

**SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN KERALA:
A STUDY IN RURAL NORTH MALABAR**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
SOCIOLOGY**

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INDIA

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A Dissertation submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the requirement
of the award of the degree of

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
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**Supervised by
Prof. Nagaraju Gundemeda**



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation entitled **SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN KERALA: A STUDY IN RURAL NORTH MALABAR** is carried out under the supervision of Prof. Nagaraju Gundimeda, Department of Sociology, School of Social Science, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad for the award of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and no part of this dissertation has been submitted for any Degree or Diploma in this or any other university or institution. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my dissertation can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

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Further the student has passed the following course work requirement for the M. Phil.

Course Code	Course Name	Credits	Result
SL701	Advanced Sociological Theories	4	Pass
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Further, a conference paper titled 'Experiencing Diaspora at home: A Sociological look in to the effects of Migration to Civil Society Formation; Study of Nadapuram Village' has also been presented before the submission of the thesis as part of the international seminar on Migration, Diaspora and Nation Building: Opportunities and Challenges' held on 7-8 March, 2018 at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECE: Early Childhood Education

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education

ICDS: Integrated Child Development Services

IPS: Islamic Preschool

AWW: Anganwadi Worker

AWH: Anganwadi Helper

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Preschool education has become a billion dollar industry over the years. India is not an exception to the emerging phenomenon. The Right to Education Act of 2009 which came into effect from 2010 aims to provide ‘early childhood education and care to all children until they complete the age of six years’. The government of India’s commitment for Education For All (1990) and Dakar Framework for Action (2000) which affirmed the inevitability of having quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) for the development of individual and nation. Apart from this, the importance of providing quality education in early childhood to the overall development of the child was an outcome of scientific researches in the area of developmental psychology, pedagogical anthropology, neurolinguistics, and economics played a significant role towards the demand for universalization of the early childhood education. Mushrooming of preprimary schools, whether in the public or private realm, attracted the attention of several social scientists in general and sociologists in particular.

The universal early childhood education has significantly expanded across the states in India as part of the introduction of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and other legislative and policy measures. The role of private players, either individual or organizations such as ‘Montessori international’ played an important role by opening the pre-schools for the privileged section of the society since the colonial times, however, gained prominence from 1947. Although the accurate data is available on the public sector initiatives, the private sector largely unregulated remains unaccounted across the states in India. This includes both the extent of its expansion or the diversity of the players and institutions in the private sector except by a number of studies.

This study is an attempt to add more to such research initiatives by providing micro-level data and analysis on the diversity of institutional settings in the North Malabar villages by placing the emerging developments in the field within the social and historical context of the locality. By doing so, the researcher emphatically put the development and function of a kind of early childhood educational setting, Islamic pre-schooling, at the center of the problem since the

extension of its engagement with different conceptual categories, i.e, class, gender, religion is more complex than other institutional settings in a national state like India where the stakeholders of the institution, the Muslim community is having the constitutional status of minority.

Placing the developments in the ECCE sector on to the policy shifts is not enough to comprehend it well but also to the social economic and cultural condition of the locality is inevitable. Bernstein (1997) had put the need to do it in the following way,

“The linkages of the school with the settings outside the school system such as religion, family, ethnicity and local community and the state, need to be analyzed”. He continues “for these offer arenas where selection and socialization occur and also amorphous spaces where identities are created, recreated or altered”.

Even though the Kerala Model of Development, as well as the Kerala Model of Education, has been studied by economists, educationists, and sociologists, there were only a few studies on the development of early childhood education with special reference to Kerala. That too about the implementation of the ICDS program or the preschool teachers, this study attempt to fill the vacuum by trying to understand the function of different types of preschool institutional settings in the northern Malabar villages.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

School as an institution, at least at a theoretical level, contradicting with its own basic aims, to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens of a nation-state and to promote social democracy. Scholars like, Bourdieu (1987), Willis (1977), Samuel Bowels (1976) examined different dimensions of such an inherent feature of schooling. The problems became much complex since European nations and American states witnessed a large influx of people of different ethnic origin. In a multicultural and multi-religious society, what is an educational system becomes a contested issue?

The educational content and pedagogy developed by nation-state tends to exclude or neglects the cultural assumptions of the working class, ethnic minorities, and marginalized sections of society. It creates an ambivalent condition in which people of other cultures are given access but

denied equal chances and opportunities promised by citizenship. Theoretically, modern education has the power and resources to eradicate gender discrimination exists at the empirical level. Since educational institutions and curriculum are the products of certain historical contexts in particular geographical space, the linear, evolutionary kind of liberal educational ethos may not be universalized as envisaged by the Euro-centric scholarship in the middle of the 20th century. Theoretically, it is possible to argue that by contradicting with the above statement the context does not only restrict the development towards equality, but it also offers new ways to rethink certain concepts or categories. Preschool educational model developed during the colonial era is not an exemption from this phenomenon. A sociological study of pre-schooling, that too at a micro level is needed to the study the role of class, gender, ethnicity and religion in shaping the growth and choice of preschools in India and Kerala.

Bernstein (2006), while analyzing emerging trends and features of British infant school pedagogy, traced its roots in the emergence of the new middle class as distinct from the old middle class which is an outcome of the increase in complexity of the division of labor, has bearing on the ‘symbolic and cultural capital they appropriated’. Instead of having the ideals of organic solidarity evolved from the inherited social, economic and cultural capital, the newly formed infant school pedagogy, developed as having centered on the abstract ideas and perspective of life which are taught or inculcated in the child through new pedagogic techniques. Such pedagogical innovations are important since ‘the new middle class’ can’t or could not assume transmission of certain values¹ to the children in their family or neighborhood settings. Preschool is then conceptualized as the avenue for spiritual and cultural transmission. Since early childhood is the time period in which a large amount of the social and cultural dimensions of the child gets defined, innovative pedagogic reforms are introduced in nursery schooling.

However, Bernstein was also aware that structured condition of social and economic system discourages the continuity of introduction of such pedagogic techniques into the later part of schooling, where the matters are defined by scope and limitations of the economy. The scope and limitations provided to an individual in the economy, then, as always, in large part defined by a person’s qualification, certificates, and grade cards. However, the pedagogic innovations in the pre-primary education and its continuity in schooling will deepen with the time since the new

¹: values inevitable to succeed in the emerging economy, economically and socially

middle class whose ideology stands on the meritocracy rather than the inherited capital emerge as the new dominant class in the society. It is important to note that the changes owing to the emergence of new middle class and infant school pedagogy did not refer to changes in the economic or social structure but in habitus, i.e, in the cultural assumptions which were dominant till the emergence of new middle class and cultural and symbolic capital have appropriated by it over time. Bernstein's perspective of understanding the class divided society, its complexities, and reproductive techniques have to be further elaborated when applying it to a society where apart from class, caste, gender, and religion play a significant role. In such a society the pedagogic and structural changes in the preschool sector may also have depended on the cultural distinctness owes to such differences.

Krishna Kumar (2016) while trying to provide conceptual and methodological tools to study childhood in India notes the importance of researching the arena on the categories of caste, gender and colonial status of Indian society along with globalization and wider application of information and technology. Studies on preschools and the empirical accounts on the educational structure in India and other nation-states, particularly in the schooling sector conform to the need of having such a nuanced understanding of preschool education as a phenomenon.

While tracing the institutional practices and the educational histories which had led to novel practices in the preschooling sector among Bengali middle class of Calcutta, Henrike Donner (2006) identifies the deep connection between preschool and the parental aspirations shaped by 'liberalization (of the economy), prospects of migration and global competition'. Along with tracing the distinctness of pedagogy of such spurting schools, the role such middle-class mothers have in the actualization of pedagogy had investigated.

According to her, the domestication of a foreign product, and preschool in the context of economic and social changes precipitated by globalization is (increasing consumerism) very much oriented to the global economy. It was evident in the parental preference of English medium education over home language, increased pedagogic involvement of middle-class mothers like accompanying children to nursery and pick him/ her back to home, help the child in studies, prepare his/ her meals carefully and last but not least the growing perception of mother of an infant child itself as a worthy occupation among the highly educated middle class mothers

(voluntary motherhood) and the absence of regional or national ideological representations within the preschool environment.

This also related to the privatization of education among the particular class. However, the preschool selection is defined by the financial circumstances, the place of residence and the ethnic identity of the family. The global orientation can be traced in the pedagogy of such schools since it works on the assumptions of modern nuclear family dispositions. As an example, she narrates about the conscious exclusion of servants and grandparents from the actualization of pedagogy. Such changes are in conflict with the ideas of motherhood prevalent during the colonial period. At that period the idea was the domestication of middle-class mothers within a nationalist discourse. Over the period, along with the change in the economy, the orientation of motherhood also got changed and even among elite families with highly educated mothers, preschool was accepted as the norm due to the understanding of the child as ‘potential migrant’.

Since the educational landscape is also defined by the ‘national and regional histories and ideologies including nationalist or religious discourses’ class aspirations may not be the only social fact which prescribes ‘new domesticities, gender relations, and child-rearing practices’. Even though the Hindu nationalist attempt to deepen such ideas in the society is prevalent in India the ‘Bengali middle-class educational history reflects other trajectory...children as citizens with a view to global economy’. In which ‘...the idea of early childhood represents a latent potentiality that must be seized’. Her study on the middle-class aspirations related to pre-schooling traced the origins of discourse around pre-schooling to the ‘market mechanism’ and in the ‘consumer interests’. Such a view offers much flexibility to include state initiatives as part of a competitive market economy of infant education in which different institutions are competing to sell their services. (Henrike Doner, 2006)

Other than the new middle class, who attempts to reproduce the newly appropriated cultural and symbolic capital, through the innovative turns in pedagogical and structural practice in preschooling, there are other groups who try to reproduce or inculcate an ideology among the population through education. As Doner mentioned in the case of educational history in the post-independent Indian context, Hindu nationalists are at the forefront of inculcating its ideology through schooling. The project of saffronization, as Nandini Sunder argued, starts with the

systematic effort to instill a particular nationalist ideology which equates the notion of citizenship and identity with that of dominant caste identity in the pedagogy of the nation-state.

Such pedagogical attempt also has to be analyzed on the class and social status of children which it serves or intends to attract. In the case of RSS schooling, it caters largely to the needs of the lower middle class, Dalits, and Adivasi children. Since Vidya Bharathi² runs the largest network of schooling after the government in India, an in-depth analysis of pedagogy and the comparative analysis of preschool and school pedagogies of such schools would enable to understand the type of (cultural and social) reproduction in the context particularly in the context of economic liberalization and globalization. As Nandini Sunder (2004) rightly identified Vidya Bharathi schools are taking advantage of the failures of government schooling such as its poor quality and inability to meet the demands of the economy. By providing quality education in terms of comparatively better exam results and adopting elite school organizational forms, that too with the affordable fee they attract children from lower-middle-class families.

But the schooling project is not as simple as this. Instead, it is greatly more complex since its foundational aim is to inculcate certain notions of citizenship among the population to achieve political power in the long run. Here the study of schooling (in our case preschooling) phenomenon becomes more difficult owing to the supplementation of contradicting political ideology to the class aspirations or strategies of its reproduction. It also hinted towards the need for having the availability of quality state schooling across space and population to the very continued existence of social democracy.

The account of Islamic preschools in the Malaysian context provided by Lihanna Borhan by offering a thick description of everyday life in schools outlines the distinctness of such institution and its philosophical underpinnings from the existing preschools which serves as religious education centers too. (Lihanna Borhan. 2004). Distinct from the Hindu nationalist context, where religious values are taught to achieve a certain political end, here Islamic religious values

² Vidya Bharati, short for Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan, is a non-government educational organization which runs one of the largest private network of schools in India, operating 12,000 schools with 3.2 million students as of 2016. It is the educational wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It has its registered headquarters in Lucknow, a functional headquarters in Delhi and a sub-office in Kurukshetra. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vidya_Bharati/ access on 01/06.2019.

are taught to produce disciplined bodies (disciplined and obedient to the Islamic ideals) in the wake of perceived cultural threat due to the onslaught of neoliberalism and globalization.

The development of such schools, particularly in the Malaysian context, where Islam is the state religion and Muslims constitutes a major religious community. Islamic teaching is part of secular school's moral education, offers avenues of theoretical exploration in which how Islamic communities respond to the educational structure formed historically in the nation-states. Such an exploration cannot be done without having an understanding of social and economic changes in Islamic communities in the different national state context. And it also has to be understood on the categories of gender, region and also in the context of the subjective perception of state educational structures to have a comprehensive view of such preschools. What makes it distinct from the other schools is its foundation of pedagogy on the teaching of Islam 'as a way of life' and by 'teaching subjects that are overtly Islamic such as Quran recitation' and 'organizing everyday activities explicitly on Islamic values and manners'. In an overall sense, it tries to abandon the 'secular and religious boundary exists in pedagogy'. (Lihanna Borhan, 2004).

In a secular country like India, the emerging types of preschools have to be understood by taking into consideration, the specific social and cultural context (national and regional) in which such developments are happening. Such an attempt not only have the potential to understand the different directions educational trajectories in different contexts are taking, but also to view the developments in different contexts as the success/ failure of the state in adapting with social, economic, and cultural changes within the boundaries of the nation-state. As AR Vasavi noted, the major problem in a social democratic space like India is 'increasing class and communal divisions, promoted through differential schooling, thus diminish the promise of a more meaningful common citizenship held out by higher literacy levels.'

With the foregoing accounts informs that preschools have acquired a religious colour by content and pedagogy. Research questions of the study are

- To find out where the young children of rural Malabar aged between 3 and 5 are?
- What are the social (structural), economic and cultural factors which determine where children are?

Objectives

1. To understand the diversity and complexity in preschool education in rural Malabar (Kerala)
2. To understand the nature of the relationship between Islamic preschool, class and gender and the patterns of aspirations and experiences of stakeholders with preschool in the study villages.

Methodology

The study is based on an empirical work conducted in the villages namely Velom, Kuttiady, and nearby villages, in the Vadakara tehsil of Kozhikode district in Kerala. The fieldwork was conducted from November 2018 to January 2019.

Kozhikode district was chosen because of two reasons. First, the district is the researcher's native place where it was convenient to visit the study villages. The second one is related to the researcher's primary motive, to study the phenomenon of Islamic pre-schooling. All the Islamic preschool chains are centered in the Calicut city and also the entire district has an even distribution of such institutions.

In selecting the study villages, following factors were considered, the presence of different types of preschools in the villages, social, economic and educational features of the villages and the characteristics of geographical space (the presence of a town in the study villages). By identifying all the preschools in the villages Researcher classified them into four types and among them, two of the institutions of each variety were purposefully selected. In addition to this, a separate study on parental choices has conducted at a neighborhood in the villages in which 12 family households which have children attending preschools were investigated.

Both primary, as well as secondary sources of data, were incorporated in this study. Primary sources of data include unstructured schedules for schools, interviews, observation and case studies. Secondary sources of data include census data and various reports on education by both central and state governments and international agencies like the United Nations.

The study used unapologetically qualitative methods of data collection. The data collected through unstructured interview schedule is processed through comparative and content analysis. The study tried to validate the data through key respondents in the village.

Chapterisation

This dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter deals with certain theoretical and empirical works related to the sociology of education in general and preschool in particular. The attempt was to provide a direction to the field work. The Second chapter is an attempt to contextualize the study by tracing the historical roots of ECE in general and by providing a brief account of educational developments in the study villages of Kerala. Chapter 3 presents the case studies, in which the structure and function of selected preschools from the study villages narrated. Chapter 4 talks about the subjective accounts of different stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and management on the rationale behind the growing popularity for the Islamic pre-schooling. Summary of the research and discussions of the dissertation are provided in Chapter 5.

Summary

Early Childhood Education is expanding across the states in the country owing to the social, economic, and cultural changes of the time and also to the state's efforts to universalize the provision. In such a context, a study on early childhood education sector in the rural north Malabar, both in public and private sector demands a sociological inquiry. The study was designed on the conceptual framework derived from the works of Bernstein, Nandini Sunder, Henrike Doner, and Lihanna Borhan. This is an effort to understand the diversity and complexity of the preschool education in the rural spaces of North Malabar and to comprehend the role of class, gender and Islamic religious sect in shaping the faith-based knowledge and pedagogical preschool choice in the selected village spaces of Kerala.

Chapter 2

Historical development of Early Childhood Education in India

2.1. Introduction

Without having an understanding of historical development of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the modern era and also the about the general educational milieu of the context, the attempt to sociologically approach the events in the specific context would be futile. This chapter unfolds the Development of ECE in the wake of modernism and industrial revolution and also the evolution and expansion of ECE in post-independent India, by focusing on the state interventions and policy initiatives. This was supplemented by a section about the Educational Development in Kerala, in which the success, failures, and challenges this much-praised model faces have narrated. In a sense, this is an attempt to contextualize the study of pre-schooling in the context of rural Malabar Kerala.

2.2: Historical Development of ECE

Early childhood care and education have its root in the emergence of modernity and its expansion. From where the childhood was nothing, in the middle ages to the childhood as a distinct phase of human life which has bearing on all other stages of life, in the modernity, it has traversed lot. The developments, the progress which the human being has made both in understanding the period of childhood and formulating theories and practices which enable the child to achieve his full potential should be read by situating them in the historical events and contexts. Likewise, the historical development of early childhood education and care has ensured the concretization of changing dynamics in society.

The social, economic and cultural changes that Western Europe had passed through at the time of cultural renaissance and then the enlightenment and due to the intellectual fervor of the time made possible the birth of scientific approach to life and human-centered knowledge paradigms and institutional structures in Western Europe and North America. Reinvention of classical literature through the contacts and conquests made with Byzantine and Arab empires in between and after the crusades and the emergence of Bourgeoisie class due to the economic prosperity these Western European countries had gained through the trade instigated religious reformation

followed by the prosperity of science eventually culminated in to the idea of the independent existence of the approaches ‘rationalism and empiricism’ through the philosophy.

The ultimate result was the men became the center of thought and action. The outset of considering ‘children as distinct’ in the modern era lies in these social, economic and intellectual developments. The developments through the Middle Ages to the enlightenment were 1: The improvement of economic and social conditions reduced the infant mortality rate and improved the condition of child rearing among the middle class. 2: The scientific spirit of the time helped the evolvement of the idea ‘childhood as distinct’ and to understand children, not as adults in miniature dresses. John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau had provided enough philosophical bases for the later developments in the studies on children in various disciplines. Along with the developments in philosophy, the attempts to formulate theoretical and practical systems to educate children by educators and pedagogues like Comenius and Pestalozzi had provided real educational materials to early childhood to cope with the changing social situation. According to Cleverly and Phillips “The child, rescued by physicians and reformers, liberated from inane ideas by Locke and Hume, is brought to the center of human affairs by Rousseau” and “the bridge between Emile³ and community of educators was built by Pestalozzi” (Lascarides and Hinitz-).

The development of pedagogy and preschool practices has to be contextualized, i.e, placed on the social and economic changes of the time. It has same historical roots either in the need for better education/ learning provisions to children of bourgeois or to ensure labor participation of working mothers/ child protection by the coming of the era of the industrial revolution. Comenius (1592- 1628) who was the forerunner of infant education had suggested mothers should be properly educated to teach their child until the age of six. The ‘mother school’ as he proposed was meant ‘for character training, development of senses and fostering of mother tongue’. The early year’s education, according to him, is for the physical and mental care and development of the child and should be based on the threefold purpose of “faith and piety, uprightness in respect to morals and knowledge of language and arts”. The attempts, based on the didactic principles he had developed from observing nature, which he comprehended in ‘The

³ : ‘Emile (on education)’ was written by JJ Rousseau in 1792 following the ‘Social Contract’.

Great Didactic'⁴ was marking the beginning of modern educational system in its every sense, whether in the pedagogy or the structure of schooling.

As Jeffrey noted, the intellectual problem of the 17th century England was to “establish on a lasting foundation the habitual attitude to thought and knowledge which we know as a scientific method” which provided the direction for the philosophy of Locke. The pedagogy based on observation, strong refutation of severe disciplinary techniques which were prevalent at the time, like Comenius and the prominence of knowing overdoing and the understanding of learning as receptive rather than active were central to Locke’s educational philosophy.

From Comenius to Locke, the educational philosophy also shifted from the centrality of religious morale (Protestantism) to secular foundations. The universality of pedagogy, the possibility of its application to every nation, even though envisioned by Comenius in his Great Didactic had become conceptually real by Locke with the separation of entire religious (cultural) from the educational thought.

However, the much-needed sophistication of the idea of education, with the emergence of Nation-states in Western Europe, and the expansion of the ideas of freedom, equality, and individualism with the French revolution, had provided by Rousseau. I quote Krishna Kumar in verbatim “Rousseau’s engagement was centered in the child on whom nature had endowed freedom. How would such a child be educated? This key question underlies the history of educational progress and the contradiction between child-centric pedagogy and education for citizenship.” According to Celi Lascarides et al. ‘The Emile’ was an attempt to challenge his arguments in ‘Social Contract’ where citizen’s submission to ‘general will’ based on complete equality and democratic participation had idealized. From his transformation from earlier understanding of education as a “manipulative device of an evil society” to “right kind of education could be used to better society”, one can trace both the beginning of child study as a field of knowledge and foundation of modern progressive education. (Celi Lascarides, et al. 2000).

Need for the care of child by someone (trained) other than the mother, the distinction of avenues where education comes from as nature, men and things and the recognition of limitation of

⁴ : Text written by Comenius (Jan Amos Komensky 1592-1670), one of the pioneers of ECE.

adult's influence in education, importance and centrality of the play in child's education (through which he actively constructs knowledge), refutation of the need for adult supervision and also the habit formation, Rousseau creatively countered his own ideal realm in 'social contract'. (ibid). A democratic society with complete equality would exist if it had found on the educational philosophy which endows freedom, equality, and individuality of the child. The systematic theories of early childhood education emanate from these foundational principles provided by Comenius, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi. Such theories, like the institutional settings or structures, emerged at the time, even though share many similarities, have differences too.

It was Froebel (1782- 1852), A German teacher and educator propounded the need for educating young child, a child under six years old, outside the family setting contrary to the prevalent system and his own belief in the trained mother's potentials to provide right kind of education. According to him 'social and moral development of the child under seven years old need a larger circle of equals since family narrows the child's experience.' He had found an institution 'Institution for the Education of Little Children' in 1837 which later renamed as 'Kindergarten'.

The systematic theory and pedagogy developed by Froebel for educating children in the early years exist on the application of evolutionary theory to the education, his belief in the unity in life (which makes inevitable the need for harmony in thinking, feeling, willing and doing) and the belief in the innate goodness of a newborn child. His pedagogy revolves around the ideas of the development of the self-activity of the children and the importance accorded to play. With Froebel, the early childhood educational attempts among the middle class had become popularized in both Europe and America.

Another attempt to develop a systematic pedagogy was by an Italian educationist, Mario Montessori (1870- 1952), a doctor by profession, in the first half of the 20th century. Even though there are significant differences between the curriculum and pedagogy, both had given prominence to the self-activity of the child, teacher's role as a facilitator, need for having the freedom and developing individuality. Montessori like Jean Piaget developed her theories on the foundation of biology. The theoretical writings of Piaget, which were more psychological, and its adoption by early childhood educators had led to the influx of 'marketable curriculum kits' to sell cognitive development. By adding a 'cognitive turn' to the existing early childhood programs, and revealing the interrelation between socio-economic condition and the cultural

differences of the children and his capability of educational attainment, more child-centered, context centered approaches were developed.

The concern here is the development of institutional structures since the mid-18th century. However, it could not have done without an understanding of the development of pedagogy. The developments since the industrial revolution can be classified in to

1: A welfare approach followed by the ‘Institutionalization of childhood due to the increasing amount of women entering to the workforce’, one like Robert Owen’s ‘institution of the formation of character’ found in 1816 at his own New Lanark Factory to educate the children of his labors. Later, different countries had obliged to expand the provision of Early Childhood Care and Education to improve the mental and physical health of the children as like French adoption and expansion of Oberlin's infant school to the national education system in 1833 by renaming it as ‘Ecole Materernelles’ for providing care to the children of parents working in the field.

2: The increasing need for early education among the bourgeois and emerging middle class, the one which centered on learning and cultivation of the character like Froebelian Kindergartens and the Montessori's house for children. The increased state investments in the educational aspects of the children, along with the custodial nature such childhood care centers have had systematized and had become more learning centered with the efforts of Margaret Mcmillan and Grace Oven in the first decades of 20th century England.

With the advancements in pedagogy and scientific research, with the findings on the formative character of early childhood like the findings of Freudian Psycho analytics, different nation states had also started to invest in it. Even though the aim and purpose of universal ECE were different in different nation-states as the form and structure such national systems have adopted. Britain’s ‘Fischer Act’ (1918) which made possible the establishment of nursery schools throughout Britain with the government’s grant in aid gave equal emphasis to health, nourishment and physical welfare of the children along with the provisions for mental and social education.

In the Soviet Republic, preschool education was identified as the first step towards creating a ‘new Soviet citizen’ and indoctrination to the state ideology was the norm. While Creches for children under 3 years is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, KGs for 3-6 years is

regulated by the Ministry of Education in Russia. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016). In the United States federal funding to such programs was started in 1965 to “break the vicious circle of poverty” and the program came to known as ‘Head Start’ and implemented by Department of Health and Human Services. In India, the Government had introduced the Integrated Childhood Development Program in 1975 as a pilot project which adopted the life cycle approach and focused on the whole development of the child. The Government program is the responsibility of the ‘Ministry of Women and Child Development’. With the coming of the new century, to provide the universal early childhood education had become obligatory to the nations by the international commitments they made under Education for All (1990), Dakar Framework (2000) and Moscow Convention (2010) treatises.

2.3: Early Childhood Education in India

Formal and organized early childhood education in India had begun by efforts of Gijubhai Badheka and Tharabhai Modak. The two were fascinated by the writings of Dr. Mario Montessori and worked together to propagate Montessorian theories in the 1920s itself with the institution of Balakendra at Bhavanagar, Maharashtra. They have also started a center for training the teachers. When Mahatma Gandhi had visited the Montessori training college in London, he lauded the basic principles and the method which she developed. In the speech he delivered at the college in her presence, he sighted the importance of having access to this type of education to poor children and the limited resources India have in the availability of trained teachers and institutions. He also told her about the need for assimilating her system into the Indian context. With her visit and prolonged stay in India during the Second World War, the Montessori system had become popularized. She and her disciples conducted training courses in Montessori Method across the country. To summarize, the early childhood education in India before independence was mainly fulfilled by efforts of voluntary organizations and private institutions. (Patnaik, J. 1996).

Developments in Early Childhood Education after independence are marked by a series of state’s interventions either in the form of suggestions from the educational commissions, policy developments, and introduction of early childhood education and care programs. From 1953’s Committee on Early Childhood Education to National ECCE resolution, 2013 significant provisions and programs were introduced, expanded and updated to meet the existing demand for

ECCE in the country. In a general sense, the state's interventions follow the welfare model. Constitutional provisions such as Article 15 which ensures equal treatment of all the citizen irrespective of religion, caste, sex, place of birth and the its 3rd provision which states "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children" and other articles under Directive principles of state policy such as article 42 (relevance to the working women) and article 45 which directed the state to provide free and compulsory education to all the children up to the age of 14... obligated state's intervention in the ECCE at various levels. With the enactment of the Right to Education Act, Article 21 A in 2009, to get the free preschool education also had become the right of the child under the age of six. Even though the developments at the implementation level were slow it had made significant progress following the introduction of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) in 1975 consequent to the National Policy for Children, 1974. Let us look into the major policy initiatives which shaped the state interventions in ECCE in chronological order.

National Policy for Children (NPE), 1974 focused on the need for providing equal opportunity for the integral development of all children during the period of growth. It has to be done by providing health and nutrition services to both the infants and the children of preschool age and the expectant mothers, and also by providing informal preschool facilities particularly for girls and children of the weaker sections of the society. Even though education found mention, Care and health were the prime focus regarding the children of preschool age in the document. The document emphatically put the need for public participation and the role of voluntary organizations in the implementation of the policy.

National Education Policy 1986 recognized early childhood education as a provision inevitable to the 'universalization of primary education and human resource development in general'. To achieve this, the document suggested the integration of provisions for child care and pre-primary education and the need for inclusion of both in the ICDS programs. But, formal education was discouraged for the pre-primary period. Instead, child-oriented, play-centered education with ensuring the involvement of the local community in the programs has encouraged. The policy document was a major step towards the development of pre-primary education since 1968 education policy missed the preschool education part in it while focusing on the promotion of 10+2+3 pattern. In 1992 the NEP 1986 was updated by the central government. 'The Program of

Action' outlined an elaborate vision for the universalization of ECCE by expanding the reach of ICDS services, opening preschools with state primary schools, crèches for children of a working mother. By this time, India was also the signatory of the Jomtien declaration and the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, both obligated the state to provide universal primary education.

By critically approaching the developments in the ECCE sector, National Curriculum Framework, 2005 argued that the state failed in transforming policies into action due to the divided responsibilities and lack of coordination among various agencies. Along with it, qualitative differences in the availability of services to different segments of society, polarization between public and private sector added to the fray. It provides an elaborate plan to improve the condition of ECCE, quantitatively and qualitatively both in the public and private sector by identifying major issues in the field of ECE in India and providing measures of solution. The ECE service providers in India can be classified into the Public sector (mostly through ICDS center), Private sector and NGO services. But the condition of services provides through these sectors are of poor quality, developmentally inappropriate and largely inadequate to meet the demand and existing needs of ECE. The case of the private sector is no different, except for a few centers which serve to the children of higher social classes.

However largely unregulated, the poor quality private sector set the norms of developments in the ECE sector even in the public programs. The parental aspiration towards upward social mobility prompts them to depend on private preschools as soon as they are economically sufficient. This is also related to the parental perception of English as the language facilitates upward mobility. Since most of the private preschools adopt English as the medium of instruction and give preference to it over regional or state language contrary to the public program's insistence on not teaching languages other than regional language. The NCF 2005 document, however, criticizes the stand and advocate for the teaching of English as an additional language since it is impossible to convince the parents that in both public and private sector home language should be the medium of instruction.

To improve the quality of ECE sector, according to National Curricular Framework 2005, effective measures have to take such as

1. Developing norms and standards to ensure the quality of teachers, child-centered curriculum, appropriate ratio and group size of the children, adequate infrastructure, and supervision and monitoring that will help to set a standard for the institution of preschools across sectors.
2. To regulate the largely unregulated sector of preschooling, the registration of institutions should make mandatory, not licensing.
3. By taking advocacy measures to empower the parents, families, and communities in the ECE
4. Since the lack of availability of a trained workforce is a major problem, steps have to be taken to improve and enlarge the workforce
5. Child-centered, contextual and activity oriented curriculum has to be mandated.
6. The research in the area of preschool education has to be encouraged along with ensuring effective and adequate resource allocation such as financial, teachers and learning materials in the ECE sector.

The effective implementation of such measures needs major changes in policy since Educational policies didn't formally recognize ECE as part of state's educational system and the implementation of ECCE programs are largely done by the Department of Women and Child Development. It also obligated by the effective implementation of the curricular framework. In a general level, the NCF 2005 recognized the need for improving the quality of ECE services across three sectors. While emphasizing the need for documentation and balanced regulation to improve the quality of preschool programs in the private sector, the decentralized, community-oriented, and more learning-centered ECCE programs are identified as the needs of the public sector. (NCF, 2005).

With the enactment of Right to Education act in 2009 which came into effect in 2010, to promises free and compulsory education to the children of preschool age became the responsibility of the state. Section 11 of Article 21 A says,

“With a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years the appropriate government may make necessary arrangement for providing free preschool education for such children.”

National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2013 has to be read in this context. The issues raised in the NCF position paper on Early Childhood Education are addressed in this particular policy. The vision of the policy which envisages achieving “holistic development and active learning capacity of all children below 6 years of age by promoting free, universal, inclusive, equitable, joyful and contextualized opportunities for laying the foundation and attaining full potential.”

The key objectives of the policy are as follows:

- to provide needed infrastructure and services aimed at holistic development of the children, universalization of ECCE particularly focusing on access to children from vulnerable sections,
- to entrap human resources to the particular field and ensure capacity building to improve the quality of service providers, and
- to set out standards and norms and also curricular framework and ensure their practice across sectors, spread awareness about the significance of ECCE among public, and will develop culturally appropriate strategies and materials for preschool programs. (NECCE Resoultuion, 2013).

2.3.1: Government Programs and their Status

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which had started in 1975 under the ministry of women and child development following the recommendations in National Policy for Children (1974) is, as of now, world’s one of the largest Early childhood care and education programs. Its objectives are

- to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age group of 0-6 years.
- to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child.
- to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout.
- to achieve effective coordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development, and

- to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.⁵

The six services provided through such centers are 1: The deliverance of supplementary nutrition to the children of age up to 5 years old, pregnant and lactating mothers, 2: preschool education for children in the age group 3-5 years, 3: Immunization of children and mothers, 4: Health checkups and antenatal and postnatal care of mothers, 5: Referral services for sick and malnourished children, and 6: Nutrition and health education to adolescent girls and women.⁶ This covers 76.5 million children below 6 years of age among India's 158.7 million children of this age (2011 census). This was achieved through the wide network of 14 million Anganwadi centers (AWCs) across India. Apart from these, there are 23785 Crèche services for children of working mothers under the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme For working mothers and other statutory provisions of laws such as Factories amendment act (1987), Mines act (1952), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005).... The Government has achieved in providing almost 50% of the children (48.2%), the ECCE provisions through ICDS, mostly among the rural areas. Hence it is unclear that to what extent the quantitative achievement has turned in to quality outcomes. To develop such an understanding is inevitable since the growing 'unregulated private channel suffers the issue of inequitable access, uneven quality, and growing commercialization'.⁷

Even though Government has various schemes apart from ICDS to universalize the provision of ECCE such as crèches, programs developed under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level⁸, universalizing Anganwadi centers emerged as a new norm since the Right To Education Act (2010) obligated free and compulsory education to children of age between 6-14 and National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2013) understood other arrangements as 'stop gap arrangements till Anganwadi centers are universalized in the area'⁹.

⁵ : <https://icds-wcd.nic.in/icds.aspx> accessed 1st June 2019.

⁶ : EFA, towards quality with equity, Aug. 2104, NEUPA.

⁷ : National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2013.

⁸ : ibid

⁹ : ibid

The preschool education through ICDS centers in 2012-13 was attended by 35.3 million children. While preschool classes attached to formal schools were enrolled by 12.9 million children.¹⁰ Even then considering the total number of children across the country in the age group 0-6 (158.7 million), almost half of the children are away from access to preschool education, let the private sector be muted for a while. However as the growth in Gross Enrolment Ratio in pre-primary education has shown, 55% during the period of 1999- 2010 India has achieved significant progress in expanding access to free care and non-formal education to the young children. However, concerns over the quality of the services provided, especially over education, as like most of the policy documents and studies on the status of ECCE in India had highlighted, remains an unresolved issue as of now. In a sense, the quantitative achievement over the years has failed into transforming to qualitative outputs. NECCE Policy, 2013 had addressed it by directing to reposition of Anganwadi Centers as ‘Vibrant Child-Friendly Early Childhood Development Center’ ‘with adequate infrastructure, financial and human resources for ensuring a continuum of ECCE in a life cycle approach and attaining child development outcomes.’¹¹

As a continuum, a national early childhood curriculum framework was developed in 2014. It aims at the holistic development of the children by providing an outline of stage-specific objectives. While providing care, stimulation and interaction and protective environment for the children from birth to three years old, providing early learning and school readiness are the aims of the programs to the 3- 6 years age group. Such an educational setting and its content should be play centered, child and activity oriented, instruction provides in home language while teaching other languages additionally.

The unfolding of the curriculum in specific contexts has to consider the ‘specific goal that guides the activity to be undertaken’ and ‘how the activity in the child’s environment creating an enabling environment for that learning goal’. The importance accorded to contexts and the need for developing curricular content from the contexts needs active local community involvement in the development of the ECCE program. It also suggests the need for evaluating the children to identify developmental delays in the learning, children’s improvements with qualitative assessment methods but without any tests. Even though it didn’t draw a theme based 12-month

¹⁰ : EFA, August 2014. NEUPA.

¹¹ : NECCE Policy, 2013.

plan, the comprehensive document outlines almost all the aspects of formulating a child-oriented curriculum. (Kinnari Pandya, 2014).

The curriculum framework, as envisaged in the NCF position paper on ECCE and National ECCE Policy 2013, set equal objectives and programs to the children from different sections of society, it didn't address all the issues addressed in the former document. While the working women's concern for having the facility of whole day child care is discussed in the 2005 document, a preschool program for 3 or 4 hours as suggested in the NECCE Policy 2013 will not be sufficient to meet the demand, especially of women from weaker sections of the society. The informal nature of instruction and the proposed delay in the teaching of 3Rs¹² might cause the middle class' aversion towards state ECCE facilities since they did not meet their aspirations of them. At a general level, the ideal framework for the curriculum, which is prepared on the assumptions of the middle class and state's capability to facilitate infrastructure for weaker sections, may not fulfill all the objectives which directed the document. The achievements will depend on the willpower of various state departments and the effective implementation of the policy and curricular framework without any rigidity in approaches of implementation and by showing flexibility to contexts and situations.

However, in a country like India, where class, caste, gender, and religious divides deeply exist, it may not be easy. Instead of the achievements in the deliverance of ICDS services as quantitative data shows (Out of 10 children in India, seven are already attending the preschool program¹³), the aims of the programs, to provide equal opportunity and social justice to every citizen is a faraway dream. The financial allocation to the education sector in 2017- 18 was only 2.7% of the GDP which is far away from the actual need of at least 6% of GDP spending towards achieving equity and quality in education. This might delay the implementation of NECCE policy and NECCF, especially in the government sector. The recent issue from Tamilnadu where a Dalit AWW was denied the work due to the protest from dominant castes of the village also shows how deep social divides are preventing the implementation of ideals in the policy. (The Hindu, 2019).

¹² : Represents reading, writing and arithmetic.

¹³ : IECEI study, 2013

2.4: Educational Development in Kerala

Educational developments in Kerala cannot be viewed outside the unfolding of ‘Kerala Model of Development’ which had become possible by state’s ‘overarching concern for social justice in its policy choices’. In fact, the much praised and studied developmental model, the achievement of a higher level of social development such as high literacy levels, low infant and mortality rates, and a strong public health system among others comparable to the developed countries with its low economic development, has its foundations on the “public provisioning of health and education, ensuring equitable access to education and health, and the provision of social security entitlements to weaker section of the population”. Along with it, the attempts to include the public in the implementation of policy measures such as literacy movement bear the fruit. As data shows Kerala had achieved all the Millennium Development Goals set out by the UN much ahead of the time. The universal accessibility of school education, across rural and urban areas and that too cost-free, helped to achieve the goal of providing universal primary education with a very low dropout rate (0.22%). However, following India’s policy shift towards economic liberalization, however, the nature of politics which guided the policy formation and its implementation strategies also has shifted towards a ‘liberal mode’ from ‘the public action mode’.(Devika, J. 2013) This shift had also occurred in the educational sector.

Since the 1990s instead of its achievement in the universalization of school education and its egalitarian distribution across population, certain exclusionary trends have been intensifying due to the policy shift. Growth of student financed institutions, increase in educational expenditure incurred by households, nonfinancial entry barriers such as poor educational quality and standards of Government schools and the inadequate attention to the problem of marginalized people by the state, the egalitarian educational model moves towards exclusionary trends. (Ajith Kumar, et al. 2009). The growth of the private unaided sector in the schooling since the 1990s, decrease in the educational expenditure by the government compared to pre-reform period and the failure to ensure equality in educational attainment among various sections, especially of weaker sections of the population had also increased. This owes to the lower representation of marginalized in the higher education sector. The state’s failure to improve the quality of schooling has led to an increase in unaided private schools due to the consistent increase in the house hold’s capacity to pay for it. This was precipitated by an increase in per capita state

domestic product, large scale emigration and the expansion of the job market. (Ajith Kumar, et al. 2009). The Number of children enrolled in unaided private schools had shown a steady increase from 2.5% of the total number of children enrolled in various schools to 4.93% (2000-01), then 8.33% (201-11) and raised to the level of 11.15% in the 2016-17 academic year. Since the proportion of students enrolled in private schools has decreased. It has reduced to 10.9% in the 2018-19 academic year. Kerala economic review, 2017 owes this development to the 'Public Education Rejuvenation Campaign' planned and implemented by the state government with the objective of protecting and promoting public education. The targets are up gradation of 1,000 Schools as center of excellence, conversion of all classrooms from Standard 9 to 12 as hi-tech classrooms, improvement of infrastructure facility in schools where more than 1,000 students are studying, improvement of infrastructure of primary schools, encouragement of proficiency in English language, special packages for renovation of Schools which have completed 50 and 100 Years.¹⁴ This was a much-needed effort to rejuvenate public schools and ensure its quality. But to evaluate the program, it is not the time since the program is at the implementation level.

Considering the increase and willingness of households to spend more on the children's education since 1990s, as National Sample Survey data on choice of schooling shows, among the 1000 samples interviewed, more than half of the people selected private school (602) over government or aided school due to better environment of learning in the former.¹⁵ Another prominent reason sighted was the preference of medium of instruction as English. The parental aspirations of the people of Kerala have to be analyzed on the specific nature of the Kerala economy. The one-fifth of the state's GDP is generated from the emigrants. Almost 2.4 million of Keralites are emigrants and remittance they sent back account to 71000crores. (K.C Zachariyah. et al. 2015). It is natural as an economy looks towards job opportunities elsewhere intending to more quality and international linguistic experience at the school level itself.

In a totality, Kerala Educational Model, even though achieved universal schooling across sections of the population, including Scheduled Tribes and Castes, it has failed in to transform as educational attainment. The state also had failed in improving and updating the schooling which is capable to meet the demands of the economy and parental aspirations. Education as an avenue

¹⁴ : Kerala Economic Review, 2017.

¹⁵ : NSS Education in India. January- June 2014.

of upward mobility still remains as a distant dream for weaker sections of society if they fail to climb the economic ladder by other means such as Gulf migration, or migration to other states. (Suma Scharia. 2014). It does not mean that the state was averse towards reforms or creative interventions towards promoting public education. But the efforts were failed to meet aims due to

1: The reduced financial allocation towards education since the 1990s prevented it to reach among the marginalized sections of society (MA Ommen. 2008) and the ‘perception of lower employment potentialities of higher education’ among different sections of people. (Suma Scharia. 2014)

2: Failure of educational reforms in meeting the demands of the economy and failure due to differential perspectives and goals different stakeholders have. (Laya Mathew. 2012).

A case for increased attention and investments toward Early Childhood Education can be made since reforms of various kinds are failing to provide expected results. This owes much to the school readiness and age-related intellectual development of the children besides the falling standards of Government schooling. The attempts to implement curricular and pedagogical reforms based on NCF 2005 and Kerala Curricular Framework 2007 were failing in case of government or aided schools, which serve to almost 90% of the children, according to Laya Mathew, due to lack of public deliberation were perspectives of teachers, parents, and children of such schools differ from the perspectives of policymakers and the latter's inability to reformulate the standards of middle-class aspirations towards certain professions such as Engineering, Medical, and Chartered Accountancy. (Laya Mathew. 2012).

Middle-class aspirations have a major role in setting the standards or norm of the nature of schooling. The intensity in the activities in the early childhood sector in Kerala, especially in the study villages have to be read in this context.

Summary

The roots of early childhood education in the modern era lie in the unfolding of renaissance and enlightenment movements in Western Europe and also an outcome of intense industrialization. On the foundational base provided by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Comenius, Montessori and

Froebel developed pedagogy and structured systems of early childhood education. Along with the middle class who propounded such schooling, the needs of working-class children on the wake of industrialization had fulfilled by the state and it later systematized with the effort of Margaret Macmillan.

From the pre-independent era, where early childhood education was realized to elites, it was a constant focus of all the major educational commissions and policies throughout the history of Independent India. Even though the focus was on universalizing the provision for non-formal education and care to the young child, following the welfare approach, the education component was getting increased attention since 2009 Right to Education Act followed by National Early Childhood Care and Education policy, 2013 and National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework 2014. However, the private sector which is expanding over the years since 1990 remains unregulated and unaccounted.

A study of Early Childhood Education Model, in the wake of much studied Kerala Education Model, which succeeded in universalizing school education but undergoing tremendous changes owing to the economic policy shift towards liberalization and privatization has envisaged here to account the practices and contemporary changes in early years education in the state.

Chapter 3

ISLAMIC PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE STUDY VILLAGES

3.1: Introduction

The villages witnessed the phenomenon of pre-schooling only after 1990, after the economic policy shift towards liberalization and privatization. However, the villages have a wide network of schooling even before 1947. This chapter traces the relationship between the historical development of schooling in the proposed villages and its influence of shaping the nature of preschool education sector in the geographical space of the locality followed by the case studies of each type of preschool identified in the villages.

3.2: Educational and Demographic profile of the study villages

Velom and Kuttiady are two adjacent village panchayaths in the northern part of Kozhikode district in North Malabar region of Kerala which comprise a total population of 46,089. Among these two panchayaths, Kuttiady is the major town (even though it is not classified as census towns in 2011 census) which having trade and commercial buildings, hospitals, educational institutions such as Schools and colleges and also known for the production of Kuttiady coconut oil.

Like any other villages in Malabar, apart from having plenty of natural resources, a large part of the working population is employed in the Middle East. According to the 2011 census, Kuttiady has a literacy rate of 94.06% and Velom 91.05%. Each village having 2,243 and 3,220 children in the age group of 0-6. As per census 2011, the district has shown a phenomenal increase in the growth of urban population, i.e, 67% of the population lives in urban areas compared to the 39% in 2001 census.¹⁶ This shows the urban features that population has acquired during the last 20 years without having growth in the manufacturing or agricultural sector. An increase in the number of small towns in the area indicates the effect of remittance money and the increasing consumer character of society. Hinduism and Islam are the two major religious groups in the villages. The Muslims of the village are then divided into different organizational sects such as

¹⁶ : Censuses, 2011.

Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (EK Faction), Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (AP faction), Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (KNM), and Jamaat-e- Islami Hind.

During the time of independence itself, the villages have a wide network of schooling. This owed to the expansion of reform attempts among various religious and caste communities and also to the national movement.

Let us look in the historical development of schooling in these two villages documented by ‘School History Committee’ of Kunnummal sub-district. ‘Since the early 19th-century Kuttiady village has educational institutions and educators. This intense interest in education was the reason for Kuttiady having people who were active in national movement and reform efforts among communities. The progress in education has helped the strengthening of secular consciousness among people even at an earlier stage (of nation formation).

In the last century, the locality had witnessed a historical event in which a building and other resources accumulated from a community for their religious educational purpose has given to the common use of society. ‘Al Madrasathul Islamiyya’ established by ‘Salahul Islam Sabha’ has become ‘Madrasathul Islamiyya upper primary school’(MIUP School) through this event.

Educational activity in the village was started by ‘Ezhuthachans’¹⁷ who came from South Malabar and also known as ‘Kattappattans’ in the locality. The first formal school in the village was Balabharathi LP School founded by Raman Nambeeshan in 1888. But it was shut down due to the lack of students. ‘Narikkotumchal’ and ‘Nitoor’ have ‘Ezhutupallikkoodangal’¹⁸ in 1910. At the same period, a teacher named Krishnan had taught pupil on an upper floor of a building in the Kuttiady town. MIUP School found in 1925. ‘Oorath LP School’ also started in the same period...

Now, Kuttiady village has five lower primary Schools, two upper primary Schools, and one higher secondary School. Except for the Government higher secondary all other schools are

¹⁷ Ezhuthachan is the name of a caste of village teachers. Following the period of Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan known as father of Malayalam language, people from various castes adopted this title as they were engaged in teaching.

¹⁸ Ezhutupallikkoodangal were informal schools in the villages where reading and writing in the Malayalam had taught and run by individual teachers.

under aided management. Govt. school at the outset had worked in the building of Islamiyya college. It also has three unaided schools and four alternative educational institutions.’

‘Even before independence Velom village had schools. As the reflection of social situation, those who were among the lower strata of society, especially ‘Avarnas’ among the Hindu community had no access to education. Untouchability and Feudalism existed in that period. Private schools which were there in the village earlier the formation of the Kerala state were at the hand of higher section of society. Teachers used to get a meager salary. The provision for upper primary education was available only at Cherapuram upper primary School which was found before independence. It was impossible for Harijan children to get an education in these schools.

When Gopalakuruppu a social reformer and freedom fighter had tried to register a Harijan child during anti untouchable activities were happening as part of the freedom movement in a Government LP school in Velom south, the ‘Savarna’ authorities of school had denied his entry into the school. However, the new social consciousness and awareness inculcated among people due to the social reform movement and the growth of national movement Velom village were not behind in the field of public education. ‘Oothupallis’¹⁹ and ‘Ezhuthupallis’ were there at that period. That might have the reason behind the name of a house in the village as ‘Ezuthupallichal’.’ (Neru, History of schools in Kunnummal sub-district prepared by school history committee Kunnummal sub-district).

The participation of communitarian organizations in the educational activities is still significant at different levels such as providing scholarship to excellent students, instituting private English medium schools and maintaining a few aided schools along with higher educational institutions in the private sector. The phenomenon of private schooling, which was unknown to the villages, as like most part of Kerala, made its presence in the early 1990s with the institution of the Ideal Public School in Kuttiady town. It also marked the beginning of Preschool education in the study villages.

¹⁹ : Oothupallis were village schools for muslim children where religious learning had taken place and run by an individual teacher known as Mollaka

Table No. 3.1. Number of schools in the Velom and Kuttiady villages)

Educational institutions	Numbers in Velom Village Panchayath	Numbers in Kuttiady Panchayath
Lower primary school (Govt.)	4	0
Upper primary school (Govt.)	1	0
Lower primary school (Aided)	5	5
Upper primary school (Aided)	1	2
English Medium Schools	0	3
Preschool	19	30
Total	30	38

The distribution of educational institutions is influenced by the spatial factor, i.e, the presence of a town. As like primary, upper primary and high school education, the three private Kindergartens (part of private English medium schools) and seven among the eight religious preschools are located around this town. The competition between schools, especially among aided schools for the claim of children is intense. The result in the LSS²⁰ or USS²¹ exams or of SSLC result and the achievements in youth fests are determining the quality of school and the parental need for having his child admitted to there. Except for ICDS centers, the preschool like schooling as a choice (for parents) is determined not only by its close presence to home, i.e, its neighborhood status, in the study villages. Even though accurate data could not be collected on the number of students from Velom village in the preschools of Kuttiady town, individual cases which came across in the field has proved that the spatial barrier due to distance from home is not influencing the selection of schools since almost all the schools provide transportation facility either as a School Bus, Van or Jeep, even government or aided schools. It should also note that except a few low-cost private schools, villages didn't have high fee charging English medium schools.

²⁰ : Scholarship exam conducted by the Kerala Government for the class fourth students.

²¹ : Scholarship exam conducted by the Kerala Government for the class seventh students

3.3: Preschool Education in the Study Villages

Since 2000, pre-primary education is available in the study villages either as ‘Anganwadis’ (community centers through which ICDS goals are distributed by Government) or as private Kindergartens related to English medium schools. The types of preschools available in and around the study villages have increased in recent years. They can be classified as

- 1: ICDS centers (Anganwadis)
- 2: Private Kindergartens
- 3: Pre-primary section of Government or Aided primary/ upper primary school.
- 4: Religious preschool.

3.3.1: ICDS Center (Anganwadi):

Launched in 1975 by the Government of India, now It is the world's largest ‘Early childhood care and education program’. ICDS, Integrated Childhood Development Services adopts life cycle approach by providing care and services to pregnant and lactating women, children from birth to 6 years of old and adolescent girls through Anganwadis. Among 102mn beneficiaries across India, 70mn are at the age group 3-6 years old (MWCD, 2015). These are the largest preschool service provider in India. Nonformal education and care are provided through such centers.

3.3.2: Private Pre-primary institutions:

The private preschools are schools run by individuals or educational trusts by mostly depending on (high) tuition fee collected from the parents. Since most of them work as a feeder program for later years, they are highly academically oriented. Hindi, English or other native languages are used as the medium of instruction. As long as such schools are drawing students from middle and high-income parents, English is the most preferred language of instruction. The texts and materials are selected by schools independently from the market.

3.3.3: Pre-primary section of Government or Aided primary/Upper primary school:

The pre-primary section attached to Government or aided schools falls under this category. These are highly academic oriented since they explicitly act as feeder programs. They charge a nominal fee from each parent with getting a minor or no support from the Government. They are either started by the community initiative or by management to cater to the need for school readiness. Among other things, school readiness is the foremost aim of such programs.

3.3.4: Religious preschools:

The programs run by various religious sects or organizations to inculcate in the child religious morality and perspectives in addition to preparing a child in secular subjects. They are private initiatives targeting children from middle and upper-middle-class families of the religious community and charging low or high fees. To be a religious preschool it should have a vigorous religious curriculum.

Table No. 3.2. Number of different types of preschools in Velom village

Type of preschool	Availability in the village
ICDS centers (Anganwadis)	17
Pre-primary section of Government or Aided primary/ Upper primary school.	07
Religious preschool	01
Private Kindergartens	0
Total	25

Table No. 3.3. Number of different types of preschools in Kuttiady Village

Type of preschool	Availability in the village
ICDS centers (Anganwadi)	14
Pre-primary section of Government or Aided primary/ Upper primary school.	7
Religious preschool	6
Private Kindergartens	3
Total	30

As the above (Table. 3.1 and Table. 3.2) shows, almost every locality has the presence of more than one preschool. Hence it is also evident that, the presence of a town, which determines the distribution of different types of preschools. Six among the 7 religious preschools and all three private Kindergartens are located around the Kuttiady town. Apart from this, Kiuttiady town also has preschools attached with aided schools. Children of both the villages attend these schools. The universal presence of preschools in these villages shows the increasing demand for the early year's education.

How do parents choose the pre-primary institution for their children? What are the factors affecting this preprimary school choice? This analysis has been done at two levels. 1: The comparative analysis of the nature, structure, and characteristics of existing institutions in the market. 2: The analysis of parent's perspectives in choosing the institution. The above analytical distinction has built on two assumptions. The pre-primary education field is understood as a market in which different actors are trying to sell their services and the parents are treated as (conscious) actors where all their decisions are their own rational choices. This partly emerged from the initial engagements in the field and it also forms the part of the theory. However, it does not negate the influence of structure, both the (general) social and economic structure (of the village) and the structure of early childhood education. Since the latter is structured by the former (social, economic and cultural) and this (emerging) design has a reproductive and stabilizing tendency, the subjective understanding of parents could not be treated as independent from the influence of changes in society.

3.4: Preschool economy; a comparative analysis of institutions in the villages:

How things are becoming more complicated in case of early childhood education in these villages. This complexity is not due to existing distinctions such as religion, caste, class as such, but due to parent's choices determined by having different perceptions of those distinctions and the social situation. This was further complicated by the gained economic prosperity of the people due to remittance from Middleast. The following excerpts from the researcher's experience will help us to understand the part of the complexity.

‘That was a bright sunny day. My younger sister was preparing to go to Anganwadi. As my mother was busy, I have to accompany her to the center which is on the top of a small hill in the village. On that day, she was joined by one of her friends to the ICDS center.

Our neighbor and also a close relative to the other child was studying at a private preschool in the village. It was her curiosity, incited by the narration about activities and her friends' at Anganwadi by my sister, the other insisted to go there. Sometimes my sister also shared her wishes of studying in a nursery school (of her friend's), having a uniform and going to school by school Van'.

'The elder one, a boy, who used to go to Anganwadi till four. At the age of four, due to the insistence of teachers from an aided primary school, we registered him to their school, even though it was around one kilometer away from home. He studied at that school for one year. Every day, school van came and picked him. Instead of continuing his primary education at that school, for the first standard, we admitted him to nearby primary school which is only 100 meters away from home and better than the other. His younger sister is now studying in an Islamic preschool. She used to go there by school Jeep since the institution is 4KM away from home. It was at her father's (who works in the Middle East) insistence that I admitted her there. I didn't feel much difference except they are charging higher fees. The next year we are planning to register her to the 2nd standard of nearby primary school' (incidentally this nearby primary school has no pre-primary facility).' (Excerpts from the conversation with the mother (Zubaida) of a girl child who is attending an Islamic preschool).

Selection of a choice of a preschool, like any other situation, has always malleable. Even though not vulnerable, the choice of selection of preschool is, as a rational choice by the parent/ parents, in most case, defined by their perceptions of the situation. A perception can either be better informed or not at all informed but the product of a conditioned mind. The concrete analysis of available preprimary institutions, by taking one of the types of institutions as a case study will serve the primary analytical purpose, the analysis of the structure of pre-schooling. This analysis has been done on a comparative level based on selected themes/ areas of focus. They are 1: Nature, characteristic features and development 2: Location in space and different stakeholders 3: Nature of Pedagogy (Curriculum and textbooks) and 4: Preschool's perceptions of social structure. A detailed description of each case has been given on the above themes in the following sections.

3.5: Field Narratives:

The following pages present the narratives of the respondents on the rationale behind the selection of diverse types of schools in the rural north Malabar region of Kerala. This is based on the participant observation in the selected preschools in the study villages.

3.5.1: ICDS centers of Velom village panchayath located in 16th and 17th wards

Nambamvayal is a small locality in the village having around 400 households. It covers the parts of 16th and 17th wards of Velom village. The locality has one primary school and two upper primary schools and another government primary school in its surroundings and two ICDS centers. This study attempt to understand the nature of the everyday functioning and the difficulties such centers are facing as preschools. I as a person and also as a researcher have certain inclinations while approaching to those centers for understanding its nature and style of functioning. It is important to make them explicit to get an idea of orientation the writing is going to take.

Anganwadis are perceived as

1: potential preschools which can be used to achieve the concept of neighborhood pre-schooling and

2: With their limited resources, they are doing very well.²² Located at two ends of the village space, they both had found in 2000, 25 years after the introduction of the ICDS program as a pilot project.

The 16th ward Anganwadi center functions in an old, empty house in the hilly part of the village. It was a pleasant afternoon, in the mid-October, Suma teacher, the Anganwadi worker, and Mrs. Ajitha, the helper was serving food to the children while I was entering into the premises. After sending the children to the home, with mothers and Grandmothers who came to the center, the teacher had talked about the plight of the center. Even though the area has more than 30 children only 15 to 18 children used to attend the center. That too children within the 100-meter perimeter of the Anganwadi. Even in the case of those who attend, children won't come regularly to the center. It was only 8 children who had come to the center on the day I had visited. According to Mrs. Suma teacher, who has 18 years of experience as an Anganwadi Worker

“The Anganwadi centers are not understood as educational centers by the parents. Even though we are teaching reading, writing and how to deal with numbers, since without

²² : Part of this assumption derived from researchers own experience influenced by his younger sister's days at Anganwadi (she attended one of the Anganwadis taken as case study).

having textbooks, it is difficult to convince parents about the educational part of the center.”

The walls of the Verandah of the house which is used as the classroom was filled with the letters and pictures written and drew by the children. But the space available for children to move was too constricted. The teacher was very happy while informing me that they are moving to their own building by the end of next month. But the 17th ward ICDS center which also functions as Gama Seva Kendra has its own building with a separate room for the kitchen since 2007. The classroom which is wide enough and has a tiled floor, chairs for sitting and an almirah to keep the materials. Children, 2-year-olds to 5-year-olds were taught together by using the teacher’s guide prepared jointly by the Ministry of Social Justice and State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT). Not only the classroom space is too constricted, but also the availability of play material also seemed to be limited. The play kit which was supplied 5years ago by the village officials was not enough to meet the need of children. Besides that, since Anganwadi Workers have other responsibilities too, it is not easy to find time to find for teaching regularly. The demand for teaching is increasing from the parent’s side. Most of the parents, who had sent their children to the center last year, enrolled their children to the low-cost preschool available in the nearby primary school. Suma teacher explained the phenomenon,

“Parents want us to teach English also to their children. We are not provided with training or materials to teach the language. But since the demand is increasing, we workers collectively decide (unofficially) to teach English besides teaching the theme based textbook by buying textbooks from the private publishers and distributing them among the children.”

A day at an ICDS center will start at 9 30 am in the morning and ends at 3 30 pm. Children will reach the center by 10. No prayers to mark the beginning of the day. Also, there is no provision for the uniform. Children will engage in their own activities until the teacher starts taking lessons. It may be the most gender neutral spaces of preschooling available in the locality among various types. Children are not differentiated based on their gender, either in seating arrangements or preferences given in various circumstances such as classroom activities, sports day or arts fest. The other responsibilities workers are occupied with such as updating the household survey sheets (11 registers are kept by an ICDS center), to attend and the training programs related to health care, various other awareness programs conducted by Village and Block panchayaths, and other departments and conduct awareness program in the locality keeps

AWWs away from teaching. The nutritious food is provided at three times a day. At 11, children are served by porridge and for Lunch, they are served the rice and rice and beans and while leaving sweet porridge prepared out of wheat.

Both the centers have teachers who have a qualification of Secondary School Teachers Certificate. The educational qualifications of the Anganwadi workers have not mattered even though their qualification is minimum since they used to identify as teachers by villagers long back. Repeated training programs related to care and education, in fact, enhanced their commitment level. It is their struggle to see it as an educational center keeps its relevance as an educational center in the village. But the perception of Anganwadi worker and helpers as the lower level of educational strata, according to Suma teacher they are compelled to fill the seats of an audience of various training or awareness programs conducted by the local self-government or the worker's affiliated political organizations.

Lessons are planned and delivered based on the theme book 'Anganappoomazha', which serves as a teachers' guide. The theme book is organized on the child's physical sensory motor development, language development, social and emotional development, knowledge expansion and also the development of a child's creativity. This has to be achieved by mapping the resources at the local space maximum. In a sense, children have to be learned by knowing his environment, both social and physical. An analytical look into the organization of themes in the guide book will provide the nature of non-formal education at the ICDS centers in Kerala.

3.5.2: Functioning of Preschool attached to Aided/ Government school (Little Buds Preschool, Cherapuram UP School):

Cherapuram UP School is one of the upper primary schools in the Velom village. As an aided school which had found in the 1940s, it has an immense role in shaping the educational milieu of the village. This narrative account centers around preschool which have founded in 2015 by the school management in the same school compound. Even though the inception of preschool couldn't be understood as an independent act by the management, but inseparably related to the aided upper primary school.

Little Buds Preschool was established in 2015 in the primary school compound by the school management. This preschool section has no relation to primary and upper primary sections of the

school, but function under the direct supervision of management. As of now, it has a strength of 60 children cared and supported by 3 lady teachers. Even though without having helpers, separate play area and well-organized classrooms with adequate child-friendly infrastructure, the school has earned a reputation of excellence by the parents within these three years. It was evident in the increased enrolment of students in the Lower KG class last year.

Lower KG has two divisions and having 40 children while upper KG has one division of 20 children. The medium of instruction, according to the teachers is English. As I found from the interaction with children studying there, the primacy of the English language is not strictly imposing outside the classroom. Since children share the same play area, food, and in a general sense, the same schooling spaces with primary school, the possibility of artificially creating a constrained educational preschool environment in such schools are impossible. It is not about having friends among children of primary classes, but the increased tendency to imitate the games of later among these children that I was trying to account. It functions by collecting fees from parents. Comparing to other private preschools, the fee is very low. A parent has to pay 500 rupees per month for the child. Along with this, they also have to pay 250 rupees for transport facility. School offers free food for the children.

A day in the school starts at 10 with the common prayer which selected school children to recite through mike except for assembly days. Children have to stand until it ends. Each class is allotted to one teacher. The teacher has the freedom to choose which subject has to teach in each period. Every day, the teacher covers English, Malayalam, General Knowledge and Mathematics. Each period covers around 45 minutes. There are two intervals at 11.30 and 12.30 for a tea break (milk or egg would be provided) and for lunch. The meals are prepared in the school kitchen for all the children. Afternoon there are no lessons. Children are free to play until they are transported back to home. Since having not many toys and play materials, and enough time for play, children themselves have to find games to occupy with. This is where the imitative tendency comes to play. The mother of Radin, who attends the school has narrated how dirty his uniform would be while returning from the school. Most of their games, like police and thieves need enough space to run, hide and run and they are playing in between other children in the muddy school ground.

School textbooks are distributed by one of the private publishing agencies, Hall Mark publishers. So far, each year teachers and management together selected different publisher's textbooks. The publisher also provides child evaluation materials such as exam question papers and they also organize all Kerala talent search exams every year. Incidentally, the performance in the talent search exam is utilized by schools as marketing material. One of the teachers described how it works. The agents of the publishing agency come to school before the beginning of every academic year to market their materials. They also provide uniform clothes. Except the curriculum set, their other attraction will be the talent search exam conducted across Kerala.

Conducting talent search exams by each publishing agencies, for the teacher, it is nothing but a way to do business.

“By collecting a fee around 150/200 from each child, they will provide a short book containing various information. The child has to memorize it, more than that we have to teach it to the children by stop teaching curriculum for one or two months. Most schools who subscribed the same publisher's textbooks will participate in this and a considerable number of children from each school get the rank also.”

To reduce the weight of school bag, Textbooks are divided into three terms and a book in a term of six months contains separate sections for General Knowledge, English and Mathematics. Along with it, an additional textbook for Malayalam will be there.

As a researcher, I could not say the classrooms are adequate and have a child-friendly environment since the roof was made of tin sheets and classes were too narrow for 20 children. In one of the classes, the teacher has no table or her own space to keep her materials. The old and somewhat spoiled benches were used as desks. The only thing which I can say adequate was small chairs. Empty walls were painted with nothing or have any other wallpapers depicting the child's creativity contrary to most of the primary school classes. Classes were divided not by wall but by a cardboard sheet. It is impossible to take classes without dealing with noise from the other class.

According to Naeema teacher,

“the increase in the number of children owe to parents interest in providing English medium education to their child and closing of private preschools in the area due to lack of adequate infrastructure.”

One of the parents I have interviewed expressed the same opinion. She sent her elder daughter to ‘Zenith’, which was one of the private preschools in the village but forced to send the younger one to Cherapuram UP since ‘Zenith’ is closed. According to her the care and attention which the elder one had got from the Zenith are not getting to her younger sister.

That is how it functions. But it could not be taken as a general picture or as a representative of all other preschools attached to aided or government schools. To understand that, it is inevitable to have an idea about the story behind the intention and inception of preschool sections of such schools. One of the active social worker in the village and also a teacher in the same school, Vijayan master, during the interview, undoubtedly put forward the reason as

“It is the very existence and sustenance of school that prompted the management to think about opening the preschool section. The primary school teachers also supported the idea since school readiness (of the children) is one of the challenges they are facing. The intention of management is nothing but to increase the enrolment in the first standard. The after effect of opening preschool was as expected. From having only one division in the first standard in 2016, now the school has a strength of 70 children in the first standard. That means we can have three divisions. It also helped to attract children of the parents who are more inclined towards English medium education.”

Anyhow this is one side of the story. Another side is narrated by him and other teachers who I had interacted with

“It is also a way to do business that too in two ways one since teachers are minimally paid, even from the low fees collected from parents, management can make a profit. Another by increasing the enrolment of children in primary classes, new teachers can be officially appointed. The (illegal) donation collected from these newly appointed teachers, as of now, is around 25 lacks. It becomes an acceptable custom to pay the money to get the job. The way aided schooling increasingly becomes a business in this way. Teachers are appointed not on their quality but on the ability to pay the needed amount.”

This trend, i.e, aided school sector becoming more and more market-oriented, not in a legitimate way, but by exploiting the (un)questioned custom of receiving money for appointing teachers since Government has no policy regulation for the appointment of aided school teachers added to the fray. Riyaz master confirmed and explained further what Vijayan master has told to me as

“Newly appointed teachers are getting a commission for canvassing children to their schools from management since new appointments can turn in to a huge profit. The beginning of every academic year, those teachers are carrying out regular home visits by

collecting a list of the children from primary schools to lure the parents to join the child in their school.”

But this competitive trend has another side as Vijayan master hinted,

“Management and highly committed teachers are working together to improve the school infrastructure, performance in extracurricular activities and exams.”

But it depends on how management approaches the issue. Even though I didn’t cross-check, Vijayan master narrated the story one upper primary school around the Kuttiady town

“A few years ago, one of those schools, advertised around the area itself by projecting the new school building it was going to construct. Although the image of the building projected was a mere representative, the enrolment of pupil had increased every year. Since they also offer travel facility, parents who used to send their children to our school started to send them there. Unlike our school that school has well-constructed school buildings, smart classrooms, and playground.”

Like other primary or upper primary schools in the locality where the old ruined buildings and facilities are not rebuilt, teachers are struggling to provide their maximum. Like one of the headmasters from the area had wished, “If we get a new building with enough classroom space to move around and classrooms separated by concrete walls, our efforts will have more results than what we have now.” Since classrooms are too narrow and separated by cardboard sheets, they used to conduct classes outside. That school did not have a playground even.

Though approaches by the management differ in the way the school is becoming a commercial property, it has positive benefits too. It ensures competitiveness among the schools to provide maximum results and improve the quality of its infrastructure. However, the possibility of having neighborhood schooling, even though the universalization of primary schooling (or pre-schooling, since Anganwadis are present in most of the locality) in these villages is a reality is fading away. Such an account of reality should explain why neighborhood schooling is important since all of these schools are in the Government or in the Aided sector? That is inevitably related to the intricacies in the social and cultural spaces of villages and the ahistorical growth of the child and also to the increasing turn of these schools towards exam result oriented teaching.

Turning to the other trend by which public schools are trying to keep up its relevance. In fact, the unavailability of quality private schools in the locality and the free education provided by

these low-cost preschools, schools attract even those parents inclined towards English education. The foundation of preschools attached to primary schools has also related to the introduction of English medium classes in Malayalam medium schools. The syllabus and curriculum of such classes will be provided by the ‘State Council Education Research and Training’ (SCERT) Kerala. Cherapuram UP School has started one English medium division for each class seven years ago. According to the Vijayan master,

“The proportion of students choose English medium over Malayalam medium have been increasing every year. In 2017-18, among 60 children enrolled in the first standard, 40 chose English medium class over Malayalam medium.”

Muneer master who works in the only Government Highschool in Kuttiady village also had noted the same trend.

“Pupil who studied private English medium schools are increasingly seeking admission in the English medium divisions of our school from eighth standard onwards. We are providing better results than those private schools and education is totally costless. Our infrastructure, whether in terms of school buildings, digitalized education, playground, etc are better than those private schools. The way parents evaluate the school is based on the total results achieved by schools in the public exams. We are providing better results.”

The phenomenon of low-cost pre schooling attached to Aided or Government schools in the village has to be understood in the context of 1: an Increasing parental inclination towards English medium and early childhood education 2: The school’s response to such increasing demand for (academically oriented) preschool education from parents. Most of these preschools are introduced after parent’s demanded it in the Parent Teacher’s Meetings.

As an arena which is not regulated by the state and having uneven quality across schools does not make its relevance less in the new educational environment of these villages. It is one of the ways through which parental aspirations towards educational dreams of their children got fulfilled. The state itself recognized the importance of providing direction to such schools as the newspaper report tells. SCERT Kerala along with Ministry of Social Justice Department is introducing a new curriculum for preschools in the vicinity of Government or Aided schools and

plan to start 1000 preschools with adequate facilities and necessary infrastructure by coordinating with available Anganwadis in the vicinity of a Government school.²³

3. 4. 3: Private pre-schooling in the study villages

Following India's policy shift towards the liberalization of the economy, since the last decade of the 20th century witnessed the spurting of private schools across the country. The study villages were no exception. In fact, the study villages and the surrounding area had introduced to preprimary education through such private unaided schools. Hence the trend has shown certain peculiarities. Among the 5 private English medium schools which offer education from Pre-primary to 10th standard (not every one of them), three of them are managed by educational trusts formed and controlled by members from particular religious communities. It can either be read as a continuation of community-level involvement in the educational activities (since the state's policy shift did not entertain aided schools or new Government schools. By 2000, cost-free primary education through government or aided schools has universalized in the villages) or as the effort at the community level to satisfy the (quality) concern of the education growing among the new middle class in each community. Here, for the sake of understanding the sophistication of private pre-schooling (in a whole, private unaided schooling) in the locality, two of the schools managed by religious educational trust/ committee have taken as cases. They are

1: Ideal Public school, Kuttiady

2: Vyasa Vidya Peedam, Vattoli

Muneer master, one of the Government school teachers from the locality, explained the trend among the organizational level efforts to open private English medium schools among sects of the Muslim community as

“No one can deny the involvement and active participation of organizational sects in the educational mobility among Muslim community. Hence after 1990, when liberalization opened the educational space for private players, all those organizations, even those opposed secular education at their beginning, started to invest in the unaided English medium schools. In fact, most of the localities where a particular organizational sect has an immense presence, English medium schools have opened under an educational trust either existing or just formed. That was for nothing but to cater to the educational

²³ : Government plans new child-friendly curriculum for pre-primary schools. 21 October 2018. The New Indian Express. It is not yet operationalized due to the lack of funds.

aspirations of the middle class among the community. What prompted this trend is the increased remittance from the middle east.”

He even compared the active presence of traditional Muslims sects in the arena of secular education to the counter-revolution happened in Europe following enlightenment and renaissance. In this context among the three private English medium schools around the Kuttiady town, two of them are owned by religious educational trust. So the selection of the sample of a private preschool as a case study also determined by who owns the school, to say religious educational trusts.

3.4.3.1: Pre-primary section of Ideal public school

Ideal public school was established in 1992 by a religious educational trust in the locality. Islamiyya educational trust, formed by people related to Jamaat Islami Hind one of the major organizational sects among the Muslims in the area to promote Islamic education and activities in the locality also runs an Arabic college, Unaided Public school, self-financing Arts college, and Quran learning center apart from the nursery school.

Pre-primary section of the Ideal public school operates in a two-storied building in the compound of an Islamic college (function under the same management) on a riverside away from the noise of Kuttiady town. The courtyard of the one side opened square shaped building painted in light green and white was filled with school jeeps when I entered. It was around the three in the evening, the time to dismiss the classes and the children to go home. The walls of the building are covered with enlarged and colorful maps of India, Kerala and the childish versions of animals and birds like most of the government or aided schools in the locality. The classes were too painted with them along with Malayalam letters and English Alphabets. Those classes were wide enough for 30 children and having child-friendly benches and desks with an almirah to keep the children their materials while leaving to home (It was told to the researcher that school following the policy that children should keep their books at school). The school also has a playroom and two digitalized classroom.

The nursery school was started in 1999. It caters to 180 children hailing from the neighborhood (Kuttiady town) and nearby villages. Since school offers travel facilities up to 8 kilometers parents are sending their children from the nearby villages. It has three Lower KG and 2 upper

KG batches as of now. Earlier up to 300 children were studied at a time. According to her, “Since most of the children are hailing from Muslim community, in fact, more than three quarters, the spurting of Islamic preschools in the neighborhood has led to this fall of the number of children. Even the same management has opened an Islamic preschool, a franchise of Heavens in this year. It functions at the building of their own CBSE School in the town”. School has 9 teachers and 3 helpers. The teacher selection does not mandate the ‘National Teachers Training Certificate’ for pre-primary or Montessori teachers training certificate. The teachers are selected by evaluating their communication skills, extracurricular abilities... Most of the teachers in the institute have more than 10 years of experience in the field. One teacher was a trainee who was pursuing her teacher training (NTTC) at a nearby institute. The teachers are paid around 8000-10000 per month.

This institution is supported by tuition fees collected from the students. It collects 10300 for a child as tuition fee for a year. Since the institution offers snacks and lunch, an additional amount of 400 per month also has collected. If the child needs school jeep facility, the parent has to pay around 500 or more per month. The language of instruction and communication is English except in Malayalam and Arabic periods. It offers religious education for Muslim children. Lower KG class has special moral studies lessons while Upper KG class offers the Arabic language along with moral studies lessons. However religious instruction is restricted to the period allotted to each subject, not in the organization of daily life at school or in the extracurricular activities. The color of the uniform of boys and girls are the same. Boys wear chocolate color shorts and white check shirt while girl children have midi²⁴, top and a coat in the same color. There are no rules restricting mingling of the children of different gender, hence usually in the classroom, each gender prefer their own gender to sit with. The seating arrangement also did not show hierarchical positioning since the benches of girls and boys are arranged in parallel. The case is the same in the case of assembly gatherings too, separate parallel lines for girls and boys.

The nursery follows the curriculum designed by Early childhood education board of ‘Vidya council for Education’ (also known as Integrated Education Council India (IECEI)) found in

²⁴ : Midi is used to refer to any dress or skirt that has a hem which hits at mid-calf – halfway between the knee and ankle.

1979 and headquartered in Kozhikode. According to a subjective view, It was formed ‘in response to the huge demand for scholastic and co-scholastic support and coordination from the unorganized managements of unaided schools but recognized by the Kerala Government or the CBSE, as a non-profit seeking organization’.

As the website shows 92 unaided and 8 aided schools are affiliated to this body. The objectives are ‘to promote value based quality education and to try to empower affiliated schools to run in a professional way’. They provide textbooks, child assessment materials, resource packages for teaching staff and organize arts and sports festivals where children of affiliated schools compete each other annually. They also provide training to teachers both in the updated textbooks and in competency building during summer vacations in addition to other training sessions. The particular body also conducts recruitment for schools. Since it is a not profitable body, most of the resource persons affiliated to it are serving voluntarily to the cause and working with academic institutions such as government colleges or schools or retired academicians. The council’s involvements in the early childhood education can be summed up as ‘to meet the quality concern in the early childhood education at a time with increasing parental obsession with early childhood education (since nuclear families replace joint family settings) didn’t match with quality standards of spurting Kindergartens having no systematic syllabi, assessment standards or trained and qualified teachers’ by mapping the available resource in the community to the particular field.

The textbook which has taken as study material was a newly introduced one in 2017, a revised text which according to the Director “as a measure to reduce the burden carried by the kids, we introduce term series”. Instead of having different textbooks for different subjects, each six-month terms in an academic year have an integrated textbook which has separate sections for English, Mathematics, General Knowledge and Malayalam.

Can it be termed as a religious school? The researcher was curious about it because there are number of reasons one can classify it among the religious schools. Owned by a religious educational trust, function in the compound of an Islamic college, most of the students are hailing from the Muslim community and have separate hours for moral studies and Arabic learning. Are they enough to categorize it as a religious preschool? It seems that it needs more description of the structure and organization of school and a comparative account with the school

which names add Islamic as a suffix to preschool. Even though most of the students are from the Muslim community, there are children hailing from Hindu families. Among the 9 teachers, four are not Muslims. All of them are women. There is no dress code for teachers to follow in the school. The classroom, every day practices such as school assembly, child-teacher interaction, dining table manners... are not filled with religious contents (If someone wants to follow, he can).

The religious teaching is restricted to the classroom, in that too to particular periods. Even in the classrooms, one could not identify prayers or quotes related to religious teachings. Even though what is religious/ nonreligious is a contentious issue, the perspective which I have followed lies in his conscious attempt to identify practices or symbols related to Islamic teachings in the school environment and curriculum. In that, I could say he failed (somewhat nonobjective statement). Hence the studied case offers an excellent example to the way Muslim community has responded to the increasing demand for nursery education (also for English education) at a certain period of time, say post-1990s to till 2012.

The principal, Najma teacher, has the opinion that English medium schools are more successful in imparting the value of discipline and seriousness in learning than government or aided schools. She has also noted two trends growing in the locality. One as pointed out, the spurring of Islamic preschools. According to her such schools are offering a burden to the children since they are completely academic and having a vast syllabus ranging from the internalization of Quran to study of mother tongue. The Islamic preschools end with preschool education in most cases. So the discontinuities in the pedagogy the children will feel also hamper what is expected as positive benefits. Hence she noted that now such schools are opening primary classes in addition to preschools. Kuttiady has one such school.

Another trend she noted was the opening up of English medium batches in the government or aided schools. During the conversation, when I had expressed the concern to know about the post-preschool life of children she said that there are enough aided schools who are already canvassing parents to register their children in their schools. Either the children continue with Ideal public school, or as in the most cases, they will end up in the newly opened English medium schools of aided schools like MIUP School, Naduppoyil UP School located around the town.

Such English medium sections (all of them follow state syllabus) of the government or aided schools have increased demand. According to Muneer master, who teaches in the only higher secondary school in the Kuttiady village, Government Higher Secondary School Kuttiady located in the town, “the demand for English medium section is higher among parents than Malayalam medium. Especially those children who studied up to the seventh standard in the nearby private schools will try to shift to our school due to low cost and the high-quality education we are offering”.

3.4.3.2: A pre-primary school affiliated to Bharatheeya Vidya Niketan:

Vyasa Vidya Peedam offers English medium schooling from pre KG to 8th standard. This school is affiliated to the Bharatheeya Vidya Nikethan (BVN), Kerala chapter of Akhil Bhaaratheeya Vidya Sansthan, Lucknow, found in 1978 following the developments since 1952 for promoting a certain majoritarian Hindu ideological socialization through education. It is the largest education provider in the country after the Government in India.²⁵ According to BVN, it has 7836 students and 5331 teachers in its 389 primary or secondary schools across Kerala. There are 5 schools affiliated to Vidya Nikethan around Vadakara taluk. To understand how it works in the village contexts, it is essential to have an understanding of the macro picture, i.e, the nature and the style of organization of such schools both at national and state level.

While ‘Akhila Bharatheeya Vidya Sansthan’ is straight forward in stating their mission, its Kerala chapter has entirely buried the school’s implicit mission from the public. Former stated its mission as ‘to develop a national system of education which would help to build a generation of men and women that are committed to Hindutva and infused with patriotic favor...’. Hence there is no mention about such a project in the statement about the mission of BVN which is ‘To develop a National System of Education that build a generation, which is physically, vitally, mentally and spiritually developed to face the daily challenges of their own lives and to serve the needy and thereby, serving the nation’. The unavailability of statements about such implicit political agenda to the public and the portrayal of the establishment of the school in the villages

²⁵ : Article published by Huff Post in 18/09/2018 written by Betwa Sharma titled In RSS schools, Muslim students are learning to live with Hindutva.

as an attempt to inculcate (the lost) ethical values of ‘Hindu’ culture in the children and through it the holistic development (the physical, moral and intellectual) of the child. This much-diluted presentation helped it to gain the status of religious school which has nothing to do with politics. In an abstract sense, the structure and curriculum of schools are prepared in accordance with the dominant ideas in the public sphere of Kerala.

‘I was introduced to such schools through my school friends who studied till 7th standard in the nearby Vyasa Vidya Peedam. Even though we were from the same village, only we got to know each other since we started going together to the high school. His father, a clerk in a judicial court was the secretary of Communist Party of India in the village. Another student was a strong supporter of the Student Federation of India and involved in the activities of the organization at our school, son of a daily wage manual worker were also alumni of Vyasa. At the same way, most of the students who studied at that school were hailing from strong left oriented families. But most of them were also from the lower middle class or middle class. The annual fee is 1500 only. The school also offers transportation services and food’.

In addition to the reasons stated above which explained how the structure is organized tactically, How the Left-oriented spaces of villages are witnessing the presence of such schools and the legitimization from left-oriented families have to look at to parental perspectives towards a variety of schools. Hence, that too related to the organization of structure and its functioning at the micro level. Most of the time what matters is social, economic and cultural conditions at the micro level and the approach of the institution towards such a condition. The following excerpts from the researcher’s journal have led to such a conclusion.

‘I entered the compound of Vyasa with an uncertain mind. Since I am a Muslim, I was unsure about how the school principal and manager will react to my wanting of knowing about it (with a prejudiced mind about how they present themselves). The preschool section of the school, which works separately from its primary and upper primary section located in an old tharavadu²⁶ home in the traditional architecture. Probably, it was voluntarily given by one of the members of the school committee. In fact, nothing was changed to make it as a school except the courtyard was tiled and roofed and separated into classrooms by thick cardboard sheets. I entered the school, in

²⁶ : Tharavadu is a Malayalam word for ancestral home usually used by Namboothiries, Nairs.

the house by removing my footwear where all the footwear were dumped by children and passed a huge statue of Swami Vivekananda. Office of the principal welcomed me with the portraits of Hegdewar, Golwalker, and Saibaba hanging on the wall along with certificates of achievement school had in the past. I was welcomed by one of the managing committee members who also work as an administrator of the school voluntarily.

It had found in 2000 by a local committee formed by educated people interested in voluntary social service and nation building to curb the phenomenon of school drop out by providing quality education within a low budget. It follows the NCERT syllabus and also the curriculum developed by Vidya Niketan. In between the conversation, what I heard repeatedly from the manager and the principal is the importance of ethical and moral education according to the cultural values of Indian society. To them,

“The major problem with the government education system is its negligence of cultural and moral education. In fact, there is no provision for it. Rather here we are focusing on the holistic development of the child by inculcating in them certain values through daily routines and training both the children and their parents according to a special syllabus.” Towards attaining this, a system of teaching four languages and ‘panchanga system’ is introduced. Children from their pre-primary standards itself were taught English, Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Hindi.

The panchanga system includes a special focus on five areas. They are

1: Shareerik Shikshan (physical education)

2: Yoga

3: Music (Sangeetha)

4: Sanskrit and

5: Naithik Evam Adyathmik Shikshan (moral and spiritual education).

School can be distinguished from other private or government schools due to its addition and importance given to special periods and textbooks for moral and spiritual education and by the style of teaching of Sanskrit and the Prarthana Sabha (researcher excluded yoga and music since they achieved a certain degree of secular status). The daily life of school begins by a

comprehensive prayer by pupil which helps them to be ‘mentally sound intellectually sharp and spiritually enlightened’.

This prayer includes Saraswathi vandanam, Brahmanath, Dhyanam, Gayathrimanthram, Rasthravandanam, and Shanthimanthram. Besides, there will be ten minutes warming up of exercises enhancing bodily fitness. Agnihothram is doing weekly once in this school. Apart from it, it will be done on the birthdays of pupils in the presence of their parents. Parents are educated on how to rear their children by special sessions for them known as ‘Sopanam classes’ apart from parent teachers meetings. There will be 5 such special sessions in a year.

The regular school day starts around 9 30 am in the morning with a 15-minute long prayer section followed by moral studies class in which verses from ‘Geetha’, different ‘slokas’ are taught.

Apparently, the intensity of contents related to religion in the daily activities of the school had led, according to his son, the Local committee secretary of the communist party to change his son’s school.

Another moment from the visit which may explain how such schools act as propaganda spaces,

“I was about to leave. While taking photos of school premises, I had noticed bunch articles which looks like recently published materials made for distributing among the children on a table in the verandah. To quell my curiosity I had a look, It was an article criticizing the stand taken by Government of Kerala in the supreme court and the events followed it related the women’s entry to ‘Shabarimala’²⁷, explicitly a propaganda material.”

The preprimary section attached to Vyasa Vidyapeedam is considered not as a religious preschool, even though it does have an idea to inculcate a religious way of life in the child. What defines the philosophy of such schools is its political end, not religion itself. The following section describes a newly emerging trend among the Muslim community, Islamic preschools.

²⁷ : One of the largest annual pilgrimage center in the world, located at Shabarimala hill, Pathanamthitta district in Kerala dedicated to Sri Dharma Shastha popularly known as lord Ayyappan.

3.5.4: Religious preschools (AI Birr and Al Fithrah Islamic Preschools in the study villages):

“Make your child a winner in this world and a winner in the hereafter too”

One of the Islamic preschool brands in Kerala, in fact, the first among all the other introduce themselves with the above caption. Started in 2012 by an Islamic educational trust in the outskirts of the city of Calicut, the phenomenon has spread all over Kerala, especially northern and central Kerala due to the investments made by different sects among Muslim community at the organizational level. As of now, there are five preschool chains related to various organizational sects functioning on the label either ‘Islamic’ or ‘Quranic’ across Kerala (some of them have affiliated institutes outside Kerala also).

3.4.4.1: Islamic Preschool; the concept and the philosophy:

The concept and the methodology of Islamic pre-schooling in Kerala adopted from the system of education and curriculum developed in Egypt in the early years of the 21st century. ‘Nour-ul-Bayan curriculum’ has developed to revive the Islamic culture of learning and inculcating Islamic values and practices among Muslim children from early childhood itself. It was formulated by a group of Islamic scholars led by Shaikh Tarique Assaeed Al Madbury, a prominent scholar from Alazhar University, Cairo.

The attempt to develop such a system lies in the increased perception of the social, cultural and economic decay of the Muslim world. As a religious community, Muslims has an obvious logic to turning back to their own scriptures and practices (ideal) while perceiving the threat of the loss of social and cultural values which supposedly has to be held by the members of the community for the attainment of success of individuals and then of the community (which is far more complicated while comparing with the experience of other religious communities). Ever since forces of colonization had engulfed the places and spaces of Muslim communities and nations in various ways, there were attempts to revive the Islamic culture and knowledge and to develop methods and practices to socialize children in Islam from the part of Islamic scholars and leaders.

However even after freed from the chains of colonization, the structural readjustments and the knowledge paradigms disseminated by colonizers in such countries and communities limited the scope of Islamic education and socialization of the child in Islam. So the idea and conception of Islamic pre-schooling have to be understood in the attempts to revive the cultural and social ethos of Islam among Muslim communities. The scope of the subjective understanding of such a system (by a scholar or an individual from the community) lies in the perception of existing practices of secular and religious education in the society, the understanding of childhood and education and in the search for problems and its solutions.²⁸

According to an authentic tradition from the prophet Muhammed, “Every child in the world comes with pure nature. It is his father or mother makes him Christian, Jew, Parsi or Muslim”.²⁹

The child will be intimately connected to the mother until the age of 3. After three, the mother-child relationship has gradually loose and the child will be introduced to multiple and various social situations and people. The children in this age group can be divided into four. The children of the working class and peasants who have no access to education (the term uneducated also implies uncivilized in the liberal era), children of the middle class and the children of the ruling class or elites of the society and last group comprises children who have denied educational provision due to war, famine or illness.

The idea of Islamic preschool is put forward to overcome this division and inequality in the educational provision for different groups (in a way, classes) by developing a curriculum for all sections. Apart from the difference in content for a different class of pupil, a large part of modern schooling and educational practices transfer and disseminate among the children nothing but ‘Knowledge waste’. Along with this knowledge wastes, the tsunami of electronic contents and printed materials and its consumption by children from everywhere, whether it is at home or school worsen the conditions of socialization and intellectual growth of the child. The concept of knowledge waste is supplemented by another term, ‘Pure knowledge’, not at all an antonym but explains the ideas about the content of the curriculum in preschool.

²⁸ : The following account of the concept of Islamic pre schooling is derived from multiple narratives about the system by preschool educators who promote this idea.

²⁹ : Narrated by two of the seven major Hadith (profet’s tradition) collections, Bukhari, Muslim.

Then the question arises, How to protect the child from this knowledge waste? Through purifying the knowledge he gets by controlling social situations and experiences up to a certain period. More than this, what is more, important is pure knowledge itself. It is the (Kalam of) words of God, Allah, i.e, the Holy Quran. The idea is to build all other knowledge on the strong base of Quran, the foundation should be the Quran. Since God has arranged nothing special for children, then the words of Allah should be comprehensible to them at a certain level. On this base, by the comprehension of the Quran at their level, the children will be capable of grasping all the other knowledge such as logic, science, languages, etc. The unconscious learning through providing enough circumstances also include practices which inculcate in the child the Islamic ways of dealing with everyday situations. The curriculum is prepared on the underlying principles such as the replacement of secular and liberal science by Quran as the epistemic and ontological base of knowledge and life, to accomplish conscious change in the society by imparting radical changes in the children through Islamic schooling. Then what should be the content of early childhood education? Obviously, it should include Quran and Prophetic traditions along with multiple languages, mathematics, and environmental science.

What is special about such a system is that this would be the perfect blend of ancient (Islamic content plus pedagogue) and modern knowledge. While the advancements in the fields of psychology, neuroscience and pedagogical anthropology have combined with contents and (lost) pedagogical developments in early Islamic societies. For example, the teaching of language, especially Arabic, follows a different method from the dominant one. Instead of following listening- speaking- reading and writing method, the Arabic language is taught through the method reading- listening... Here the Quran occupies the central position since Arabic is learned by the child to comprehend the Quran. The idea is Arabic is learning through the Quran for the Quran. This idea of pedagogy derives from the Holly text itself since the revelation of the book had begun by the sentences “Read in the name of God who created...”. Otherwise, the structure, organization and the other curricular content and pedagogy follows advancements in modern day scientific researches. The ideas of Mario Montessori, Frederich Froebel and Social constructivism of Jean Piaget plays an important role in the formation of the Islamic preschool structure and curriculum. In a nutshell, the major feature of the idea of Islamic preschools are,

- The return of learning to Quran and prophetic traditions (this does not negate the learning of secular subjects, but emphasize the importance and inevitability of both as a foundational base over the other knowledge paradigms)
- It ensures the protection of the pure nature of the child by providing him (pure) knowledge.
- All the learning should be through the Quran.
- The equal importance has given to knowledge, character formation, and moral duties and the synchronization of three.

This synchronization will be imparted in the child through the everyday practices in the preschool. Generally, emerging Islamic preschools follow the above philosophy since almost all of them adapted the concept from the Egyptian system. But the unfolding of such an idea in the context of Kerala has more to tell, which owes to the characteristics of Kerala Muslim community.

3.5.4.2: Islamic preschool chains and the multiplicity of actors

Apart from the contesting claims over adequacy and authenticity of curriculum and pedagogy, these preschool chains have a few differences in the structure and in its outlook. But their impact at the social level varies since the outlook and perspective towards society and social change varies among each sect of the Muslim community. Even though it is too early to qualitatively or quantitatively measure the social impacts, it has done here by analyzing the ideal conceptual realm on which such visionaries function. The primary objective here is nothing but the critical analysis of the structure and organization of various preschool chains at the micro level and a comparison with the functioning of traditional madrasas.

Table No. 3.4. Distribution of different Islamic preschools

Name of the institution	Parental organization	No. of preschools				Year of inception
		Kozhi kode	North Kerala	Kerala	Outside Kerala	
Al Fithrah IPS	AnjumanTha'leemul Islam, Calicut	33	108	128	14	2012
AlBirr IPS	Smastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama(EK Faction)	57	156	167	0	2015
Zahrathul Quran IPS	Smastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama(AP faction)	28	71	86	14	2013
Heavens Quranic IPS	Jamaathe Islami Hind	7	22	23	0	2018

The preschool chains have become popular in the study villages around 2015 due to the initiation and effort took by different Mahalla or Madrassa committees to own a franchise of the preschool-related to their organizational sect by utilizing the madrasa building. Madrassas in Kerala function in the morning (6 am to 10 am). The timing has significance since it allows the coexistence of religious and secular education which once was a major entanglement. Compared to the infrastructure of local primary school, either government, aided or private, madrasas in the study villages have much more facilities than the former. A few of the aided schools are managed by the madrasa committees. According to an administrator of one of the Islamic preschools, the maximum utilization of madrasa buildings is one of the reasons for allotting franchise to madrasa or mahalla committees. However, the strength and depth of organizational structure each sect has in the villages (not only in the study village but in whole Kerala) helped the spread of the idea in such a short span. This is evident when analyzing the strategies such as preschools adopting to market their institution in the locality. When the researcher observed the invisibility of such schools in the locality due to the absence of hoardings or luring flex sign boards introducing or notifying the admission, an administrator cum teacher trainer associated to Al-Birr Islamic preschool put it in this way. “The central office has laid out strict rules for advertisement. The institution can only use one hoarding that too in the prescribed size to

introduce it in the locality. The notification for admission in the new batch and the significance of it will be announced to people at Friday gatherings or mahalla related programs”.

Most of the time, the idea of Mahalla, and the community around a mosque transcends the sectarian divisions even though each mosque and madrasa is controlled by people from different sects. Since the members of the community have organized in different ways (ideological (organizational sects such as Sunnis, Mujahids, Jamaath...), spatial (Mahallu or madras committees, relief or charity groups) or at different levels (ideological, political, cultural...), it enables both qualitative competitiveness or disastrous competitiveness and community integration at a time. This is where the claims for authenticity of knowledge, the child and spatial friendly syllabus and curriculum came to the front. The intense debates over various issues due to such organizational differences (according to the observation from the field) have been restructuring and reformulating the interventions by different actors. How it works. The following accounts from the field dairy will be a reflection of the above argument. Following accounts are also offer a comparison of the working of these institutions.

While introducing and up to its five years of function, Al Fithrah Islamic preschool did not have provision for the teaching mother tongue. Hence all other preschool chains give importance to teaching mother tongue (Malayalam) at least in theory along with Arabic and English (the researcher did not measure the claim). Last year (2017) they introduced Malayalam.

Al Fithrah, the first among other, practices 3-year duration system. The children at the age of three, can are admitted to the institution. But the Al-Birr developed a 2-year system and the minimum age to get admission is three and a half.

Each school chain has developed its own curriculum and having an expert committee to form and update the curriculum. Along with that, they are also providing residential training to teachers. To be a teacher in any Islamic preschool, the candidate has to complete a 40-day training (Al-Birr Islamic preschool) or one-month training (Al Fithrah Islamic preschool) conducted by the parental body. There is no need to complete NTTC (Nursery Teachers Training Course) to be a teacher in an Islamic preschool.

The pedagogy and the methodology too are similar in structure. A comparative analysis of the school's everyday organization of time and activities and the account of the way teachers and

parents evaluate the children prove that there are more similarities than differences among them. A day at an Islamic preschool starts around 9(differences in timing) when children have begun to reach the school either by school van or with parents. The teacher's (all of them are female) welcome them either by remembering them to greet by Salam³⁰ (an Islamic way of greeting) or by replying to the children's greeting with Salam. At 10, classes will begin. The time table for a day is the following.

Table No. 3.5. Daily Time Table at Al-Birr Islamic preschool

Sl. No.	Time	Activity
1	9. 30 AM- 10 AM	Adkar (prayer)
2	10 AM- 11 AM	Hifzul Quran (Quran learning)
3	11 AM- 11. 30 AM	English
4	11. 30 AM- 12 PM	Tea Break
5	12 PM- 12. 30 PM	Arabic
6	12. 30 PM- 1 PM	Hadees (Prophetic traditions)
7	1 PM- 1. 30 PM	Maths
8	1.30 PM- 2 PM	Environmental Science

(Some schools function till 3.30, in that case, they also offers lunch and evening tea. The subjects taught are similar to the description above among all schools).

How it differs from other preschools (even from the preschools conducted exclusively for Muslim children) is it's overt emphasize in teaching Quran and learning Islamic prayers. The activities that are common among all the preschools such as Assembly, tea break, Lunch, etc... are used to convey the Islamic way of living with it. Example, during the tea break, the teacher ensures the children wash the hand properly, sit while drinking tea, and recite the prayer before start eating. Another example is the classroom itself. If the child replied positively to a query by the teacher (even he did not react) the teacher will use Bismillah, Masha Allah³¹ to remember

³⁰ : 'Assalamu alikum' is an Islamic way of greeting taught by prophetic traditions which mean 'Peace be upon to you'.

³¹ : It means 'in the name of God' used in the beginning of any activity and '(this is) What God wills'. According to oxford dictionary the later is used to expressing praise or resignation among Muslim countries.

and praise God. The classroom, the learning, and other activities are filled with Islamic content. In the next section, an attempt is made to analyze the idea and practice of Islamic pre-schooling in the context of the village.

Islamic pre schooling; analyzing the idea and practice by perspectives of religion, class, and gender:

One of the major criticisms against Islamic preschools within the community is its exclusive Muslim nature. A controversy, even though less noticed, over the spurring of Islamic pre-schooling in Kerala erupted by a certain section of the youth wing of one major Muslim organizational sect, rival faction of Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (Times of India, Calicut, July 29) and Muslim Educational society (Times of India, Calicut, Aug 16, 2016) had tried to devalue the need for such exclusive Muslim schools and also had read them as a potential threat to a multi-religious Kerala society and as not in tune with the pluralistic culture of Kerala. Since such schools are exclusively designed for Muslim kids and even the presence of members from other religions have not found within the structure of the institution, the point has a certain value. It is already mentioned that Islamic preschools are an attempt to overcome the boundary between secular and religious education by following the philosophy 'Islam as a way of life rather than considering it as a religion bound by customs'. However, the argument that such institutions will be a potential threat to the multi-religious society of Kerala where different religious communities are tolerantly coexisting could not be avoided. Hence it would be immature if the analysis and the inference are made only on the exclusive Muslimness of such institutions.

Let it put aside the social, political, cultural and economic context where such institutions emerge for either evaluating or providing a neutral account of it. Even then, there are possibilities for overcoming the (anticipated) narrowness of world outlook (inculcated among the children) both at theoretical (the curriculum design) and at the social level (the features of society at the locality of the school). An in-depth analysis of the curriculum was beyond the scope of this research. However, the importance of local social spaces and its orientation is discussed here. Social spaces have an eminent role in shaping the social, cultural and political orientation of the child. As data about the RSS schools shows, the possibility of school structuring or restructuring the consciousness is directly related to the degree of similarity of the world outlook of both the school and its social space (Nandini Sunder, 2004). The dominant

perceptions of self and others in the social space can undermine the consciously developed curriculum to impart certain values among the individuals. Two instances of daily life at school from the periphery of the field villages, Nadapuram, infamous for (communal clashes) are quoted here.

“Schooling, (especially Government schools) which is expected to provide opportunities for co-living or knowing the other are failed in doing that. In Vanimal, there are two primary schools in one compound. One is a Mappila school in which all the students are from the Muslim community while the other one is only attended by children from Hindu community. I didn’t have a friend from the Hindu community until I went out from the locality to pursue Entrance coaching, Even if I had many Hindu neighbors. Since the students are divided to different divisions based on the second language they had taken, i.e., Arabic, Malayalam, or Sanskrit, Muslim students will be separated from Hindu students in almost all the cases”³²

When reflecting on daily life at school, a girls school teacher once said in an informal conversation “The communal mindset among students is visible very much in the daily life of the school. The people from different communities won’t sit together on a bench. They are having no friends from other communities. There may be a few exceptions. Even teachers try to sit them diversely, they will return to their old positions as soon as possible. In tour programs, those from different communities won’t share the same room.”

Then how social space in the study villages perceives the differences in society has to be analyzed. The above narrative accounts about the schooling spaces of nearby villages can in a way extended to the analysis of social spaces in the field. Hence it is adopting as an ideal, not as an actual representation of reality.

The Ideal conceptual realm of this idea has an understanding of (not so sophisticated) class divisions exist in the society and the need for transcending inequalities perpetuating on such divisions. Rather than denying the existing class divisions or offering ways to overcome such divisions, what the theory offers is, the acceptance and the inculcation of Islamic values will eventually create a generation interested in the distribution of justice to all. Hence the practices

³² : The narrative account offers a Reflection of school life in the Vanimal village, Nadapuram. The one who had done it was a post-graduate student at a central university and also hailing from Muslim community.

of the ideal in the field villages have to tell diverse stories that sometimes contradict the theory. The concept and its practice have analyzed in the perspective of class divisions in the society (community) on three levels. They are

- Accessibility to different classes of people from the community?
- How does the institution manage at a local level?
- Whether the phenomenon hints towards the emerging 'new middle class' in the community and their needs?

When the researcher asked about the issue of accessibility to the institution for economically weaker sections from the community, the administrator has replied this institution aims to children whose parents are prepared their mind to send their children to private English medium schools. Such parents are ready to spend at least 10000 annually for their child. The issue of accessibility in terms its potential to create further class divisions (or strengthening them) among the community lies in the higher fees and other expenses demanding such institutions and the inadequate presence of such preschools in the locality.

According to Principal of Alfithrah, since the institution is located in the rural area, to make it affordable to all they are charging only 12000 instead of prescribed 25000 per year. The fact that those institutions are managed by Madrassa committees and function in the madrasa buildings could not avoid attention. Since such buildings and its maintenance are carried out by the collective effort of the community. The increasing inclination towards secular education by middle and upper-middle-class families even by giving up provisions for religious education and the consciousness and effort by community leaders to deviate from such a trend to uphold its own value structures reinforce each other and as a consequence, local spaces have started to witness institutions such as Islamic preschools. Here the concern for serving to the needs of an emerging middle class (new middle class) is visible in terms of

1. Curriculum design
2. Abandoning certain traditional practices in religious education and
3. The familial background of children.

How do such institutions approach gender differences? Were they prefer boys over girls? Or do they invisibilize the girl child? The schooling practices has to be analyzed at a structural level

and then in comparison with traditional practices in religious education. The boys and girls have an almost similar uniform. While boys were dressed in shorts and tee shirts, the girls wear a skirt and tee shirt. The uniform is nothing but the adoption of the dominant trend in western countries. Even though uniform has color varieties, the boys and girls wear a uniform in the same color a day. There is no provision for a girl child to wear hijab as an existing custom among the Kerala Muslims suggests. Not only this, pupil freely mingles each other during free time. Classrooms have no strict rules segregating children according to their gender. Boys and girls can choose their sitting positions without constraints. At least in the preschool period, the everyday practices are more egalitarian and gender neutral.

At the level of management and teachers also, there is no explicit policy to keep gender-segregated in the preschool settings. During sports fest or annual arts fest known as Kids fest, every child can participate in any item. These are remarkable shifts from the gender practices followed in the traditional religious educational settings of the largest organizational sects like EK Sunni faction³³ and AP Sunni faction³⁴. Even though hijab is not strict for girl child during the first year, they are excluded from the extracurricular activities wanting public performance and segregated seat arrangements in the classroom. The comparison has more chances of errors since age and the growth of the child has very much significance in Islamic upbringing.

Summary

A wide network of schools owing to the influence of national movement and community reformation attempt paved the way for universalization of primary education in the study villages. Government's policy shift towards economic liberalism in the 1990s has led to the emergence of private English medium schools having a pre-primary section. The involvement of the religious community, particularly the Muslim community, was evident since 2 of the three schools were started by religious educational trusts.

Since 2000, rural spaces have seen the dissemination of Anganwadi centers. Nonformal education delivered through such centers has to be supplemented with quality infrastructure, trained teachers and adequate curriculum to actualize itself as a vibrant child development center.

³³ : One of the largest organizational sects among Muslims of Kerala, represents traditional muslims.

³⁴ : Another organizational sect represents orthodox, traditional muslims.

Since Anganwadis are failing to satisfy parental aspirations, low-cost preschools have spurted across the locality. Such schools attached to Government or Aided primary schools act as feeder schools for the primary classes and concentrate more on school readiness. However, the field experiences point the finger towards the commercial aspect of low-cost preschools and the inappropriate environment they have.

Post 2012 witnessed the spurting of Islamic preschools across North Kerala. The religious turn preschools have taken in the wake of Islamic preschools is evident in its attempt to conceptualize and practice Islam as a way of life rather than a particular subject to be taught at specific periods. The organizational plethora, which is the characteristic of Kerala Muslims defined the way such a concept popularized across the state. What is important is the radical shift it enables in the society, particularly among the traditional Muslim sects, in terms of inclusion of women as religious teachers, gender inclusive classroom and school spaces, etc.

Chapte4

ISLAMIC PRESCHOOLS: ASPIRATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

4.1: Introduction

The entire story which I had narrated in the previous chapter might have given an understanding about complexities in the economy due to the presence of multiple actors to claim the child and his/ her three years of early education. Here the attempt is to complete the story somehow, by entering in to further depth, to present the perspectives of individuals, who are at two ends, the parents of these children and the management of the institutions at the locality and also to the preschool teachers. Somehow their subjective views were reflected in the early chapter on the economy.

But it is an endeavor to place them in an interactive mode where the failures of the state reinforce and concretize certain tendencies in the emerging economy of pre-schooling in North Kerala villages. Of course, it seems like having concluded before the venture starts. Yes, like most of the research endeavors, I also had a hypothetical direction which was reinforced by the social location. As an individual hailing from the Mappila Muslim community, I always had a feeling that the state at one level and the (hegemonic) presence of certain ideas at civil society level are failing to restrain the growing perception of humiliation and the isolation among minorities, backward and oppressed castes... and also fail to address these issues at the level of education, especially school education.

That is where the 'state' and its apparatus enter the story. In the course, I always used the freedom to quote individuals, even though he lies outside my field geography in its limited sense. But how can one turns a blind eye towards some insights related to research topic due to his/her no presence in the limited geography as we call it 'study villages', particularly since the topic represents vast geography beyond study villages? This part of the story has restrained on multiple levels. In a sense, it even cannot represent the study villages. The sample has no representation to members of other community than the Muslim community. The sample has only 12 parents who are related by kinship and also shares same geographical space in the village (living in the same neighborhood as nuclear families. The selection of sample will be justified by the unraveling of the story as I believe).

For analytical purposes, the concerns over their child's early education among the parents (12 parents who were interviewed) can be categorized into two.

1: The availability of Neighborhood (public) pre-schooling and the increasing apathy towards such institutions.

2: Growing concern over the religious identity and its positioning against available public and private schooling possibilities. On a certain level, these two situations are derived from the problems perpetuate at the structural and organizational level of each institution, those factors which have dealt with in the perimeter of the previous chapter. But the question, I was concerned with here are

Do parents are conscious of those problems or issues related to curriculum design, pupil-teacher interaction, learning experiences planned for children or the qualification of the staff...?

If not, how do they choose the institution for their children? What makes their preferences of one over the other?

Here more than concerns over quality, there are other factors which have an enormous role to play. It could not be neglected the parental aspiration towards a child's education is high in India, so as in the villages. This is reinforced by the factors such as gulf migration which has led to the economic security, attempts to promote education at the community level, the state policy of universalizing public education and the inclusion of the common citizen in the policy implementation. The other factors which should also have bearing on the study were, most of these children are second generation school goers, i.e, even if their parents are not highly educated and employed on the basis of educational qualification, they are fortunate to have fathers aware of the need of education to have a better sustain. That does not mean children are performing well in the school and going to higher education.

4.2: Perspectives from the management: an overview

What reinforces and helps in eventually stabilizing the emerging tendencies in the pre-schooling economy of study villages? An overview of the differing perspectives from different management, from the state who controls Anganwadi to various private players, from religious organizations to individual owners of preschools have to be taken in to account to get an idea of emerging tendencies and extent of the possibility of its concretization in the study villages. It will be somehow an account of the emerging new social and cultural consciousness of the people. The role 'state' has to play in the formation of such a consciousness among the people is interesting. Somehow, as I said in the beginning, the perception of state's failures to be inclusive of differences or in providing market-oriented quality education have significant roles to play in the concretization of tendencies emerging in the economy.

Even though the cultural question of education and its institutions was always the concern of scholars and educators from the Muslim community, ever since the European invasions to Muslim dominated spaces, it might not be the only reason for the spurring of Islamic preschools in the region. The scholarly suspicions (within the Muslim world) over the nature and effects of modern education, even if it is schooling, not only its harmful effects on the religious upbringing but also to the child's integral development have led to the development of the idea of 'Islamic Pre-schooling'. Then the question arises is whether the idea is adaptable to India where different religions co-exist? Not only that, one should note, at least at the level of schooling, Kerala has achieved the universalization and inclusiveness in terms of enrolment from various sections of people and historically, different Muslim organizations adopted pro-state school stand. Then, it might not be surprising that a section from the community perceives those exclusive Muslim spaces such as Islamic preschools and its expansion across the state are 'not in tune with Kerala culture'. What is, not so striking, but the perception from the field is increasing apathy towards the state's educational institutions. As one of the administrators of an Islamic preschool in the village has told, incidentally who was a retired primary school teacher

“Cultural neutrality which promotes by the Anganwadis or schools actually favors majoritarian culture. So it is time to introduce schools which promotes our own cultural and religious values.”

The cultural threat perceived from the increasing dependency of private English medium school was sighted by another school teacher, who actively involved in the introduction of an Islamic preschool in the village. This perception towards schooling is in any sense not a common phenomenon among the community but gradually gripping into the minds of members among the community. Not only might the state's failures to produce an inclusive curriculum, but there also have other reasons for such perception. It could be none other than the unfolding social and political conditions in the spaces.

While bringing the state as a potential mediator who ensures inclusiveness and quality across the field, the non-regulatory regime of the preschool economy (private preschools) is far away from it. Even the state institutions such as village courtyards are suffering from lack of adequate infrastructure, non-availability of teachers in the classrooms and a demandable curriculum... Government's infirmity on teaching in mother tongue and not including English as part of the curriculum as envisaged in the NCF 2005, NCF 2014 is reducing the prominence such centers have in the village community as early childhood education centers.

The concern of the researcher is more about its potential to be neighborhood preschool centers where the special peculiarities of each village can be flourished. Even, people in the locality are not seemed to be interested in the development of such a potentiality. This disinterestedness towards Anganwadis as nonformal educational centers owes to the social, cultural and economic condition of people and also to the conditions emerged in the preschool economy in the study villages. As Suma teacher noted, the three-year-olds who used to come to Anganwadi will abandon it in the very next year to join low-cost preschools attached with Government or Aided primary schools. For her "it is not because they are better than Anganwadis but due to the parent's belief that school readiness of the child would be greater in such academically oriented feeder schools along with their crave for English medium education."

As one of the highly educated members from the Muslim community has told,

"It is not Muslims, Dalits or other backward castes responsibility to protect the mother tongue by sending their children to government institutions since the education in mother tongue limits his/her career. We have an economy dependent on the migrant workforce."

This could be supplemented by the recent reports on the increase in enrolment in the government or Aided schools. The introduction of English medium classes along with

Malayalam medium is one of the reasons, in fact, most important among others such as digitalizing the classrooms... The new initiative, to improve the quality of non-formal educational aspect of ICDS centers, by the ministry of social justice, Government of Kerala, even though in the proposal state has to be noted.

According to News reports, the Government is going to improve the infrastructure of 1000 Anganwadis function in the compound of primary schools along with appointing new teachers, introducing a child-friendly curriculum and above all child-friendly environment. The recognition by the state of limitations that educational provision supplying through the Anganwadis has, maybe leads to an informed and timely intervention by the state. Such interventions should enable the Anganwadis to be a better competitor in the preschool economy of the villages. All other idealism based on theories might reduce its role as neighborhood educational centers since it would be difficult to convince the parents to send their children to such institutions.

The availability of low-cost pre schooling provides impetus to the above situation. As I have narrated and explained in the previous chapter, these low-cost preschools attached to Government or Aided primary schools, either profit or non-profit based, function as feeder schools to their primary section. The introduction of the pre-primary section to Government or Aided schools by the management or by the local community is related to the very existence of the school in a competitive regime of Government or Aided schools for the claim of the children. From its social service oriented consciousness, they are turning to be an arena where more money can make if it enrolls more children. Then the quality of the schools depends on the management approach towards it. It varies a lot from institution to institution.

The private preschools, like the neighborhood model adopted by 'Little feet Kindergarten' in the Vadakara town which provide no travel facility and enroll children in and around the town so that parents can drop and pick the children from the school and the schools which are part of private English medium schools and function as feeder schools for the primary section and offers travel facility and enroll children from nearby villages, function on the different perspectives of management. They are owned either by private individuals or educational trusts. If it is owned by a religious educational trust, they provide facilities for separate religious education. They are not in any sense exclusive spaces like in the case of appointment of teachers or pupil. Like the

example of 'Ideal Public School' even non -profit models are there in the private sector. At the same time, there are institutions which demand a large amount of donation to enroll the children even, except for having a high fee. Such profit-based institutions are making it as an invisible norm, that to get admission, you have the ability to pay.

In these multiple views and orientations of management and the diverse institutional structures and spaces, the plight of teachers has to be analyzed to get a complete picture of the ECE sector. In the following section, an attempt is made to provide the condition of teachers in each type of the institute.

4.3: Teacher's agency in pre-schooling: The story demands attention

Pre-schooling is an arena where teachers are paid very less. Unregulated by state, dominated by private players, quality across the sector is also unevenly distributed. In the case of India, except certain sample studies conducted by the United Nations or private research firms or universities, there are no reliable data available on the private preschool sector and its condition across the country. The plight of teachers in the private sector, in this profit-making market is worse compared to their counterpart in the Government sector such as Anganwadi Workers and Helpers. Hence this section has more than to tell about their economic plight. Even if it was also a major concern of research, I will begin with the following questions.

- Who are these teachers?
- Do their social and cultural affiliations have roles to play while becoming a preschool teacher?
- Do teachers have the freedom to exercise autonomy in designing and implementing curriculum?
- As preschool teachers, are they organized?

This questions which were the focus while I was in the field has to be answered by taking each type of institution separately. It is because the role they have to play as teachers, institution's approach towards them and the need for teacher's organization and the problems they are facing is different in the case of different institutions.

Teaching as a profession in preschools is entirely the arena of women. It doesn't mean that the curriculum is also designed by women. In the case of academically oriented private preschools, the latter is a male dominated area. If the curriculum is designed for a group of institutions affiliated to a particular educational body, as in the case of Ideal Kindergarten or different Islamic preschool chains these teachers have a role to play. This role, however, is restricted in many senses. Even though they are private schools since they are one among the chain of schools, teachers of a particular cluster held cluster meetings to discuss the difficulties in teaching lessons and preparing lesson plans in every three or four months. Moreover, such parental educational bodies are keen on updating textbooks based on new developments and by collecting opinions from the teachers year by year. Teachers of this type of schools are also getting two weeks long (changeable) residential training in the new curriculum (if they have adopted one) covering child psychology, pedagogical science, personality development. Most of these school chains or research councils are sustaining by mapping the educational resources within the community as sighted earlier. Since I had provided a detailed account of how private preschool affiliated to such a body function in the previous chapter, here the case of different Islamic preschools is narrated.

However, this is not the case with individually run private preschools or preschools attached to Aided/ Government primary schools. They are compelled to teach different textbooks every year. That too most of the time had chosen by the management without consulting teachers. Teachers are not getting any training in curriculum and pedagogy or other areas unless the publishing agency of the textbook subscribed to offer training in teaching the set curriculum. As Naeema teacher told, they hope this year they will get training since publishing agency offered it. Since such schools have no communication with each other, teachers have to be completely relied upon what they had learned in their professional teacher training year. The early education component of Anganwadis is getting more attention from the Government in these years. Even though textbooks are not encouraged, the AWWs are provided by a teaching guide and theme charts jointly prepared by SCERT Kerala and Ministry of Social Justice to teach for a year. There is no dearth of training to Anganwadi workers. According to both Anganwadi workers I have interacted with, Suma teacher and Praseetha teacher, "they are fed up with these training and unnecessary survey data sheets."

Schools follow different standards for recruiting teachers. While, most of the Private preschool and preschool attached to Aided or Government primary school mandate completion off NTTC course or Montessori Teachers Training course, some of them focus on the communicative and creative skills the teacher possesses. AWWs are recruited from the local community and the powers to recruit them to lie with District Magistrate. ICDS scheme envisages Anganwadi Workers (AWW) and Helpers (AWH) as honorary workers from the local community who come forward to render their services, on a part-time basis, in the area of child care and development.

The recruitment procedure of Islamic preschool does not mandate completion of NTTC course but the completion of any Graduation. Teachers who intend to teach religious subjects have to complete a degree in Arabic or preliminary stage of Afzal-ul-Ulama.³⁵ Even though the procedure of different school chains may show a few differences, most of them follow the somewhat same procedure.

Here the narrative account follows the procedure of teacher selection and training by the AlBirr Islamic preschool management. The applicant has to be from the same locality of the school and having a letter of reference from the preschool which she likes to work with. More than this they have to qualify Teacher's Eligibility Test conducted by the council. The test has both written and interview parts. If they qualify the test then they have to complete 30/ 40 days residential training organized by the particular educational council which controls the school chains. The candidates should be Muslim women. As obvious the candidate will apply for the post of teaching in the preschool chain controlled by religious organizational sect she is affiliated to.

For a section of Muslim women, those who have hailing from families follow orthodox organizational sects commonly called Sunnis, the occupational opportunity offers by Islamic preschools as teachers and Helpers is a radical shift from the organization's approach towards women. For them, the introduction of the concept obliged the active participation of women as teachers in the school. And this, in a sense, opened the doors of opportunity to religious teaching to women. It was an entirely a male hegemonic practice since no women were allowed to teach religious subjects in Madrasas affiliated to Sunni organizations.

³⁵ : Afzal-ul-Ulama is an undergraduate Arabic Language course.

With the introduction of Islamic preschools, those spaces of Madrasa, where they were never allowed to teach but only to be taught as children have become gender inclusive even though with limits. It should be noted that a few women were part of religious teaching in the madrasas among Mujahid³⁶ and Jamath³⁷ sects.

With the introduction of primary schools along with the preschools, their role as religious teachers is also getting expanded. It is to note that for educated women of the entire Muslim community, it has opened the doors of a respectable job and also helps to change the perception towards women's work. There are teachers who were allowed to work since the institution is directly under the control of Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama. Most of those teachers were highly educated but remained as housewives. Along with the lack of opportunities for work, they were also the victims of belittling attitude towards women's work in the community. One case was of

‘Saleema teacher of AlBirr IPS had completed her BEd 3 years ago and remained unemployed. Even after having children, her husband's family also had encouraged her to become a teacher in the Islamic preschool.’

Since such preschools are attributing so much emphasis on the importance of early childhood education, these teachers are earning more respect from the community. It has another dimension. Most fathers are absent at households due to their occupation in Gulf countries, mothers are overburdened with the nurturing of children. These schools, by replacing school over family and teachers over parents as models have to be followed as examples expected to ensure an Islamic nurturing of the child. By foreseeing the opportunities of job which may emerge from the dynamic economy of pre-schooling, more and more young women are joining into the fold either by enrolling to NTTC course or by completing the training provided by Islamic preschool chains.

Not only differences can be seen in the teacher's selection procedure. In addition to prescribing uniform for children, schools also insist on teacher's attire. While Anganwadi workers are prescribed to wear Sari and having a name badge on it, preschools attached to Aided/

³⁶ : Those who follows the principles of Salafism and inherited the legacy of community reformation in the Kerala context.

³⁷ : Those who affiliated to the organization Jamaath-e- Islami Hind.

government schools and some private preschools did not mandate any dress code for teachers, wearing hijab is compulsory for teachers in Islamic preschools. Some women prefer niqab³⁸ over hijab.

Working environment and salary also show differences. However compared to the working hours and effort they are committed to, generally, teachers working in different types of schools are paid very low. More than that, the facilities available for the teacher in the school also differ from case to case. In fact, as long as the early education teaching sector remains as unorganized' it would be difficult for these teachers to express or to demand their needs. It should be noted that not all the teachers are unorganized or being part of a teacher's community. Some institutional setup such as the case of Islamic preschool, Anganwadi workers... itself designed to have well and continuously trained and committed teacher's community. It does not mean that teachers are organized autonomously and in a position to be having an independent body. Some times their approach towards the profession helps them to negate all other difficulties they face in the work environment. At other times they will seek better work options with comparatively high salary, a school with adequate infrastructure, pedagogical materials, etc... The problems which they confront also differ from institution to institution.

Government, both center and state Governments are keen about the quality enhancement of Anganwadi workforce since the achievement of its goals depend on the better service delivery at the micro level.

Table. 4.1. Fee and Salary details of the preschools attached to selected Aided/ Government schools in the study villages)

Name of the school	Annual fee	Pupil's strength	Number of teachers	Number of caretakers	Salary of the teacher/month
Cherapuram New LP School	5000	30	1	0	3000
Cherapuram UP School	7500	60	3	0	6000
Cherapuram east MLP School	4000	20	1	0	6000

³⁸: A garment of clothing that covers the face.

Naeema teacher teaches at preschool attached to Cherapuram UP School, narrated her own personal account.

“I was working at another preschool in the neighborhood before joining here 5 years ago. With a salary of 3000 per month and having no increments, it was very difficult for me to continue there. Besides the school has no proper toilet facilities for lady teachers. With no Play materials, inadequate classrooms, I had struggled a lot to teach the children. When preschool has started here, I left the job and joined here.”

Reshmi teacher from the same school explained further about the working environment at Cherapuram UP School,

“Here we are provided with classrooms roofed with Metal sheets. It is very difficult to teach at monsoon and summer seasons. One of our classrooms didn’t have proper facilities for the teacher to keep her materials. There are no helpers to help with children. So we are overburdened to take the duty of helpers too. We have to pick the children from their home and our day ends when we transported back them to their homes. Since there are no helpers, we are paid 6000 per month.”

As I had observed while at the school, the construction and painting work in the preschool building was going on to welcome another academic year. The normal salary for teachers at such preschools is at the range of 3000 to 6000. If the school has a caretaker, the salary will be less since it got divided between teachers and caretakers. Hence most of this type of preschool variety have no caretakers. Among the three schools I visited in the study villages, none of them have a caretaker.

Private preschools in the area pay an average of 8000 to the teacher per month. An experienced teacher can earn at most 10000 per month. Compared to the preschool attached with Aided or Government schools, the working environment either in terms of infrastructure or in terms of availability of toys, child-friendly game zones, these schools are far better.

Table No. 4.2. Fee and Salary details of the Private preschools in and around the study area

Name of the school	Annual Fee	Strength of children	Number of teachers	Number of caretakers	Salary of the teacher/ month
Ideal Public school	10300	180	9	5	8000-10000
Bright Public school	13000	95	6	4	5000-7000
LittlefeetKindergarten	20000	200	10	2	7000-10000

While the first two schools identified by their management as not profit-seeking schools run by educational trusts to promote quality education, the third one is profit based and owned by an individual. As I explained in the case study of ideal Kindergarten in the previous chapter, teachers from the first two schools are getting training for competency building, updated textbooks, training in the teaching of the curriculum, the teacher's plight in the third school is similar to those who teach at preschools attached to Government/ Aided schools. Private publishing agencies are providing textbooks to the school. Teachers have to rely solely on their experience in teaching the curriculum most of the time.

If one is ready to set aside apprehensions about the effects of religious preschools in a multi-religious society, in fact, it is too early to conclude like that, and to look at how it functions, the plight of teachers in such schools are far better compared to teacher's plight in other types of preschools in the study villages.

Table. No. 4.3 Fee and Salary details of the Religious Preschools in and around the study area

Name of the School	Annual fee	Pupil's strength	Number of Teachers	Number of caretakers	Salary of the teacher/ month.
Al Birr IPS, Vlakettu	16250	32	4	2	10000
Al Fithrah Cheekkonnu	12000	96	8	4	7000
Al Manar Quranic preschool	15000	75	8	3	6000

One of the preschool chains, Al-Birr IPS insists on providing the amount fixed by the central academic council and it is among the best payment available to the teachers in the industry. Hence teachers from other two preschools are satisfied with what they are paid with. According to one of them,

“Since the school is working in a rural area, it is understandable that management has to keep the tuition fees at low. The school runs entirely on the tuition fee collected from children. So we believe, we are paid the maximum.”

The teachers of these institutions are getting regular training by experts in various fields such as Psychology, pedagogical science, health, and nutrition...Parental educational councils under which such institutions work are keen on ensuring the quality of schools. This helps the teachers in getting adequate work environment.

As one of the office bearers of Al-Birr IPS told and the teachers of the school confirmed “Teachers even have, even though minimal, role to play in designing and updating curriculum, their experience of teaching lessons are valued by the expert committee. When teachers complained about one chapter from the English textbook of IPS standard one is difficult to teach, the chapter was replaced in the next year.” Monthly workbook, a magazine distributed among the children, to complete it with the help of parents, provide space for those teachers working at its schools to share their experiences at school and other creative works of them.

To grant a franchise, it is essential to own by the desired management ‘Secured and well-structured building, Playroom cum rest room, IT-enabled classrooms, Toys and equipment, Children’s park, Transporting and Child-friendly toilets.’ All the classrooms of the school are digitalized and teachers are well trained to utilize the digital facilities they are equipped with. It also follows the pair teacher system. There will be two teachers at a time in one class. A core teacher who is a subject expert leads the class and the other by becoming one among the children, helps the children to understand the content of teaching and instructions.

This category of school chains follows the same system of teaching. It does not mean that they all follow the same syllabus too. The curriculum and especially the textbooks are different for each school. They are prepared by academicians/ research scholars who are voluntarily serving to the cause. Since the model is an imitation of developments in Egypt, the adaptation of it to the local context is ensured through the locally made textbooks. Teachers were eager to identify this difference among the curriculum, which makes the difference from the other. For the principal of Al Manar preschool at Kuttiady, Their parental organization, Kerala Nadwathul Mujahideen compelled to start the school chain since

“Other preschools like Al Fithrah have a syllabus which is beyond the child’s capacity to comprehend and not prepared from or for Indian contexts. They even didn’t have provision for teaching Malayalam until last year.”

All the three schools I had visited as part of field work have playroom cum rest room, child-friendly infrastructure (classroom with enough space, child-friendly chairs/ benches, and desks, at least having a laptop in each class and an almirah to keep children their things) and enough toys. Moreover, the teacher’s commitment to schools is very high compared to those working in other types. This high level of commitment is emanating from the religiosity of these schools which both the teacher and the children’s family share. Work satisfaction is also very high as I observed. This may be due to the positive reviews they are getting from parents. Unlike other schools, children from this type of schools are not only evaluated on their academic performances, such as what extent they can write or read or how many numbers they can count but also on the practice of pure cultural items. This is because of the nurturing of cultural and religious values expected by parents from this school.

Even if other schools are very particular about such nurture of the child, the parents may miss to recognize them. The difference in expectations by parents from different institutional settings indicates the level of autonomy parents are acquired in choosing institutions from the market. Schools are in a position to determine what should be the evaluating criterion. This partly related to the economic constraints of the families. But it is inappropriate to limit the upper hand schools have, to the limitations imposed by class and religious status of families, especially in a state like Kerala where the universalization of free and compulsory schooling has achieved decades ago.

The criterion which families are adopting to measure the institutions vary from one to another. Do not forget, these are their expectations also. Sometimes expectations match. Not all times. From every institution, from Anganwadi to religious preschool, some form of formal education is expected by the parent. They mandated English education. Sadly with good or bad intention, village courtyards have no provision to teach English. When low-cost preschools are spurting across locality offering nutritious meals, the welfare-based approach of Anganwadis are struggling to keep its relevance as nonformal education centers. One way Anganwadi workers are doing this is by teaching English additionally on their own effort. Textbook to teach collectively is decided by AWWs of a village. To convince parents without having English

education that Anganwadis are preschool centers too, according to Suma teacher “is impossible nowadays”. So what happens is children will come here, even though not regularly for a year, at the age of 3 and at the age of four they are sent to other preschools. Children who attend Anganwadi are in almost all the case, send to low-cost preschools in the locality attached to primary schools. An obsession towards public education from the educated families, unlike what I have perceived from the existing literature, is evident in the neighborhood since most of the children from Government officials are choosing Anganwadis and public schools. Partly this might be due to the high presence of Government salaried teachers in the area.

School readiness component dominates the choice of low-cost preschools attached to primary schools. As I had explained earlier in the chapter, it is not the quality of schooling but the presence of a primary school environment increased academic nature and English medium education which attracts parents. Even other primary schools which did not open the preschool section yet are forced to start one due to pressure from parents in the neighborhood. Even though parents are concerned about infrastructure, they do not seem like well aware of what should be essential in such settings. What determines the parental choice most is, according to Vijayan master

“what extent the school is succeeded in advertising itself in the locality, either through flex boards describing their achievements and facilities or through an intense campaign to lure the parents by the teachers of a particular institution.”

What strikes me when rereading the interview sheets with parents is that none of the parents have observed any positive behavioral changes in their children. Well, it is not to deny that such responses as ‘child become more self-expressive’, ‘the shyness to face others has changed a lot’ but excluded from the category of behavioral change to provide a certain direction to the narrative. Such responses emanate from them consecutively to an exited narration of his/ her child’s first public performance whether it may be a recitation or a group dance or storytelling as part of school’s annual day. While Anganwadis depend on the elder students to train the young in items such as group dance, oppana, song recitation, low-cost preschools collect fee around 1500 to appoint special teachers to them. Even teachers are excited to organize such a program. That follows to the grateful and congratulatory greetings from the parents towards them, i.e, one of the ways leading towards work satisfaction.

What would parents expect from private preschools which charge a high fee? Moreover, parents sending their children to such schools are wishing to continue their child's education in private English medium schools. Since they are not much different from low-cost preschools, how did expectations differ? Azhar master, one of the parents who teach at a higher secondary school in the nearby town, put it in this way.

“It is easy to distinguish those who studied at public school and those who have English medium background. If I had commanded them to copy a particular picture to the notebook, the student from later will be always ready to do this with enough equipment. But the student who has Malayalam medium background will be on an attempt to collect needed equipment from others.”

A notion, which may or may not be true, which exists among the people has to do with the expectations also. A somewhat similar argument was raised when I asked Najma teacher, principal of ideal KG that why people have preferred English medium school. “It instills the value of discipline among the children, unlike Malayalam medium schools. Unlike the other type, our school structure and everyday life are organized in a way which helps to inculcate in the child discipline, obedience, and manners.

So it is not incorrect to say that people expect from such institutions, along with English education, a certain type of growth of their children. To say in more abstract terms, a class specified nurturing of children is what expected by parents. Teachers of private preschools then, have to adapt to such class notions. The way schools ensure this is by mandating uniform and identity card to the teachers and prohibiting conversation in Malayalam even among within the teachers circle...Parents are more concerned with the academic excellence of the child. So these preschools are eager to conduct scholarship exams organized by textbook publishing agencies and like to project the result as the academic excellence of the school. Along with it, annual day, children's day and kids day are celebrated by the school by organizing a competition among children.

The parental expectation from Islamic preschools, or in more general term, from religious preschools, is more nuanced. They seem to be excited by the religious content little children have memoried or grasped along with other subjects such as English, Mathematics, Arabic, and Malayalam. Not only parents seem to be excited with the children's knowledge, but they are also eager to help them to practice this knowledge. Rewinding the narrative accounts of parents who

send their children to Islamic preschools given at the beginning of this chapter will clarify the point. Parents are also eager to note that their children have become “more disciplined and know how to handle a situation well and more self-sufficient in studying” as the father of Sana who completed 3 years in Al Fithrah IPS told or as like the mother of Fathima said that “she knows how to behave with elder people well”. The parents believe these changes they have observed in their children might not be possible if they had sent their children to another school. More than class-related aspirations parental expectation is related to religious inculcation of the child. But such inculcation also assumes certain class assumptions in it. The structure and organizations of the curriculum and everyday life at school and the high academic nature (see case study on Islamic preschool, chapter 3) of it indicate its class notions than religious. At the same time, it is evaluated by parents and even teachers and management on the ground of religion by pushing behind the class assumptions of such institutions.

4.4: Parental Preferences, the Factors define choices:

‘Just within two months after joining in AlBirr Islamic preschool, we experienced a lot of changes in our daughter Yumna, which confirmed the school can nurture an Islamic way of life among little children. One day, when children were playing after school, I have seen Yumna looking thoughtfully towards the sky. I was curious to know. She said, “Mother, earth and the sky were created by God and he is the one who also created us”. My eyes were filled with tears of joy. “Alhamdulillah” I praised the God almighty. On the other day, when the call for evening prayer had begun, I was talking to her younger sister, Yumna mol came and put her finger on my mouth and said, “We should not talk during azan”. She waited it to end and then recited the prayer without any mistake.’ (Muhsina, mother of an AlBirr child, named Fathima Yumna)

“Due to my elder brother’s insistence, we enrolled our son to the AlBirr preschool where his son was studying. We were already amused by the fact that his son recites dhikr/ prayer as prescribed in the prophet’s tradition when he eats, drinks, entering to the vehicle or wearing foot ware. Even though in first one week, Lian had shown an unwillingness to go, he has nothing but the stories at AlBirr now. Even if he feels enough shame to tell his father what he has learned at school when he calls. Hence if I had given a start, he will complete it. I could not raise my eyes from his face while he recites Fathiha, opening chapter of the Quran. Lian was reluctant to eat with hands. Now, he used to eats himself, that too how it prescribed in the Islamic tradition.” (Sareena, mother of AlBirr child Ziyan)

Above are the narrative accounts of the mothers of children studying at Al-Birr Islamic preschool. The excerpt is extracted from one of their own publication 'Al-Birr Kids magazine' an activity-oriented story book which is designed for parents to teach and learn with the children. Accounts of subjective experience from parents have to be supplemented by researchers own experiences from the field. I had interviewed three parents who selected Islamic preschool for their children. Among the three, one child dropped out of the school in the second year. Since both of the parents were highly educated, they remained with the child's decision. Yet, they too were having an inclination towards such schools. Father of the dropped out, who works as an assistant professor in Arabic, in fact, was one of the pioneers of introducing the idea of preschool into his village. The unwillingness of the child is explained as general reluctance towards learning, learning every subject. The mother who an English graduate and still is pursuing her masters in English literature said they were not at all interested in sending the child to any preschool. I quote

“We decided to send him to the Islamic preschool only because it offers Islamic and worldly subjects together and inculcate Islamic values into the child. Otherwise, we would have preferred not sending him to any preschool but to keep him our side till five”.

Among three children who attend Islamic preschool, only one had a working mother. She works as a college lecturer in a self-financing college in the area. However, they still have a joint family setting in which the child, her father an aided higher secondary teacher, mother, a college lecturer, father's brother, his wife and their daughter of the same age, another unmarried brother and their father and mother live together. However two children are attending preprimary schools, for that, they have to travel 15 kilometers a day forth and back. Another interesting thing is even though they are from the same household, each child attends a different school.

Moreover, the way parents are evaluating the institute, especially Islamic preschools, has to do a lot with the way institute and its promoters present itself and the standards of measurements provided by them. Those standards have linked to a great extent with cultural aspects of the structure and pedagogy than the content of the curriculum, either religious or secular. The father, the young higher secondary teacher, was amused by the way his daughter reciting Quranic verses and he compared it with his own experiences of religious learning at Madrasa in the childhood. The fact is in the three cases, two of the parents are experienced many positive changes in the

child which they believe would not have possible if he chose another type of preschool. Well, I could not say changes, since most of these narrative accounts are about new learning experiences and the practicing of acquired knowledge. But I prefer the word ‘changes’ since parents are comparing their childhood or the everyday practices they have used to with their own experiences at school, experiences of learning and internalization. The way, Fathima 5-year-old girl who attends an Islamic preschool was evaluated by her mother, offer more insight.

“One day when I was calling her Grandmother sitting on another end of the room, to get her attention I raised my sound. Fathima was there. Later she came to me and said very gently that “don’t raise the voice on Grandmother, call her softly and lovely”. According to that mother, Fathima now knows how appropriately behave with elders.”

Another interesting trend she noted in her child is to do with, as I identified, contradictions in the school- family settings. Of course, this is not to say that familial settings are free (even if it has a disciplined father) and the undisciplined, consciously organized school settings have a forceful, controlling nature and also not to say any one of them is ideal.

“Fathima learned most of the prayers attached to everyday life in the first year itself. But What I had found is she used to remember them if she becomes aware of the school, like she recites the prayer before entering school van, not the other times. She is aware that the teacher will ask whether she recited it or not.”

Even such things are common, what found interesting is that the deliberate and conscious inclusion of parents into the curriculum and pedagogic plan. Parental relations to school are supplemented by special classes for parents in nurturing children, helping to complete monthly magazines and reminding children to practice what he learned at school. Annual parents meet is organized to provide them guidance and also to evaluate the child’s improvements. The idea can be put in the following way as one of the administrators in the head office of AlBirr IPS has told,

“It is to change the family and then the community by inculcating an Islamic way of life in the child and including parents into that unraveling of the curriculum.” Due to demand from parents, these schools are adding Lower Primary standards to nursery schools. Three Islamic preschools around the locality had started the primary section from the 2017-18 academic year onwards. Actually, Nour- al-Bayan curriculum, the model these preschools are imitating, is designed for

12 years, not only for early childhood education. So far the children from the neighborhood are concerned, they are about to join in an aided primary school in the locality.

The way parents are evaluated the educational setting of child, i.e, the preschool also shows the expectations they have from their children's education. The growing perception among the Muslim community of threat to religious and cultural identity also has to be noted. This subjective feeling, whether having an objective basis or not, is a social fact in the study villages. This can be sighted as one of the reasons for active community involvement at the local level in establishing such institutions. Neither of the Islamic preschool chains in Kerala is profit based or completely independent of control from religious organizations. In fact, all of them bank their chances on their respective parental organizations to attract children. This perception of isolation and non-inclusiveness can be apprehended from the following account from the field

‘It was about starting off an Islamic preschool in the locality. I overheard it from a high school teacher who is also actively involved in community life during a family get together. “The un Islamic culture which other preschools and even Anganwadis are propagating is influencing the child's attitude towards his own religion”, he was explaining the reason. The very next year they have started one of the branches of AlBirr Islamic preschool, which is run by ‘Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidybhysa Board’, the educational wing of one of the prominent (largest one) sects among Kerala Muslims.’

Even though discussed in the previous chapter, the question of the familial background of the children attending Islamic preschools needs more elaboration, since the class status of children has a role to play, as data shows. Among the three households interviewed, two of them have highly educated parents. The other household where the husband is employed in the Gulf countries earns well even though less educated. The mother of the later told that she decided to send her child into an Islamic preschool due to husband's insistence. But in the three cases, only one had a working mother. In one of the Islamic preschools I had visited, among 75 children studying there, only 5 had working mothers. But most of those 75 mothers are educated (at least completed their Higher secondary education and in a position to help their children in their studies). It is a fact that not everyone can afford such a comparatively high fees. But the particular nature of the Kerala economy, which depends on the lion's share on the remittance money also disentangle the direct proportion between educational level, occupation, and economic status. At least I can say it was. This has led to the emergence of traders, merchant and unskilled migrant laborers who are economically rich. The concept of Islamic preschool attracts

both groups, educated from the community and employed in Kerala itself and not so much educated/ educated and skilled gulf migrants who earn well.

Another interesting moment from the field which confirms the foundation of such institutions in the locality has to do with emerging class aspirations. Ahmad master, administrator of the only Islamic preschool in the village has told in response to my query over exclusiveness of such institutions due to the high fee,

“These institution targets those parents who are intending to send their children to private preschools either for giving them better early educational experience or seeing it as part of social status. I have witnessed children from the village traveling 15 kilometers back and forth for only having preschool education. Such parents are always ready to spend at least 15000 per year.”

Responding to the needs of such a class of people is also related to the cultural question, either for community leaders or for parents themselves. Though outside from the geography of the field, the narrative account of a young father who is also a university assistant professor will help to understand how much parents are concerned about the cultural question.

“I was looking for a preschool for my daughter around the Calicut city. I was suggested to enroll my daughter to a preschool (he didn’t mention the name of the school. For us it doesn’t matter). These schools are used to teach children a particular idea or concept such as different colors or importance of having certain manners by emphasizing the specialty of days (like mother’s day for teaching the love and care mothers having towards their children or Yellow day to teach the color of Yellow). That institution where my young daughter attends had selected Halloween day to teach the color of Black to the children. For that, all the children were informed to wear a black dress. Since I could not accept that, I challenged that command before their director board. In fact, they had never thought about the cultural aspect of that day. Even though they continued with the program exempting my child from wearing Black that year, they had informed they will revise the need for celebrating it next year.”

The section about parental preferences could not avoid the historical development of the relationship between schooling and the community. Historical analysis from the second decade of the first half of the 20th century reveals three stages to the Muslim community response to the need for primary education. It also depends and shaped by the state’s policy and its shifts and social and economic dynamics within the community.

Those stages are

1. Community attempt to universalize education by instituting aided or demanding government schools in the locality. Up to the last decade of the 20th century, this was the trend. No one can deny the role of religious community organizations' role in universalizing schooling in Kerala
2. Community attempt to open private English medium schools and colleges with provision for separate hours for religious teaching. The trend has grown with the liberalization of the Indian economy. And
3. The emerging trend, community attempt to design and develop private educational institutions on the philosophy of religion as a way of life. This needs further elaboration. In the first period to attract the Muslim community towards secular education, by the effort of community leaders, Arabic was introduced into the curriculum.

The universalization of Madrassa system in the Muslim geography of Kerala which had developed to fulfill the religious educational needs of the growing child also ensures the possibility of coexistence of religious and secular education. By 1980s universalization of primary schooling had almost achieved in the field villages. By the 1990s when education sector was opened for private players, those community organizations had founded private English medium schools along with other educational institutions on the name of various religious educational trusts, either newly organized or already existing, across localities. One among the first private CBSE schools in the study villages, Ideal Public School was set up such a religious educational trust, 'Islamiyya Educational Trust' run by people related to the organization 'Jamaat-e-Islami Hind'. Private schools around the village such as Salafi Public Schools,³⁹ Sirajul Huda⁴⁰ public schools and Bright public school, etc... are found and run by such religious educational trusts related to different religious organizations.

Why such institutions? A description of its structure will answer who demands it and who are the stakeholders of it (see the case study ideal public school in chapter 3). An observation provided by a government high school teacher about such institutions

³⁹ : Run by peoples related to Kerala Nadvathu Mujahideen in each locality.

⁴⁰ : Run by people related to Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama (A P Faction).

“Those are nothing but attempts to keep children of rich parents supporting different religious organizational sects within the community together. Since those schools also have provision for religious education, those children are exempted for attending madrassa.”

Anyhow, such schools are revealing more than religious features, anything but the emerging class divisions among the Muslim community. Hence when it comes to the contemporary phenomenon, the last among the three stages, the secular nature of schools and their structure take a completely new turn. Religion becomes a way of life. Its presence will be visible in the school environment and most of the everydayness of school. Those private English medium schools, as like what happened to most of the kindergarten associated with them, may gradually turn in to this new model. Of course, this has a tempting charm in its centrality of religion and culture.

Given to their economic conditions, families sometimes have restricted choices comparing to their aspirations. Not only economic status, the structure of pre-schooling (availability of different types of preschools in the area, quality of the available preschools in terms of teachers, curriculum, infrastructure...) can also set limits to aspirations. Parental preferences might also constrict by reasons other than economic. They may or may not be conscious actors while choosing the preschool for the child. What matters here is whether parental aspirations match reality? How parental aspirations differ from one another? What are the factors which define the aspirational level? These questions are important in the case of locality since established norms related to early childhood are gradually losing its grip and children are increasingly sent to early childhood education settings.

Increasing parental aspirations toward an Islamic preschool among the Muslim community is a visible trend. Adding to the above descriptive account of how the relationship between community and schooling had adapted to different periods, an account even though I had sighted in the earlier chapter repeating here. Najma teacher, principal of Kindergarten section of Ideal public school sighted,

“The parents are choosing ‘Heavens Islamic Preschool’ over ours like these days. Last year our own management started a franchise of it in the public school compound. We are witnessing student shortage then.”

All the parents who chose Islamic preschool over other preschools have sighted one reason, In such schools, nurturing of a child carries out according to Islamic values while having a rigorous secular curriculum. Even those parents who could not afford the fee wishes to send their child to an Islamic preschool, like the family of Aza Fathima I had interrogated with. But they forced to send her to Little Buds preschool attached to Cherapuram UP School (see case no.1 in chapter 3).

Those who chose aided school attached to Cherapuram UP School, i.e, three families, have sighted main reason for sending their children to that school as school readiness. For them, it will benefit if the child has an early school experience. The economic condition of the families also has to be noted. Three mothers are unemployed while two of them had completed higher secondary and their husbands, two of them working in abroad as unskilled laborers and the third manages a boutique in the nearby town. As Reshmi teacher from the school observed,

“Children here are either having unemployed mothers or mothers occupied in daily wage manual work, or in textile shops or supermarkets in the nearby towns.”

The affordability of education is one of the main reasons for this type of preschools spurring across the locality. From the perspective of school management, they are nothing but feeder schools for primary section. The academically oriented curriculum, physical proximity with primary schools, the structure of classrooms and teaching style are serving the purpose of school readiness. Since such low-cost preschools have spurted across the locality, the role of Anganwadis as educational centers is gradually fading. Parents chose to send their child to the Anganwadi at the age of three, then at the age of four, they used to shift their child to preschools attached to Aided/ Government schools. This has a lot to do with structural limits of Anganwadis as early childhood education centers such as teacher’s non-availability due to her multiple roles as an Anganwadi worker, no availability of English education and adequate facilities. Even though people are not abandoning the welfare model of ICDS centers, but they are demanding for more academically oriented education to their child from the early period onwards. It is personal relations the Anganwadi workers have in the neighborhood prompts families to send their children to the center.

It has to note that people have the choice, even among the different types of preschools, they can prefer one over the other since the quality of such institutions differ lot from the point of view of infrastructure, curriculum, teachers... There can be other reasons too, which influence both the

choice and preference other than economic, religious or school readiness (deliberately avoiding the choice for having nutritious food since this thesis mainly focuses on educational aspect). Especially an economy which is more oriented to the global employment market, the aspirations might have another dimension.

Hadiya was studying at a nursery related to MES Public School which is 15 Kilometer away from her home. At the age of three, she used to go to Anganwadi with her neighborhood friends. But the mother was compelled to enroll her to the school since the family is planning to live abroad for the coming years. The husband, a degree graduate and works as a salesman in Sharjah, UAE and the mother a commerce graduate and a housewife have many dreams about their single girl child's education. They have to give her international standard education to which the family should stay in UAE, away from their newly constructed home and tightly managing the family spending.

Since the arena of preschool has become intense with the arrival of new players and methods the economy of pre-schooling and its developments, in a large part, dominated by the sellers than the buyers of the commodity. Even the parental aspirations are high as they are also doing nothing but flowing with the wind.

Summary

The chapter was an attempt to place different stakeholders of preschools, parents, management, and teachers and their perspectives against state's approaches and initiatives in the pre-primary sector. The failure in ensuring the community involvement in the functioning of Anganwadis and meeting parental demands in preschool education along with the increased perception of cultural and religious marginalization among minorities in the locality has led to the expansion of Islamic preschools. The parental aspirations towards preschools are shaped by the economic condition of the household and their aspirations toward employment and also by the influence of community imagination of schooling in the village context. In the context of the growth of differential schooling, such as Islamic preschools, there is an inevitable need to revitalize Anganwadi centers as adequate early education centers capable of meeting parental demands. There is also a need to provide norms and criterion by each state to ensure the quality of pre-schooling in the private

sector and also to improve the wage and working condition of teachers. The inevitability is the creative intervention from the part of the state to meet the demands of different stakeholders.

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussions

As a researcher, what I have tried to provide is an account of social, economic and cultural factors that influence preprimary education and also the social and cultural turn such influences enable in the society. For that, both the subjective experience of different stakeholders and objective analysis of different institutional structures from the field have carried out. The conceptual framework which directed the field journey was derived from the writings of Bernstein on British infant school curriculum, Krishna Kumar's prescriptive essay on studying childhood in India and different accounts of preschool education across world, particularly from India, China, and Malaysia apart from the historical account of development of early childhood education in the western world.

Bernstein's study on British Infant school pedagogy unfolds how economic, social and cultural changes have led to the new pedagogic regimes in the preschool education. Apart from that, the significance of such pedagogy to different economic classes in their educational and later occupational attainment also had explained. What was important for us is his elaborative framework of coding of objects in which he provided conceptual categories which help to account sophisticated class divisions and changes in it over time within a society. Then, by following the footsteps in the development of the sociology of education, the pre-primary education in the Kerala villages has studied on the categories of class, gender, and religion.

Since the state has a major role in providing and universalizing the provision of preschool education, I have also narrated briefly the development of state programs along with the evolvement of state policy on early childhood education in India. Private preschool sector is largely an unregulated area but rapidly expanding even to villages, the idea was to understand different types of preschools available in the villages on the parental perception of such institutions, the institution's claim for children (management perspective) and also on the distinctness of curriculum and pedagogy, quality of infrastructure and teaching environment of such schools.

The somewhat detailed account of everyday activities and the historical evolvement of each type in the field are supplemented by narrative accounts of parents, teachers and management

representatives. Since private and state programs are historically followed different (former follows the educational and learning-centered while later developed on welfare approach) approaches, here all those institutions are understood as educational and competing for the claim of a young child in a vibrant market economy of pre-schooling. The preschool discourses in the villages are understood on the conceptual terms of market mechanisms and consumer interests following the steps of Henrike Doner. Further analysis of the narrative accounts has to be done since the distinct accounts of each case failed to put them in a comparative and comprehensive frame enabled by the belief in the necessity of state's creative intervention in the field of preschool education. This needs a timely change in the state's own approaches towards citizens and communities. The problems, especially in education, apart from the issues related to access and quality, are of cultural. The exclusion of working-class children or ethnic minorities or tribes from the content of the curriculum and also by not recognizing the capabilities enabled by their culture in the school, such groups are denied the egalitarian treatment envisaged in the democracy. Let me once more look into the field accounts on the above factual assumptions.

In the market economy of pre-schooling in the villages, ICDS centers do not have much to attract children as preschools. Simply the policy rhetoric did not match with actual experiences from the field. Since one of the centers did not have its own building even after 15 years and both of them are in need of toys, child-friendly seats, display boards and above all multilingual provision in the curriculum, to teach English. These centers are understood by parents as child care centers with having not much to do with education. The Anganwadi welfare monitoring committee, which has to be constituted to monitor and improve the conditions of ICDS centers in the locality is almost dysfunctional. It needs to turn to public action mode in the policy implementation to ensure the participation of the public into the remaking of Anganwadis as Vibrant Child Development Centers.

The growing demand for ECE among all the sections of the population is then gratified by the low-cost preprimary schools attached with Government or Aided elementary schools. The quality of schools in terms of infrastructure varies across schools but in terms of the curriculum, they all follow the footsteps of private English medium schools. The thriving economy also witnessed the growth of publishing houses invest in preschool textbooks and reading materials. The parents are not expecting much from such schools beyond school readiness.

But the parents of children who attend private English medium schools seek class specific nurture of the child. More disciplined, English as the language of instruction and interaction, child-friendly infrastructure are perceived as providing such nurture. More than that, in the context of villages, private English medium schools enables a class culture by keeping the children of rich together. The class combines with religion if it owned by a religious educational trust. In the context of Kerala where public schooling⁴¹ was very much popular the actual effect of such schools can be minimal. But when comes to religious pre-schooling, much-sophisticated picture derived from the descriptive accounts.

The growth of private unaided English medium schools and religious preschools has to be seen in the context of the state's failure in ensuring quality and creatively engaging with parental aspirations. Where the state itself tried to competitively organize its schools, it bore the fruit. The increase in the student enrolment in the public schools and the consequent decrease in the student enrolment in unaided schools of Kerala following the introduction of more English medium classes to Malayalam medium school, after steps were taken to improve infrastructure and to digitalize classrooms, provide an excellent example to the above argument. This needs more than a welfare approach and to be viewed itself as a competitor in the market economy.

It is also not possible to make general statements about the private unaided sector. Since this contains different types of preschools and some having exemplary models for ensuring quality by tapping the resources within the community, more concrete studies concentrating on micro settings is needed to account this sophistication.

Community imagination of education has much to say in case of the spurting Islamic preschools across north Kerala. As the historical development of schooling in the study villages shows, the involvement of the community in popularizing and universalizing public education is a known fact. In Recent years, how religious organizations constructed and engaged in ECE have led to the popularization of early childhood education across the Muslim community. The organizational plethora, which defines Muslims religious community in Kerala, created a public sphere within the community by each having control of a network of secular and religious educational institutions across Kerala, weeklies, magazines and most importantly a network of

⁴¹ : Here the term public school used to represent Government or aided schools.

mosques and mahallas.⁴² This has been helping to adopt, reformulate and update the engagement with each new phenomenon witnessed by the society in general and community in particular as is the case with pre-schooling. Such a situation also helps the community in tapping the human and other resources towards particular projects. The effect is a more dynamic, intense community having people conscious of their everyday life.

The attempt to read spurting of Islamic preschools in the study villages in the conceptual framework provided by Bernstein offers more insights into the nature of developments. The situation shows the changing concern over religion and culture among the new middle class. What does it mean to the pedagogic turn Islamic preschools took? The new pedagogic turn, these schools are enacting, through changes in the curriculum content and organization of everyday life at school and the need for expensive pedagogic tools inevitable for the actualization of pedagogy tells about the specific nature of such schools while comparing to other types. Not only it has to be understood in terms of inter-linkages between class and religion but also a reading in terms of such institutions as conscious use of agency by the community and as an attempt to resist the cultural and social subordination of the community enacted through state and private educational institutions over time, in a multi-religious society. As the field perceptions about Anganwadis and unaided schools tell, the negative perception of such institutions among the people concerned about religious way of living, (interestingly this is also the class of people whose inheritance did not have much to offer them in terms of knowledge contrary from the old aristocratic Muslim leadership) turn them towards these new institutions.

Also, it is important to note that the economic security enjoyed by Muslim community in Kerala is not a consequence of the educational attainments of the community, rather the consequence of the large scale absorption of unskilled laborers and the entrepreneurs by the Gulf countries. The specific nature of Muslim religious community (marked by the organizational plethora) of Kerala and their continued presence and influence in the public sphere (both within and beyond the community) as noted earlier, even among the emigrants, have led to the attempts to appropriate newly acquired economic capital to cultural and symbolic which is marked by the explicit Muslim attire, increased interest in organized charity, political activism and also in the professionalization of religious and secular organizations. Even though the presence of religion

⁴² : In the context of the villages, Mahalla refers to community related to a particular mosque or madrasa

was always there in the Malayalee public sphere, dominance and the disguise of majoritarian values as the values of all was prevalent and the socialization was the aim, the emergence of Islamic preschools marks a radical turn from it. The identities are going to be visible but also capable of negotiating the resources with the new middle class of the majority religion. How? Unless the context is affected by an outside, unexpected phenomenon (example, a terrorist attack), such education will reduce the distance between middle-class across communities since the prevalence of skills acquired and the market-oriented curriculum and the guiding principle of such a curriculum, meritocracy reinforce each other.

Last but not least, the problems arise from differential schooling has to be dealt, rather than following a state-centered or sponsored perspective in which emerging tendencies are viewed as encouraging sectarian or communal polarization. Here I have tried to understand them on the conceptual categories of identity (over socialization), agency and resistance. Such an understanding, widen the scope of study since it follows the assumption that educational activities and the turn it took nothing but the reflection of society. If the state is failing to formulate or reformulate the educational structure and content to the emerging needs and demands of society, citizens will find other ways to deal with it. What much needed in such a context is 'Public deliberation' at the level of institutions and the structure and content of schooling initiated by the state.

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Interview Schedule to the preschool principle

About the outset;

Management:

Intention:

Established year:

About pre-primary

The method following:

No. of children :

No. of divisions:

No. of teachers:

The procedure follows for teacher's selection:

No. of caretakers:

The facilities provided:

Classroom

Play materials:

Travel facility:

The curriculum and textbook selection:

Evaluation procedure:

One day at school: (daily routine)

Extracurricular activities:

Annual fee:

Teacher's salary:

About parent teachers association:

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Interview Schedule to Parents

House Name:

Members:

Name	Age	Education	Occupation
(Father)			
(Mother)			
(Child)			

Annual Income:

House: Old New One storied Two storied

Details of the Child:

Name:

Which preschool the child is studying? Which Year?

What are the reasons for sending children to that particular school?

Has the child attended any other preschool before going to current school? Yes No

If Yes Where?

What are the reasons for changing the institution?

Are you satisfied with this preschool? Why?

Did you observe any changes in the child after started to attend preschool?

Preschool- Parent relations

PTA: Once in a month Once in two months Once in three months

School Dairy

Whatsapp group

Parent-child relations:

Did you help child in learning? Yes No

How?

Does the child share school experiences at the home?

If yes, what about the child talk more?

Preschool:

Preschool timing:

Fee:

Facilities available:

Food:

Others

How does the child after returning from the school?

Did any other children from family attend preschool?

If yes Where? When?

What is he studying now?

Where is he studying?

Features of the child that you have noted?

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN KERALA A STUDY IN NORTH MALABAR

by Muhammed Shabeer T M

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