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Locating Education:
School, Family and Community
and the Practice of Care

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Abstract

Mapping family, community and school as overlapping spaces of learning and hence as an extended domain of pedagogic practice, this paper explores the complexities of an ethics of care in the domain of education. Drawing from the feminist debate on the ethics of care, the paper analyzes the specific aspect of care in the context of schooling. Also, I bring attention to what may be categorized as 'minor aspects', which become critical in certain situations. Hence, I underscore the importance of a supporting network at local level for an ethical practice of care in school and outside. This is not to discard the structured nature of discriminations and marginalization, but to call attention to the actual moments when the structure is in action.

1

Since the introduction of modern education, the school has been recognized as the location for all kind of learning practices. The major question that inspired the researchers was: what will be an ideal practice for learning once the children are inside the school? The education system, for this analytical purpose, is usually comprised of students, teachers and curriculum and policy makers. Learning was considered as a special activity that happens in educational institutions and everything else was usually marked as outside of it.[1]

Scholars of education recognize learning as a continuous activity and lifelong process while considering school education as a specific goal- oriented and limited activity. This in itself is not a problem, if the object of inquiry is limited to specific practices inside the school. However, if the focus is on the child who is undergoing the process of education, then the inside/ outside concepts may not be helpful in understanding the transformations of the actor (the child) during the process. It is important to trace the whole network through which the child is moving and both acting upon and acted upon. A. R. Vasavi observes that "research in India has failed to detail how intra-family locations and caste-community

relations vis-à-vis the larger society and politico-economic factors act as deterrents to those aspiring and working towards educational achievements".[2] In short, for educational studies in general, school cannot be defined as the inside and the family and community as the outside. The social here is a continuum or a network which includes school, family and the community.

Social constructivists in the 1980s emphasized the importance of the social in the learning process famously expressed in statements like "students do not come to school as clean slates to be written on" or "children's minds are not *tabula rasa*". Studies of education inspired by the constructivist arguments underscored the aspects of the sociological differences brought into the school from outside by the child which critically influences practices inside the school.[3] However, the question was still focused on what would be a good practice *in school* that could overcome the social differences among the students. The idea was that for educationists (teachers or researchers or in general the institutional system of education) what is happening outside the school are external elements. At best, the figure of the parent was assumed to be the sole agent who can intervene in this social that surrounds the children outside school.

Analyzing the narratives of Dalit women's experience of education, Shailaja Paik explains that the issue of education of Dalit women is entangled with the issue of water, food, access to travel and gender norms at home. Based on Ambedkar's argument that the mere access to school in itself will not solve the educational issues for Dalits, Paik explores multiple locations such as home, the road to school, the market, the school and inside the class room.[4] Paik's theorization of Dalit women's experience allows us to locate school as a continuation of family and community. Similar examples can be found in academic works and autobiographical narratives of educational experience by the marginalized section of the society.

In Shantabai Kamble's narrative of her school days, scenes move from home to school and back where decisions made at both locations entangle and determine her future education. The school teacher advises her to shift into another school as her current school is an 'agricultural school' where girls are not usually admitted. Her father expresses his helplessness in sending her to a school which is in a faraway town.[5] It is between these two precarious locations that she travels and struggles to get a higher education. Shankarrao Kharat's description of the lunch interval at school when Dalit students try to earn some money by selling animal bones to the 'bone merchant' is an example where pedagogical practices move outside the school.[6] Here, it is the 'interval' at school which has more importance than the activities in the class room, where he learned the realities of caste discrimination and oppression. In his famous autobiography *Baluta*, Daya Pawar's description of his school days includes everything from hostel food, incidents in village and city to his adventures through the realm of sexual desires; but description of the class room is only a miniscule part of his narratives. The engagement of teachers outside the class gets prominence and becomes life changing in this narrative.[7] This is true in the description of schooling in Bama's autobiographical narrative *Karukku* as well.[8]

Murali Krishna, in his analysis of violence against Dalits in schooling, shows that the discontinuities between the home and the school are always a matter of concern for Dalit students. The teachers (mostly upper caste), even with good intentions are disinterested 'in finding out what happened at our

homes' and hence fails to understand the issues Dalit students face outside the school. He underscores that unless these issues are seriously incorporated into the design of curriculum and pedagogy, the world at home and world at school will remain worlds apart.[9]

The stories that I refer below are not very different from the above mentioned autobiographical narratives; all of them talk about various forms of struggles individuals undergo during the period of formal education, which enabled some of them to become upwardly mobile but for some others generated feelings of failure and disappointment. Like any other autobiographical narrative, these narratives are unique and located in very specific contexts. At the same time, they allow us to see many important concerns from perspectives that are not usually accorded the same importance by scholars or policy makers. For example, activities that are not usually recognized as those within the domain of education attain critical importance in these narratives. The curriculum or pedagogic methods, which scholars consider very crucial, might have only a marginal importance in these reflections. Some caring words by a teacher about health, an elder sister's marriage, a mother's death and so on take preference over whether the school follows an activity-oriented pedagogic approach or whether the content of the syllabus is appropriate etc.

Although the pedagogical and curricular aspects critically affect the educational career of any student, the affective engagement of a teacher in the lives of students has not been usually considered as appropriate for analysis of the educational practice. Before extending the argument further, in the next part of the paper I will analyze two stories briefly; one which is a success story and another one which is story of failure. I do not claim that these two stories represent all other narratives; all narratives are unique and different. However, these two stories allow us a glimpse to the issues I am focusing on.

2

Vidya[10] is a professor in a University department in Kerala and is from a Scheduled Tribe group in a village where most of her neighbours were landless agricultural workers and the majority was illiterate. Her parents studied up to seventh standard, an exception for their times. Her father, who worked as a watchman in a central government department, was the only person in her neighbourhood who had a government job. She mentions that her parents were determined to give her a good education and this helped her during the period of school education. She, however, reminds us that they were not bothered about the quality of education or the level of education that she could achieve; the idea was to get a government job as soon as possible. She herself had internalized the urge to get a government job from early childhood. She remembers: "When I was six or seven, my mother told me that I should take care of her when she becomes old. I replied that I might not get time because I will be an employee by that time".[11]

Vidya first attended Lower Primary classes in a Government Malayalam medium school, which was at walking distance from her house. She topped her class, though she had some difficulty in mathematics. Her parents had subscribed to children's comics and magazines (in Malayalam) and by the time she was five or six she could read fluently the stories and novels for children. Her favourite subject however was English, in which she always scored well. After seventh standard she had to go to a different school, not

very far from her house. This was also a Government Malayalam medium school, in which most of the students were from the nearby villages. According to Vidya, those who were keen on having best quality education joined the Christian convent school in the city, because the Government school nearby was notorious for its lack of discipline and classes were disrupted by frequent students' strikes and protests. She also wanted to go to the city school, but her father discouraged her saying that there she would not be able to compete with the rich students and she might feel disappointed. Most of the classmates in the new high school were there just to finish the tenth standard and were not bothered much about getting good scores or going for higher education. She also lost her spirit and rigor and in her teachers' words 'became lazy though having very good potential'. She finished her tenth standard with a second class.

What motivated her in her school education were mainly two factors. First was the parents' dedication to train her for a government job and second, some individual teachers who took personal care. She remembers with gratitude that these teachers were vital for sustaining her momentum and interest at least in some specific subjects. This interest developed in the school influenced her in her later decision to major in history for the undergraduate degree. She was very interested in English as well, which helped in a smooth transition from the Malayalam medium to English, which is the medium for higher education in most universities. She completed her MA from a Government College and later completed a B. Ed Degree as well. Considering the social background from which she comes this was a long and extended duration of education.

Most of the neighbours and sometimes her parents as well were worried about her continuing in higher studies rather than applying for a job. The assumption was that, since she belongs to a Scheduled Tribe community, it would be easy for her to get a job even with a high school pass. Of course this would be at the lowest level of the government bureaucracy, but at this point the priority was to get a job rather than the highest positions she could achieve with her capabilities. However, by this time she was determined and continued her higher studies and her parents did not object. After her studies she first worked in a school and then later joined a college as a lecturer.

Vidya's story could be read as a narrative of individual struggle and determination versus the backwardness and ignorance of a community in which some of the enlightened outsiders (here individual teachers) helped her to overcome these difficulties. In this version, her parents' support would be connected to their education or to the employed father, which would be considered as an exception to the rule. The obvious problem with this interpretation is that it does not take the structural issues into consideration and ends up concluding that individual hard work necessarily brings success. At the same time, an opposite reading, namely that the issue must be considered only at the structural level without accounting for the local is equally problematic.

It is clear from her narrative that there is a strong belief in her family and community that schooling is one of the most important factors for mobility. However, this belief is also restricted by many other considerations. Mobility itself is understood within the limits (imagined or real) of the starting point where one situates oneself. Vidya's father wanted her to be well educated and is 'aware' that the

convent school in town is better than the government high school in the village. However, the quality of the school is not the only criteria in his decision-making.

The limited ambitions of her family or in the community can be read either as their ignorance or as the operation of the hierarchies of caste, gender and class. However, neither of these views helps us to explore the strategies for expanding the scope of success to other students. Vidya's success in overcoming the structural barriers exposes the limitations of the structure and the gaps in the system through which one could cross the boundaries. At the same time, the attempt to widen these gaps cannot be sustained simply by individual hard work; it needs methodical and creative collective intervention at the local level itself. Before exploring this further, let us take another story which is reported as a 'failure story' by the narrator himself.

Selvam is from a fishing community in a coastal village in Keralam.[12] He and his younger sister were brought up by their single mother who was a fish seller. His story has many parallels with Vidya's but is situated in a different socio-cultural context. His mother had not attended school which made him the first one in his family to do so. He studied in an aided private school in the Malayalam medium where most of the students were from the fishing community. He was first in his class until the tenth standard. He fondly remembers that one or two teachers took special care and encouraged him in his studies. When he was in primary class, a tuition teacher, understanding his poor situation, taught him for free and was crucial in developing his learning capabilities. His mother who struggled to provide basic amenities made sure that the financial crisis would not affect his studies. She even subscribed to a newspaper, one of two subscribers in the entire village, the other being a school teacher.

When he was in fourth standard a convent was established near his home by a Christian church. They had a project for providing financial assistance, in the form of books, uniform and free tuition. This also helped Selvam to continue his studies through high school. Teachers in the school were encouraging and helped the students especially in scoring good marks in examinations.[13] As a member of the fishing community, he received a small scholarship from the government. His dream at this point was to become a police officer. At this time, he was also interested in sports, but as the time for training and tuition overlapped, his mother and relatives discouraged him from involvement in sports.

A crisis at home (about which he is reluctant to talk in detail) which occurred while he was in his tenth standard dramatically altered the situation. After this event, he was unable to concentrate on studies or on games. He decided that he would not write the final examination for the tenth standard because he was sure he would not pass. However, under compulsion from his family and teachers, he eventually took the examination. He passed with lower scores and this led to further disappointment and frustration. Due to a severe financial crisis, neither his relatives nor neighbours were able to support him at this critical juncture. As the project by the convent also finished, they were also unable to provide further financial assistance. He studied one more year but dropped out without finishing his twelfth standard. He was unemployed for some years and according to his own words, "If only there were some help and if I had tried again to pass the plus two, I would have become a police officer." After lazing around with friends for some months, he began looking for jobs outside India. He was cheated by recruitment agents twice and lost a huge amount of money. During this time, a new hotel opened in his

village and he joined there first as security guard and then as a life guard. He is married and has two children. His present dream in life is to give a good education to his children.

While a single event at home toppled Selvam's dreams, it is clear that there was no support system around him which could have prevented him from drowning in unemployment and financial crises. The same family and community who were supporting him in ordinary times were not effective in a moment of crisis. The idea that "If I had financial support and help in sustaining motivation I would have finished my studies" is a recurrent theme in many of these narratives. While lack of support from the community did not affect Vidya's education, it had deep implications for Selvam's life. It shows that the 'social influence' question should be deeply contextualized and it should be addressed locally. In other words, structures in the abstract sense (such as caste system or patriarchy) help us to frame some questions, but only when we highlight or make visible the acting out of such structural forces in contexts from which we can address issues of discrimination or marginalization.

There are similar kinds of events in other narratives that have been collected as part of this research. For example, Mukesh Prasad who is from a poor Dalit community describes how a small incident outside school involving a caring teacher brought him back to school, which would otherwise have ended when he was in third standard. In a mathematics class, his teacher beat him severely for a small mistake in calculation and he felt really upset. He started uttering curse words (which he learned from his father who was alcoholic) to the teacher, while he was screaming and this resulted in further beating by the teacher. Soon, he left school for home which was very close to school and decided that he would never go back. He told his father who was at home that he is not going to school anymore and his father replied: "if you don't want, don't go." After some time another teacher from the school came to his house and took him to a restaurant, bought him his favourite food and advised him to come back. At this point, he was unable to say no to this teacher and he returned. After this incident, he continued his studies uninterruptedly and became a professor at a University in Keralam.[14] The incident itself may be considered common or minor for larger issues of educational practice, but the acutely experienced intensity of these minor incidents is crucial for the continuing education of students from the marginalized sections. Two important themes come to the fore in these narratives. The first is the ethics and politics of care. The figure of a caring teacher is a common factor in many of the narratives. However, the possibility of this figure becoming a benevolent and patronizing authority figure is also real. The second theme concerns the need for a support system responsible for addressing issues at both an individual and a structural level in a locality. These two issues need further detailed investigation which is not in the scope of this article; in the remaining part of this essay, however, I will attempt to develop some preliminary thoughts regarding these two themes, and later contextualize them based on the educational reform attempts and decentralization projects in Keralam after the 1990s.

3

The ethics of care as a philosophical concept has been discussed and critiqued by many philosophers including Kant, Nietzsche and Habermas from differing perspectives. However, it is the feminist scholars in the 1980s who developed the concept as a political question.[15] They located the question of care in

the public domain whereas it was earlier positioned in the realm of the private. For example Virginia Held, criticizing Barry's approach of justice argues against relegating "care to the status of an optional extra for personal contexts."[16] This feminist debate helps us to understand care not just as the moral obligation of a rational being, but as a social relation in which feelings and reason are equally important.

The notion of care as a social relation challenges the dichotomous conceptualization of care -giver and care-receiver. They focus more on caring as practice rather than care as an already available resource or virtue of an individual. Nel Noddings points out:

> There are people who attend and respond to others regularly and who have such a well-developed capacity to care that they can establish caring relations in even the most difficult situations. But at bottom, the ethic of care should not be thought of as an ethic of virtue.[17]

Noddings underscores the importance of dialogic relations between care -giver and care -receiver and caring as an open-ended conversation without anticipating an exact conclusion. What is important for our discussion in this debate is that the figure of a caring teacher should be situated in the context of caring practice as a social requirement, rather than conceiving of it as an individual quality or virtue of a teacher. In Noddings' explanation, however, caring appears as a practice of two individuals rather than as a social practice involving multiple individuals and hierarchies. In the context of schools in India where caste and gender discrimination is rampant, it is important look at caring as a political activity and mutually respecting social relation rather than a relation between two individuals. For example, Rajesh who is now an engineer remembers his school days: "There were some teachers who were always ready to help. But they thought that we (Dalit students) are the only people who need help and we will always need help. Somehow a feeling of shame developed inside me and I always resisted the temptation to ask for help."[18] Here one can easily notice that in spite of intentions, there are chances that students might read the individual attempts by teachers as patronizing and alienating. Rajesh rationalizes that the social experiences of exclusion and humiliation has already created an atmosphere of suspicion in which it is impossible for individual students to get support even if it is available.

The practice of care requires sensitivity to sensory experiences. One cannot assume that the conversation in caring practice can be limited to rational communication. Noddings argues that care as practice needs to "operate in an intuitive or receptive mode" rather than an objective rational mode of cognition.[19] This is not to say that only learned people can have rational communication while ignorant people express their ideas through feeling. In the context of communication of experience, the separation of feeling and reason is impossible. Hence, in caring, in which sharing of experience is crucial, responding to sensory experience is important for all members involving in caring. Comparing the experience of sensing at home and school, Santha, a Dalit woman from Palakkad, who dropped out from school when she was in seventh standard, emphasizes this point. She mentioned that teachers in the primary classes paid attention only to two factors: whether she could read properly and write properly. What she was feeling when she was reading or writing was not important.[20] The pedagogy was not oriented towards gauging what she felt when she read and wrote. It should be underscored that the point is not to invoke a natural feeling of empathy in individual teachers. The sensitivity towards 'feeling' should be part of the learning process of teachers. In other words, if we consider that the sensitivity

towards sensory experience is not a virtue or something natural, there is a need to train everyone to have such sensitivity. In short, caring is a social activity which is one of the necessary requirements of any meaningful practice of education.

One of the important questions regarding the practice of care is how can we keep a balance between meeting objective needs through social institutions and at the same time intuitive-receptive modes of care in operation? On the one hand, there is a need for institutional practice of care rather than an individual relation between two people, and on the other hand there is the fact that caring cannot be meaningful through goal - oriented, utilitarian, approaches which guide most institutional practices. Bubeck has argued that care does not need an emotional relation, but it should work based on activities that will meet the objective needs of a society.[21] Challenging this view, Held argues that "an important aspect of care is how it expresses our attitudes and relationships."[22] The challenge is to understand the social as not just constructed through objective facts (poverty line, income, dropout rate etc.), but as a process which involve experiences of respect and love as well as suspicion and distrust.

There is a tendency to consider the subjective part of care as something natural and given and the objective part of care as something that can be developed through training. The stereotypes, such as that mothers are naturally caring or women are better at nursing patients, develop from this understanding. What is overlooked is the part where a girl child is trained from very early childhood to be a provider of care. Similarly, considering the capacity to care as a "gift" is to reduce the multiple aspects of caring. Caring includes various aspects ranging from attentiveness to the structural issues of communities to satisfying the immediate need of individuals in the community. No individual can be considered as naturally incapable of being part of caring. Here in each community, no one should be exempted from caring for others or being cared for by others. In this sense, social training and moral compulsion emerging from this training together create the qualities of a care-giver; however it cannot be considered as a job of an expert. As the entanglement of needs, prejudices, desires and disillusions are part of the daily life experience, the distinction between the objective needs and the subjective practice of care need to be brought together in the practice of care.

While the discussions on the ethics of care by feminists are helpful in understanding the practice of care in education, it is important to note the fundamental differences in the contexts between the two. In the former, care is mostly debated in the context of nurturing a child, nursing patients and the old and so on, where it is difficult to expect the same kind of care back from the care-receiver. Held observes:

> In normal cases, recipients of care sustain caring relations through their responsiveness—the look of satisfaction in the child, the smile of the patient. Where such responsiveness is not possible—with a severely mentally ill person, for instance—sustaining the relation may depend entirely on the caregiver, but it is still appropriate to think in terms of caring relations: The caregiver may be trying to form a relation or must imagine a relation.[23]

When we shift the location to the context of education, further complexities arise. Here the student is not just a care - receiver. She can actively care for the teacher, the parent or a member of the community and caring happens between students as well; however in the dominant view of care,

students from the marginalized section are considered always at the receiving end and incapable of actively participating in caring.

The insensitiveness of the upper caste teacher in a classroom – which can vary from direct violence against the students from the marginalized sections to the well-intended patronizing approaches – are a result of an absence of social training in caring. Here social training should be understood in a wider perspective. When caste and gender hierarchies are normalized on the one hand and made invisible on the other, caring becomes a privilege and being cared for becomes a matter of inferiority and shame. Hence the social training needs to be understood as political struggles, intervention of student groups, and open ended conversation between groups. The last part of the paper will analyze how the issues discussed above were conceptualized and practiced in the educational reform programs of 1990s Keralam.

4

In the educational reform discussions in Keralam, care ethics was not discussed at all even in the debates on marginalization and discrimination in school. The reform in school education in Keralam along with the implementation of the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) in the late 1990s was an important milestone in the history of post-independence education in Keralam. For the first time after the formation of the state in 1957, an attempt was made to rethink about revamping the curriculum and pedagogy along with decentralization of educational administration. The importance of child-centric and activity-oriented learning was underscored and, based on this understanding, a new curriculum and new pedagogic strategies were designed and implemented in all primary schools. There was an attempt in the curriculum and in the syllabus to address the issue of sociological difference in society and create critical awareness among students about these issues.[24] The difference among the students itself and the different forms of learning capacities in relation to their socio -cultural surroundings were mentioned but not addressed in any detail in the pedagogic strategies of class room teaching and evaluation. More importantly, the reform project failed to seriously consider the fact that the child-centric and activity-oriented learning completely depended on the creative capabilities of the teacher and the social network of the community. In other words, the project did not start with preparing the teachers or the community members for the reforms and this became one of the major drawbacks to the success of the program. There was an attempt to train the teachers as the program was implemented, which was mainly focused on pedagogic strategies in the classroom and activities as part of the syllabus.

It is clear from the narratives discussed above that individual care of each child is an important factor especially for children from marginalized sections. Most teachers who belong to the upper caste and middle class backgrounds were incapable of recognizing the experiential world of the children from a very different background. Renu Kumar observes that the ideal child of the DPEP reform was the upper caste, middle class child. Hence activities like visiting an agricultural field or artisan's workshop were considered a way of enhancing the respect for labour among students. However, one of the major reasons why children from Dalit or artisanal classes attended school was to escape from manual labour. This contradiction was never taken into consideration in the reform project. There were no formal or

informal groups from which teachers could learn about the care ethics or hear about the experiential world of the children. Even in the meetings of parents and teachers, there was no session that focused on these differences in which the parents of the marginalized students could open up and tell their stories. These meetings were again dominated by the upper caste/ middle class parents and hence teachers had no learning opportunity here either. Most of the workshops conducted as part of the teachers' training workshops were attended by educational experts and teachers who shared a common life world. Their 'normal' student was an upper caste/ middle class student around whom all the discussions were focused.[25]

The ethics of care, as an attempt to dwell in different worlds simultaneously (worlds of prejudices, stereotypes, power differences and even mutual distrust) and to create overlapping spaces, requires not just open minded individuals but a politics that challenges the hierarchies which are often invisible to the dominant section. Such a space for political criticism is necessary and in order to develop such spaces, the participation of individuals with different experiences (not just in the form of token representation) is a necessary pre-condition. Virginia Held points out that "we might have a society that saw as its most important task the flourishing of children and the development of caring relations, not only in personal contexts but among citizens and using *governmental institutions*."[26] There was no attempt in the educational reform program to develop a formal framework which used caring as its organizing principle, and in the absence of such formal opportunities, the practice of care was left to the impulse and urges of individual teachers.

Even in government schools, where teachers are selected through public service commission examination, the representation of the teachers from reserved categories in committees and decision making bodies is nominal. Hence it is impossible to develop an ethics of care naturally among teachers unless there is a continuous and sustained demand for care from the community and parents. What is important is to develop formally and informally such spaces where people feel the freedom to express their criticisms and are able to hear from the teachers about their perspectives. This leads to our second theme of creating networks which will have authority to intervene in the education system meaningfully.

The stories of Selvam and Vidya remind us of the importance of a formal network at local level that is part of all aspects of the educational practices. The supporting family or community is necessarily an added advantage but they cannot replace a formal network for more than one reason. The most important reason is that the family and community in most cases are part of the crisis situation or a tragic event that a child faces; they are not outside of the event and hence they may not be able to provide a support system. Hence it is important both from the educational perspective and from a political perspective that formal networks are created in localities which connect members of school, family and community.[27] The People's Planning Program, implemented by the state of Keralam from 1997 on, attempted to create such a network. It will be useful to examine how the proponents of the plan conceptualized these networks and how they implemented it at the local level.

The main objective of the People's Planning Program was decentralization, and strengthening the village Gram Panchayats. Education was one of the major areas in which the powers of the state government

were supposed to be delegated to the Panchayat institutions. Once the delegation of powers was enacted by the state government, the lower and upper primary schools came under the village Panchayat, and the high schools under the district Panchayat. The State Planning Board, which was the state level implementing agency of the People's Planning Program, introduced a Comprehensive Education Program (CEP) to guide the Panchayts. CEP visualized education as a process which involves the participation of teachers, parents and the community members. This resembles a formalized network which I suggested above; however at the conceptual and practical level, it failed to build a network system that would support the children from the marginalized sections.

The People's Planning Program received severe criticism not only from the opposition political parties but from the left-leaning academics as well. Most of the critics, while appreciating the project in general, located the problem in its implementation. For example, K.P.Kannanpoints out that the decentralization project, which delegated about 40% of the plan fund to the village Panchayats, did not consider the 'fundamental constraints in institutional capacity building.'[28] He also questions the 'campaigning mode' of the program's implementation which was without a proper administrative or organizational structure. Here too the criticism is about implementation. While these criticisms are valid, it is important to question the conceptualization of the program itself, especially regarding the participation of marginalized sections of the population.

The planning and design of the decentralization plan was highly centralized and the approach was a 'top down' one. In the domain of education, village Panchayats did not have any decision-making powers. The appointments of teachers, their salary and the disciplinary procedures were still regulated by the Kerala Education Rules, to which there was no amendment to fit the decentralization of authority. The design of the curriculum, textbooks and evaluation methods were decided by centralized bodies such as SCERT. The Panchayats' involvement was limited to providing infrastructural facilities or to the distribution of uniforms for students, and providing financial assistance for the midday meal scheme.[29]

The discussions at the Panchayat level meetings were dominated by the teachers or other political party leaders in which people from the marginalized sections were neither represented nor their issues discussed. As mentioned earlier, the main theme of discussion was on implementation and not on critically analyzing the program or its various features. It is clear that meaningful engagement with the experience of marginalization could emerge only if it was on the agenda of the discussion. Further, these discussions cannot be limited to only the implementation of the program. In short, there is a need for collective action to challenge the structural hierarchies at local level; and in the case of education, this requires a network of teachers, parents and community members which focuses on the question of discrimination and marginalization.

Chapter IV of the Right of the Children for Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 has provisions for forming School Management Committees at the local level. The act also ensures that the members from the marginalized section are represented in the committee; for example fifty percent of the members should be women, and marginal communities should have proportionate representation.[30] However, from the Kerala experience it is clear that the token representation in itself will not challenge, but only reinforce the hierarchies at the local level. In other words *community* and

local are not unproblematic categories and need further introspection. Sarada Balagopalan, commenting on the earlier draft of the RTE act observes:

> 'People's participation' is being increasingly understood not in terms of their organic involvement in process to effect local change, but rather in their ability to demonstrate their emotional investment financially. This is not necessarily through capital per se but through their labour, their resources, their contributing to the construction of the school building, etc. [31]

She further cautions that the surveillance functions of the local level committees could work against the democratic participation of the marginalized section of the community. "Rather a Foucauldian lens that formulates questions of power not so much in terms of justice as those of technology, tactics and strategy would allow us to be prescient about how the 'community' is increasingly emerging as a new technology of power within which local surveillance can function effectively, economically and without any threat of major resistance."[32] From the Kerala experience, it is clear that the local level committees were dominated by upper caste, middle class male parents and teachers.

This need not lead to the conclusion that the local level committees can never be proper representative bodies which could provide the function of caring. The challenge is to imagine these committees less as bureaucratic measures and technological apparatuses of power and more as organic spaces of conversation and sharing. This requires immense political pressure from the marginalized groups on the one hand and proper legal provisions to back up this pressure on the other. It is also necessary to have a conceptual shift among the scholars and policy makers from a mode of accommodation and acceptance, in which all differences are accommodated by the dominant section, to a mode of learning where one does not lead the discussions but participates in them. In the accommodative mode there will be care-givers and care-takers with power differences, which will necessarily create another hierarchy, whereas in the learning mode, care is a mutual relation between all members in the group. Unless there is continuous and conscious critique and self-reflection, the existing difference of resources will only enhance inequality and marginalization.

It is essential to clarify that the importance of family and community as domains of educational practices is not specific to the marginalized section of the society. It is a fact, though not often acknowledged, that for privileged groups, there already exist powerful networks that connect family, community and school. Children from these groups are equipped with support systems for overcoming the difficulties in school. More importantly, policy makers consider students from this group as the ideal when they discuss curriculum and pedagogic reforms. Secondly, the privileged sections are equipped to deal with any drastic changes in curriculum or pedagogy. If they think the system itself is not satisfactory they can move into a totally different system (from State syllabus to CBSE or ICSE and so on). On the other hand, even a minor imbalance in the routine creates multiplied effects on the children from the marginalized groups.

To conclude, I would like to quote from the narrative of Hameeda Beevi: "My father did not like to send his children to school. He believed that in school, teachers always beat children and the atmosphere in school is not good because there is always quarrels and violence."[33] Hameeda Beevi's father did not like to send his children to school maybe because he cared for them and found school a place of violence.

On the other hand, there are parents who consider that children only learn efficiently if given severe punishments. The question, however, is how to create a support system through which Hameeda Beevi's father will feel confident enough to send his children to school and which will show the other parents that pedagogic practices need not necessarily include punishments such as beating. "If there were someone…."Beevi stopped her sentence in the middle with a disappointed sigh. Can we understand these sighs, screams, curse words and silences not as emotional and irrational outbursts but as learned criticisms of the existing system? Can these experiences become a learning opportunity for teachers and scholars of education in thinking about an ethics of care and its politics?

[1] For Example, see, *Vidyabhyasa Parivarthanathinu Oru Amukham* (An Introduction to Educational Reform), Kerala Sasra Sahitya Parishat,Thrissur, 2002. Sameer Mohite's study of two schools in Maharashtra is another example where the caste prejudices among children is explained as the failure of pedagogic practices within school; see Sameer Mohite, "Critical Thinking on Caste among School Children in Maharashtra: A Case Study of Two Schools in Chiplun," *Economical and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, Issue No. 22, 31 May, 2014.

[2] A R Vasavi, "'Government Brahmin': Caste, the Educated Unemployed, and the Reproduction of Inequalities", *TRG Education and Poverty Working Paper Series*, https://www.ghil.ac.uk/trg_india/publications.html, accessed on 20th March 2017.

[3] For studies focusing on class room or pedagogic approaches which are influenced by constructivism see, Yilmaz, Kaya. "Constructivism: Its Theoretical Underpinnings, Variations, and Implications for Classroom Instruction." *Educational Horizons* 86.3 (2008): 161-72; Loyens, Sofie M. M., and David Gijbels. "Understanding the Effects of Constructivist Learning Environments: Introducing a Multi-directional Approach." *Instructional Science* 36.5/6 (2008): 351-57.For studies analysing the influence of social on education in India see Rekha Kaul, Accessing Education in India, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36,2 (January 13, 2002).

[4] Shailja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*, Routledge, Oxon, 2014.

[5] Shantabai Kamble, "Naja Goes to School", in Arjun Dangle, ed., *Poisoned Bread*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 106-108.

[6] Shankarrao Kharat, "The Bone Merchant", in Ibid, pp. 123 – 129.

[7] DayaPawar, Trans., Jerry Pinto, *Baluta*, Speaking Tiger Publishing, New Delhi, 2015 (First published 1978).For a description of practice of untouchability in school in 1950s, see, OmprakashValmiki, *Joothan: A Dalit Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003.

[8] Bama, Trans., Lakshmi Holmstrom, *Karukku*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010 (First Published 2000).

[9] M. Murali Krishna, "Pedagogic Practices and Violence against Dalits in Schooling", in Christine Sleeter etc. all, eds., *School Education, Pluralism and Marginality: Comparative Perspectives*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 54- 82.

[10] The description in this section is from the Transcription of the Interviews provided by Transnational Research Group; hencefort *Transcription (TRG)*. Names are changed for reasons of privacy.

[11] Interview with Vidya on February 10, 2014, *Transcription (TRG)*, p. 12.

[12] From Interview with Selvam on March 25, 2014, *Transcription (TRG)*.

[13] From Selvam's narratives it is clear that the school was promoting rote-learning and he considered this as a good practice. For him a good score in the examination was important and was a sign of his success.

[14] Interview with Mukesh on April 8, 2014, *Transcription (TRG)*.

[15] The beginning of the feminist debate on Care Ethics can be traced back to Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick, and Joan Tronto contributed and developed this concept further in

expanding its scope to political theory and philosophy. See Carol Gilligon, *In A Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge,1982; Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labour: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. Routledge, New York, 1999; Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, Routledge, New York,1994; Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. University of CA Press, Berkeley,1982; Sara Ruddick, "Care as Labor and Relationship" in Mark S. Haflon and Joram C. Haber, eds., *Norms and Values: Essays on the Work of Virginia Held*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 1998; Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

[16]Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global,* Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, p. 79.

[17]Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A Carnic Alternative to Character Education*, Teachers College Press, New York, 2002, p. 14.

[18]Interview with Rajesh by author on August 20, 2013.

[19]Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984. P. 7.

[20]Interview with Shantha by author, November 12, 2013Punkt am Ende?

[21]Diemut Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

[22]Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, p. 33.

[23]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[24]SCERT, *Evolving a Constructivist Curriculum: Kerala Experience*, Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007.

[25]These observations are made based on my participation in these meetings in 2013 as part of the research work.

[26]Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006.

[27]For an analysis of the effort of creating local networks of family, community and school, see, Belden Fields and Walter Feinberg, *Education and Democratic Theory: Finding a Place for Community participation in Public School Reform*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2001.

[28]K.P. Kannan, "People's Planning, Kerala's Dilemma," *Seminar*, No. 485 (January 2000).

[29]M.V. Mukundan and Mark Bray have discussed the issues of delegation of power and authority in the people's planning program in Keralam. They point out that the state level bureaucratic system was replicated at a smaller level and meaningful participation of people. "The Decentralization of Education in Kerala State, India: Rhetoric and Reality*," International Review of Education*, 50: 223 – 243 (2004).

[30]"The Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009," *Gazette*, Government of India, New Delhi, August 27, 2009.

[31]Sarada Balagopalan, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 32 (Aug. 7-13, 2004), p. 3589.

[32]Ibid., p. 3589-90.

[33]Interview with Hameeda Beevi on February 12 -13, 2014, *Transcript (TRG)* p.7.