Chapter Two:
Situating Perspectives

The chapter attempts to present how the concerns central to this study were anchored in perspectives, while indicating the broader question they carved out. In doing so, it addresses three major concerns of this work – the politics of the relation between the State and the margins, the question of exclusion and the experience of marginalisation, and the context of institutionalised education and its character. It begins with the thoughts and works of Ambedkar (1979, 2002, and 2004) to draw a frame to situate the category of exclusion. I draw on the particular concepts of morality and fraternity from his thoughts to make sense of exclusion, and to briefly explore how it relates to ‘experience’. Following this, the chapter explores the relation of the State with its margin, to situate the understanding of the categories of experience, the institutional and the margins, vis-à-vis exclusion. I pursue this through the works of Veena Das (2010, 2004), particularly the ones where she has explored the State-citizen relation in the context of urban slums. I draw from her thesis the perspective that it is through its relation with the margins that the entity called the State and its authority are constituted. In order to situate the ‘politics’ of institutional education and knowledge, the chapter then refers to Illich’s and Gandhi’s socio-philosophical scrutiny of ‘modern’ education (or the modern way of life itself). While Illich’s (1971, 1973, 1981) works help in understanding the character of modern ‘institutions’ and the project of schooling, Gandhi’s (1909, 1937) concept of Nai Taleem (New Education) presents an imagination of an ‘alternative’ political economy of knowledge and system of education. This enables in situating the broader questions that this study inquires in relation to the purposes that schools serve. More than proposing a theoretical framework, the chapter sketches an outline of the perspectives that enabled in thinking about the categories that emerged from the field.

However, in practice it was not possible to delineate the perspectives in such a prosaic and categorical manner. This is because they continued to evolve (or refine) in the constant interaction between, or engagement with, the field and a search for perspectives that could explain what I ‘observed’. Although the pursuits were taken-
up consciously and thoughtfully with the idea of ensuring a systematic approach to inquiry, what comprises ‘systematic’ for one inquiry may appear ‘messy’ from an external objective perspective. This chapter would be better described as a compromise between the actual representation of the process of etching out the theoretical underpinnings of the study and the demands of academic writing and submissions. The former demanded deviation from the norms of linearity (which in itself was challenging), while the latter involved an idea of sharing the work with a larger community. For this reason, the various sections of the text may appear to lack organic inter-linkages. However, what holds the perspectives presented in the chapter together, is that they all enable in reflecting on the categories of institutions, ‘politics’ and marginalisation; the ideas of ‘development’, justice and agency; and the values and morality of the ‘modern’ human life. On the one hand the thoughts of Ambedkar, Illich and Gandhi provide a lens to think about the social world in a more socio-philosophical manner (complementing and contradicting each other in various ways), on the other the works of Das make it possible to make sense of the everyday practice. These categories, ideas and values were critical in integrating these perspectives and reflections.

2.1. Ambedkar’s thoughts and the question of Dalit exclusion

As one thinks about the concept of exclusion and how it is experienced in an educational context, it becomes difficult to find a single frame in which one may situate ones thinking\(^1\). To understand Dalit exclusion, or the application of the term Dalit to oppressed castes, I explored the works of Ambedkar. In this process, it came across that although Ambedkar’s thoughts and works are regarded as critical or seminal in the particular domain of ‘exclusion’ of ‘broken men’, a reference to his thoughts in the educational context to understand the concept of exclusion is not very common. Velaskar (2012, p. 245) underlines this, when she says:

> Despite the phenomenal impact that it has had in transforming the lives of dalits and its continuing contemporary relevance, Ambedkar’s social and educational thought remains surprisingly neglected in Indian

\(^1\)Although contemporary works in the area draw specific analysis of exclusion from works of Silver (2011), Kabeer (2000), Sen (2000) and the like, their focus is more descriptive.
educational discourse. Education was assigned a revolutionary role in Ambedkar’s conception of social progress and in his vision of a just and equal society. It was identified as a key instrument of liberation from oppressive structures of Hindu caste-patriarchy as well as of reconstruction of a new social order. (p. 245).

One reason for the limited application of Ambedkar’s ideas emerges from the fact that access to them comes through separate speeches and writings, which makes it difficult to consistently trace a thread. As he continued to refine his ideas progressively, it makes interpreting his writings more challenging. Also, as Omvedt (1994, p. 223) says, Ambedkar’s thought was not always consistent and did not fully resolve the problems he grappled with. Thus, deriving from Ambedkar’s work in general is a more rigorous task. Furthermore, it requires an understanding of those frameworks where he located his thinking, including Buddhist and Hindu philosophies and religion; philosophy of equality, justice and liberty; the history of French thought; and political theory. This makes it difficult to integrate his ideas into a unified whole.

However, as one reads through Ambedkar’s thoughts and works, some common threads become traceable in the specific context of the ideas of democracy, equality, liberty and justice. This in turn makes his works even more pertinent in understanding exclusion (and its experiential realm). Velaskar (2012) also highlights such quality in Ambedkar’s thoughts as she attempts to draw an ‘educational philosophy’ from his works. In doing so, she identifies morality, equality, justice, social democratic liberalism, modernity, and emancipation as core ideals on which she bases her reflection. However, for the kind of work that I was doing it was more critical to make sense of exclusion and its constitution. To situate the idea of exclusion, I draw from Ambedkar’s works two ideas which appeared to me as being foundational in his thinking – ‘morality’ and ‘fraternity’. In the following section, I present this understanding.

2.1.1. A framework of morality: Ethics of maitree and exclusion

As I engaged with Ambedkar’s thoughts, it appeared that a framework of ‘morality’ or civility of life assumes the central place in his philosophy. In fact, equality, justice,
liberty, oppression, untouchability, discrimination, and many other concepts that he addresses through his works, appeared to be underscored by an idea of human ethics— or morality which has a universal character. It is through this framework that he analyses ‘caste’ as well. Ambedkar’s critique of the Hindu system of chaturvarna and the practise of caste emerges from his rejection of an order that is deprived of this idea of universal human ethics and morality. This also comes to the fore when he compares a society where caste based exclusion is practised, with other societies, and says that “nowhere in the world does ‘untouchability’ exist” (Ambedkar, 2004, p. 83). Therefore, he assesses Indian society vis-à-vis a broader idea of human morality.

Also, one of the reasons for his conversion to Buddhism was that he saw in it a morality that Hinduism was bereft of. He says, “… religions are not alike in their answers to the question ‘What is good?’… One religion holds that brotherhood is good, another caste and untouchability is good” (Ambedkar, 2002, p. 222). The value that he places on the concept resurfaces as he explains his conversion to Buddhism. He says, “The simple answer is that morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is morality… in Dhamma morality takes the place of God although there is no God in Dhamma” (p. 225). Justice, equality and liberty, which were central to his thinking, are also situated in this frame of morality and the spirit of the Dhamma. Although, these three basic tenets of his political thoughts were European in origin and emerged from his experience of western education, it was through Buddhism that he engaged in re-inventing their meanings (as I would refer to in the following pages).

While equality, justice and liberty, that underlie his idea of democracy, are usually considered to be the centrepieces of his philosophy, a somewhat different understanding emerges as one delves deeper. Much more than the above-mentioned ideas, a concept that is of constitutive relevance in his philosophy is that of ‘fraternity’. This is particularly so as it comes across as the core constituent of the ethics of a civil and human life that Ambedkar imagines. Ambedkar (2004, p. 126) himself identifies fraternity to be the core of the ideals that he proposes. How he

---

imagines a fraternal bond among fellow humans as an alternative to an exclusionary ordering of human society comes across in the following explanation. He says,

Without fraternity, liberty would destroy equality and equality would destroy liberty. If in democracy, liberty does not destroy equality and equality does not destroy liberty, it is because at the basis of both there is fraternity. Fraternity is therefore the root of democracy.

Therefore, while he sees democracy as an ideal state of social life, it is conceptualised in a relational ethos based on ‘compassion’ among the individuals and groups. In this, it is critical to note that his concept of ‘fraternity’ is not derived (in absolute) from its French genesis. Rather, he uses the term *maitri* (‘fellow feeling’) and prefers this meaning over ‘brotherhood’ (p. 223). The term has an origin in the Buddhist philosophy, where its meaning is situated in a spiritual realm, and connotes something more than the fellowship of thought and action.

### 2.1.2. Inter-relational ethics: Fraternity and exclusion

If one further attempts to examine the concept of ‘fraternity’ in relation to exclusion, it adds meaning to its ethical dimensions. To understand this it will be useful to draw from Sen’s (2000, p. 18) analysis of the concept of social exclusion. In scrutinising the concept, he refers to fraternity. He highlights the absence of fraternity (‘relational failure’) as being of constitutive significance in creating conditions of social exclusion, which in turn can lead to other kinds of capability deprivations. He says, “The failure of fraternal symmetry can be, in many cases, a cause of poverty and inequality of other kinds” (p. 18). Therefore, absence of social relations, or a fraternal relation, could be one case that leads to exclusion that in turn can be understood in a framework of capability deprivation. Thus, fraternity and exclusion are inter-relational in nature.

In a similar fashion, Ambedkar saw the hierarchical social ordering of the Hindu society as being constitutive of the exclusion of broken-men from the social, economic, and political life. The caste system’s characteristic of fixed social and economic rights for each caste, implies ‘exclusion’ of one caste from a social
interaction with and undertaking the occupations of the other castes. In this, the practise of untouchability becomes instrumental in the restriction on the social interrelations, as it creates a situation in which a fraternal bond cannot exist. This emerges from Ambedkar’s (2004) comparison between slavery and untouchability: “Once he is born an Untouchable he is subject to all disabilities of an Untouchable. The law of slavery permitted emancipation” (p. 86). In such glimpses, Ambedkar’s idea of how exclusion and the condition of broken men are constituted and Sen’s (2000) analysis of social exclusion appeared to match each other. However, a doubt emerges when one takes into account Sen’s (2005, pp. 207-208) view where he appears to express an ambivalence about the significance of caste (vis-à-vis class) in analysing exclusion in the contemporary Indian context.

Irrespective of the match between Ambedkar’s and Sen’s analysis of exclusion, the former’s ideas about the concept, deal with the problem of poverty by situating it in the nature of the social ordering of Hindu society. That is, an individual’s economic and occupational possibilities get defined not by his natural capabilities but by the status of his ‘family’ in the social hierarchy. Therefore, given the caste-based order, a person’s quality of life is based on what is called “a dogma of predestination” (Ambedkar, 2002, p. 263-264). The application of the term ‘Dalit’ (to explain the condition of ‘untouchables’) by Ambedkar, may also be understood in this context. He said,

Dalithood is a kind of life condition which characterises the exploitation, suppression and marginalisation of dalits by social, economic, cultural, and political domination of the upper caste brahminical order. (cited in Das, 2004a, p. 7)

Dalithood is not constituted in the present but is ‘predestined’, and being so it comes to constitute the present. It is framed by a set of life situations where relations between social groups are based on a hierarchy. Also, paradoxically, Dalithood creates a space for the formation of a fraternal group that could be brought together by

---

3 Thorat and Kumar (2008, p. 9)
4 He further says, “The personality, which the law bestowed upon the untouchables, is withheld by the society…A slave had a personality, which counted notwithstanding the command of the law. An untouchable has no personality in spite of the commandment of the law. This distinction is fundamental”. 
its shared life conditions and experiences. Ambedkar’s idea for social action – which he defines as ‘organise, agitate and educate’ – may be read in this context. These ideas are further clarified when one looks for the spaces through which Ambedkar attempted to actualise them in practice – for example, through his engagement with the Indian constitution where he placed a high value on (what he referred to as) the ‘constitutional morality’.

A framework of constitutional morality was a pertinent concern for Ambedkar. He often stated it as the rationale for the elaborate structure of the Constitution of India as compared to that of the relatively matured democracies. He says,

> Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people are yet to learn it.

> Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic (as cited in Beteille, 2008, p. 42).

Analysing this, Beteille says that the Constitution becomes vulnerable without the infusion of constitutional morality among legislators, judges, ministers, civil servants, writers and public intellectuals; and that is why it was a key concern for Ambedkar (p. 36). This can be seen as a design for developing a fraternal ethos among the functionary cadre and a ‘safeguard’ against the absence of such relational ethos.

Further, the significance of fraternity in the framework of the Indian constitution becomes evident in the way in which it is practiced in the court of law. The Supreme court case concerning RtE, *Society of unaided schools of Rajasthan versus the Union of India and others, 2010*, was analysed and defended in the light of the constitutional value of fraternity (in a situation where equality and liberty were contradicting each other) (Guruswamy, 2012). The debate in this case highlighted how making provisions for ‘equality’ are not sufficient by themselves in the absence of fraternity. In fact, given that there is a fellow feeling among citizens, making provisions for equality would have a different meaning.

How the judiciary played its (sometimes what is called a ‘pro-active’) role in the context of the RtE was also unpacked to some extent by reading how Ambedkar
explained the concept of fundamental rights and necessity of remedies to guarantee them. While he makes a case for provisions to ensure that the legislature and the executive do not override rights, he also underlines the limitations of the constitutional law. In that, he expresses that rights are protected by the moral conscience of a society much more than the law, and that if a community opposes the fundamental rights then the law cannot ensure it.

The contestations to the RtE could be analysed more meaningfully when they are situated in this context. The questions around the EWS quota present a case where the constitutional values appears to be interacting with a set of institutions that lack fraternal morality, or with a society which lacks ‘consensus’ on the question of the disadvantaged social groups and the children. Similarly, it also enables one to examine from an ethical standpoint the quality of education that is available to the poor in the State schools, the withdrawal of the middle classes from these institutions, and the perceptions that the State functionaries hold about ‘the poor’ (as highlighted through the relevant literature in the previous chapter). What Ambedkar called ‘gyan’ and ‘sheel’ may come to explain the situation in this context, particularly when one refers to the right to education. Referring to Buddha he explains how ‘gyan’ or knowledge without moral courage (or sheel) is precarious, and makes a formally educated man dangerous and incapable of discharging his social duties (Ambedkar, 2002, pp. 174 – 175). It is in this element of morality or ethics that his idea of social relations in a society is situated.

In many ways, Ambedkar’s thoughts lead one to reflect on how ‘social distance’ is embedded in the framework of social interactions in the Hindu society. In this sense it enabled me to visualise how a framework of ‘Otherness’ may be constructed or situated within a given society. While Said’s (1978) works and the post-colonial theory engage with the notion of otherness in the context of the ‘West and the East’; Ambedkar’s works may develop a perspective to understand how it may be constituted and practiced within the socio-cultural stratification of the ‘Indian society’. In this context to understand education from Ambedkar’s lens, one would have to imagine through this framework and reflect on the questions: What kind of
education would ‘change’ such a social situation? How would social relations in an ideal school look like and what would be their nature? What roles would the State and its functionaries perform?

Although Ambedkar’s works provide an outlook to perceive exclusion as embedded in the social relations among the social groups, his works may not adequately enable one to see how the ‘political system’ called the State mediates in this context. That is, though his works throw light on the concepts of the State, institutions, citizens and the like (and how these should work), to make sense of how these come to be constituted in the everyday practice (particularly in the post-independence Indian context) makes it pertinent to draw from other perspectives. In the following section, I draw from the works of Das to understand the how the State-margins relation is ‘constituted’ in the everyday life where I also reflect on the manner in which exclusion comes to be situated in this interplay.

2.2. State, institutions and margins: ‘Citizens’ and politics in the margins

The concepts of citizen and citizenship are not new in educational thinking and discourse. Institutional education as a State enterprise in itself entails a project of citizenship, whereby the focus (though debatable) is on the creation of good citizens. However, how the relationship between the State and the ‘ordinary’ people is ‘negotiated’ in everyday life spaces, at least explicitly, is not addressed through this discourse. That is, the ambivalent categories like illegal ‘citizens’, marginal ‘citizens’ and semi-visible ‘citizens’ (where the ideas of marginality, illegality and invisibility get involved in the conceptual category of citizen), do not seem to directly get addressed in how citizenship is understood in the educational discourse. Although ‘citizenship’ is not a central concern for this thesis, the field observations made it impinging to consider the nature of relationships between people and the State in their negotiations in an educational context – and particularly so when politics, a public institution and exclusion were foundational to the study. As one locates a fieldwork

---

5 Although, such issues do come in the purview of the works on education and democracy, civil society and marginalisation, these lenses do not directly engage with the negotiations of everyday life in this context.
based inquiry in the margins of the ‘State’ or its institutions, it becomes relevant to
draw from social theory in this context.

2.2.1. Everyday relational constructions

The works of Das (2004, 2010) enable in understanding such relations, the processes
in which these are negotiated, and how such marginality is constructed. Furthermore,
her works also enable to situate the category of ‘experience’ in the margins – though
not in a direct fashion. Therefore, her works also implicitly address how politics is
located in the realm of life spaces and in the everyday ordinaries. It can be said that
although experience is the most prominent concept around which the body of Das’s
works revolves, it runs in the undercurrent in the text.

A close reading of Das’s work reveals that when she researches margins, her
anthropological subject is the State and not just the margins (Das and Poole, 2004, p. 8).
The core constitution of her work, in this sense, is based on the thesis that it is
through its relation with the margins that the entity called the State gets constituted.
Therefore, instead of understanding the margins as spaces where the control or the
politics of the State is fragile or weak, she analyses the constitutive value of margins
in the political category called the “State”. Through such an approach to locate the
anthropological subject, she intends to make problematic the universal category of the
citizen, and those of the public institutions and policies. That is to say, these
categories in theory or in stated policy may appear to be universal, but in practice
there are different forms in which they exist. Das contends that similar to the act of
writing which contains within itself the gap between rules and their ‘performative
aspects’, the forms of governance instituted by the state engender the possibilities of
how such forms are interpreted, manifested and deployed in practice, and therefore
the new forms in which the State itself is reconstituted (Mukhopadhyay, 2006, p. 3510-3511).

---

6 Violence, gender, childhood, and subalternity are the other areas in which Das writes.
7 Das and Poole (2004) say, “Our analytical and descriptive strategy was to distance ourselves from the
entrenched image of the state as a rationalised administrative form of political organisation that becomes
weakened or less fully articulated along its territorial or social margins. Instead… reflect on how the practices
and politics of life in these areas shaped the political, regulatory, and disciplinary practices that constitute,
somehow, that thing we call “the state.”” (p. 3)
In this study, to situate the everyday life and politics in a slum context in Delhi, I draw from Das’s work in a JJ colony in NOIDA. Located in this frame, how in the everyday engagements the slum dwellers negotiate with State institutions and functionaries would be understood. From the understandings that her works propose, I draw on only some particular ones (specifically those where she explores how the categories of the State and the citizen are constituted in the margins). The first is the perspective that the power of the State is constituted not through the ‘law’ but through the arbitrariness that comes across in ‘exceptions’. The second is her analysis of instruments through which the State-citizen/people relation is negotiated. The third relates to how the people in the margins negotiate or claim citizenship. In a broader sense, these three enable in formulating a perspective on how exclusion ‘happens’ as situated in the ordinary and routine practice. The following pages present this analysis.

2.2.2. Politics of exclusion and exception
The idea that politics and exclusion may not be experienced in a stark and gross fashion by an insider in the everyday contexts of lived reality, as they may be visible to an outsider or a researcher, gets qualified in Das’s works. While a researcher’s objectivity and unfamiliarity with the spaces that s/he researches in an anthropological mode may lead to a temptation to see things categorically, such ‘otherness’ however distances the researcher’s meanings from those of an insider constructed in the ordinaries of life. How an insider experiences and/or engages in everyday (banalities of?) politics comes across prominently through Das’s analysis, particularly in the manner in which she ‘defines’ the margins. Das and Poole (2004) conceptualise margins in three ways: (1) Margins as peripheries seen to form natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialised into the law. (2) Margins as constituted in spaces in which the State is constantly experienced and undone through the illegibility of its own practices, documents and words. (3) Margin as a space between bodies, law and discipline. These three concepts suggest different modes of occupying the margins than what might be told by a simple story of exclusion (p. 10). Exclusion therefore, much more than being an outcome manifest in specific instances, is seen as
being played-out in the negotiations, or rather constituting the margins and everyday life therein.

Central to this negotiation or constitution is the power of the State to define “state of exception”. In fact the central thread that ties together the works in the volume (Das and Poole (Ed.), 2004) is the articulation of the power and control of the State (particularly in the margins) as its ability to define states of exception. Like in the case of a national emergency, during a war and in conflict situations, the State defines ‘institutional violence’ as an exception. Talking in the context of State ‘sponsored’ violence in 1984 she says, “None of this was strictly legal, but the paraphernalia of recording claims, examining certificates… and so on gave it an aura of legal operation” (Das, 2004, p. 240). It is in these exceptions that the arbitrariness of the power of the State is constituted, and that the practice diverges from the law and becomes illegible. Thus, it is the illegibility much more than legibility of the practice in which the ordinaries are negotiated in the margins.

To explain how the legitimacy of arbitrary action of the State is constituted, she draws on the idea of excuses – where the actions of the functionaries of the state are attributed to their general ‘human nature’. For example, saying “the general level of education of the population was responsible for contaminating the police force” to ‘justify’ the violence (p. 248). In this process, the State defines its action as rational by attributing an irrational quality to people or rather to humans. In the work that I was doing in an educational context, this explanation enabled inquiring into the everyday narratives that I encountered in the field and how these discursively constituted the State politics (in institutional and non-institutional spaces). For example, it facilitated inquiry into the nature and constitution of the narrative of the disinterest of the poor in educating their children, uneducability of the disadvantaged social groups, and that of the unwillingness of the teachers to teach8. This also

---

8As stated in the previous chapter, this narrative of uneducability and unwillingness of the children is encountered by researches done in a similar context (PROBE 1999, Subrahmanian 2005, Banerjee 2011). While at the same time, these researches counter this narrative of unwillingness by attributing an adverse attitude to the teachers and middle level functionaries. In this light, reading Sadgopal’s (2006) argument may be useful to consider. He says, “How do you expect the education system to be any better if flawed policies are being implemented? I would rather contend that the State is normally quite efficient (inefficiency is rather deliberate and selectively practiced!).
enabled in “observing” how the rationality of the ‘State’, or the goodness of its
educational policy, and genuineness of its effort is constituted in such everyday
discourses of the unwillingness and uneducability of the community, and the poor
motivation or aberration of the lower level functionaries, which in turn legitimises the
educational provision. It is in such context that the process of ‘exclusion’ was studied
in this work.

2.2.3. Entering the margins: Documentary proofs and checkpoints
The author locates the various instruments, through which the legibility and
illegibility are constructed, in the documentary proofs of citizenship. These proofs are
seen as working as technologies through which the citizens and the margins are
defined, and so is the ability of the State to enter the psychological and ‘biopolitical’
realms of everyday life in the margins. While Poole (2004) sees the use of these
proofs at the ‘checkpoints’, Das (2004, 2010) traces their power in the ordinaries like
that in negotiating for ration and electricity supply. She focuses on how these
documents, through which the State claims to secure identities in practice, become
one way in which the same identities are undermined. Also, these documents
instrumentalise the production of states of exceptions on the pretext of saving the life
– where the power of the State takes an arbitrary character. Furthermore, in the
manner in which these instruments bring people to “deal with” the bureaucracy
further constitutes the nebulousness in the power of the institutions and their
functionaries. Das and Poole (2004) say,

    The pedagogic aspects of the state are manifested here, not through
school textbooks on citizenship, but rather through the practices by
which subjects are made to learn the gap between membership and
belonging. (p. 17)

More than anything, Das’s analysis of documentary proofs enabled in asking
questions like: How may the relation between the people and the State be deciphered?

The education system is the disaster that it is due to reasonably efficient implementation of flawed policies.” (p. 115). Thus, the discourse of ‘unwillingness’ of the community and ‘lack of motivation’ of schoolteachers or implementers may also be analysed in the framework of ‘excuses’.
How apart from the spatial location called the public institution [school] do the State and people interact? How is the ‘institutional’ constituted, and how does it become worthy and omnipresent? What functions do the State functionaries [the teachers and school staff] serve in interactions with the people in the margins? It also helped in tracing the manifest forms in which the politics of negotiation and exclusion may be observed in everyday life in the field. In a socio-political context where ‘caste’ in itself is negotiated through the documentary instruments of the bureaucracy, what would constitute the marginality and experience of Dalits in the everyday field contexts emerged as a question that demanded reflection. Such analysis shaped the understanding of caste as an ‘experience’ that is constructed in the everyday ordinary negotiation, instead of undermining it as a ‘simple’ conceptual category.

2.2.4. Agency and ‘incremental’ politics
The idea that exclusion is a process of interaction, as said earlier, also comes across through Das’s works. Her association with the subaltern studies (Das, 1989) in itself throws light on her position with the idea that the ‘margins speak’, and that the people continuously engage in struggles against the ‘modern’ form of domination – the bureaucracy with which they have been compelled to establish a ‘contract’ (p. 310). She sees the tradition of subaltern studies and its place in contemporary times as posing a serious challenge to the dominant conceptions about castes and tribes in the anthropological theory. Therefore, in her investigation of the politics of the State and margins as well, the ‘people’ are not visualised as passive or inert, or as simply ‘excluded’.

Das and Poole (2004) highlight a paradox in their theory of “states of exception”, particularly in the light of the activity of the people in the margins. They say, “… these spaces of exception are also those in which the creativity of the margins is visible, as alternative forms of economic and political action are constituted.” (p. 19). Das (2010) explores a variety of forms in which the people negotiate with the State and engage in creating incremental rights. She situates this in the particular case of how jhuggi dwellers in a slum incrementally construct their dwellings. To explain this, she draws an analogy to the popular folktale of the camel incrementally pushing
out the master from the tent. She thereby explains the strategy of pursuing (or negotiating) entitlements as employed by the slum ‘community’.

During the fieldwork of this study, this analysis offered an explanation of the manifest forms in which people’s voices might become visible. These forms may become overt in the manner in which the tangibles (like civic infrastructures) are negotiated. However, they represent how life is imagined incrementally and aspirations are adjusted or shaped in a cumulative fashion. Furthermore, this lens also brought to the fore a need to perceive people’s ‘responses’ as ‘action’ or as their ‘agency’, instead of collapsing the margins in a plain category of ‘the excluded’. This concept of creation of incremental rights generated questions like: How do the ‘social groups/people in the margins negotiate? What strategies are adopted in such everyday negotiations? What forms does ‘resistance’ take among the marginalised social groups?

While the above works enabled in developing a perspective to understand exclusion, and to some extent the processes through which it may be experienced, the specific questions pertaining to school as an institution and its functions got situated through the perspectives of Illich (1971, 1973, 1981) and Gandhi (1909, 1937).

2.3. Institutional politics and knowledge
It is relevant to share that in the conceptualisation phase of this work, two thinkers whose thoughts were central in propelling me to inquire into aspects relating to the ‘institution of education’ and the idea of ‘institutional knowledge’ were Illich and Gandhi. It was through their works that the idea of ‘politics’ (and the forms and character it may assume) was framed as a broader context for the inquiry. The thoughts of Gandhi and Illich brought forth the roles that institutions and knowledge may play in the political and social world, or rather in human society. My introduction to them happened through their ideas in the specific context of education. What made reading Gandhi and Illich more intriguing was that I found several similarities in how they perceived ‘modern’ education and institutions.
As I explored the wider spread of their works, I was introduced to a particular frame of examining and imagining the world as an ontological entity. Scholars who critically engage with the concepts of modernity, science and reason, and the development and nature of human civilization, find the thoughts and works of Gandhi and Illich ‘useful’. In an educational context, their works also come to explain the political character and the problematic of the ‘mainstream’ institutional education. It is difficult to tie together the vast spread of their ideas that engage with the meaning of being and existence. Therefore, I present from their works only a perspective on institutional education. In the following few pages I begin by briefly reviewing the nature and similarity in the framework of their arguments, and then present the ideas I draw from their works.

2.3.1. Critics of institutional education
The first reading of Illich’s (1971) and Gandhi’s (1909) works together highlighted conceptual similarities in their critique of schooling (though there are explicit and obvious differences in the thoughts, context and arguments of the two authors). First is the belief or observation that both share about the conventional form of schooling and institutional knowledge. That is, both call the established form of education “false” or “illusory”. They say so specifically because it creates a fallacy or rather a paradox of education being a public utility even when it is useful for none or more useful for some or self-fulfilling only. The second similarity is found in their disbelief in knowledge as knowledge of letters; both understand knowledge as being an outcome of engaging in significant processes of daily life and consider ‘subsistence or self-reliance’ as a significant part of knowledge. Third, they also qualify their idea of ‘work’ by differentiating it from that created by industrial society and somehow relate its centrality in the enterprise of education. A deeper reading of these ideas reveals that both of them separate ‘learning’ from schooling.

9 Like Nandy (2010) and Alvares (2009)
10 Gandhi (1909) says, “…Both you and I have come under the bane of what is mainly false education” (p. 77), while Illich (1971) underlines, “Only liberating oneself from school will dispel such illusions” (p. 60).
11 Illich (1971) says, “Primitive man lived in this world of hope. He relied on the munificence of nature, on the handouts of gods, and on the instincts of his tribe to enable him to subsist.” Gandhi (1938) says, “…boys need a thorough industrial training if they are to become self-reliant and self-supporting” (p. 45).
Another similarity is found in the nature of learning institutions their ideas would support. Gandhi’s idea of basic education may not imply a completely non-institutional form of schooling but would essentially require a different form of institutions than the ones that exist. Illich’s (1971) deschooling does argue for a need to “disestablish” schools (as one of the many non-convivial or manipulative institutions (Illich, 1973)) but suggests different forms of “educational/learning webs” (p. 76). A deeper engagement with their works revealed that such similarities originate from their broader ideological quest.

Gandhi’s faith in Swaraj and Ahimsa emerged from conceptualising an alternative human living vis-à-vis a (western) way of life, which in his view was violent and inhumane12. On the other hand, Illich’s critiques focussed on ‘deschooling’ society from the institution of western modernity that in his view schooled people in a servitude of ‘consumption’. However, what is significant here is that neither of the two thinkers was ‘against modernity’. Instead, their critique was levelled against the culture of violence and subservience it has become an instrument of. Scholars have explored the similarity in their thoughts on these lines13. Therefore, without delving into the similarities in greater detail, I wish to emphasise that I read the works of the two thinkers together as I found them complimenting and also completing each other (at least in the context of education).

For this task I draw from Illich’s (1971, 1973, 1981) works, his analysis of the ‘self-fulfilling’ character of modern institutions and the manner in which they shape the human autonomy. As for Gandhi (1909, 1937) I draw from his perspective on education, not for the reason that it offers an ‘alternative’, but because it is based on a vision of a particular kind of knowledge and society relationship.

2.3.2. The institution called school

Schools have been a subject matter of critique from the standpoint of the new sociology of education and in the context of the questions pertaining to representation.

---

12 Also explored in depth by Alvares (2009) and Dhareshwar (2012)
However, Illich’s (1971) examination of school is set apart from such tradition as it makes problematic the institution of schooling as a whole rather than raising specific questions on institutional knowledge, pedagogy and related processes. Illich (1971b) points out the futility of such arguments when he says,

We are used to considering schools as a variable, dependent on the political and economic structure. If we can change the style of political leadership, or promote the interests of one class or another, or switch from private to public ownership of the means of production, we assume the school system will change as well.

The central argument that he makes in the context of the institution called schools, stems from their omnipresence, which in itself is an indicator of how they are not “dependent variables”, and thus come to have a life by themselves. In his works (Illich, 1981) he brings in the purview of such analyses of several institutions (of industrial society) including work, health care, hospitality, elaborate transportation, military, etc. (except for those which are called ‘convivial’). These institutions, including schools, are referred to as ‘manipulative institutions’ for they create a ‘myth’ of service and public utility by “convincing consumers that they cannot live without the product” (p. 60). He believes that these institutions engage in a project of generating consumers for what they produce, and sustain themselves in this process.

It is in this context that he questions ‘obligatory’ schooling and what it does to the autonomy of children (in his/her learning) in particular, and to that of adult ‘minds’ as well. He defines school as an age specific, teacher related process requiring fulltime attendance at an obligatory curriculum. In this he sees school as an instrument for grouping people according to age and thus generating social categories identified by their relation to school – pre-school child, primary school child, high school graduate or an ‘educated’ adult. By serving such functions the schools become instrumental in mass-producing childhood (Illich, 1971, p. 22-24). He believes that if there were no age-specific and obligatory learning institutions, “childhood” would go out of production (p. 24).
Further, as he comments on the reduction of a child in the category of pupil, he also introduces how schools reduce a child’s learning to the product of school teaching. The ineffectiveness of schooling in being able to ‘impart’ education to the children of the poor is understood in this context. It is in this ineffectiveness that what school imparts gains all the more significance by making people believe that they are inferior, thus making schooling even more ‘desirable’. In this project, institutional knowledge becomes a tool for creating this illusion of value, desirability and a better future. For it brings one to assume that by accumulating ‘knowledge’, by spending more and more time in this institution, the possibilities of life are enhanced. Illich (1971) qualifies the understanding of schools as institutions that can bring about equality of social claims, and says that schools do the reverse – as the ‘opportunities’ the school assumes are not available to the children of the poor.

Therefore he questions compulsory schooling, particularly in the nations that are poorer – for it “inevitably” grades the nations into an international caste system, in which success in schooling becomes an indicator of “human development” (p. 10). While in this form the school becomes one of the institutions for maintaining the servitude to, or desirability of, the modern value system, it plays a central role in further regulating independence – of thoughts, actions (self-directed), learning and mind. What emerges from his work is how instead of becoming a means of education, life comes to depend on and is dominated by the institution called school, and thus gets entrapped in a counterproductive circularity. These ideas of Illich have been well analysed by authors writing in the area of education. However, his other ideas (particularly on work) find less reference in the area.

Another work of Illich (1981) helped in situating the autonomy of the child in a broader context of modern political economy. How a child’s life in totality comes into the domain of ‘shadow work’ that the modern work economy creates can be appreciated by the argument that Illich (p. 5) makes: “With the rise of this shadow economy I observe the appearance of a kind of toil which is not rewarded by wages, and yet contributes nothing to the household’s independence from the market.” Illich refers to the unpaid work that women do in non-subsistence economies and how it
sustains the wage work that a man does. From this perspective, as I observed the field reality, it appeared (though arguably) that the school in itself was playing a role of bringing the activities of a child into the domain of the shadow work or modern political economy – where the age called childhood is spent in an institution to ensure a ‘productive’ future. Along with this, the work that children engaged in at home, particularly to support their parents’ waged work, was also situated in a perspective. In the field where I worked, many children substituted the household work that women (mothers) did at home, so that both parents could labour.

Illich’s thoughts generated questions like: Why do schools exist? What purposes do they serve? How would (if at all) compulsory schooling and official (or formal) curriculum bring about justice and equity? What is the nature of these conceptions of justice and equity? What roles do children play at school and in the family? How do they learn in these processes? What meaning does such learning hold in their lives? While this perspective enabled in asking such questions, Gandhi’s thoughts and ideas invigorated the imagination of ‘responses’ to these questions. What separates Illich’s and Gandhi’s thoughts and works, among many other things, also emerges from this aspect of their philosophies. It is in these ‘answers’ that one finds in Gandhi’s work that makes his system of thought more rounded.

2.3.3. Politics of knowledge
A critic of western-colonial modernity, Gandhi was not a ‘traditionalist’. He was also a critic of the ‘tradition’. As Kumar (1993, p. 507) says, “It would be wrong to interpret Gandhi’s response to colonial education as some kind of xenophobia. It would be equally wrong to see it as a symptom of a subtle revivalist dogma.” It was this nature of his thoughts in which he reinvented the idea of ‘modern’ and gave a new meaning to a traditional (or ‘Hindu’) way of life – and in that, “an alternate politico-cultural agenda” was born (Pathak, 1998, p. 53-54). It is in this respect that the centrality of ‘dialogic’ (with self, the reader, and others) in his philosophy becomes evident. His thoughts revolve in a framework of ideals, and his application of such ideals in his own life makes him a different kind of philosopher – whose thoughts could not be separated from his ‘being’. The consistency in these aspects
enables one to identify the fundamentals of his system of thinking and action. While swaraj and non-violence are two of the prominent tenets in his thought, one way in which Gandhi sought to actualise them comes across in what he called *Nai Taleem*. As Skyes (1988) puts it, “Gandhiji dreamed of finding out by experience and experiment "a true system of education" which would put into practice the ideal he had put forward in Hind Swaraj.” (p. 10). It is also relevant to quote Kumar (1993) here:

> Yet the fact remains that Gandhi wanted education—reconstructed along the lines he thought correct—to help India move away from the Western concept of progress, towards a different form of development more suited to its needs and more viable, for the world as a whole, than the Western model of development. (p. 507)

*Nai Taleem* is a system of education based on Gandhian ideals. But this system also represents a Gandhian sociology of knowledge that was based on his moral critique of both western-colonial and brahminical social order and epistemology. The idea of *Nai Taleem* was based on two major principles which are of relevance here: first, that the knowledge of letters by itself has no meaning, and the second, that a ‘craft’ must be situated in the centre of education (Gandhi, 1909, p. 76; Gandhi, 1937, p. 57). The idea of the mother tongue as a medium of education and self-sustaining education, are allied to the above two. While the ideas are (apparently) simple, as one thinks about the political character of a system of knowledge that revolves around a handicraft, not only does the brahminical social order based on an ‘oral tradition’ begin to crumble, but the monopoly or control over ‘production’ through which western capitalist economy survives also breaks down (Singh, 2005, p. 16). That is, it enables asking questions about and locating answers concerning the aims of education and forms of knowledge, and in thinking around a concept of education in which work and knowledge are not separable.

While talking about the politics of representation and selection in the school curriculum, in particular the context of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Kumar (1983) reflects on why such an idea of education ended in a failure. He says, “… areas of
knowledge dealt with by a school system depends not only on inventive ideas put forward by influential individuals but the status of those social groups whose life and aspirations are mirrored in the subject” (p. 1571). However, what is critical here to note is that the design of Nai Taleem cannot be understood as a matter of inclusion or exclusion of manual skills as a school subject. Instead, it is a complete system in itself which neither lends itself for assimilation in the existing mainstream schooling, nor can coexist or dialogue with it. It emerges from its critique and offers an alternative that is not regressive, but chalks out a direction for a ‘new’ way of life that is based on an indigenous social and epistemic context.

This idea of education makes evident the politics of the structure, organisation and philosophy of the contemporary system of education. In doing so it nurtures the violence of western science and modernity and continues to subject the children of the manual labouring classes and castes to a “system of unhappiness” (Alvares, 2009). In this study, the alternative that Nai Taleem offers comes to highlight the contrast in the value system of the two kinds of educational frameworks. It also helps in understanding the place that ‘work’ assumes in the lives of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy and how the institution called school interacts with their lives. In many ways, in the process of doing this work, the contrast that I talked about brought to the fore how the western scientific rationality and brahminical morality intertwine with each other and merge beyond recognition in the institution for education and in the everyday meaning making about education. This perspective also guided me in understanding how the question of politics of ‘knowledge’ is not just a matter of curriculum, but spreads to the institutional design and framework, or the entire project of ‘educating’. Therefore, understanding it only as school curriculum would mean limiting the inquiry to the question of representation, which in itself is insufficient.

2.4. Perceived inconsistencies: A note on Gandhi, Ambedkar and Illich
As I begin towards drawing a conclusion from the above analyses of the varied works, it appears necessary to talk about placing Ambedkar, Gandhi and Illich together. The question of ‘Gandhi versus Ambedkar’ emerged at forums where this work was shared. This question particularly emerged from the view that a work that explores
experiences of ‘Dalits’ would better be framed in the thoughts and vision of Ambedkar, instead of Gandhi. In some ways, this was based on the idea that the thoughts of Gandhi and Ambedkar are inconsistent. Such an argument, although meaningful in some ways, appeared to do two things. One, it pitted Ambedkar and Gandhi against each other, and therefore explained the relevance of Ambedkar by deeming Gandhi irrelevant. Two, it somehow fitted or assimilated the philosophy of Ambedkar in the cognitive category of Dalit exclusion, and it also negated the relevance of Gandhi’s work and thought in understanding the exclusion of Dalits, and the problems of caste based social order. Such comparison (in some ways at least) seems to be based on the manner in which the two thinkers are presented in literature and general discourse. However, the same is also contested in the literature that critically examines the polemics of the Gandhi ‘versus’ Ambedkar debate. Pantham (2011) reflects through the letters exchanged between the two thinkers, and analyses how their ideas were also formulated and reformulated in dialogue with each other. Parekh (2009) makes a case for complementarity between Gandhi and Ambedkar, and asserts the need to review how the two thinkers are read vis-à-vis each other. In this work, the ideas of the two thinkers have been understood in this frame.

However, more than on the matter of caste, inconsistencies in the thoughts emerged on the matter of Gandhi’s and Ambedkar’s position in relation to ‘western modernity’. In that, placing Illich and Ambedkar together appeared logically inconsistent as well. However, as said earlier, Gandhi and Illich did not contest the notions of equality, brotherhood and justice. Their critiques were levelled against the inequity, injustice and violence of ‘western’ (practice of) modernity. Similarly, Ambedkar also did not completely derive his thinking from the western ideals, but also formulated and reformulated his thought in an engagement with Buddhism. Therefore, in this context a need to engage further with these philosophies came to the fore.

2.5. The inquiry and the perspectives: Summing-up
The above works framed the perspectives with which I made-sense of the social reality in the field. Ambedkar’s works directed thinking where I engaged with the
perceptions of the ‘outsiders’ towards the ‘community’, and resistance of the people in the field towards such perceptions. They also situated the scrutiny of the inter-relational ethos at school and in the community. Through Ambedkar I derive the understanding of exclusion in a framework of morality and civil ethics. Exclusion may well be understood in a framework of deprivation of capabilities that have economic, political and social implications. However, such understanding removes it from a psychological and emotional realm. His thoughts develop a case for arguing against exclusion as an unethical phenomenon, and as an economic and social category as well. Ambedkar’s thinking revolves around the problem of the exclusionary and exploitative social structure of the society and dehumanising morality, and is grounded in his experience. It is probably for this reason that, Ambedkar comes across through his writings as a thinker who consistently made a case for social action to counter and subvert the oppression – in which “organise, educate and agitate” were central.

Das’s ideas guided me in understanding how everyday negotiations shape exclusion, and the limitation of locating exclusion in particular stark instances. It opened up my thinking about the category of ‘citizen’ and the State-citizen relation in the margins. How people’s relation with the institution of education gets constituted, how these relations get shaped in everyday interactions with a ‘public’ institution, and what is the nature of this relationship, are some of the questions that got framed in this context. While the entitlement of people to institutional education comes in the domain of ‘rights’ of the citizens, it also (incrementally) brings them within the purview of State’s control and authority (that manifests in its institutional form and transcends beyond that as well). This becomes all the more a case in the lives of the people in unauthorised, illegal, semi-legal, and ‘transit’ slums and/or resettlements as well (as it is in these geo-spatial locations where such rights and authority would be ‘implemented’ the most), where the State is not present in a similar sense as it is in the ‘legal’ centre/core. In this context, how the interactions take a ‘formal’ form (and transcend the formal to create new and nebulous forms) came across through Das’s exposition.
Gandhi’s and Illich’s perspectives shaped thinking about schooling. Illich’s two specific ideas that guided the observations in the field and the analysis of the data, both relate to the self-sustaining character of schooling (and the institutions of contemporary society) and its increasing ‘acceptance’. Firstly, such an analysis of ‘acceptance’ of schooling developed a perspective to understand its ‘rejection’ and its functioning as a ‘ritual’ much more than a meaningful enterprise (see chapter 5). It also helped in analysing school education somewhat ‘objectively’, by enabling me as a researcher in maintaining a ‘rationality’ that prevents collapsing educational experience in one category of schooling, and engaging in a passionate argument for compulsory schooling. Secondly, it highlighted the oppression of children, which is involved in the process of determining their learning, and deeming such learning synonymous with schooling.

Gandhi’s ideas were central in offering a frame to analyse the people’s (whom I interacted with in the field) demands and expectations from schooling, and to locate these demands in a perspective on forms of knowledge. They also led me to engage with two questions – how through school knowledge a social re-engineering may be imagined, and how ‘schools’ as institutions may play a ‘radical’ role in society. The concept of new education also enabled in qualifying the initiatives for equity and quality in education, whereby the ‘changes’ are proposed in curriculum, in the schemes and in financial sponsoring of education without conceptually altering the design/imagination of the ‘given’ system of education. Furthermore, as said earlier, it enabled me to ‘observe’ how the ‘scientific rationality’ and ‘traditional values of domination’ intertwine with each other and merge beyond recognition in everyday practice (for example, in the notion of ‘hygiene’).

The works of Gandhi, Illich and Ambedkar enabled me to ‘perceive’ social reality in a broader sense, whereas Das’s analysis developed an ability to make sense of the specific contexts of everyday ‘politics’ in a slum setting. While the perspectives may not seem to be interrelated, all four enabled me in thinking about the life, relations, politics and institutions in the field. The connections and inconsistencies between them continued to unfold in an iterative fashion throughout the work – a process that
is difficult to document. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, in some places the exercise of presenting the thoughts in a coherent fashion has compromised the messiness that was actually involved in the process of the research. The next chapter will present some such aspects of the process of research and the manner in which the ideas and theories informing this work continued to evolve.