t you write? Didn’t they teach you there [her previous school]?
Chandrika: [long pause] They did. Back then, a ma’am committed suicide by hanging herself
Sri: She hanged herself? In that school? So?
Chandrika: Yes. I feel very sad remembering that. She had an infant daughter with her. I remember her...

I cannot still understand Chandrika’s association here, yet I am haunted by it. Why such a drastic non sequitur?

Whether or not Chandrika intended it, her statement left myself and Sripriya in a moment of communication breakdown, almost play-like in the tragic absurdity of her statement, forcing us to re-consider the kind of causal explanations we were trying to discover between Chandrika’s current lack of reading ability and her previous educational experiences. ‘Why can’t I read?’ she
seemed to ask, ‘Because life itself has no meaning.’ And, therefore, there was no discovery to be had at all. It was a story that almost perfectly corrected Camus’ (1942) version of the Absurd, developed in the *Myth of Sisyphus*. For Camus, the man who committed suicide was the man who recognized life’s absurdity, a kind of tautology given that the only person who could know the thoughts of a man who was about to commit suicide was the suicide victim himself. But in this instance, *it was another person’s suicide that was the tragic proof of life’s absurdity*, more akin to Camus’ own subject position as the man trying to understand why someone would take his or her own life than that of the suicide victim him or herself. Needless to say we never returned to the question of Chandrika’s literacy levels again.

Later, Chandrika tells us about her family, mostly focusing on the death of her father a year earlier, an event she describes in vivid detail. She tells us at first that he died of jaundice, but then elaborates such that it becomes clear that he had died due to liver cirrhosis:

“*My grandfather died... my grandmother also died... my father’s parents both died... even my father died... He died of jaundice... It will be a year now... An ambulance was called. There was too much vomiting. My father said ‘I am leaving you all now. Who shall look after you?’ He was breathing very heavily... (Pointing to the liver) A durmaamsa had formed. [‘Durmaamsa’ could mean a cyst or cancer. Dur-bad, maamsa-flesh]... He was taken to a hospital when he was asleep... The cyst (durmaamsa) had grown. When he died, my mother became unconscious. My grandmother was staring and sitting... My father said he wouldn’t eat until his wife would come... he said his wife should feed him. Then my mother came and fed him and both of them ate. Then she went to phone my uncle [father’s younger brother]. By the time he would come my father fell on my grandmother... and died. Then my mother came and saw. Then my uncle came. My grandmother scolded everyone ‘you all come after he died’... We have land, my uncle buried him there... my father would drink too much alcohol and eat pig-meat... Don’t drink so much... there is no one to look after us if something happens to you. We would cry at nights even when our father was alive. His face had swollen up.”

Near the end of her story Chandrika began to cry, thinking about her father:

“*Father would go to work... first he was a driver... then lifting stones... My father would give me money every day. He would be with me. He would get me snacks to eat. He would get me clothes. All that I miss... I remember everything... my father and his younger brother lived together... they were happy... now this happened... and the house we live is rented... there are women who are of age... why do you keep them in the rented house... gather some money and build a new house they said... There is money in the bank it seems, [my uncle] will take it out and build a house it seems... [My mother] keeps remembering [my father] and crying. My uncle helped a lot during that time. She remembers all that and cries.”

Chandrika’s story ends hopefully, with her uncle’s dream that they will finally buy a house by renting out their home, by taking out the money they have saved in the bank. It is another instantiation of Das’ re-framing of suffering, that with each memory of suffering, there is a new instantiation of life. These instantiations of life are never backwards looking. They cannot,
for example, entail moving back to a native place left behind, especially as neoliberal economics curtail opportunities on any but the highest performing agricultural lands. Chandrika herself tells us that there is no work in Uddarahlali, that even her older uncle continues to struggle to make enough to survive, getting only about 30 rupees per day from their work in the fields. “That is why,” she explains, “we’ll work here and build our house… when we get the loan money.” The difference between a loan and savings is, I know, quite significant, one meaning ownership, the other meaning higher levels of family debt, but I never found out exactly which of the two it was. In some ways I am thankful, still fearing what the answer might be.

On the same week when Chandrika took the surya photograph, she also decided to make a short photo-essay of her career aspiration consisting of three photographs of her posing in her imagined occupation. She wants to be a doctor, she tells us, and begins to brainstorm her script that culminates in the nine sentences below:

I wish to become a doctor. I want to provide treatment to everyone. If poor people get typhoid I should provide injection. I will tell them to keep their surroundings clean to prevent mosquitoes and dengue. If there are mosquitoes then there are dirty dogs there. I will tell them to clean that garbage. Surroundings of the house should be kept clean. I will admit them if they get dengue and treat them. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to talk.

It is the last sentence that always strikes me, this need to thank us in writing for being given the opportunity to talk. I cannot help seeing it as reflective of the unequal power relations that Chandrika must experience, in her relationships with Sripriya, her teachers, her family, and me such that the act of talking is never a foregone conclusion, never assumed as part of daily life, a privilege that might be given, but always at risk of being taken away.

But perhaps this is my own developmentalist bias, a way of oversimplifying the entirety of a human life into that of suffering and structural dispossession. As Nouvet writes, “Agency cannot be found, or lamented as absent, in particular social actors… persons and opportunities, events and weather conditions, food prices, neighbors’ luck, and illnesses. The sensing of these particularities qualifies these as “micro-agencies” (Grosz 2005, 6), and in turn impact/form capacities to act” (Nouvet, 2014, 85). Chandrika’s photo-essay is just such an example of micro-agency, part of a broader “sensing” of the particularities of her life that will then impact her capacity to act in the future.

She explains her desire to become a doctor in more detail later on, remembering that she had seen a Telugu serial by the name of Chinnari Pellikuthuru, which translates to ‘Little Girl’s Marriage’, a show that was originally a Hindi-language show, but has since been dubbed in several other languages including Telegu and Kannada and is the longest running daily drama in
India. The show is completely set in a village and interrogates the practice of child marriage and widowhood in village India. Not surprisingly, in the show the villagers are challenged by an “Other”, a man from the city who comes to the village and disregards the customs and traditions that have been in place there, falling in love with a girl who has recently lost her husband and asking her hand in marriage. Chandrika tells us that during the show, in one of the other child marriages the husband goes on to become a doctor while his wife is not allowed to study. She identifies this plot point as one of the reasons why she wants to become a doctor.

Importantly, Chandrika does not foreclose her own possibility of becoming a doctor because of the gendered roles presented in the serial. Instead, when she sees the serial, she immediately connects it to herself, a text-to-self connection that those within education are always striving to have their students make, telling us that she had suffered from typhoid when she was younger and so she wants to treat typhoid patients by “putting them on glucose and giving them injections on their hands and that she would help poor people get free medical checkups,” all a part of what she imagines are the particularities of a doctor’s daily work. This idea of becoming a doctor, while connected to her own experience, is never left there, but necessarily spirals outwards in Chandrika’s ambition to help others, another illustration of the dual nature of development as always development on both Self and the Other.

The inversion of gendered roles and the imagining of a future of possibility based upon but still very much troping on what she had viewed in her serial are Chandrika’s particular micro-agencies, micro-agencies that may not lead to her becoming a doctor, but will lead her down a different path opened by these small, yet significant, actions and are part of the affects of development.

* * *

Frame 35: Usha returns to the village
My ninth grade student Usha took this image of her sister sitting on the veranda of her home and reading. Its shot effortlessly, a singular moment in time that does so much work towards understanding where she lives, in a home that, like all village homes, are *unique*, subtle differences in layout, in how they are decorated, painted, and inhabited demonstrating the particular aesthetic sensibility of their inhabitants. The colors of the house, freshly and festively painted and the potted plants on the sill are two of these aesthetic features, each plant still green and healthy, meticulously watered by the homes inhabitants. In other words, there is a “poetics” to every one of these homes (Bachelard, 1994), and in this case, the houses construction engenders a very particular experience for Usha and her sister, allowing them to sit on the veranda and read under the lights, which will go out sometime very soon after the photograph is taken, given that the current only stays on from 6pm to 10pm in the evenings in the village.

We are sitting in class, twenty of us, students, teachers, myself, and Sripriya, and I am about to play a clip that Usha has taken during her week with the camera, footage that make me both proud and leaves me with pangs of discomfort. I want to know how the students and teachers will react, and so I get everyone quiet, and we start the clip, shot at the very scene that this photograph was taken, just in front of Usha’s house.
It’s night time, and I can see the colorful front wall of Usha’s house, painted green and yellow, and the beautiful potted plants on the window sill, on the right. The camera points straight down a narrow lane, lit only by the light of neighboring houses, and I know that the lane will lead to a small dried-up pond, followed, if I turn right, by the new secondary school building in the distance. But in this shot, in the darkness that permeates the entire scene, I cannot help but think of it as a lane to nowhere.

The scene starts with a round of introductions, each student standing in line waiting for their turn to speak:

Vijayalakshmi (in English): My name is Vijayalakshmi, 5th standard, GHPS Adavisandra School
Deepika (in English): My name is Deepika, 6th standard, GHPS (starts to giggle) Adavisandra
Sonika: My name is Sonika, 6th standard, GHPS Adavisandra school, my character is a daughter
Ranjita: My name is Ranjita, 6th standard, GHPS Adavisandra school
(Girl jumps up from the ground)
Jyothi (in Kannada): My name is Jyothi, I am in the 6th standard
Vijayalakshmi: I am playing the character of a drunk
Deepika: I am playing the character of the mother
Ranjita: I am playing the part of the daughter
Sonika: I am playing the part of the daughter
Jyothi (laughing): I am going to give help to all of them

Usha holds the camera steady as the girls shout to one another to get in their places, four of them lining up just in front of Usha’s house. Vijayalakshmi starts playing her role, a boisterous version of a drunk man coming home. She stumbles around holding a fake bottle to her lips, singing indistinctly as Usha tries to keep focused on her random, stumbling movements. Vijayalakshmi finally falls down in front of the house, patting the ground with her hand to signal that she wants food to eat. The other girls begin to yell at her for coming home drunk, which Vijayalakshmi responds with louder and longer drunken shouts.

They all suddenly stop for five seconds as they notice a man, another farmer from the village pass, hesitating to play out the scene in front of him.

When they start again, Vijayalakshmi is on the ground, being served food by her wife, still holding the imaginary bottle in her left hand. Her wife, finally, begins yelling, “Bottle! Bottle! Bottle! Ayoooo...” and grabs it out of her hand, finally throwing it to the ground. Angry, Vijayalakshmi gets ups and begins beating her wife and all the daughters, murmuring about how they are good for nothing. The other girls begin to giggle, but then respond with their own blows.

Two boys who live next door interrupt the scene, mockingly feigning as if they are trying to break up the fight.

Almost without warning, Vijayalakshmi is dead. Collapsed on the ground with hands and legs splayed. Everyone else begins to “bury” her, digging and imaginary grave, lifting her into it, and scooping imaginary dirt onto her with imaginary shovels. They cannot stop laughing as they act, even as they pretend to bemoan his untimely death.

But as they cry over their loss, Vijayalakshmi is alive again, a monster ready to terrorize them for their actions. She shrieks and keeps her body stiff, rushing at anyone and everyone who run away in fear, then at the camera. Finally, the others corral the screaming beast.

As she is finally corralled by the four girls and two boys, they end the scene... 1,2,3... “THE END”.

265
The students in class hoot and holler as the story ends, completely and totally taken by the acting and filming of their peers. It is the first time that any of them have thought to use the cameras to put on a makeshift in-camera play and, from that point forward, almost every student would try to do the same, creating shorts of teachers and students, of hijras, of stories from the Mahabharata.

But this film, and the series of films that Usha made, were the first of this type, and still, for me, generate the most emotional impact, partly because they were the first, but also partly because of how well Usha paints a scene that captures some of the major issues and themes that she, and her fellow classmates, face during day-to-day life in the village. Importantly, Usha, her sisters, and her friends, were not prompted to put on any play and were never given any script to follow. In fact, I myself resisted any inclination to suggesting what and how students should use the camera, and so the idea to stage a play, and to decide on this theme for the play, was ultimately Usha’s choice as director. The camera in her staged pieces seems to begin the work of “breaking repression” (Boal, 2013, 129), to use a Boalian phrase, allowing the students who are part of the play to enact a situation that is highly repressive – in this case, a drunken father coming home and beating his family – while also giving them an opportunity to resist this repression, making the violent acts less harmful and more comical and de-stabilizing the unequal power relations they face.

Perhaps the content of the film is less than surprising, given the number of conversations I had about alcohol, alcoholism, and the problem of drinking in the village. Every student who I talked to described it as the issue in the village, and would tell some story of their own experience dealing with drunken violence or someone else who lived close by dealing with it. Take, for example, the discussions we had with Lalitha, who lives in the village, just across the street from Usha, but now goes to PUC College in Kanakapura, a town that is a two-hour bus ride away:

Sri: So you said there is alcohol problem in the village. How do you handle that?
Lalitha: How can anyone handle it, they will not listen to anyone.
Sri: What happens after they drink?

82 Boal (2008) writes, “The technique of breaking repression consists in asking a participant to remember a particular moment when he felt especially repressed, accepted that repression, and began to act in a manner contrary to his own desires. That moment must have a deep personal meaning: I, a proletarian, am oppressed; we proletarians are oppressed; therefore the proletariat is oppressed. It is necessary to pass from the particular to the general, not vice versa, and to deal with something that has happened to someone in particular, but which at the same time is typical of what happens to others” (129). While my students are not directly following the Baolian technique, they are using the camera to describe deeply personal, yet typical hardships felt by them and those around them and depicting a scene in which they are able to act against this oppression, in this case domestic abuse, literally killing the father who is harming them. At the same time, the father’s return from the dead is also part of acrual experience, as Usha has understood her uncle’s death as a byproduct of just this kind of ghostly figure who returns from death.
Lalitha: When they are drunk they will not be aware of what they are talking. They talk whatever and sleep wherever.
Sri: How many people in the village have this problem?
Lalitha: Every house.
Sri: Every house? Is there no one who doesn’t drink?
Lalitha: No. Someone or the other drinks in every house. Except 1 or 2 families.
Sri: How do you manage at your home?
Lalitha: I keep telling my father. He has reduced lately.
Sri: Reduced means? He doesn’t come totally drunk?
Lalitha: Yes.
Sri: what are the problems caused by alcoholism? What I have noticed in a few houses there is that either of the parents is absent.
Lalitha: Yes they are divided.
Sri: How many families have divided like that?
Lalitha: Every family is divided because of alcohol.
Sri: Every family??
Lalitha: Yes
Lalitha: They create a ruckus at home. The sisters-in-law get upset and fight among each other.
Sri: So they think that living apart is better than living like that. This has happened in my aunt’s home. The one in front of our house. Shalini?
Sri: Yeah?
Lalitha: Her house. Her father drinks a lot.
Sri: But her mother has not left right?
Lalitha: Her mother had left but she came back.
Sri: Oh! How many families like this?
Lalitha: This happened in Ranjitha’s house.
Sri: Also, Swati’s mother left her husband because of drinks right?
Lalitha: Yes.
Sri: And? Are there any other reasons besides alcohol?
Lalitha: That’s the major reason.
Sri: No other reason?
Lalitha: No other reason.
Sri: I mean, they have good jobs?
Lalitha: Even if they don’t have jobs, they are farmers and they can have money...if they grow mulberry... they get 400-500rs per kg.
Sri: But they waste it all on alcohol?
Lalitha: Yes they ruin their lives because of alcohol.
Sri: It can’t be changed?
Lalitha: No.
Lalitha: To change this condition all the liquor shops were closed down but they started selling alcohol in their homes by hiding it from everyone.
Sri: How can this be changed? What should we tell people?
Lalitha: They won’t understand no matter what. What can we do?
Sri: There should be a way to change this right?
Lalitha: I have no idea what to do
Sri: So the families that are facing these problems, they have children right? Do you think they’ll change or repeat the same?
Lalitha: They will change and not become like them [their fathers]
Sri: Why?
Lalitha: Some children follow their parents but because of education some of them will be different and they will understand not to do this. They try to tell their parents but they won’t understand. I have a friend called Meenakshi, even her mother drinks. She faced a lot of problems to come to school.

Sri: What if she starts drinking too?

Lalitha: No she doesn’t. She told her mother that her reputation is at stake because of her [the mother]. But neither her mother nor her father stopped drinking. Even now they drink.

Sri: That might create a lot of problems at her house right? Is there beating and all?

Lalitha: A lot of beating.

Lalitha’s discussion of drinking in the village shifts as she talks. When she starts, she is adamant that nothing can or will change, that they have tried to eliminate the amount of drinking in the household in the village, but have not been able to. I take note of her reference to closing down the liquor shops in the village, especially because I had always been puzzled by the fact that drinking was such a problem and that the students had told me that there were nine places to get drinks in the village, even though previously I had never seen one indicator of alcohol in any of the small shops in the village. By the end of her story, Lalitha has changed her tone, now more hopeful that there could be a future in which the children who have grown up witnessing their parents’ problems will bring change, primarily by getting an education. This particular story is one of the ideals associated with education-as-development, a hope that if children go to school, study, learn material, and have a different set of experiences, that what they want and how they act will naturally change, a form of self-development that will benefit the entire village and eliminate one of its ills.

The issue of drinking in Usha’s play is linked to the occult, in the man’s return from the dead after being killed, another part of the play that is also a reflection of Usha’s life. When I talk to Usha about it she confesses that there she is always worried about an “evil ghost wind” that had killed her family members:

Usha: I don’t know what happened. He [her uncle] went to the fields; he had just come back from Tirupati, and while going to the field next day, he got stuck in the wind and died

Sri: He met with an accident?

Usha: Not accident. Wind...devil...

Sri: Like a storm?

Usha: No, the devil.

Chandan (from the background): When someone dies, they come back as ‘ghost wind’ and kill others.

Usha: Devil... dead people come back as ghosts.

Sri: So who had come back as ghost to kill your uncle?

Usha: No one knows... it happened when he went to the fields.

Sri: Did someone see that happening?

Usha: No one saw... my father had slept on coming home... first they went to a hospital. He called for my aunt to get the medicines. After he took the medicines, my aunt went for work (removing
the cocoons from the chandrike). My uncle had slept. He felt like someone strangled him that
time. Then my grandmother came and called up the ambulance, they took him to Kempegowda
hospital in Bangalore. But he died even before they reached the hospital. So our family moved
here after my uncle died. And they brought him back him back in the ambulance.

This tale of strange happenings had spread across the village, as much a part of everyday life as
going to school. For example, Lalitha re-tells the story of the “ghost wind” as well:

Sri: Are there any other superstitions in the village similar to the one you told me about last
time? Like the ‘evil (ghost) wind’ killing a person?
Lalitha: There is a lot of belief in ghosts!
Sri: Have you ever seen anything like that happening?
Lalitha: I haven’t seen but I heard people saying that a spirit (ghost) had entered someone and
made them do (weird) things.
Sri: Have any of your family members experienced anything like that?
L: No one in my family has experienced that
Sri: No one? Ok. Who had experienced that in your surroundings?
L: There is a house near my house...
Sri: Usha was talking about her uncle...
L: Yes her uncle died of that they say. His father-in-law had passed away and become a ghost it
seems. And then... there should be a ‘peace offering to the God in front of the fire’ (shanti homa)
it seems. They had not done it. That’s why it would happen whenever he went to the field. Hence
they wouldn’t send him to the field. Whenever he would go he would be all disconcerted
because he would feel strangled. There was no one at his home that day and he went to the field.
To trade the trees...
Sri: To do what?
L: Trade trees... to cut them down. He came and within half an hour he died.
Sri: Just like that?
L: He fainted.
Sri: It wasn’t a heart attack?
L: No it was not a heart attack. They took him to the hospital but he died on the way.
Sri: Oh. What did the doctors say?
L: The doctors...
Sri: Did they reach the hospital or not?
L: No, they came back.
Sri: If they had gone they would know what actually happened right?
L: He would experience this wind thing earlier also.

Lalitha’s re-telling is more specific and she positions the ghost within a Hindu frame, claiming
that the reason why the ghost killed Usha’s uncle was because he had not properly conducted the
shanti homa, the last rites of his father-in-law, who, in turn, came back to haunt him.

I’ve struggled to understand the relationship between these occult happenings and the
issue of drinking that together emerged in Usha’s film. Over time, I’ve come to think of these two
as ever-connected by the inherent lack of control that those who are at the receiving end of these
occurrences must feel, alcohol as much a “ghost” that still haunted the lives of everyone in
Adavisandra as these stories of the “wind ghost”. The unexplained and the uncontrolled are
always ripe for mystical and mythical meaning making and, for Usha and many in the village, the experience of alcoholism and domestic abuse fall directly in that category, beyond the boundary of rationality, continually occurring whether or not one knows it to be wrong or can show how deleterious it is for everyone involved.

Usha’s eagerness to use the cameras and make films was always understated. She would quietly walk up to me, no complaining or cajoling, and merely smile expectantly, a tactic that was always a welcome relief from the normal begging, pleading, indignant protests from the other students. She always exuded a thoughtful confidence, both in class and out, never the first to answer questions or take on classroom tasks, instead preferring to silently complete her assignments, listening to instructions, following them perfectly, and doing exactly what was expected of her. For some, she would be considered the ideal student, never causing any disciplinary issues and always reliable, a student who was determined to do well and studious enough to make that happen.

Part of what made Usha so different from her classmates was that she had only lived in Adavisandra for two years, having moved back to the village from Bangalore after her uncle passed away because of the “ghost incident”. Her parents both still live and work out of Bangalore, her father as a lorry driver and her mother serves as a supervisor for a window wiping company, but Usha and her younger sister stay with her grandmother and her aunt, helping them around the house.

It was her return migration from the city back to the village that gave shape to her own aspirations and she was constantly making distinctions between the village and the city. Partly, this played out in embodied ways, in, for example, her far better ability to read, write, and comprehend English than her peers. She was proud of this ability and would make sure to use as much of her English as possible when talking to me or while in class. Several of her short films showed her reading pages from her English textbook, panning down the page as she read the words out loud. I don’t want to over-sell Usha’s English ability, she was still far more comfortable speaking in Kannada and could not be considered anywhere close to fluent, but what did differentiate her was her confidence.

Her urban-rural position also took shape in another one of her short films, this one taking place while three of her younger sisters sit on the bed in her family’s home:

The camera is on as they start to discuss what it is they want to play, and eventually Chandrika decides, “You two are both Kannadiga, and I only speak in English.” The three quickly agree and they start to play their parts, beginning with the English speaker being “welcomed” to the village home. They start with “Welcome-addi Chandrikaaaa” stretching the word and
inflecting it with a village accent, while sitting cross legged and moving her arms up and down. In response, the English speaker says, “WHAT?” loudly, to which the other two start to make fun of her. They start to correct her and explain that in Kannada, “What andhra Yennu”, and after the English speaker pronounces it incorrectly, they shout in her face, “Yennu!!”.

The scene slowly degenerates into a fight between the three, the two Kannadiga villagers shouting that she is a “PaTTe hooDagi” (A town/city girl), which then become a physical (play) fight with each girl pushing the other and shouting insults back and forth, “Halli guggu” / “PaTTe guggu” / “Halli guggu” / “PaTTe guggu”. Eventually this play fight morphs into a kind of song and dance sequence, each of the three girls singing a different song while they keep shouting intermittently, “Halli guggu” or “PaTTe guggu”.

The term “guggu” literally translates to “idiot”, while “halli” means village, and “paTTa” can be glossed as town or city. So, the girls insult each other as, literally, “village idiot” and “town/city idiot” as they inflect their voices with what they hear as stereotypic accents for those from the village and from the city, but which also correspond with bodily comportment and dress. The phrase “halli guggu” is ubiquitous in city centers, and you can find references to the word on a number of Kannada slang sites, which, for example, use it in the sentence, “Look at those Halli Guggus trying to enter the Bangalore Club. They will never get in dressed like that!” It is not surprising that dress is what is marked in this reference, given that it is the first semiotic evidence of where one might hail from. The phrase “PaTTe guggu” does a similar work, highlighting a similar perception that those who come from towns and cities are idiots given that they neither speak the language nor can carry themselves as proper Kannadigas, which in the childrens’ play is equated with the village.

In the context of Newark’s racially diverse youth population, Ramos Zayas (2012) writes about the importance of “cultural polyglots, able to master both dominant and alternative forms of cultural capital, and at displaying emotions with a pointed awareness of contextuality” (295). In this instance Usha is one of these cultural polyglots, perceiving herself (and her siblings) as able to navigate both rural and urban contexts effectively. Usha and her siblings’ positions as interlopers between the village and the city allow them to make this critique of both the village and the city in her film, in their depictions of the contextually inappropriate ways of acting when the two groups meet. This critique is not limited to those in the village, as is often times the case, but is actually a critique of the divide itself, an adversarial situation which need not be the case at all if one had the ability to speak and act appropriately in these multiple contexts.

When I ask Usha about her aspirations, she is extremely clear about her future:

Usha: I want to become an engineer.
Sri: Why?
Usha: I will help poor people by becoming an engineer
Sri: How?
Usha: I will have money. I will use my salary to help poor people. And also give money to my home if there is any problem.

Usha’s statement is a classical form that digital development has taken in villages like Adavisandra. On the one hand, her aspiration to become an engineer is part of the push towards technological education in the areas around Bangalore, as reflected in Kalam’s statements mentioned earlier. At the same time, Usha’s interest in engineering is linked to “helping the poor”, a link that, on its surface does not seem logical except when contextualized within the constellation of curricular and NGO based value migrations that have instilled a sense of social justice that intersects with her experiences in the village. Her social agenda is purely philanthropic, the ability to make money, in turn, allowing her to help her own family and help the poor. In this analogy, the moment when she will be able to develop Others is at the moment when she has money, an idealized notion of capitalism with a human face.

* * *

Frame 36: Naveen and a 30% camera interest

Photo 6.4: “Shadow Selfie” by Naveen
I get a call on my U.S. cell phone one day in late May 2015, about five months after my last trip to Adavisandra. It’s a “91” number, India’s international phone code, and so I know that the call must be from one of two sources: my relatives in Delhi or my students in Adavisandra. I pick up and get ten seconds of muffled static before the call drops. One minute later I get a second call with static, before on a third attempt I can hear a voice asking for “Arjun Sir”. I recognize Naveen and tell him I’ll call him back in one second, after which I pull out my computer, open up Skype, and use its online mobile feature to call him back.

An international phone call from Karnataka to the USA costs approximately 14 rupees/minute on the kind of pre-paid phone plans most common amongst those living in villages. As with most mobile cultures, the pre-paid/post-paid divide is almost completely class-based, as those who do not have access to large amounts of liquid capital tend to “top-up” their phones in 50 or 100 rupee increments, almost all of which would be consumed during just one of these international calls. The fact that Naveen had called at all meant there was something important he wanted to tell me. Admittedly, I was a bit discombobulated when I heard his voice, as it was the first time he had called since I had left Adavisandra; the day-to-day tasks associated with being back in Philadelphia eroding the affective entanglements I had forged over the past two years.

We speak generally for a few minutes before he tells me the reason for his call: “Sir, I have passed my SSLC exams and I am going to PUC College in Bangalore to study Engineering.” I notice some subtle changes in Naveen’s tone, cadence, and responses. He is trying to use as much of his English as possible, something which he had been loathe to do during my time with him in the village, preferring to communicate with me in Kannada rather than English. Now, however, he is in a different position, a student who will be entering a PUC College that is completely taught in English, and I sense that he is both nervous about this and determined to prepare himself for the task. I ask him directly how he will manage in English and he responds matter-of-factly, “I will learn…” I express my encouragement and congratulate him about his successful completion of 10th standard, but I am also secretly worried. Naveen finds himself in the same position as almost all other students who go to Kannada medium schools for their K-10 education, taking English as a second language, but never becoming more than nominally fluent in it. Once I hang up the phone, telling him to call again if he needs any help, I sit at my desk and wonder aloud how he’ll learn the engineering content, difficult in its own right, in a language that he is not at all fluent in.
Naveen had been one of the most ingenious photographers in my ninth standard class, adapting, experimenting, creating, and manipulating the camera whenever and however possible. He was the first to truly immerse himself in the process of photography and filming, and over the course of the six months he would sometimes, to my chagrin, take the cameras from his classmates to get a few more days to shoot whatever he felt like. Indeed, it was a challenge to keep him away from the cameras, especially as he began to differentiate himself from his classmates in his knowledge of each camera’s functionality and in his rapidly developing aesthetic sensibility. There were so many photographs I could have chosen to frame this particular section about Naveen, shots of Naveen balancing on his bicycle while taking a picture of his handlebars, shots of his family’s reshmi fields focused on the barbed wire fence that surrounded it rather than the fields themselves, shots of coconut trees from angles that highlight their awe-inspiring length, and on and on. Naveen had a special flair for lighting, instinctively understanding how to position himself in relation to the sun to create shots of varying effects, sometimes choosing to shoot a scene with the sun in the foreground to wash-out the entire image, producing its own hyperreal effect without the need for any of the image-effects generally reserved for post-production.

I chose the photograph above partly because it was chosen by the class for our student photo exhibit, but also because of its unique-ness as a self-portrait, one in a series of “shadow selfies” that Naveen took during one particular week of experimentation. Unlike the traditional discussion of the selfie, focused on the mobile phone and on direct shots of one’s face, shots which my students in Adavisandra also would take from time to time on their cellphones, Naveen’s version here does something different, drawing from and responding to the selfie culture which he participates in (there are some hundred shots of Naveen in front of the camera as well) by experimenting with the form that the selfie takes and, in turn, constructing a very different image of himself. Indeed, part of the appeal of the selfie is its explicit counter to the idea of the photograph as descriptive, instead drawing from a history of self-portraiture that has “always allowed us to craft an argument about who we are, convincing not only others, but also ourselves” (Cep, 2013). Shipley (2015) puts a finer point on the import of the selfie, contending that

“rather than a singular form of technologically driven self-portraiture, [it] is a multimedia genre of autobiography or memoir that makes the image maker into the protagonist of stories of his or her own composition. Selfiness is an emotional and semiotic field that emerges through the potential ever-presentation of the selfie. This ubiquity affects how people around the world react to cameras,
reshape the protocols and contexts for image taking, and, by extension, reimagine themselves as part of dispersed urban and transnational publics” (Shipley, 2015, 404).

Shipley’s final statement i.e. that the selfie is a means to reimagine oneself “as part of dispersed urban and transnational publics” falls into a broader blindspot in digital discussions regarding rural praxis which images, like the ones I have included here are a part. In this instance, Naveen’s shadow selfie constructs his artist-self, a means by which to enhance his own image, and perhaps, emphasize his artistic ability. By the end of our participatory photography project, almost every student would talk about Naveen’s particular skills with the camera, both admiringly and somewhat jealously, sometimes feeling his prowess was less due to any natural talent and more because he would aggressively take ownership of the cameras whenever possible.

But as importantly, Naveen constructs a relationship between his home and himself in this shot that is an inherent challenge to the dominant development gaze that would tend, as discussed earlier, towards a stereotypic representation of him and his home. Naveen’s photograph completely overturns this particular notion of the typical, representing his own “typical” home in a completely atypical way that is far more about his own affective relation to his home than it is about the viewer’s ability to get an unmediated view into his life, home, or community. It is the illegibility of the image itself that marks it with artistic and political significance. In a sense, then, this is Naveen’s implicit message to me, his classmates, and the global audience that he knows will eventually see this photograph: it is not our inherent right to see his world as we want to see it.

Yet, that is not to say that we do not get any information from the image. In fact, Naveen’s gaze does provide information about his home, just not necessarily the information that is expected. Practically, we get an intense view of one wall of his home, as textured and layered as if we were to see the entire house. We get, for example, the colors that characterize his home, we see the smudges and smears of paint all over the walls, we know that there is a window just behind Naveen, with parallel bars running across it. All of these are characteristic of rural homes, yet are inverted in Naveen’s depiction, producing an affect that is quite different from those produced by the normative depiction of “the rural” or a village house. Indeed, I, along with the other students in the class, were drawn to this photograph because of its aesthetic, which, in my own interpretation, carries with it a Rothko-esque quality, especially in it’s conjuring of expansiveness, a “window into the infinite” in the jagged, blurring of colors that frame Naveen himself. We are seeing the shadow of Naveen, yes, but we are also seeing far more because of his move towards abstraction, a fantastic example of a productive “thin-ness”.

275
Naveen and I became forever bonded because of this love of these cameras. It became my entrance into his life and his ideas, and the springboard for all of our interactions thereafter. It was Naveen who took it upon himself to teach me about his village, planning trips so that I could explore the agricultural land around the school, wandering together from home to farmland and up into the hills, and gathering more of his friends in the process. It was Naveen who taught me how to play kabbadi, one of the most popular and easiest sports to play in the village, given that there was no need for any equipment beyond space and people and amounted to a very sophisticated version of tag.

Playful might be the best way to describe Naveen both inside and outside of class, a playfulness that always danced in his eyes and came out in his goofy, slightly crooked grin, the feeling only exacerbated when juxtaposed with his larger than average ears. In class, Naveen did his work and was not overly talkative or disruptive, though he did have a tendency to get into minor scuffles with his classmates, especially Suresh, and they’d end up in a long series of insults that would end only when one of the two were completely exhausted. Naveen was also always at the cusp of distraction during lessons, the formal lecture style in which he was expected to sit, listen, and write not conducive to his particular kind of kinesthetic, tactile learning. He was always better when there was time for him to ask questions or to at least respond to questions, answers which he would excitedly blurt out without thinking, sometimes to his teachers’ amusement and sometimes to their chagrin.

This tendency towards the kinesthetic was also why he would sneak away from class, reach into my backpack, and pull out my computer, furtively clicking through new photographs or movies that were on my desktop. None of the students were especially adept with computer technologies, given that not a single family owned a personal computer, though there was one laptop at the school for the teachers to use. Yet, they were all eager to learn, having been inculcated with a desire for technology, partially due to their proximity to Bangalore and partially because of the technology-based drive towards national development which they were accustomed to reading about in their text books. In either case, Naveen was again the most adept with the laptop, having the confidence to explore on my computer before most of my other students and, much to my consternation, feeling more than comfortable taking and using my computer without my permission at any time.

It was this mix of playfulness, curiosity, and lack of discipline that left his parents bemused. On one Saturday afternoon in late July 2013, I go over to Naveen’s home to meet his family, the first of many trips to his home, in which his father, mother, sister, and baby brother
lived together. His grandmother, uncle and aunt, and cousins also live in houses just next door to his own, an example of the oft-discussed joint family structure in Indian villages. The entire family has lived in Adavisandra for nearly a full century, his grandmother, now widowed, having moved to the village when she was married some sixty years prior. Naveen’s family is considered one of the more well to do in Adavisandra, mainly because they own ten acres of silk producing land, a fact that allows them to have a year-round income.

We sit together, Naveen, his father, his mother, who is also holding their two-year old baby boy, Sripriya, and myself, talking over a cup of tea and some snacks. It's a large room in which we’re sitting, one corner consisting of a TV, three chairs, and a cot, with a small space separating this section from the majority of the room, almost completely filled with two beds, scattered with mulberry leaves, happily being consumed by hundreds of silkworms that will, within 30 days, spin themselves into cocoons. Naveen’s father wants to know exactly why we have come, eager to help us but wanting our discussions to have a goal. “You must come with a purpose. Something specific you want to know and learn,” he chides us as we walk in on this first day, an expectation of intentionality that takes me aback, but was also unsurprising. Who, after all, had time to sit and chat randomly with two strangers, even if these strangers were now part of Naveen’s school community.

Naveen’s father is a handsome man, a strong jawline and a thick beard with passionate eyes that resemble Naveen’s. He can barely walk, and he uses crutches to move from the front of the house, which he has made into a small shop, to the main sitting room, less than three meters away, but still a struggle. It takes him a long time to move, and he sits down very gingerly, his face scrunching as he lets his bottom hit the seat and finally relieving the pressure on his foot. I ask him how he hurt his foot, and he shakes his head with disgust while he explains that he hurt his foot in a motorcycle accident, driving back from Bangalore to Adavisandra, and that despite over a years worth of trips to the hospital, that his foot still hurts and no one can figure out exactly what the problem is. His injury has made it impossible for him to work on his family’s land anymore and was the major impetus for the opening of his shop, a means to generate income without having to move as much and because his other occupational opportunities are limited given that he has only completed 10th standard.

Naveen’s father doesn’t talk much more about the injury with me, preferring to explain the process of sericulture production, from the moment when they grow the mulberry leaves to when they finally sell the cocoons in the market, an expertise that he has cultivated over his entire life, but which he can no longer use, debilitated as he is by his foot injury. It’s perhaps why he
takes a special interest in our questions, replying with exactness as to the number of worms in each egg, the price he will get for one kilo of cocoons, and the time it takes for the silkworms to grow while Naveen grabs some silkworms so that we can hold them and feel their squishy texture against our skin. Naveen’s sister, Sahana, on the other hand, is more eager to share the family’s recent story, admitting that, yes, times had been more difficult since her father’s injury, hospital bills eating up the little money that they had saved.

The story of Naveen’s family only highlights, again, the precarity of life in the village, what Stewart writes can “take the form of a sea change, a darkening atmosphere, a hard fall, or the barely perceptible sense of a reprieve. Attachments, or ways of living, can be precious without melodrama. Ordinary things that matter can shimmer precariously” (Stewart, 2012, 519). In this case, precarity takes on all these forms simultaneously, a quite literal “hard fall” also carrying with it a darkening atmosphere of life and the metaphorical form of a sea change. And yet, in order to mitigate the tendency towards abstraction, an implicit critique of Stewart’s version of affective-laden precarity, we must view this family’s precarity in relation to the materiality of developmental change (Berlant, 2011). Naveen’s father hurt himself while driving down a road that had been constructed in just the past twenty years, an infrastructural change that purportedly facilitates movement between Bangalore and village peripheries, but has, in his case, literally immobilized him and has left his family on the precipice of what Muehlebach (2013) describes hyperbolically as the “nightmarish dispossession and injury that our age entails” (298). It’s an injury that has placed Naveen’s family’s traditional occupation in jeopardy, a situation that both produces an attachment to this slowly eroding way of life and spurs on change.

Most importantly, Naveen’s father’s foot injury has only made it absolutely clear to him that, regardless of his attachment to sericulture, such a life is no longer tenable. He answers frankly when we ask about his hopes for Naveen:

Lekha: Would you wish Naveen to continue this occupation?
Naveen’s father: No I think it should end with our generation... let him study well and get another job.
Lekha: What would you want him to become?
Naveen’s father: Can’t say anything now...
Students: His fate!
Lekha: He takes good photos and videos...
Naveen’s father: Yes he is good at mechanical stuff like that...

Drawing from Berlant and Kearns, Aitken (2015) writes, “Although precarity throws us into, exposes us to, deep webs of relation with each other, it also orbits around divides of inequality. This implies a nation of relational difference in interdependency with others. If we say we are all precarious, then the precariousness that is shared with others is always something that separates us from others” (204).
There is no doubt in Naveen’s father’s answer: whatever else happens, sericulture should end with his generation, literally any other occupation will seemingly do. I get an even stronger and emphatic reaction from Suresh’s grandfather about the subject of agriculture. He tells me, “We have all died for agriculture. Let him do something else.” This evocation of death-by-occupation, the literal erosion of the body, puts a finer point on the affective intensity with which those in villages like Adavisandra feel the difficulty of agricultural life. In turn, the self-aware desire to extinguish a traditional occupation because of its precarity within the current economic and social conditions in Karnataka state is itself one of the affects of development.

At the same time, his father does see Naveen’s particular talent for “mechanical stuff”, which he notes with a hopefulness for the future, but which also makes Naveen’s academic performance even more important, the entirety of the future resting on his ability to perform well. It’s why Naveen’s father immediately turns to Naveen after this dialogue and begins admonishing him, criticizing him for taking his studies less seriously than he should, especially given that Naveen should know better, having witnessed just how precarious the alternative could be. “He sees me,” he explains, “I did not complete school. Now it is like this. He should do more.”

To be clear, this does not mean that all of the farmers in Adavisandra want their children to give up farming, far from it. Lalitha, a girl who is now attending college from Adavisandra, says nearly the opposite,

L: Agriculture is progressing.
Sri: Agriculture is progressing? Are more people doing agriculture?
L: Yes but its more of silk now than raagi.
Sri: Silk is being grown a lot?
L: Yes
Sri: Why do you think that agriculture is now more of silk and less of raagi?
L: There is a lot of money in silk now. That will help them progress. A lot of people now have half field of mulberry and half of raagi. If they have less land then it’s completely mulberry.

And her words are, by far, the more “typical” position, one currently being promoted by the Karnataka state government (Siddappaji, et al. 2014), in which sericulture is seen as a particularly lucrative agricultural industry, a means to progress because it provides yearlong yields and is well-integrated into agricultural markets. What is important, however, is the tension between these two positions, and the precarity inherent to agricultural life, even if, at its best, one can still make a successful living.

Naveen himself, imbibing his father’s desire for occupational change, has no desire to end up working as a silk farmer in his village. And because of my own eagerness to see Naveen
continue to grow as a photographer, I ask him on several occasions whether he would like some help getting in touch with filmmakers or photographers from Bangalore who could mentor him further. There is undoubtedly some presumptuousness in my offer, perhaps an implicit assumption that I have opened Naveen’s eyes to a world that he did not know about before and that might lead him down a path that he never knew he wanted until now. And, thankfully, Naveen let’s me know, explaining, “I am interested in the camera 30%, but I have a 100% interest in becoming a police officer.” It’s a challenge to the significance of my presence in the village and my intervention, that no matter how nervous I might have been about intruding, affecting, influencing, and imposing, that I should never have been so egoistic as to think my impact was overly significant for students who had an infinite number of other influences, ideas, and thoughts. More broadly, it's a challenge to the logic of empowerment inherent to development intervention, in the assumption of a need for outside help to facilitate change, a learning that I cannot soon forget.

Of course, had I ended my conversations with Naveen then, in April 2014, there would have been a “freezing” of time, suspending Naveen’s story at a moment when it was still pure potential, undetermined but for the possibility of a future aspiration. It was a moment that, in time, would be reappraised towards action, as he moved through tenth standard and dealt with the pragmatics of choosing a college to attend. The aspiration to become a police officer quickly superseded by the reality of Bangalore’s technological future which, I hoped, would fit Naveen’s noted prowess with “mechanical stuff”.

*Frame 37: Punyakoti and Digital migration*
Look at this photograph. *What do you see?*

It’s the same guiding question I’ve used throughout my fieldwork. In this case, one could imagine the reply might be “merely descriptive” – “I see a bull, sky, and ground” – none of which seem to paint a vivid, complex scene. Biehl (2011) writes, “Photographs do not incite this same return to lived experience. On the contrary, Lévi-Strauss writes, ‘photographs leave me with the impression of a void, a lack of something the lens is inherently unable to capture’ (1995:9)” (Biehl, 2011, 10). When we look at this photograph of the *Bull on the Hill*, do we agree? Do we see it as vacuous, as somehow devoid or lacking? Or do we see it as full and overflowing with experiences, of that which is within the frame, those who are behind the frame, and those who view this one frame? For me, all these presences already exist in this photograph, even if we crave to excavate it, to “bind” its boundless, overflowing experiential meanings, and to imagine the other sensory experiences – the sounds, smells, and feelings – that might have been present at the moment of its taking. Therefore, in the rest of this first section I will begin the work of
“binding the boundless”, trying to narrate into existence some of which is captured in this photograph.

I am walking through the Bannerghatta forest with six of my students, a trip we had planned some days in advance, and which one of my students, Ajay, is especially eager to take us on. The forest begins just past his own doddi, about three kilometers east of Adavisandra, past reshmi and raagi fields into an ever more hilly and tree-filled forest ecology. It is illegal to trespass into the Bannerghatta forest, and a wall separates it from the last few rows of village homes, lined at the very top by two rows of barbed wire. Ajay knows a path to get through, and we come to a small opening where the wall has cracked, and where we can squeeze through if we lean down far enough. As we finally walk into the forest, some of the other students start to shout at Ajay and he tells us later that some of the other students did not feel quite as comfortable trespassing into the forest and had asked “Why I am taking you inside the forest, and whether I am too arrogant!” And indeed, Ajay does admit that it could be dangerous in the forest, since wild pigs, snakes, even tigers, lions, and elephants might be seen if we walked far enough into the interior. I am, as usual, nervous, not having any idea about the terrain and following Ajay and the others as best I can, though they skip ahead, running in different directions and suggesting different paths to head further up a large hill. Ajay wants us to reach the top, from which we will be able to see in all directions, and even as far as Bangalore on a clear day (which was extremely rare).

As we are walking, Ajay is reminded of his photograph, *The Bull on the Hill*, he points over into the distance and tells us,

Ajay: ...that’s Sonnardoddi... And that’s where I took the bull’s photo.
Arjun: There?
Ajay: Yes there.
Ajay: Anekal, Jenkal hill. [anekal is elephant rock and jenkal is bee rock]
Arjun: Anekal?
Boy: Jenkal hill means there are a lot of bees there.
Ajay: I don’t know whether this is true or false, many years ago, there was water here it seems. You see that hill over there? It seems a deer had jumped from there to here. I don’t know whether that’s true or false.

His words on the subject are brief, but for me they are a powerful reminder that change and awareness of change is not a new thing, but has always been a constitutive part of life for those living in villages just as for those living in urban centers, a fact that has been marked in a number of contemporary studies of village India, in, for example, Mines and Yazgi’s *Village Matters*, but which I think bears repeating because of the characterizations of an “authentic” and/or
“primordial” India instantiated in the village—passed down from an earlier colonialist logic and reinforced in the Gandhian imaginary of India’s essence residing in its villages, which still exists in the characterizations of the village by many within the developmental space. What I find especially compelling in Ajay’s reflection is his juxtaposition of a seemingly plausible ecological change (water having existed in the area years ago) with the seemingly implausible (a deer jumping from one hill to another, a distance of nearly five kilometers). Of course, all of his classmates ridiculed Ajay for the second statement, laughing as they tell him that “there is not a chance” that that could have happened. Still, narratives are always suspended in this realm of the imagined, the plausible and implausible sometimes equally valued, and, especially when thinking about the past, which is as exotic and mystical a place as was the “Orient” to a colonialist, why I especially love the title of Lowenthal’s (1996) text *The Past is a Foreign Country*.

But maybe as importantly as a recognition that those within villages are aware of change, is the dissonance between informal discussions of how much change is occurring and the answers to questions that deal directly with change. For example, I asked Naveen’s father if anything had changed in the village in the past twenty years and I got these responses:

- Lekha: From the time you started 25 years ago, do you find any changes?
- N’s F: Nothing has changed
- Lekha: it is the same?
- N’s F: Yes it’s the same.

When I asked Suresh’s grandfather the exact same question, I got a surprisingly similar answer, an instinctive response that “no change was occurring”, village-life de-facto a place where nothing ever changes in this circulating discourse imbibed even by many who live in villages, even when they eventually identify so much which has changed, a similar sentiment to what my students also mentioned in the previous chapter as well.

Returning to Ajay, he explained the photograph in one, almost dismissive sentence, “The cattle had come to the forest to graze. I clicked the picture while taking them back home”. It’s a simple explanation grounded in the realities of his everyday life in the village, the daily work of tending to his family’s cattle. When I, along with my research assistant Sripriya, ask the teachers what they think about the photograph, however, I get any entirely different explanation. Manjunath Sir, the students’ social science teacher, and a former MA in Sociology, explains,
“The one I liked the most is the bull on the rock. It impacts such deep thoughts that a whole story can be written about it. It suggests drought, the green is all gone, as if the cow is looking for grass.” Two of the other teachers in the school, Murali Sir and Reddy Sir, overhear and chime in, “It seems as if it is orphaned. It has no one to look after it…” and then Murali Sir remarks, “Dharani Mandala Madhyadolage… it is about the cow and the tiger….”

The students also see this story, called Punyakoti, in the photograph, a story that is one of the oldest in Karnataka, passed down in the Janapada tradition of Kannadiga storytelling, but other versions are told in many of the other folk traditions of South India as well. “Jana” means “People or tribe” and “Pada” is a kind of short verse joined together. The term is also a short hand for the early “folk culture” associated with the Kannada language. Dharani Mandala Madhyadolage, the first line of the Punyakoti story, translates literally to “in the region at the center for the earth…,” a beautiful reminder that where the “center of the globe” is located has always been directly related to who is telling these stories and where they themselves are located. The students tell me the Punyakoti story as we walk through the forest, disagreeing about all of the details – what the characters had done, the order of events – until Nagraj takes over the telling, and tells us a version that I very much like:

There was a forest, there was a person called ‘Golla’, who is a cowherd. He takes the cattle to the forest to graze. When the cattle were grazing, he takes a bath in the river, and sits below a mango tree playing his flute. When all the cattle will be grazing, this one cow wanders off alone. It meets a tiger. The tiger says: I have got food today, I shall eat you. When the tiger says this, the cow replies: I have a calf back home, I shall go feed it milk and come back, then you can eat me. The tiger asks how it can trust that the cow will come back. The cow says: Truth is my father, my mother, Truth is my family, if I don’t follow the path of Truth, will God approve of me? The tiger agrees to let it go. When the tiger agrees the cow goes to its calf. It says to the calf: today I shall die, drink the milk and be good... it tells the calf to be friendly to all the other cows... yes be friendly to others, it says to the calf and goes. When the cow [returns to the tiger], the tiger says that if it eats the cow now God will not approve of it and it [the tiger] instead kills itself.”

Of course, the story is beautiful, a rumination on the nature of Truth, meaning of life and morality that lends itself to an infinite amount of interpretation.

When I heard the story for the first time, I was overly happy with myself, a kind of ethnographic hubris taking over. This was it, I’d arrived at the heart of the “Camera Kannadiga”
(borrowing from Pinney’s *Camera Indica*) i.e. an authentic cultural way of seeing. And, in another time, it might have been enough to end here, the next step being to interpret the story in relation to what it said about Kannadiga culture; a kind of excavation that could be considered “thick”, in the traditional Geertzian sense.

But when I re-listened to the recordings of our dialogues again, later, in the quiet of my room, I heard something different, a throw away comment by Ajay overwhelmed by the children’s excitement to tell me the story. “O ya,” he says, “it was shown on Chintu TV.”

Chintu TV is a Kannada-language Children’s TV channel, part of the Sun TV Network Limited that operates 33 channels all over South India, including seven Kannada-language channels. It’s a corporation that has been named the most profitable media corporation in all of Asia and was the first to begin privatizing media programming in South India, which had, previous to its inception in 1993, been dominated by public broadcasting.

I find out later that Ajay is referring to a version of Punyakoti that aired on the children television show, Little Krishna, a 3D computer-animated show about the Hindu-god Krishna as a child. As I watched the clip, which can be found quite easily with a simple youtube search, what struck me was that students, like Ajay, were, in some cases, no longer learning stories like Punyakoti from their families or Kannada language texts, but were learning about these stories through their consumption of television programs instead. And in this case, Chintu TV showed Little Krishna side-by-side with Kannada-dubbed versions of Dora the Explorer, Jackie Chan Adventures, Spongebob Squarepants, Men in Black, and Kung Fu Panda.
Figure 6.1: Screenshot of “Punyakoti story” on Litte Krishna

Ajay’s (digital) photograph and the story of Punyakoti is necessarily re-mediated and re-valued within the village’s distinctive televisual culture, one facilitated by the digital as infravalue and which produce the unexpected “value migrations” I’m interested in. In this particular instance I use “the digital” to flag the transmission of digital signals to television sets in homes in Adavisandra many of which have satellite dishes (like the United States, India has chosen to go digital, replacing all analogue systems with digital ones by March 2015) as well as to flag the types of computer technologies necessary to create three-dimensional TV shows like Little Krishna.

First, what I think is unique about the digital is its affect on time-space, characterized by disparate temporalities and multiscale connections; highlighted in the example just given in the side-by-side consumption of Dora the Explorer and Little Krishna, which index hyper-disparate temporalities and spatial circulations facilitated by these digital infrastructures, a sharp contrast to previous televisual cultures in India, which were markedly “national”, exemplified by Doordarshan in India, a nationally controlled TV network, that dominated programming until the early 1990s, an analog to digital transition that corresponds with privatization and a burgeoning global viewing culture (Nakassis, 2010; Rajagopal, 2001). Second, other values are also bundled and migrate through these television programs, here the story of Punyakoti, a Kannada folk story.
with no mention of any Hindu gods or goddesses is now Hinduized and associated with Krishna and his youth. These regional and religious values are bundled to, of course, facilitate consumption, advertisers paying for and therefore playing a key role in determining what’s being shown on these Kannada language channels to youth.

On the same day that Ajay took the photograph of the *Bull on the Hill*, just a few minutes before he takes the photograph, he also shoots a forty-second film, one which has fascinated me ever since. In the film, Ajay takes us along the edge of his village, until he reaches the forest, which is cordoned off by the same wall we passed through in order to start our walk in the forest a few months later. He walks behind three goats who move slowly in front of him, stopping from time to time to graze as they move further up the hill adjacent to his village. The clip, without sound, does not seem that interesting, merely another example of one of my students shooting footage during their “everyday” life.

Yet, with the sound on, the entire scene changes, the crunching of feet and hooves on grass and dirt drowned out by the sound of music. I’ve watched the clip many times now, each time listening to the music as Ajay slowly walks behind his goats, a song called *Heartalliro Harmonium* (Harmonium in my Heart) from the 2013 Kannada film *Brindavana*, a remake of the Telugu-language film *Brindavanam*, starting, building, and ending abruptly, when Ajay turns off the camera, unable to film and focus on his task simultaneously. Every time I watch, I am reminded of another film, *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf*, a participatory film created by a group of sailors traveling from the Gulf of Kutch in the state of Gujarat in collaboration with the CAMP activist collective, in which they shoot footage of their travels using only their cellphones. Similar to what Ajay does, the clips always include diegetic music, in their case mostly Bollywood songs, that start and end abruptly, a brief window into daily life that is, purposefully, not shot with the viewer in mind, captured only when the sailors have a few moments to pause in the midst of their work. The effect of this style is jarring and yet changes our expectations of how and what a film should look like at the very basic level of each scene, but it's the music that keeps us engaged, a surreal juxtaposition with shots of the sea, and shocking us in and out of each scene by what we hear. Ajay’s video recording has the same effect, the juxtaposition of the Kannada film song changing our relationship with what we are looking at, and shocking us out of a simplistic understanding of the experience of herding goats. Yes, he is herding his goats, but he is also connected to a world beyond by his decision to play this song while he works, an unexpected worlding practice all its own.
That Ajay was listening to Heartalliro Harmonium was not so surprising given that *Brindavana* was one of the biggest hit movies during my time in Karnataka, a film that stars Darshan, affectionately called the “Challenging Star” by fans, and one my students’ favorite actors.

The Kannada film industry, based out of Bangalore and popularly termed “Sandalwood”, has a history dating back at least 70 years and releases approximately 100 films a year, mostly in theaters around Karnataka. Darshan’s films were talked about by almost every one of my students at some time during our dialogues, competing with their other favorite actor, Punit Rajkumar, the son of the most famous Kannada film star Rajkumar. Nearly every student had a favorite Darshan film, whether it was *Brindavana* or one of his older films, such as the aforementioned *Yodha* that had influenced Pradeep’s aspirations to go into the military or *Sarathi*, a film whose story one of my students summarized as:

Darshan’s father will be given the village’s administration, like a king. He will have pledged to perform pooja in the temple if he had a boy child... Darshan’s father’s younger brother tries to kill the baby so that his son would become the heir. He leaves the son in the middle of a running herd of cattle. His father goes to protect him and dies. Everyone leaves to Bangalore after he dies leaving the infant in the wild. The child is taken care of by someone. He grows up and comes back to his village. He then remembers the events from his childhood. He then learns about his life there. He then becomes the administrator and kills his uncle and his aides.

They would also buy Darshan trading cards from Harohalli, just five kilometers away, a sheet of which you can see in the picture below and a few of which they gave me during my last few days in the field.
I have tried to understand the specific appeal of Darshan and the characters he plays, especially given that Darshan’s personal story is one rife with scandal. In 2011, he was taken into custody for allegedly beating his wife Vijayalakshmi and threatening her with a firearm after the two had fought over an alleged affair he had had with Kannada film actress Nikita, who was banned from the industry for three years. He was eventually acquitted of all charges, but the incident did not seem to have any affect on his career, as his next film, the aforementioned Sarathi, was his biggest blockbuster hit. Indeed, what was most surprising was how steadfastly enchanted by Darshan most of my students were, even when either Sripriya or myself reminded them of Darshan’s past scandals.

Part of Darshan’s allure starts with the images in these playing cards, which place Darshan in a longer history of Kannada film stars. Notice that in the first three rows of images Darshan poses in front of autorickshaws, one of the signs of the filmstar as the “everyman” that has been a major troupe in Kannada film for the past thirty years, part of a strong targeting of film to the rural and urban working class in Kannada films beginning in the early 1970s (Srinivas, 2010). For example, in the documentary When Shankar Nag Comes Asking (2013), filmmaker Sushma Veerappa tells the story of famous Kannada actor Shankar Nag, whose filmic career spanned most of the 1980s and whose legacy has been kept alive by autorickshaw drivers, who stick stickers of his face onto their autorickshaws in his memory, both a representation of their continued struggle for survival and Shankar Nag’s portrayals of the working class struggle in his films – for example in the film Kaarmika Kallanalla (1982), which literally means the Workers are not Criminals – a struggle which also represents a broader critique of corruption, Westernization, and the loss of Kannadiga culture. For Darshan to stand in front of an autorickshaw in these trading cards places him within this legacy, a de-facto spokesman for those who struggle in Karnataka regardless of his actual life history as the son of an actor.

And yet, Darshan’s characters also play upon the contemporary relation between Bangalore and its surrounding villages, forging and maintaining particular urban-rural linkages in the process. Take, for example, the aforementioned, Brindavana, which started this frame. One of my students, Krishna, starts to tell me the story of Brindavana, though he gets shy during the telling, never finishing the story and inadvertently creating a kind of teaser that gets me to go see the film myself:

First Darshan helps one of his friends to get married. His parents ask Darshan (who in the film is named Krish, shorthand for Krishna) who he loves and so Darshan goes to bring the heroine who
he loves to meet them. When he meets her, she tells him that her friend from her native village is caught in a problem and needs help.

Not one of my Bangalore-based friends would accompany me to watch the film, staring in disbelief when I mentioned that I had gone to see the film at all, a class-based perception of what constituted quality film and who would go to see movies like *Brindavana*. I finally see the film some two weeks later, accompanied by Nikhil sir, at Gokulam theater, the closest theater to my house in Jayanagar, finally getting a clearer picture of what, exactly, the story is about.

As Krishna articulates above, the story begins with Darshan aka Krish, the son of a Bangalore-based multimillionaire, falling in love with Madhu, a girl from a local village who has come to Bangalore for her studies. Madhu’s cousin Bhoomi, who still lives in her native village, comes to her for help, desperate to get out of an arranged marriage with a village goonda who she does not want to marry. Madhu in turn asks Krish to help Bhoomi, and he reluctantly agrees, going with her to the village and pretending to be her boyfriend (instead of Madhu’s). As the plot unfolds, Krish realizes that he has stumbled into a rivalry between two stepbrothers, Saikumar and Sampath Raj, who are Madhu and Bhoomi’s respective fathers. By the end of the story Krish has resolved the village conflict, gotten the two brothers to get past their differences and, inadvertently, gotten *both* women to fall in love with him. The last scene is an especially comical one, the two women pulling him from either side until Darshan desperately runs in to pray to Lord Krishna for an answer. The two girls run into the room, standing on either side as Darshan looks at one, then the other, then at the screen in puzzlement as the three people slowly fade into an image of an idol of the Lord Krishna accompanied on either side by two of his wives, Rukmini and Satyabhama, a not so subtle hint that the story is somehow an allegory for the story of the Lord Krishna, even the title of the film “*Brindavana*” a reference to the mythical town in which the Hindu God Krishna spent his youth.

How do we understand a storyline like this? First, for me it exemplifies the kinds of “soft” value migrations necessary to sustain a cycle of global capital, which exceedingly is concentrated in urban centers like Bangalore and needs a continued labor force of migrants from villages. In order to facilitate this movement a recalibration of aspirations in villages is also required; a simultaneous de-valuing of rural life while iconizing the urban, in heroic figures like Darshan, who remains staunchly culturally Kannadiga and Hindu even as he has availed himself of a progressive cosmopolitan life. This form of heroism sharply contrasts with the aforementioned figure of the working class film hero; Bangalore city and its growing cosmopolitanism now iconized in these films despite the fact that these films are catered to the
rural and working classes. In this sense, Kannada film functions much like how Hardy (2010) describes Bhojpuri cinema “as a cultural medium which is situated precisely in the circuits between rural and urban, in the spaces in which rural and urban must be taken as mutually constitutive. These circuits are inscribed in the movements of the language and its speakers, in the narratives and imagery of the films, and in the processes of their production” (Hardy, 2010, 235).

When I talk to Nikhil sir after we finish watching the film he is of two sentiments. On the one hand, he enjoys the film quite a bit, describing his favorite lines and scenes and happily proclaiming that, on the whole, the film was good fun. On the other hand, he recognizes that the village is portrayed in a less than ideal light. He tells me frankly that he does not like that the village is seen “negatively” and “backwards”, portrayals that do not reflect his own feelings about rural people and places. And yet, he cannot resist going to see these films, socialized into a Kannadiga filmic culture that he is affectively entangled within, loving the songs, the comedy, the Kannada version of the “masala” stories that mix drama, fighting, and romance into a single narrative of debauchery and happy endings, even though the storylines and characters seem to portray those from villages, like him, as in need of help, change, and development, a narrative that should now be quite familiar to those reading this text. And, in this sense, the film and broader media portrayals therein become there own “technologies of the Self”, complicating one’s ability to resist their own exploitation in implicitly accepting seemingly ‘natural’ and ‘desirable’ filmic portrayals.

Importantly, my students rarely watch recently released films like *Brindavana* at the theater, instead watching them later when they are released for television consumption a few years later. What they do instead is watch portions of these films on their mobile phones, downloading them onto their phones or, in many cases, sometimes just downloading the music videos. Here, we see multiple instantiations of digitality working in conjunction with one another—a mobile digital technology and digital video—together allowing for youth consumption patterns as I witnessed them in my ethnographic context.

And in this form of mobile music video consumption, less expected types of values also migrate in, for example, viewing the music video that accompanies *Heartalliro Harmonium*, the song which Ajay listens to as he takes his goats to graze. The song itself is a love song, a moment when Darshan and his primary love interest express their deep desire for one another. The first two lines do enough to characterize this love, almost absurd in translation: “Heartalliro harmonium tune haakidey / Roobaroo…roobaroo / He manasina FM-mally ninde haadidey / Roobaroo…roobaroo” (“The harmonium in my heart is singing. / Roobaroo… roobaroo. / Your
song is playing on my mind’s FM (radio) / Roobaroo… roobaroo”) But what interests me here is the visual itself, a hyperreal dance sequence framed between a beautiful snowy mountain scene and a frozen lake, the first Kannada music video to ever be filmed in Iceland. Madhu, clad in traditional pink and white Indian sari, the bearer and maintainer of “tradition” begins the song, slowly moving her arms as the music builds. From the distance, Krish emerges, walking slowly and confidently, wearing red pants, held up by a yellow belt, a pink collared shirt, covered by a black and white striped sweater, a black blazer, and eyes covered with a pair of sunglasses, the height of Kannadiga “style”, to borrow Nakassis’ (2010) term, that is partly about “a personae that emblematize style; most commonly, film heroes” (86). In Nakassis’ study, he focuses on Rajnikanth, the iconic film hero associated with style in Tamil Nadu, and whose reach can be felt in Karnataka as well, even the autorickshaw drivers in Shankar Nag mentioning that they make Rajnikanth stickers because his films also show in Karnataka alongside Darshan and Punitrajkumar films.

Krish reaches Madhu, standing behind her sensually and holding her by the arms just as the lyrics begin. The scene cuts to Darshan lip syncing the first two lines of the song, moving his arms in a kind of wave, before suddenly, the scene cuts to a long shot with Darshan and Madhu dancing in front of four white backup dancers all clad in white suits and green collared shirts, together doing the wave. Throughout the rest of the song, the white backup dancers mimic Darshan’s movements, each new dance move associated with a complete dress change for the entire cast. I am riveted by this song sequence and the white backup dancers, the only time we see white faces in the film, faces which seem to “speak for themselves”, no discourse framing their images at all. At the very least, the white backup dancers seem to do the work of both “provincializing whiteness” (the concept of whiteness has a specific signification in localised cultural and social contexts, and that the concept cannot easily be generalised beyond those contexts) (Dyer, 1997), and in this particular context “whiteness” projects Darshan’s cosmopolitanism and globality, “he has appropriated the exterior, he has become an object of desire through co-opting that which is beyond India” (Nakassis, 2010, 188) as he coolly leads these white men through the dance in his Western-style dress on the rocky Icelandic beaches. But critically, the end goal is no longer “to be like White”, the assumed premise from which postcolonial critique springs to life; and images like this one reveal the kinds of unexpected “Othering” produced in these regionally specific film forms i.e. a white person who does not or “cannot” speak, but whose value is produced only in the consumption of the gyrating body as a backup dancer to the brown hero.
Throughout *Brindavana* images of Bangalore’s prosperity come onto screen, beautiful, crystal clean malls – one of the many non-places associated with globalization, along with airports, five star hotels, and the like. Yet, as attentive ethnographer’s know, these are never non-places, they are, in fact, actual places; malls which have been constructed in particular cities, regions, and nation-states. In this case, the images are of Bangalore’s malls, constructed within the past fifteen years, catering to Bangalore’s urban upper classes.

But what caught my eye more than anything else was the types of brands that were being marketed in the film and one in particular stood out, a not-at-all subtle shot of Darshan holding a shopping bag with the words, “Favourite Shop” plastered on the side of it. You can see billboards for Favorite Shop and its higher-end sister company Soch all over Bangalore, which had started in the city before expanding to several other locations in Karnataka and seven other states all over India. The Favorite Shop brand which for others might have blended into a list of brands, especially given that it is not a traditional global brands i.e. Coke, Pepsi, etc., stuck to my ethnographer’s eye for one simple reason, I knew the family who founded the two companies, having gone to school with one of their sons.

Favourite Shop and Soch together are now worth somewhere between $60-80 million dollars, chump change compared to the astronomical valuations of the more well-known Bangalore tech companies; for example Infosys, whose estimated net worth is around $7 billion, and is one the dominant figures in Bangalore’s particular world city narrative, iconized Friedman’s now infamous *The World is Flat*. And yet, businesses like Soch and Favorite Shop are as much a part of the fabric of Bangalore, and the unfolding relationships between the global-urban-rural, developing retail infrastructure all over the city.

“Branding and marketing was the second industrial revolution,” Sameer tells me with disdain. “I mean the industrial revolution really messed everything up, made it all about capital and capitalism, but now, with marketing, its way, way worse.” He says these words in the same breath that he tells me about Soch’s expansion, about how they’re trying to digitize the entire enterprise, promoting their online stores both in India and, if they can find the right partner to establish warehouses overseas, in the US as well. The newest of their ideas is to establish digital kiosks in every one of their stores, allowing people who come to their stores the opportunity to view their entire catalog and, if they can’t find a particular style or size in the store itself, to instantly be able to search online and have it shipped to the store or, if they prefer, their house.

On the one hand, Sameer and his family represent the prototype of the transnational elite, the kind of emerging cosmopolitan, mobile, technologically enabled, capitalist class which urban
studies scholars like Castells and Sassen, for example, have pointed to as the phenomenon peculiar to the 21st century; part of the “core” of the global system as currently constituted. And yet, these transnational subjects have particular histories that situate their movements within global urban contexts. Sameer’s family, for example, is Sindhi, and originally lived on the Pakistani-side of the Sindh-region before partition. His father’s family moved to Bangalore just before partition, leaving behind their home like many others during this period to avoid the violence which would ensue soon after. In many ways, Sameer’s and the broader Soch story cannot be seen outside of this partition narrative, which shape his relationship to Bangalore.

There is always an underlying resentment that I hear when Sameer speaks about his place in Bangalore, a way that he feels isolated in a system of relationships – cultural and linguistic – which he did not choose and does not feel a part of; an outsider in a city which he has lived in all of his life and which he feels his family has been central to building. Sameer does not speak Kannada (though his father can speak a few phrases) nor does he partake in anything remotely pertaining to a kind of Kannadiga culture – the aforementioned Punyakoti story, eating of South Indian foods, and the like – that preceded Bangalore’s re-development into a world city. And he expresses feelings of isolation many times when we talk with one another.

Yet, no matter how transnational or cosmopolitan, there is no way of not interacting, if even in a peripheral or indirect way, with those within physical proximity. And, I’m arguing here, that marketing the Favorite Shop brand in a Kannada regional film is one example of this admission, that at the very least, as consumers, Bangalore’s Kannada speaking population and the broader Karnataka populations of which my students are apart, carry equal value as those half a world away. This is a central logic of capitalism, which on the one hand creates sharp increases in global inequality by concentrating wealth in the hands of a few even while simultaneously needing to connect to an expanding set of consumers, an equity derived through one’s ability to consume (Lukose, 2009).

On another night, Sameer pulls me aside and, in a tacit acknowledgment of this, asks me to teach him Kannada. He says, “You know I’m starting to think about my own business, about the people I have to sell to, the middle level bureaucrats, the local owners, and I need you to teach me Kannada. How do you do it?” Then he continues, “You know I used to not learn based on

---

84 Regarding her concept, “consumer citizenship”, Lukose (2009) writes, “Rather than take at face value their image of a depoliticized and privatized citizen-consumer, I examine how consumerism intersects with state-centric discourses and the practices of education, development, politics, and citizenship formation. Rather than see consumer citizenship as simply displacing older notions of citizenships, as these groups do, I examine the articulation between new discourses and practices of consumption and the ongoing productions of public life across boundaries of gender class, and caste” (9).
principle. I kept thinking, it’s about nation, you should know how to speak Hindi. The worst think India could have done was break states down by language. I used to not learn based on that principle, that this is the nation.”

The phrasing here, “used to” is what caught my attention, a past value logic with is no longer tenable for Sameer now. Instead, Sameer is forced to re-value particular regional and national markers of belonging in order to sell products, values from the region migrating and taking on added significance – and yet Sameer’s family has been producing and selling goods in Bangalore for over forty years, why change now? This is where the attention to the digital is especially important, as its unique character is in its ability to forge unexpected connections which can, in some small ways, de-stabilize traditional notions of how class and power function, facilitating and obviating movements in multiple directions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I began with a critique of the photovoice, an approach in which development organizations use digital tools – cameras and audio recorders – as part of their interventions, ostensibly to empower traditionally marginalized communities by giving them voice. However, I argue that the use of images, when considered uncritically, can still function to ossify the “development gaze”, especially as these images circulate and reinforce a viewer’s “way of seeing”. I argue that the images themselves must be taken seriously as works of art, in this case marking my students’ auterial capabilities, both changing how we perceive of those who are behind the camera and challenging what we see in these images themselves, together which emphasize my students’ “right to look” (Mirzoeff, 2011).

Each of my students’ photographs have been linked with a brief discussion of their own life history and their aspirations for the future, which position them within the broader narrative of education-as-development that I have sought to tell in this study. What I find most important is that in each case, regardless of their particular occupational aspiration, my students mark their trajectories with the hope of “doing good” in the world, an indicator of just how deeply felt the prerogatives of social reform have been embedded in their values, i.e. in what they ought to desire. In this, we can return to Moore’s concept of the “ethical imagination” and view each of my students’ stories through that lens, aspirations and future potentialities that are always linked to an ethics that links their own development to the possibility of developing Others, whether financially or by providing social services. This internal prerogative is one of the most important
instantiations of a particular social justice value that has migrated into the lives of those in villages.

At the same time, these stories each also reveal aspects of how “digital development” functions to facilitate change. In Usha’s story, her aspiration of becoming an engineer is the most direct version of this paradigm, a technological future considered an obvious way of making money to eventually help herself and others. Naveen’s story follows suit, except in his case, his aspirations to become a police officer are quickly replaced when he is given the opportunity to go to study Engineering in Bangalore.

Yet, in this chapter the digital does not always manifest in aspirations alone. Chandrika’s media consumption, specifically in watching *Chinnari Pellikuthuru*, plays a strong role in shaping her aspirations. While TV serials are not generally considered part of the “digital”, these media forms have been incorporated into the digital as television signals in India have moved almost completely from analog to digital, and an attention to these forms of consumption contributes to a critique of digital scholarship that focuses too narrowly on computer technologies and therefore leave out the myriad of other digital cultures that may not seem as “new” but must be included in discussions of digitality if one wants to avoid fetishizing the digital and simultaneously seeks to create scholarly insights derived on the premise that every “marginal community has an equal right to be seen as the exemplification of digital culture” (Horst and Miller, 2012, 11). In Chandrika’s case, her viewing practice plays a key role in shaping her aspirations and results in the micro-agencies she performs during her everyday school life.

Finally, I show the unexpected connections that are forged when we trace these digital media consumption practices further, revealing in Ajay’s story, both the re-mediation and re-valuation of traditional Kannada folk tales as they are consumed televisually, but also in the ways that film consumption in villages like Adavisandra, reveal urban-rural linkage and show how such consumption can exert force on those in urban centers, who seek to sell retail products to those on Bangalore’s peripheries.
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have developed a kind of conceptual map to articulate the multifaceted, disparate, and sometimes contradictory means by which “development is generated” as I observed it during my fieldwork in educational settings around Bangalore, India. I have framed this study within a historically-constituted discourse on development, that has circulated since, at the very least, the early 20th Century, and which saw recently independent nations trying to make sense of how they should go about developing the nation in light of the precepts set forth by supranational organizations, such as the IMF and the World Bank. These determinations were both economic, in indicators such as GDP, and human, in indicators such as those like the UNHDI, which Gupta (1998) argues necessarily linked an individual citizen’s development with that of the nation. It is with this historical antecedent in mind that I entered the current debates on education-as-development, one that places educational reform within the changes wrought after India’s liberalization, and reflected in the rapid NGOization of the voluntary sector in India, that has in turn created a new circuit of capital, termed “poverty capital” (Roy, 2010). Part of what I showed in Chapter Two, is how this circuit of poverty capital is tied directly to images, a visual regime I have termed the “development gaze” in which marginal communities, especially youth within these communities, are depicted as deficient in order to justify intervention. In the example I provided, the images of the government school child who “Can’t Read. Can’t Write. Can’t Count” is the assumed justification for NGO and private sector interventions.

The context in which I conducted my fieldwork continuously moved between my interactions with the upper level management of Adhyaapaka, field visits with the Adhyaapaka mentors, and my participatory film work in Adavisandra school. At one level, I have tried to provide a glimpse into each of these spaces, using brief life histories of those who work and live in each context (“still lifes”) to frame the rural-urban-global migratory trajectories, occupational choices, class, gender, religious, and caste identities that structured my own ethnographic work and the phenomenologically oriented stories I sought to tell. At the very least, the messy and variegated stories my participants told me make obvious the incredible heterogeneity that is constitutive of the region surrounding Bangalore, especially when attending to the relation between the urban and the rural. At the same time, what I have tried to emphasize by placing all these of these variegated groups in one dissertation was that they were all participating in and negotiating their roles as part of education-as-development, and that to begin an excavation of
education-as-development necessarily meant at least attempting to look across these groups, if even in a peripheral way.

What I have highlighted throughout is that the development condition in contemporary India, at least with the populations I worked with, begins with the idea that development is always about developing one’s Self and Others, and therefore the clear separation between the developer and the developing is no longer easily demarcated. This belief in development and the ethics of social change was a pervasive value i.e what one ought to desire as cultivated through education-as-development. This belief in the inherent good of social change was felt in deeply affective ways, “linking affect to value” and providing a priori justification for why nearly every single one of the participants in my study chose the life path on which they wanted to embark or had already embarked upon. Ramaswamy’s quote in Chapter Four provides the simplest version of this particular sense of value as he states unequivocally that it is the job of every person in India to do whatever they can to help the country change and develop, whether in small or in big ways. Yet, as we saw, his own fatal pragmatism became his undoing, rendering him unable to stand by his ideals in the more pressing concerns of organizational development and expansion. The Adhyaapaka mentors also demonstrate this development condition, staying tied to their development work even, as in Suresh’s and Shiva’s case, when it has not always resulted in the monetary rewards or autonomous potential that they associate with their own Self development. Part of the dilemma each faced was the distance between the high value they placed on development goals and the actuality of their own positions, a “cruel optimism” that could be seen as preventing them from moving onto jobs and livelihoods that might have been more stable. For teachers, their education-as-development roles are as deeply felt, perhaps best reflected in Sulekha ma’am’s articulation of how she wants to get students to see education as valuable in and of itself, independent of any future monetary rewards. Finally, each of my students articulated aspirations that, in different ways, highlighted a sense of wanting to participate in social change, tied partially to their personal experiences and tied partially to their immersion within broader educative processes, both mediatized and curricular. For me, the strongest version of this sensibility came in Chandrika’s discussion of why she wanted to become a doctor, a story that was partly based on her own experiences with sickness, but also partly based on having watched the tv serial Chinnari Pellikuthuru.

At the same time, I have tried to highlight several further aspects of the contemporary development condition that differentiate it from earlier articulations of development as discussed in, for example, Gupta’s (1998) Postcolonial Development: first, the increasing value placed on
“digital development” i.e. on technology, technology experts, and technological learning towards social change (in examples ranging from the students and teachers engineering aspirations to the articulation of value voiced by both Ramaswamy and Prasanna based on their previous occupational experiences); second, the value (or not) placed on monetary gain as a yardstick by which to measure development and the impact of social change agendas (differentially revealed in the constraints placed on Adhyaapaka by their funders, in Usha’s characterization of using her monetary gains to help the poor, and in Sulekha’s exasperation at the over-emphasis on monetary gain in both her personal and occupational life); third, the urban-rural negotiation that structured how individuals understood the development condition (a common thread throughout, but which could be seen in who was most commonly characterized as ‘in-need-of-development’, a discussion that demarcated the rural body as the site for development); fourth, the debate as to the value of centralization (for example, Ramaswamy’s discussion of the evils of centralization can be seen in relation to the negotiations over the midday meal and the school building); fifth, the values placed on globality, strongly introduced through differing instantiations of worlding (Nikhil’s and Manoj’s story in particular highlight this dimension along with the school’s Independence Day celebration).

I have tried to place these general aspects of the development condition in relation to the specificities of the context in which I worked, trying to show, wherever possible, the other values that were bundled together as individuals negotiated multiple categories of belonging in a moment of rapid change. Indeed, the deployment of the concept of value migrations was meant to highlight the negotiations that took place as a bundled set of values moved across space and time. On the one hand, the example of W. Edwards Deming in Chapter Two was meant to show the global interconnections that shaped an NGO’s interventions, values associated with a late industrial moment migrating into the sensibilities of those who worked in India’s education sector sixty years later, both in the vision and mission of an NGO’s Founder, but also in the standardized examination tools that have become a commonplace part of assessment in Indian education. In this particular example, I drew heavily from Tsing’s (2005) idea of global connection, and while I am still very early in my exploration of how to ethnographically trace such connections, for my purposes in the dissertation I wanted to show how values circulating globally have become embedded in the Indian education system, something which I have marked for much more study in the future. On the other hand, examples like that of GCompris, revealed how values might be bundled and migrate in the creation of a new software and its discussion on Facebook, including regional (Kannadiga), religious (Hindu), and financial (ownership) values. The value placed on
technological innovation in this context is qualitatively different, as much about how to re-evaluate what it means to be Kannadiga as it is about the technology itself.

By invoking the term “conceptual map” to describe my dissertation at its conclusion, I am explicitly referencing both its purpose and its limits. On the one hand, my dissertation has identified many people and spaces that “generate development”. On the other, I also know that this mapping has left much that needs in-depth study in the future. First, I have not attended as well as I would have liked to the import of sericulture in the region under study. While I have tagged its import in some of the dialogues with my students and with their parents, I plan on expanding this as my study progresses. Indeed, just recently the market fluctuations on the price of silk have left many farmers in Ramanagara district indebt and angry, and on May 17, 2015 they protested by dumping cocoons onto the roads Bangalore-Mysore highway i.e. the NICE Road mentioned in the introduction, a significant example of how India’s agricultural policies continue to dispossess farmers. The distress wrought by the drop in prices resulted in a number of farmers’ suicides, a social fact that I have mentioned several times in this dissertation, specifically with regards to both Manoj and Nagraj’s story, and have tried to position this form of social suffering in relation to education-as-development in so far as the eagerness to get an education and change occupations is a direct result of economic policies that render traditional ways of life untenable.

Second, I have mentioned caste as part of the development condition, marking the Brahmin, Lingayat, and Vokkaliga caste groups at various moments during the dissertation, highlighted in Summaya madam’s discussion of her place as a Muslim women in a school with “very high caste communities”. And yet, how caste and religious position generates development has remained under realized here, and will be one of the foci of future study. Third, while I have mentioned the gendered nature of development, especially in the example of the midday meal scheme, there were many more examples that I have left out of this dissertation, but which need to be addressed in future versions. Specifically, the stories of the female mentors as well as the mothers in Adavisandra village are both groups about whom I have extensive fieldnotes and audio recordings as yet to be excavated. Fourth, I have discussed the media culture of Adavisandra as an explanatory variable for how aspirations have been shaped, highlighted in both Chandrika and Ajay’s story, but I would like to do a more through media study to better map the kinds of values that migrate through their televisual consumption practices. Finally, and most

importantly, I would like to spend more time with the subjects who have been kind enough to work with me on this project, especially my former ninth standard students, who are now starting their first year of PUC college. By seeing how their aspirations change as they move through college, my study will only be strengthened, taking what for now is merely affective potentiality and longitudinally assessing their future actions.

In addition to the content of this ethnography I have also tried to take seriously the debates regarding ethnography itself, especially in (1) the continued push to find ways to move past the anthropological tendency to “bind” research, that still produces cultural Others with all of the possibilities of epistemic violence associated with this Othering (Abu-Lughod, 2002), and (2) to take seriously the changes in ethnographic practice that have been wrought by the digital moment, in enabling a proliferation of interconnections that are as ‘flat’ as the screens upon which we surf. My narrative approach has tried to reflect this theoretical position, one that takes quantum entanglement as its starting point and tries to showcase some of this infinite, yet flat connections forged within the limitations of researcher’s ethnographic experience. This approach has its own limits, and one critique of this dissertation might be that I have lost the cohesive, in-depth arguments that come with a strongly cordonned off site for study. At the same time, seeing these different moments in time in relation to one another hopefully provides it’s own productive view into the places and people that “generate development”.

I’ll briefly conclude by posing a question that I found especially compelling in Dr. Jackson’s Thin Description. Speaking of anthropologist Alan Klima’s work in Thailand – both textual and filmic (and if you haven’t seen Dr. Klima’s film Ghosts and Numbers, you really must), Jackson wonders, “What would a social science of thick description mean if the true object of study is infinity itself?” This dissertation was my first attempt at thinking with this question, in trying to creatively connect the many disparate elements that arose out of the particularities of my ethnographic engagement, and which I plan to elaborate on as this research study continues to expand.
Dissertation Addendum

My dissertation work focused on the ethnographic, on the stories of my participants, their lives, hopes, dreams, and ambitions. The purpose was to take the craft of fieldwork seriously, to pay homage to the relationships that I forged during my time in Bangalore, and to make explicit the affective entanglements these relationships produced. There were two interventions that my dissertation sought to make. First, my work clearly demonstrates that the concept of development functions as an open-signifier, which structures the lived experience of seemingly disparate populations living and working in India today. Indeed, nearly everyone included in this dissertation described an urge to develop themselves or Others, to change themselves and the society in which they lived, despite the fact that what this meant was always linked to different goals, ideas, and values (if they were defined at all). In understanding value, I start with the broadest definition of value as “what one ought to want”, which can be simultaneously about (1) profit and utility (exchange-value) and (2) ethics (moral values and considerations of the good life), both of which are embedded in social relations based on cultural markers of belonging (language, region, nation, caste, gender, etc.). And as I have tried to make clear, the values I was concerned with in this dissertation were framed within the broader discourse of development-based social change, both at an individual and societal level, which was partially about the cultivation of imagined global-digital subjectivities.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, my work contributes to both the anthropology of development in India and the anthropological theory of value by applying affect theory to their study. The fact of the matter is that whether or not stakeholders in Karnataka had a working definition of development, the concept still had a “discursive, imaginative, pragmatic, and symbolic power” (Ramos Zayas, 22) over them. This despite the fact that developing one’s Self, in most cases, had not yet produced the material changes that were expected within the current late liberal economic configuration, especially for those living in rural India. The question, then, was why the idea of development still held so much sway. What I have argued in my dissertation is that to answer this question is to attend to the affective/emotional register associated with development-based values, what I have termed the affects of development, along with their (global) entanglements, that effectively displace the issues of social inequality onto individual affect. In each of the ethnographic frames that I provided in my dissertation, I identify a moment of affective intensity framed within one’s particular material circumstances that indicates a change in his/her potential for action – in changing aspiration, imagination, hopes, and dreams –
that are the constitutive elements of development-based social change. What is most striking is the hold that these affective potentialities have on the people who I worked with in Karnataka, emplacing them in a web of relationships and decisions from which they cannot easily disentangle themselves. These affective entanglements are what link Kiran, Shiva, Manoj, Ramaswamy, Bhagyamma, Nagraj, Chandrika, Prakash and all of the other people who join the story told in this dissertation, and what I hope to further explicate as I make my dissertation into a book.

However, the stories I have told and the concepts derived from them will need to be further and more rigorously contextualized in order for their implications to be felt by the readers of the manuscript that emerges from this dissertation. As such, what I outline below are the spaces that I plan on elaborating as this dissertation takes on its book-form, focusing most pressingly on the historical frames that help position the stories articulated thus far. As a helpful imaginary, we can think of these historical frames sitting besides the ethnographic, increasing the texts internal frame-rate to highlight the change, movement, and mobility that is the heart of this project.

There are six historical frames that help situate this research and which are complicated by the ethnographic detail provided in the dissertation:

1) The traditional story of development in India begins with the Gandhian and Nehruvian imaginaries of how India should grow as it progressed from colony to an independent nation. Much of the anthropological literature on development in India begins with this historical frame, a frame that seeks to understand India’s villages in relation to the push towards industrialization within the precepts of a set of mostly economic isolationist policies. Perhaps the best example of this narrative of development remains Gupta’s (1998) *Postcolonial Development*, a text that this dissertation clearly builds upon and challenges. A rigorous framing of this political history will help to situate this study and highlight the incredible differences in how development is perceived in the 21st Century. Primarily, the argument I have made in this dissertation is that the “object” and “subject” of development have come ever closer to one another, as the zone of interaction between development personnel and those who are being developed narrows after twenty years of intervention that emphasized bottom-up approaches to social change.

2) Much has been made about India post-liberalization, a period starting in the late 1980s that initiated the era hailed as India’s globalization moment, reflected in the drastic increase in national GDP and new cultural forms that transgress national boundaries. Yet, the unfettered celebration of global India has met with resistance, perhaps exemplified in the BJP government.
loss during the 2004 elections when they ran on the aforementioned platform of “India Shining”.
In fact, the backlash against this valorization came in two important ways: first, a resistance to the
“culture” of globalization which, in the Karnataka case, was perceived in opposition to traditional
Kannadiga values (the KFC controversy in Bangalore providing one such instantiation of this, the
attacks on pub goers in Mangalore providing another example); second, a resistance to the
“economies” of globalization which came to the fore during the spate of farmer’s suicides that
occurred in the 1990s and 2000s and, given some of the stories in this ethnography, continue
today. Articulating these earlier resistances will provide the framing necessary to understand the
kind of co-optation and value migrations which have occurred over the past ten years, methods by
which to reduce resistance and bring populations that had been previously “outside” of the
globalization story into it.

3) A primary lens by which to analyze post-liberalization India is through an attention to
the changing relationship between the urban and the rural, especially in the changing economic
policies that have facilitated urban growth at the expense of rural populations. In this case, these
shifts are best reflected in my strategic focus on the region in and around Bangalore city. Given
this regional nexus, a broader framing of Bangalore’s demographic history, expansion, and
relation to its peripheries would help situate the psychosocial changes described and experienced
by my participants. Indeed, Bangalore’s rise to prominence over the past twenty years has been so
dramatic as to make the recent past seem terribly distant, the scale of growth and change into an
IT city has rendered its previous “Garden City” moniker nearly unimaginable. Areas around the
city, which had previously been entirely agricultural have now been re-branded as peri-urban
industrial zones, which mediate between the urban and the rural and embed a contemporary
version of the core-periphery economic sensibilities into the very layout of the land in and around
Bangalore. The resultant connectivity, both material and psychological, between the city and the
village is the foundation upon which the ethnographic stories of NGO personnel, teachers, and
students emerge.

4) Embedded in the discussion of Bangalore is its re-branding as the “Silicon Valley” of
India, i.e. its digital epicenter. Not surprisingly, Modi has singled it out as the first test city for his
“Digital India” movement, an attempt to bring in the “next phase of development” in India by
increasing digital connectivity both within cities and between villages and cities. He spoke in
June 2015, claiming that “Building I-ways is as important building highways.” Chief Minister of
Karnataka Siddaramaiah, seeking to make Karnataka a leader in the movement is set to expand e-
governance by setting up 376 new e-programs even as Modi is set to scale Karnataka’s mobile e-
governance platform, Mobile One, to the rest of India. Similar movements have taken hold in, for example, Andhra Pradesh under Chandrababu Naidu, who is seeking to create “digital AP”. In these cases, value-addition is linked directly to digital development, and is one of the underlying logics upon which individuals in my study have sought to develop themselves and Others. In its current instantiation, the digital is mapped onto urban-rural connectivity, an important difference from earlier versions of digital/infrastructural development (both in political rhetoric and scholarship) that focused solely on the urban at the expense of the rural, which, at least rhetorically, is a far more inclusive version of digital development, perhaps based on the realization that leaving the rural out of the development paradigm risks further fracture and dissension, and a framing that explains some of the attention to ICT in my own rural field sites.

5) The digital turn in India has had effects on education, especially in Karnataka and the areas surrounding Bangalore, the value-add placed on information technologies producing new curricular, pedagogical, and aspirational trajectories for students, like those who I worked with in Adavisandra. Part of the task of my historical framing, then, is to excavate the ideologies embedded in the Karnataka state education system and to mark the moments of value migration in these texts, as they are linked to this broader shift in how students should be educated in India today. The argument I’ve made, perhaps implicitly, is that education and development have converged as NGOization, digitization, and urbanization have all impacted the rhetoric surrounding what and how students should learn. In a sense, what teachers are teaching in classrooms, what NGO personnel advocate, and what circulates through the news media are embedded in a shared doxa, perpetually reinscribed through the ongoing discourse on “development” in India’s digital age.

6) Finally, and in relation to these historical frames, NGO personnel and teachers in schools plays key roles in facilitating the migration of values and effectively functioning as “value brokers”. Each creates his/her own patronage networks, situated within the new post-liberalization, post-digital moment in India. Yet, patronage networks and middle men have always been constitutive parts of life in India, whether one lives in the city or the village, and in order to reveal the uniqueness of the current paradigm of “development patronage” I will undertake a stronger and broader look at traditional patronage networks in India, paying attention to the particular networks of caste, class, religion, that still remain embedded in how these value brokers can undertake their task. I have mentioned some of these markers within my text, namely that of local party politics that traditionally intersected with the Vokkaliga/Lingayat caste communities in Karnataka. Personnel who work as teachers and NGO personnel come from
villages or small towns that resemble closely those areas that they are tasked with developing, and carry with them many of the markers of belonging associated with these places (rurality, caste, etc), even as the values that they espouse reflect a version of urban-digital development. What position do NGO personnel take in their villages? What new status does their occupation and education proffer on them? How do they negotiate their multiple identity-based positionings? Who might they replace and why? Embedded in these questions are new notions social mobility, in what success looks like and in how to achieve these forms of success, which invariably place aspiration in relation to one’s positionally-situated means; potentiality/possibility unmooring the otherwise highly structured (and unequal) material conditions for many of the stakeholders in my study.

In sum, what these historical frames obviate are the “regimes of value” that undergird and are altered by the value migrations that I instantiate throughout this dissertation. The questions posed by this dissertation might be re-articulated as (1) why these value migrations given these historical antecedents and, as importantly, (2) what are the interdiscourses that have shaped these value changes for the variegated stakeholders in this dissertation, including: students, teachers, grassroots NGO personnel, upper management of NGOs, and global development personnel. Part of my claim in this dissertation was that NGO personnel did not have a strong physical and direct influence on students in Adavisandra school despite the fact that they were linked in their development ambitions. What this suggests is a broader foundational set of value migrations in which all of the participants in my study participate, partly due to the precepts of education-as-development along with the digital development initiatives that have become the primary focus of development over the past ten years in cities such as Bangalore with the intension of extending such endeavors into its rural peripheries.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Casteings Taylor (1996) “Iconophobia.” Transition. 69, p. 64-88
Chatterjee, 2013 Empire and Nation, selected essays.


Nambissan and Ball (2010) “Advocacy networks, choice and private schooling of the poor in India.” Copyrighted by the authors.


Rockefeller (2011) “Flow.” *Current Anthropology.* Vol. 52, No. 4


Tooley and Dixon (2003) *Private Schools for the Poor: a case study from India*. Reading: CfBT.


Zizek (2010) “First as Tragedy, then as Farce.” *RSA Animate*. 