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Abstract: In recent decades, private players have emerged as major providers of education in urban India. The popularity of private schools among the lower income groups is extensively reported and has received a mixed response in academic writing. In much of the literature, details about the social context of people identified as the urban poor and as belonging to lower income groups are seldom provided. It is also important to unravel the processes through which they navigate the private educational market in the urban space. This paper attempts to examine the class and status dynamics of families associated with a private school in the city of Banaras. The paper begins with a history of the demarcation of urban space for the poor in the city of Banaras along lines of class, caste and occupation in terms of a ‘weavers’ settlement’. It also seeks to explore how families living in these areas seek to reconstitute their relation to schools through increased monetary and cultural investments with the hope of securing valued cultural resources for their children. A closer examination of school choice, however, suggests how the realisation of such ends remains difficult.

Keywords: Urban Education, Banaras, Private Schools, Intersectionality, School Choice
1. Introduction

‘English is in India today a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant…the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena.’

Position Paper on English, National Curriculum Framework 2005

Much of the discussion on the urban experience in India has been centred on life as experienced in the metropolitan cities. Whether we examine the process of production and distribution of the urban space or the emergence of the consumption cultures that have come to characterise urban life, the bulk of the literature explores these themes in terms of ‘mega-cities’.¹ With a turn towards neo-liberal public policies, a dominant narrative has emerged about the middle-class city dweller as primarily a consumer citizen, whose identity and politics is based on their consumption practice.² In spite of the relatively small middle-class population in India, the category in itself carries enormous influence and ‘hyper visibility’ in the discursive sphere. The disproportionate visibility has been arguably linked to a ‘politics of forgetting’ with regard to the plight of the majority whose lives have been rendered invisible in the portrayals of the celebrated category of an English-speaking middle class in urban India.³

The influence of the dominant discourse in shaping urban social geographies has been examined in studies of gentrification of cities, eviction of slum dwellers and the segmented residential patterns, suggesting unequal claims over the right to the city along lines of class,

¹ There have been notable exceptions which call for an examination of issues beyond the mega-cities. See Timothy Scrase et. al, “Beyond the metropolis – regional globalisation and town development in India”, South Asia 38, no. 2 (2015): 216-29.
² The notion of consumer citizen, in Indian context, is usually employed to examine the implications of neoliberal policy shifts in civic life. See Leela Fernandes, India’s new middle class: Democratic politics in an era of economic reform (New York: University of Minnesota, 2006); Ritty A. Lukose, Liberalisation’s children: Gender, youth, and consumer citizenship in globalising India (New York: Duke University Press, 2009).
³ The politics of forgetting refers to the politico-discursive processes in which specific marginalised social groups are rendered invisible and forgotten within the dominant national political culture. See Leela Fernandes, “The politics of forgetting: Class politics, state power and the restructuring of urban space in India.” Urban studies 41, no. 12 (2004): 2415.
caste, gender and ethnicity. It is also important to note that under the neoliberal policy regime, urban space in India is divided not just in terms of unequal access to civic resources but also in terms of provisioning of services through the private sector. School education emerges as one of the chief sites of conflicting claims over resources valued in urban life in which the private sector has made strong inroads. Proficiency in English is one such resource which is highly valued in the urban employment markets. In provisioning the English-language medium, private schools claim to have an edge over government schools which teach in the vernacular languages. Such a claim to deliver services more efficiently through market mechanisms, free from state regulation, however, has received mixed responses from academia and development sector professionals.

I argue that the discussions on unequal claims to city life can gain from the insight that the unequal positioning of the metropolitan centres and the provincial towns, in material as well as symbolic terms, affects the experiences of city-dwellers everywhere. The metropolitan cities are not just centres of employment opportunity, but are also to be viewed as centres producing the normative ideal of middle-class practice. Command over English has been one of the key aspects of middle-class identity which assumed a completely new form in the post-1990s. A certain kind of English has become a prerequisite of entry into the ‘new service industry’ but the access to the latter is severely restricted by one’s social position. With respect to school education, the imagery of the urban middle-class-consumer dovetails with the idea of a quality-conscious parent opting for education offered by the private school, and serves as a model of social mobility for the rest. The path to social mobility, however, is different for people located differentially in the urban space. A homogenous category of the urban poor is often constructed in contrast to the middle-class, with little regard to the dynamics of varied classes and class fractions within it.

In this paper an attempt is made at capturing the nuances of class and status dynamics with respect to schooling by focusing on historic shifts in the private school markets in the city of Banaras and on how people from the lower classes reconstitute their relation vis-à-vis schooling. Increased investments in schooling are being made in families which had little stake in formal education in previous generations. They are investing more in private schools for new cultural resources, at a time when their hopes for social mobility are thwarted within the older systems of work. A closer examination of the school of their choice, however, suggests how the
realisation of such hopes remains difficult. The paper studies the shifts among the lower classes towards private schools in Banaras by focusing on a particular school, its location in a neighbourhood, and the families associated with it. It is important to foreground the sites as well as the actors, which have been at the receiving end of the liberalisation policy and yet whose lives have been conspicuously omitted from the public discourse on education.

2. Unequal Access to Educational Resources in Urban India

In Indian cities, an examination of the distribution of educational opportunities, along class differentiated lines, and the effect of the changing educational economies on urban space has only recently begun. Manabi Majumdar’s work in Kolkata suggests that there is a positive correlation between the concentration of government schools and areas designated as slums. It has become part of a common sense understanding that the government schools, particularly the ones managed by the municipal corporations, are meant only for the poor, while high-fee-charging private schools cater to the needs of the urban middle-class. However, with the expansion of the network of private schools in urban as well as in rural areas, the received notion has undergone a complete shift. A number of scholars and development professionals now argue that the private school markets have been serving the needs of the poor in urban as well as rural areas. For many years consecutively, several educational surveys, reports and academic papers have been talking about the ‘gains’ made by the private schools over government-managed schools both in urban as well in rural India. It is also important to note the variations which continue to exist within the categories of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ schools. While high-fee-charging private schools have always been part of the lifestyle of the urban middle class, the private schools which are said to cater for the urban poor charge much lower fees and have poor infrastructural resources. These are different from the older private schools, run by charitable

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5 Tooley argues that the indigenous education system in early nineteenth century India also relied on private provisioning until the colonial system sought to regulate it. See J. Tooley, The Beautiful Tree (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009), 219.
voluntary organisations. There is an increasing body of literature which suggests that the private school sector in urban centres has moved beyond its original clientele of the ‘middle-class’ category and is now increasingly catering to the needs of the ‘urban poor’. The claims of shifts of the poor families from government-funded schools to private schools are explained in terms of the promise of an efficient, affordable delivery of educational services. These studies have followed a methodology that focusses primarily on a cost-benefit analysis of the schools representing the government and private schools.

Also, these studies have been questioned because there is an avoidance of the questions of the political economic contexts which have affected the funding of government schools in urban areas and paved the way for the creation of a market for the expansion of private schools for the poor. These considerations necessitate a detailed study of the processes through which these shifts are taking place. Majumdar’s study gives example of the gate-keeping mechanisms, sometimes facilitated by the state, through which the schools of the poor are kept underfunded and away from the areas marked for the affluent. For example, there have been instances of shutting down of schools meant for the poor where these are located in neighbourhoods housing higher income groups. These processes have contributed towards the production of an urban space which is being segmented along lines of class in terms of educational provisioning.

The category of ‘urban poor’ in many studies is often deployed with little analysis of the class, community and gendered intersections which mark their lives and mediate their relationship vis-à-vis schools. This vagueness is a product of a public discourse that obscures the political economic context of school education and foregrounds a market-based understanding of educational services in the urban context. In fact, much of the literature on parental choice of school is based on such a vision of an abstract individual consumer who makes an informed rational choice on the school market. The imagery of market in the field of education is problematic for many reasons. It necessarily constructs education as a commodity which can be consumed privately and decontextualises the parents from their real social settings, viewing them as mere consumers. In a different context, Bowe et al. have argued that rather than talking about

8 As an alternative to the dominant trend, a multi-criteria evaluation of the notion of quality of schools has been used by Sarangapani in her work. Padma M. Sarangapani, “Hyderabad’s education market” in *School education in India*, ed. Manish Jain et. al, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2018), 162.
an abstract individual unit of a consumer parent who is believed to be making the choice of a particular type of school over the others, we need to engage in a more context-specific understanding of the social landscape within which these actors articulate some actions as choice. Christopher Winch and Padma Sarangapani, in their critique of a decontextualised understanding of the phenomenon of the expansion of private schools in Hyderabad, argue for an understanding of the regional, religious, and linguistic factors that constitute an urban context. For example, it was pointed out that the use of a flat category of ‘urban poor’ for the slum dwellers of Hyderabad hides the differentiated linguistic practice of communities, which might be reflected in their aspiration for low-cost private schools that are run in the English medium.

The review of the existing literature in the domain suggests that the category of ‘urban poor’ located in the non-metropolitan centres is not just poorly researched and understood but that the people this category is intended to describe are often omitted from the public discourse on city life. There is an urgent need to begin unpacking the term for a more grounded understanding of the changing landscape of school education in India for the majority of its urban population. For this purpose, a renewed emphasis on the question of political economy in the urban space in the non-metropolitan centres is necessary which is characterised by the informal sector. According to recent estimates, around 80 per cent of all workers in urban India are informally employed, making it the dominant rather than the exceptional sector.

John Harris prefers using the term ‘informal working class’ over ‘urban poor’, in order to better understand class politics in an urban space where informal sector of employment plays a very important role. He also defines it in relation to the middle-class to emphasise the differences in terms of material as well as symbolic capital. While ‘middle class’ includes people ‘disposing of cultural capital’ – which may consist of both identities and competences – and those who have some property and well-paid employment, the informal working class refers to a

category of people who are subaltern, who do not dispose of significant cultural capital, and who also lack the advantage of protection through state regulation of their terms of employment or occupation. He adds that in the Indian context these tend to come from lower caste groups.\textsuperscript{15} The competences which become markers of differential location include educational and linguistic skills, and more particularly, a facility with English.

Leela Fernandes explores the consumer-based identity of the new middle class of India in the post-1990s phase of liberalisation of the economy through the idea of ‘middle-class practices’. She invokes the idea of ‘class in practice’ to understand class politics or the actions through which the middle class tries to retain its position of privilege. It is through these practices that those who are excluded from the ‘middle-class proper’ in terms of objective positions try to build up their own identity. She argues that among the petty bourgeoisie, since their property is rarely sufficient to provide material support for the next generation, class practices often mimic those of the middle class proper.\textsuperscript{16}

However, the approach might end up in identifying the phenomenon of the spread of private schools as another trend of the blind following of the middle-class hegemonic practice by the lower classes. A clearer understanding of the spatial dimension of the unequal distribution of educational opportunities, however, cannot rely on a simplistic understanding of class without examining how it intersects with identities of religion, sex and language in a particular historical context. It also calls for a nuanced understanding of hegemonic practices which become normalised to an extent that they need ‘following’ by everyone, viz. the preference for English medium private schools among the lower classes. In the absence of the necessary cultural and social capital, resources like English that are valued in the new service sector can only be acquired by the lower classes through English-medium schools.

It is widely believed that social mobility can be attained through schooling in English. However, such beliefs do not necessarily materialise in reality. For Usree Bhattacharya, English language preference is rooted in an ideology that constructs English language education as the surest means of attaining social mobility. She argues that a view of ‘homogeneity’ and ‘uniformity’ is constructed around English education in India, while the actual schools are much

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 445.
more varied in quality, and in most cases, not enough for class based mobility. It is important to note that the majority of studies on language ideologies and their interrelation with schooling choice for urban population have been conducted in metropolitan centres. These centres are far more integrated with a national and global service industry and have emerged as centres of production of normative ideals as well. Chaise LaDousa’s account of the discourses on notions of schooling and language divide is particularly telling in this respect. The author argues that the educational market of the north Indian city of Banaras is disparate and serves different ideals for different category of parents. Of the two languages which are respectable in the north Indian school market, Hindi and English, though Hindi may represent the nation, for the local residents, it is only English that guarantees spatial and social mobility within it. From the perspective of the upper middle classes, none of the English-medium schools can really claim to impart training in an English which can fetch a job in the employment market at national and global level.

These insights introduce a new dimension to the class-based differentiation of educational opportunities based on access to valued symbolic resources like English. The access to a certain kind of English which is valued in the new service industry is unequally distributed within and between the metropolitan and provincial urban centres to different sections of the urban population. An appreciation of the close links between the cultural ideals of ‘service sector jobs’ and ‘English of a certain kind’ with the construct of the ‘middle-class identity’ can lead to a better grasp of the expansion of low-cost private schools in non-metropolitan cities. The low-cost private schools invariably serve the underprivileged urban populations with a promise of better quality of education than that of the government schools. The promise of quality is dependent on an ideal of English which remains a common component of educational aspiration across different segments of occupational groups.

A huge challenge in this respect remains in mapping out the highly differentiated segments of private schools which cater to the differentially located urban dwellers in terms of class, community history and spatial locations. But more importantly, such mappings need to be

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18 C. LaDousa, Hindi is our ground, English is our sky: Education, language, and social class in contemporary India (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 98.
complemented with a clearer understanding of the changing social political context of city life as well as the processes through which the lower classes approach the schools in the urban space. One such attempt at exploring the relationship of a school with its location in the city of Banaras will be attempted in the later parts of this paper. Initially, however, I will first map the historic trajectory of private schools in the city of Banaras and its response to the threats posed by the colonial school system in the form of the Hindi movement in the late nineteenth century and Banish English movement in the late twentieth century. These developments configure the private school markets in contemporary Banaras in a particular way.

3. **Education and the urban in Banaras**

Banaras has been one of the major centres of trade and commerce in the eastern Gangetic belt since the pre-colonial period, situated as it was on the trade route that linked Bengal with Maharashtra. The political economic context of the rise of trade and commerce activities in the city is necessary to understand its status as the centre of education for much of the Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These developments also prepared the grounds for the city to emerge as a major site of nationalist contests over questions of education and language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

With the decline of the Mughal dynasty, the administrative control of Banaras oscillated between the Nawab of Awadh and the East India Company, with some amount of regional autonomy continued to be vested in the hands of the Raja of Banaras. The urban centres in northern India in the eighteenth century, as Chris Bayly has argued in his seminal work, relied on a form of associational civic life which had developed in the eighteenth century through corporations.19 The common feature of such urban centres was that they were nodal points for trade and commerce, and they sustained and patronised certain forms of literary, educational,

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19 C. Bayly, *Rulers, townsmen and bazaar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 450. Bayly identifies two types of urban centres as it emerged in the North Indian towns, *ganj* and *qasbas*. What made them different from each other was that while Qasbas relied more on the service-based economy of administrative centres under Mughal rule, Ganj thrived more on merchant-based trade and commerce activities. The former manifested in a civic culture which thrived on and sustained the Indo-Persian literary style while the later thrived on associational forms organised around Hindu caste groups and sustained by the close ties of kinship networks.
religious and leisure activities. The powerful groups which sustained a particular form of urban life in the city of Banaras included the landowning Bhumihar caste-group which acquired dynastic status; the mendicant trader-soldiers or the Gosains; and the merchant bankers, organised and operating through joint family networks. These three groups patronised and promoted a Hindu merchant style culture which was reflected in the city’s celebration of events, organisation of commercial activities, and leisure activities. They also patronised educational institutions in the city which contributed to the reputation of the city as an important centre of education in the Ganges belt. Banaras emerged as an important centre of religious learning, particularly Sanskrit and Buddhism, as has been documented in the official records of the city. However, there were other forms of schools which also catered to the different needs of the urban population along community-specific lines of learning. Nita Kumar in her account of the history of education in Banaras has captured the heterogenous nature of the educational system in the pre-colonial period with varied systems of schooling among competing groups. In her account of pre-colonial Banaras, there were Sanskrit schools, meant for the Brahmans; Mahajani pathshalas, for the merchant caste Hindus; Koran schools or maktabs, for the lower-class Muslim weavers; and Persian schools, for the upper classes of high-caste Hindus and Muslims. Each of these learning systems helped to maintain and reproduce the existing class, caste, community and gender-based hierarchical social order and transmitted the cultural values necessary for such reproduction. For example, Persian schools were more ‘career-oriented’ and emphasised literary knowledge of the Persian language necessary for the official work among the better-off population of Hindus and Muslims, in contrast to the schools attended by lower class sections of Hindus and Muslims alike. She argues that the system of education was largely based on private initiative and thrived because of the patronage of the power-wielding groups. The available data on school from the records of the district gazetteer also testifies to the variety of schools which existed much before the government funded schools were set up in the city.

21 For an alternative reading of the significance of Islamic cultural symbols in the urban life of Varanasi, see N. Kumar, Lessons from schools: The history of education in Banaras (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000).
22 Department of District Gazeteers, Uttar Pradesh District Gazeteer Varanasi. (Lucknow: Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1965), 305-06
23 Kumar, Lessons from Schools, 14.
24 Kumar, Lessons from Schools, 121-3.
The city’s position as a centre of commerce and education via indigenous traditions of learning, therefore, makes it an interesting site to study the shifts in educational systems as well as the native responses to the colonial interventions in the field of education.

In the later nineteenth century, the close relation between communities and schools was disrupted when the colonial model of schooling became the dominant norm even as the older forms of schools continued to exist. This period saw a proliferation of ‘new’ private schools, maintained and supported by community leaders, particularly from Hindu merchant banker families, and social reformers. As per Kumar’s account, these would provide ‘modern’ education without compromising on the cultural values that were of concern to them. This was most starkly felt in the arena of girls’ schooling where community-defined notions of suitable education for girls were incorporated in the school curricula by introducing components of household skills or domestic education.

Such community based responses to the colonial educational model can be seen all over India. In later years however, such schools could not sustain their efforts in inculcating a different set of cultural values. During the nationalist movement, these local initiatives played a significant role in giving a form to the political and cultural resistance to colonial education. This was most acutely expressed in the language used in education and administration, which construed colonial education as the major site of contestation.

Historically, the upper-caste Hindus, comprising the merchant castes, the Pandits or Brahmans, and the Bhumihars, occupied strategic positions in the political economy of Banaras. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, some of these groups supported and participated in the mobilisation around the recognition of Hindi in Devanagari as an official language of the United Provinces in addition to Urdu.25 The active participation of the ‘vernacular elite’ in the Hindi movement made the city of Banaras the epicentre of linguistic nationalism in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, which eventually culminated in elevating the status of Sanskritised Hindi to a national symbol in independent India. The role of institutions like Nagari Pracharini Sabha and literary and cultural icons like Bharatendu Harishchandra from the city, who pioneered the attempt at developing a form of Hindi for the

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national role, have been extensively studied in this respect. In this mobilisation, popular regional varieties like Brajbhasha, Bhojpuri or Awadhi were subsumed within Hindi and were relegated to the status of ‘dialects’ of Hindi and led to the polarisation between the elite and popular languages. It is also significant to note that the nationalist mobilisation on the question of which language should be used in Indian education was not directed against English, but against the regional other, in this case the Urdu-speaking Muslim and Hindu nobility.

In the post-independence period, Banaras witnessed another language movement, this time in defence of Hindi and against the continuation of ‘imperial’ English as an additional official language of the union in the 1960s. While states like Tamil Nadu were engulfed in protests against the proposed move to make Hindi the sole official language of the union, there was a counter-movement of Angrezi Hatao, or Banish English, inspired by Ram Manohar Lohia in the North-Indian states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The residents of the city still recollect how the majority of shopkeepers in Banaras, catering to the pilgrimage industry aimed at the tourists, had to change their signboards overnight from English to Hindi so as to avoid their being burnt. The resistance to the hegemony of English was relatively short lived and could not sustain itself in the long run.

To recapitulate, the political economic context of Banaras sustained disparate educational markets in which access to educational capital was constrained, mostly on the basis of class, caste and gender. In the later periods when the colonial model of education became the dominant model, it was appropriated by the social reformers and the merchant communities for the propagation of a certain kind of education that was modern yet community oriented. Some of the upper-caste Hindus from the merchant banker group later supported and participated in the mobilisation for recognition of a Sanskritised Hindi at the provincial and national level. This version of Hindi came to be adopted for schooling and higher education. Meanwhile, the informal popular languages like Banarasi boli and Bhojpuri which were used by the city residents in their everyday affairs, continued to flourish outside the official domains of the

28 Interview with Piyush Misra, a Hindi teacher in Banaras Hindu University (BHU), and a former participant of the movement.
judiciary, administration and education. They continued to exist in the everyday life of the
neighbourhoods in the older parts of the city, and in the popular culture industry. The cluster of
silk weaving and other related crafts which relied on a complex and intricate network of
relationship within and between clan and community members, continued to operate in the city-
specific variety of Banarasi boli. This language is resonant of the world of saree production, as is
voiced through characters in Abdul Bismillah’s award winning ‘Hindi’ novel jhini jhini bini
chadariya. Simon Beth’s work on the diglossic situation in the city testifies to the co-presence of
the two language varieties, one representing the standard Hindi and the other Banarasi Boli or
the variety of Bhojpuri specific to the city. Now Bhojpuri as a language variety has a wider
presence and encompasses several varieties. It continues to have a thriving popular cultural base
in traditional folk songs extending to the transnational diaspora communities, and is acquiring
newer forms in the vernacular music industry. However, neither of these two varieties find any
place in the school context. LaDousa’s work on the varied meanings of the term ‘mother tongue’
has demonstrated how in the school context, people demarcate between Bhojpuri and Banarasi
boli on one hand as gaon ki bhasha (language pertaining to the village) and Hindi on the other as
rastra ki bhasha (language pertaining to the nation) while admitting that both can be considered
as a mother tongue. However, the popular varieties like Bhojpuri and Banarasi boli are excluded
from the formal sphere of learning in school, in spite of their popular appeal.

4. Residential segregation and private schools

Residential segregation along community and caste lines is a distinctive feature of the old city
space in Banaras. Nandini Gooptu, in her study of the ‘urban poor’ in the nineteenth century
towns of the North India notes how the city administration, through town planning programmes,
targeted the urban poor, strived to create separate areas of habitation for them, and ghettoised
them in certain pockets of the city. Among other things, such spatial arrangements were meant to

29 See B. Simon, “Language choice, religion, and identity in the Banarsi community”, in B. Hertel & C. Humes
31 R. Tripathy, “Music mania in small-town Bihar: Emergence of vernacular identities”, Economic and Political
Nirmali Goswami  ‘Ours is a semi-English medium school.’

protect the relatively wealthy from the threats posed by the ‘unsocial’ elements represented by the poor in the city.

The town planning mechanisms, rather than addressing the problem, ended up ghettoising the poor and the resultant physical mapping of the city also reflected the social and class differences. The areas marked for settlement of the poor had fewer access to civic amenities.

Though the town planning of the city has gone through many changes, different communities in the city continue to live a segregated and conclave life. The latest report submitted by the city administration refers to three distinct areas in the city: the old city, the central city and the peripheral areas. The report also identifies the old and the central city as areas where the manufacturing and retail areas for traditional crafts are based. The areas marked for handloom weaving and embroidery work like Kacchibagh and Koylabazar are identified as slums in the same report. The industrial cluster of silk weaving in Varanasi is an industry which can be called informal in its organisational structure and in manufacturing, employs the largest number of employees (50.7 per cent).

Apart from the weavers, these areas are inhabited by small-scale traders and petty businessmen, and wage workers who are often from Muslim and low-caste Hindu groups. The residential and commercial areas tend to overlap in the labyrinth of the narrow lanes which connect the inner residential pockets to the civic amenities like hospitals, schools, main market areas. A distinctive aspect of life, particularly of master weavers and small-scale manufacturers and traders, is that their residential settlement is earmarked in one of the three weavers’ clusters. These are separate from the main market area at Chauk, where mostly rich Hindu traders live and engage in the retail trade for finished products.

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34 Varanasi City Development Plan, 2015.
35 The informal sector of economy is characterised by a different structure of labour relations, described variously as ‘imperfect market’ and as ‘fragmented labour market’. For Jan Breman, such markets are fragmented because of the scarcity of the available work and the way it is structured around ‘traditional forces’ of caste, region, religion and not being driven by forces of the free market. In his work, mediation of caste and community is specific to the nature of labour market in India. See J. Breman, “A Dualistic Labour Market?”, Economic and Political Weekly 11, no. 43 (1976): 1905-08.
37 According to an estimate, the labour force involved in the silk industry of Banaras is around 1-3 lakh weavers, 1,500 traders, mostly Hindus, and around 2,000 girastas or master weavers, mostly Muslims. See Rahul Varman, and Manali Chakrabarti, Case Studies on Industrial Clusters: A Study of Kanpur Leather & Footwear, Varanasi Silk Saree and Moradabad Brassware Clusters. IIT Kanpur, 2007.
Both the areas are densely populated and connected through narrow lanes but these areas vary in terms of status and prestige. In local parlance the wealthier areas of the old city are termed as *pukka mahal*. It literally refers to the neighbourhood of *pakka* construction, denoting a membership to the most central part of the old city. The settlements like Alaipura, Lallapura and *reveritalab* are at the outskirts of the main part of the old city where weavers’ pockets are located. Even though there has been a steady expansion of schools in the city and, as in many other places, the share of private schools in the enrolment of students is increasing vis-à-vis the public schools, not all of these become available to the residents of these settlements. Given the history of town planning and high density of population in the older pockets of the city, the distribution of the private schools in the city has a particular pattern and rank hierarchy out of which only those private schools which are at proximate locations are accessible to people settled in these neighbourhoods.

In the following sections we will examine the case of a private school in its relationship with the families located in the nearby residential settlement. The school is owned and managed by a wealthy family of Shia Muslim descent from Allahabad. It was clearly seen as a relatively higher status school than other schools in the vicinity such as the municipality school, the senior secondary school funded by the state government, and the smaller private school which charged much lower fees. While all the other schools in the vicinity were either free or very low in terms of cost, this particular school charged a relatively high fee. It mainly catered to the lower-middle-class sections of the nearby areas who could afford to spend some money on their children’s education. The principal of the school, however, sent his children to a more reputed convent school which had a higher prestige in the school market of Banaras. The case of this particular school is useful in understanding the shifts taking place in the relationship between the families and the school and in illuminating how the lower classes are negotiating their location in a particular spatial setting, and working their way towards attaining higher social prestige.

38 The District Report Cards have shown a consistent increase in the proportion of private school enrolments in urban areas.
5. Semi-English medium school in the mohulla\textsuperscript{39}

The school is located in a busy commercial lane in the northern part of the city connecting the weavers’ settlements to the main market area in the city. The students of the school come from an average distance of 1-2 km from the school. Since the school does not offer any transport facilities to the students, most of them come on foot or by bicycle, and some on hired cycle-rickshaws often shared by 4-5 students. The school is seen as catering to a smaller catchment area in comparison to the bigger schools of the city, which are able to draw students from all over the city and from higher income groups. Most big schools are located in the outskirts of the city. This private school has a dubious status of being a ‘standard’ school located in a \textit{mohulla}. It was termed so by the residents in the adjoining lane, consisting of the working class population from Hindu and Muslim communities. The school staff also talked about their school as mainly catering to the students from ‘business class’ families which were self-employed as petty traders and a smaller proportion of students parents were employed in services.

There was a more important reading of the dual status of the school, in terms of its medium of instruction. One of the most senior teachers from the school, the person in-charge of the Primary Section, claimed that the school is perceived as a ‘semi-English-medium’ school by the local residents because of the relatively high status that it enjoys among other schools in the same locality. Besides, part of the school actually ran in the English medium. The premises of the school included a primary section which was run in the English medium, affiliated to the CBSE board housed in a new building separated from the older, bigger, Hindi-medium higher secondary school affiliated to the Uttar Pradesh Board of Education.\textsuperscript{40} The bigger and the original Hindi-medium school also presented, in its annual events, its plans of changing its status to a fully English medium school in the near future.

In the past two decades, most of the high-fee charging English-medium private schools, catering to the upper classes in the city are opening up on the urban fringes because of the increasing pressure on the availability of land in the central areas of the city. Such schools are

\textsuperscript{39} Some of the observations presented in this section and the next ones are based on fieldwork conducted in Banaras during 2006-2009. Some of these findings have also been discussed in N. Goswami, \textit{Legitimising Standard Languages}, 77-120.

\textsuperscript{40} The school eventually manages to completely shift to English medium in the year 2010. The implications of the shift have not been included in this paper but confirm many of the suggestions made in this paper.
accessible to the wealthier city residents only through private bus service run by these schools. Most of the existing and older private schools in the central areas of the city have now been reduced to a secondary status in terms of social prestige among lower- and middle-income groups. In a more recent account of the schools and their distribution in the city, the upwardly mobile middle-class of the city lament the lack of quality schooling in the city as far as training in a global/national kind of English is concerned.

The school administration, therefore, on its part was negotiating its position and worked towards its projection as a growth-oriented modern school among parents. The message emerges quite strongly in its advertisements, calendar and in the annual function of the school. The Annual Function, celebrated in December/January, is a major event in which the school formally showcases itself to a wider audience by inviting the press and some special guests.

During the annual day celebration of the school in January 2007, the institutional achievements were presented by the Principal before an audience comprising parents, students and other invited guests from the city representing different fields such as education, politics and theatre. The speech was woven around themes of success of the students. The record of success in the High School leaving certificate examinations conducted by the Uttar Pradesh Board was presented on this occasion. The supplementary training for students’ success in the job market was also highlighted. One key skill in this arena was identified as mastery over English and the school administration claimed to be working actively towards its provision. The other themes like claims of a ‘child-friendly learning atmosphere’, ‘emphasis on extra-curricular activities’ and ‘personality development classes’ emerged as secondary but related to the primary theme of school’s academic success. And finally, the effort that school administration was making towards turning the school into a completely English-medium school in near future was highlighted. All these talks about achievements, and proposals of future work were meant for the audience, mainly parents and to keep them assured of their choice of this very school for their children. The mandate was very clear for all that in the near future, the school will be converted to an English-medium school. The preparation for the same was already underway, some of the subjects like Mathematics, Science and basic Computer Science were already being taught in a

bilingual mode in the primary sections of the Hindi medium school.

However, the stark mismatch between the stated goals and the resources that the school actually possessed towards the realisation of the same was visible only when one engaged with the school more closely on a daily basis. The administrative staff often complained that the parents do not tolerate even a small fee hike and threaten to withdraw their children from the school, making the availability of financial resources very limited for the school. This limitation had affected all the aspects of school operations. For example, the school did not have a functional library or laboratory for its students. The most important effect was felt on teachers’ salaries which were kept at a very low rate. The lower salary of teachers is considered as one of the major factors which is believed to have made ‘private schools for poor’ more efficient in terms of cost of schooling vis-à-vis the government funded and aided schools. However, few studies have examined the issue from the perspective of the teachers employed in the schools. The majority of the teachers in this school only stayed for a very short period, mainly because they were paid low salaries (lower than the government prescribed minimum wages for the unskilled workers) and no provision for social security was made in their jobs. Only a couple of them were trained and most tended to drift towards any school offering higher pay. Most of the male teachers in the school were constantly looking at recruitment and openings for jobs in the government sector, and this constituted one of the important themes of discussion in school staffroom. Because of their low income, the teachers invariably relied on the supplementary sources of income from coaching and private tuitions given in the after school hours.

The English teacher of the school was a young man from a nearby village and was in charge of teaching English in all the grades from class 6 onwards. He was staying in a rented room in the city and spent most of his after-school hours in private tuitions. He spoke at length about the problems of teaching English to students who always speak in Bhojpuri and Banarasi at home and, at times even in school when teacher is not around. In every sphere of life, the school administration and school teachers have to negotiate with limitations which are as much financial as they are locational. The spatial embeddedness of the school in a narrow lane, its inability to draw students from physically and culturally distant places, has weighed on its

financial resources, and put severe restrictions on its claims and aspirations of achieving a higher status in relation to the more expensive private schools which cater to the more upwardly mobile sections of the middle class in the city.

The families associated with the school, as suggested earlier, are mostly self-employed, and a few of them are in salaried jobs. They live in residential lanes not very far from the school. A substantial proportion of these are among the first generation to start sending their children to modern schools. Their relationship with this school is examined in the next section by closely following the intergenerational educational mobility in families representing the lower middle class and/or informal working class. Here, my analysis is structured around fourteen families which send their children to the school. These families can be seen as following two kinds of occupations. They are self-employed families who worked as small-scale traders, or are engaged in the private service sector without the benefits of permanent wage work. Among the nine self-employed families, six are engaged in the saree industry and three are in the process of shifting to other forms of self-employment as retailers or as traders of readymade garments. Of these nine, six are from Ansari community, and three are from Jaiswal caste groups. All of them have been settled in the city for several generations. In all these families the men who look after the family business are supported by elder sons, while women stay at home and provide care work for their children and other family members.

Their position demonstrates socio-economic vulnerability despite property ownership. This can be attributed to the shifts in the handloom weaving sector in the post-independence period in which phases of upward rise were followed by stagnation and downward growth. In the 1960s there was a gradual upward socio-economic mobility among some of the Muslim weavers who became master weavers, and some even became traders and exporters. Because of the stagnation in demands for handloom products, there were shifts towards powerloom-based manufacturing by the traders as it drastically reduced the time needed for preparing a saree. Now powerloom operators have dominated the market pushing the handloom-based weavers to the margins of the system. With lifting of restrictions on imports of raw silk as well as of the finished silk goods, the sector started facing stiff competition from the manufacturing centres in Surat as well as from China. These developments have affected the trade. They have hit the weavers the hardest but have also affected the prospects of small-scale traders and master weavers. The
availability of readymade garments at a cheaper cost has lowered the demand of locally produced manufactured goods. The social and economic position of the small traders, therefore, cannot be considered as secure.

Among the service category, there are five families who originally migrated from the rural areas of East UP and West Bihar and are now settled in Banaras. Three of them are working as employees in retail shops in the city, one is working as an insurance agent and one is working in a private firm. These are employed in the service sector but lack the necessary social security or the cultural resources characteristic of the middle-class groups. They are living in rented rooms and do not own any property in the city. They maintain their social ties with the villages in their holidays. None of these families showed any of the characteristic features of the ‘middle-class category’ outlined in the earlier sections of the paper. The men working in the service sector are better educated than the traders as all of them have had tertiary education. However, the difference becomes negligible in case of mothers as almost all the mothers were educated only up to high school level.

Both because of the differences in their employment profiles, and the nature of work in the informal sectors in Banaras, it is difficult to classify these families under distinct categories of lower middle class and/or informal working class, and boundaries tended to overlap in terms of their distance from significant cultural resources valued in school. All these families use a particular form of speech which differs from the Hindi used at school. They use a variety of Bhojpuri or Banarasi boli at home and among family members. The Ansaris claimed to have their own style of Banarasi which varied across different settlements. During interviews, everyone used their own styles of Hindi. Given the gendered division of space and work in these families, I mostly ended up talking with the women of the families, young and old, and with few men. This might have limited my understanding of language use patterns at workplaces across community and caste groups, but enabled me to probe into the gendered nature of the socialisation of children into the right language-use patterns within the family. It is important to note that the differences in occupational and educational background notwithstanding, all the families are invested in the education of their children.
6. Educational experience and aspirations of mobility

The life of people in the saree industry is organised in unique ways. It is sustained by a complex web of familial and inter-community relationship among retail traders, suppliers, master weavers and weavers. These families live in the narrow lanes of Alaipura, Jaitpura and Kachhibagh at a distance of less than a kilometre from the school. Some of these areas are marked as slums. These locations are known as the weavers’ settlement, but many of these families have started running powerlooms and hiring workers to operate these, suggesting a relatively better off position than that of weavers. In recent years people have also started shifting to some other ventures but the majority of households and their members continue to have some kind of connection with the saree industry. Their homes also house their workplace in which residential space is on the upper floors and the weaving work is carried out on the ground floor. They continue to live in shared family settings with or without a shared kitchen. Among the Ansaris, the married women of the family are also usually from the same city and have had very little exposure to the formal schools, most of them having been to a school or a madrasa only for the elementary years. As these families started moving to the position of master weavers, earned more resources and were free from full time manual weaving, they started investing in modern forms of schools for the children. Most of the young men and women from such families have been to some madrasa school for five to eight years, unlike the younger generation. The younger siblings are moving to non-madrasa schools and, at times, to English medium private schools in the vicinity. These moments of change, however sluggish they might seem are not without their tensions. The families would not send their children to the English-medium schools in the far-off parts of the city or allow their daughters to continue in a co-educational school beyond the upper primary levels. A daughter’s education is still a luxury which can be afforded only by a few, and has to be achieved while following strictly gendered norms of control and security.

For these families the sites of education are plural and not restricted to the schools alone. The alternatives sites of education in family and workplace are sometimes in conflict.

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43 The Ansaris have been at the receiving end of colonial profiling and were identified as ‘the bigoted julaha’ in colonial documents. They are still viewed as an educationally backward community, sometimes referred to as ‘jahil’ or illiterate, and as resistant to modern schooling as compared to other communities and castes, as suggested by N. Kumar, Lessons from School.
with the school education and adjustments have to be made accordingly. For example, having made the transition to school education, these families continued to arrange for private instructions in reading of Koran along with school subjects like Science, Maths and English.\(^{45}\) Having sent their daughters to a modern co-educational school up to a certain level, they had to be re-admitted to an all girls’ school in the vicinity. In my interactions with them, almost every family seemed open about sending their younger sons into higher education, a luxury which is not given to the eldest son. The choice also entails increased investments in education in supplementary forms, such as private tuitions and coaching etc.

However, not all ‘business families’ associated with the school have a similar experience with school education. There are other families of caste-Hindu traders, predominantly from Jaiswal and Yadav castes, who are going through a phase of transition from the traditional joint-family business to newer business ventures which are less dependent on kin networks such as traders of machine embroidered cloth, and retailers of grocery. The mothers’ generation has had some exposure to schools which varied from primary level to the high school level. In these families, future aspirations for social mobility are more closely tied up with investments in training in formal education of their sons, as compared to the Ansari families. The younger siblings in the families were admitted to an English-medium school, while the older ones attended the school discussed above. The eldest daughters in all the families attended a Hindi-medium, all-girls’ school. Like the Ansaris, these families appeared to be more invested in gendered school choice for their children, but unlike them they considered investing more in boys’ schooling, exploring good schools for their children even outside the mohulla. In terms of linguistic practices, these families are making a clearer shift from the exclusive use of Bhojpuri-Banarasi towards using Hindi at home which has important implications for their school life as discussed earlier.

The families in the service sector, few in number, present a very different home environment. These families have invariably migrated to the city, and are living in smaller rented houses, having moved from their family of origin and settling near their workplace. They are not involved in any form of business, lacking the necessary capital, skills and connections, and

\(^{45}\) N. Goswami, “Multiple Identities and Educational Choices: Reflections on Ansari Students in a School of Banaras”, in *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim Communities in India*, ed. V. Jairath (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), 174-93.
therefore must rely on school education for creating opportunities in life. In these service-class families, just like in the business class, men are employed and women manage the domestic world. As they are migrants from rural areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, their native language was used only by the parental generation and not by the children who have made a clearer switch to the standard Hindi.

The majority of the families have evaluated the schooling options in Banaras and made assessment of the schools accessible to them. In Ansari families, which have the least exposure to school education, only a few family members like elder siblings showed some familiarity about the status of different schools. In contrast, in other families, the parents, have a clearer idea about the position of the school vis-à-vis other schools. The most significant role was played by the mothers who had been to schools before marriage. So, parents who have had prior exposure to schooling have better ways of making the requisite choice for their children. Quite often they tended to weigh up their options in terms of their child’s capacity before making the investment in the expensive schools of the city. Financial contingencies in families had a direct influence on the choice of school even in families where mothers are quite engaged.

However, all these families, in spite of the variance in occupational background, represented similar class position in terms of their lack of social security. They were sending their children to a common school and were similarly invested in schooling but their expectations of schooling differed. They looked for better social standing for their children through entry into gainful employment but articulated it differently. The salaried people had more stakes in formal schooling as they lacked other kinds of resources. They were keen to shift their children, preferably the boys, to a more prestigious school if they could afford to do so. However, their choices were restricted due to the high costs of schooling, commuting and of rented apartments in an urban setting closer to high status schools. The families engaged in the saree and other trades relied less on formal education alone and more on their social connections, drawing on kin and community-based associations. It was also because of a pragmatic awareness about the stiff competition for jobs in the service sector. Formal education at higher level, therefore, is not considered with much seriousness. Some form of skilled training which might be useful for trade is considered more reliable along with the social network necessary to access the same.

All these families, differentially placed in occupational terms, are invested in the
schooling of their young generations as is evident in their association with a private school. However, making sense of their investment in school education requires a careful analysis of the socio-spatial dimension of their relationship with the school at hand, which is seen as ‘the standard school of the mohulla’. The school comes with higher costs in terms of fees and other associated expenditure in comparison to a madrasa or a government school, preferred in the earlier generations by the Ansaris and the caste-Hindu groups. It organises annual festivals, exhibitions, excursions, picnic trips all of which entail expenditure for the families. Most families also invest in private tutors of some kind. Though it adds to their family expenditure, it is located closer to home for most of them.

The distance from school has been found to be of significant factor in many studies focussing on school choice for the poor. Distance has cultural as well as physical properties if we account for the different meanings people ascribe to places in urban context. People’s association with the urban space and how they make sense of their place of living has implications for studies exploring the parental choice of schools. The physical aspect of distance is closely associated with costs of commuting to school and the inconvenience of aligning the working hours of parents with that of school time. Apart from being costly, the distant schools are situated in a completely unfamiliar socio-cultural milieu, which might offer better training for the children but seems out of reach to most of these families. This is most clearly articulated in parental accounts of the importance of English in determining the future prospects of their children. While almost everyone seemed to believe that English is essential for future employment in the service sector as well as in expansion of business network, and arranged for private tuition in English at home, they did not take the step of sending their children to a proper English-medium school. They felt that a complete shift to an English-only school would be difficult to achieve both in terms of costs as well as the possibility of failure in such schools.

For the families of the traders, the cultural barrier of approaching a distant English-medium school was significant enough to deter them from thinking of investing in them. The present school while being proximate to their dwelling places represented a school culture which

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46 The school was described in these terms by several parents with whom the author interacted. Some of the details have been provided in Goswami, Legitimisation of Standard Languages, 121.
intimidated parents who did not have much access to higher education. Though they represented a higher proportion in the school, their attendance at the parent-teacher meetings was more muted. They felt more hesitant to approach the school on their own and participated minimally in such occasions. Similarly, the teachers’ conceptions of such students were also marked in less favourable terms; they often saw these students as lacking in terms of a ‘culture of education’. The construct was drawn on the basis of educational, occupational and linguistic backgrounds of students’ families and, only a few students coming from families employed in the service sector, speaking in standard Hindi and having educated parents were seen as adept with the school culture.

Among the service sector families, concerns were articulated in different terms. The mother of Ayush, whose husband is working as an accountant in a shop in the city, strongly believed that the medium of a child's schooling did make a difference to his/her future career in present times, and that one had to struggle a lot in life, otherwise. Contrasting with the generation of her parents, she said that it was only possible in the past for people to progress in life even if they studied in the Hindi-medium schools. She wants to send her son to an English-medium school, but she fears that he might not be able to cope with a sudden change. Expressing her satisfaction about the academic quality of the present school, she adds that the teachers should talk to the students in English as far as possible, and that there must be enough ‘practice’ of English for easy adaptation in later stages.

For such families, therefore, the present school presented an optimal choice which was proximate and approachable unlike the more prestigious English-medium schools located at a distance. The present school promised possibilities of learning English without the necessary threat of intimidation and failure in cultural and academic terms. It still called for a lot of investment in terms of money and energy on the part of these families to make this transition to a private school in this generation. In the next section we look at some of the ways through which mothers from these families invested their energy in making their children compatible with school culture. I have focussed on their controlling and disciplinary tactics employed in sanctioning or encouraging specific uses of language. As I have already highlighted in the previous sections, the language variety used in these families are different from the ones preferred in schools. Elsewhere, I have discussed in detail the specific resonance of these
differences in the school life.\textsuperscript{48} Here I will focus on the parenting strategies adopted by mothers with regard to cultivating a more respectable form of language in their children by disciplining the use of \textit{mohulla}-specific ways of speaking.

7. \textit{‘Standard’ speech as an educational resource}

The lower-class groups living in these neighbourhoods are more exposed to a way of speaking that is specific to their socio-spatial identity in Banaras. This aspect of their life has implications for the children attending schools. Quite often school teachers lament the fact that students cannot speak and write Hindi in a correct manner. They also labelled students on the basis of what kind of Hindi they actually used in school. Therefore, in a context like this, it is not just English that is important; knowing the right kind of Hindi also becomes a valued resource from the perspective of the lower classes.

That the use of ‘official’ and ‘standard’ language varieties accrues specific benefits in the educational market has been examined extensively in different disciplinary domains. Bourdieu, for example, scrutinizes the notion of ‘official language’, often seen as the standard language, as a ‘normalised’ product. In his view educational institutions, grammarians, and teachers act as agents of legitimisation of such languages. However, he does not subscribe to the view that official sanctions alone can make a language variety more powerful and underlines the importance of family and school in transmitting the linguistic competence with implications for their returns in linguistic market and other markets.\textsuperscript{49} At family level we can discern a variety of educational strategies employed to achieve this end of learning better languages. As discussed earlier, these families used a non-standard Hindi variety in the intimate sphere of their family life, among friends, with relatives and in the neighbourhood. However, all of them made efforts, often initiated by the mothers who are ‘conscious’ about their children’s education, towards refinement of the speech of their children. The role of mothers has been carefully examined in the burgeoning literature on the class and race-differentiated parenting strategies which have come to mark the home/school relationship in much of the industrialised west. Deane Reay has highlighted how class-differentiated use of linguistic resources has bearings on mothers’ power.

\textsuperscript{48} Goswami, \textit{Legitimising Standard Languages}.
vis-à-vis school teachers.\textsuperscript{50} Drawing on Bourdieu, she highlights the skilful use of linguistic capital by middle-class mothers to the advantage of their children in a school context. However, the literature on mothering practice as contributing to the social reproduction of class-based advantage is often criticised for not questioning the discourse of mothering in the sphere of education\textsuperscript{51} and for sidestepping the question of agency of working-class mothers.

In this study we find that most women from the lower-middle class and informal-working-class groups are actively involved in their children’s educational future while being acutely aware of the social-spatial constraints that keep them tied down. Married women in these families, by and large, expressed a sense of shame with the use of non-standard languages used in their family and worked towards cultivation of standard speech among children. Most of these women devalued local ways of speaking and distanced themselves from its use. Many women used the term \textit{dehati} i.e. ‘belonging to the village’ to describe the local language variety of Banaras and complained that it is disrespectful, vulgar and abusive in nature. In their estimation, these varieties thrived in their families and in the \textit{mohulla} or neighbourhood in which they lived.

The social space of a \textit{mohulla} is usually associated with leisure activities such as playing, gossiping among peer groups, and indulging in other idyllic activities. It represents an unregulated space where the popular language varieties described as ‘Urdu-Hindi mix’ and ‘Banarasi boli’ are used. As a gendered space, it is an area which is experienced differently by men and women. For men, of different age groups, it connotes a relaxed space meant for camaraderie and fun. For married and unmarried women, it is construed as a threatening space which has to be crossed as soon as possible and preferably in daylight. Most of the mothers shared concerns about their daughters’ safety during their commute from school and otherwise because of the presence of the gang of men. Sometimes, they also complained of lewd remarks from them. Almost all the women complained about the behaviour of the men in the neighbourhood as lacking in manners and respectable speech, which posed a threat to the right kind of socialisation of their children in general and women in particular. Some mothers managed to restrain their children, both boys and girls of young age groups, from playing outside their home. One of them even suggested that she regulates her children’s playing habits by

\textsuperscript{50} Deane Reay, “Linguistic Capital and Home”, \textit{Acta Sociologica} 42, no. 2 (1999): 159.

motivating them to play inside the house rather than go outside. She arranges for indoor game for her children for this purpose. The perceived threat of the *mohulla* is very pronounced among mothers and is also articulated in their preference for standard languages like *khadi boli*, *shudh Hindi* and *Urdu* over the ones used in their neighbourhood.

While all the families strived towards refinement of their young in matters of speech, the mothers in joint family settings and engaged in traditional occupation of the saree industry were faced with greater difficulties. The joint family network and close and continuous proximity to an occupational culture which thrives on a particular form of speech, makes their effort towards speech correction a solitary affair in the family, often inviting scorn from the elderly. Their inability to restrict the non-standard language use, in spite of their efforts, suggests the difference of their socio-economic symbolic worlds which make these families value different cultural resources in different domains viz. Banarasi or Urdu-Hindi for trade and for interaction with the elderly and the neighbours but standard Hindi and English for children’s future.

However, attempts are made by all these mothers to make their children more refined and cultured in their mannerisms and speech. Through such engagement with the upbringing of their children they seek to achieve a high moral status. These micro-processes of parenting are important to understand the spatial embeddedness of the experiences of these families and their struggles implicit in the process of shifting towards higher-status schools and the associated school cultures. Their negotiations with the spatial aspects of their life in the neighbourhood are a necessary component of their hopes for a better future of their children.

### 8. Conclusion

The class-differentiated access to education in the Indian cities calls for a renewed examination with a focus on the spatial aspects of the relationship. Even as inferences can be drawn from studies which have specifically investigated the effects of the neoliberal policies, most of these have focused on issues of inequitable distribution of educational resources between the ‘middle-class’ city dweller and the ‘urban poor’. These two categories are often invoked to draw attention towards the decline of state-supported educational institutions on one hand, and the unprecedented growth of the private-for-profit schools for the poor. The spread of low-cost-for-
profit private schools in the urban slums and in rural areas has generated important debates on matters of efficiency, quality and teacher accountability. One aspect of the life in private schools that seems to be adding to their popularity is their promise of English as a cultural resource. The growth of the new service sector in the Indian economy which relies on English language proficiency has further strengthened the hegemonic position of English language schooling in the imaginary of an urban life. A focus on the cultural implications of the rise of such industries helps us to re-envision the notion of spatial justice in terms of centrality of metropolitan consumption cultures in the discourse of mobility and the subsequent marginalisation of popular cultures and languages associated with the non-metropolitan cities. In most of the studies addressing the above issues, the focus has always been on the ‘middle-class-category’ vis-à-vis the ‘urban poor’ located in the metropolitan contexts. The increasing evidence of the latter group opting for the English medium private school is often viewed as yet another indicator of the victory of the private school market over the government schools in symbolic terms.

In this paper an argument has been made to contextualise the above development by focusing on the category of the urban poor more closely in a non-metropolitan context. The exploration of a school catering to families categorised as lower-middle-classes and as informal-working classes reveals the spatial embeddedness of the lives of people who aspire to be a part of higher status groups by investing in a school that can promise easy access to English.

These families with their overlapping class positions had different vantage-points of relationship vis-à-vis the school, thereby, allowing us a microscopic view of the processes through which such families select a school for their children. It is pertinent to note how family’s access to a particular school is mediated by not just costs and physical distance of the school but also by their comfort with the associated school cultures and resources. The ease of shift from home language to the standard language, as and when required, is a much valued resource in these settings. In all such families, people make explicit reference to the aspirations of better future for their children. These aspirations are voiced in terms of better schooling in valued languages, especially English. Their mothers are invested in this direction through a variety of disciplinary measures. However, these measures are different from the extensive parental work termed as

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‘concerted cultivation’ among middle classes.\textsuperscript{53} It is important to note that, in this particular context the shift to an English medium school is not made directly but is made through several intermediary steps, including the one of learning standard language cultures preferred in schools. In a changing economic context of occupational shifts to the new labour market which is more integrated with the standard rather than local, neighbourhood languages, switching first to standard varieties like Hindi seems more plausible. And yet poorer people continue to hope for a schooling that will train their children in English. However, the schools which are accessible to them, in which they invest so much of their hopes, are not equipped to fulfil this promise because of the socio-spatial structures which constrain their lives in the city.

To conclude, the apparent shifts in the educational choices of the lower classes in the urban settings are not just about monetary investments in private schools. They also entail investment in symbolic resources, like the hope of learning English and the ability to use standard language in everyday interactions. An attention to such micro-processes against the political economic context of city life can strengthen our understanding of how spatial and social inequities of urban life shape the school choices of different classes.

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