Home and School Literacy Practices of Children in a Rural Village in India: An Ethnography

Thesis

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Home and school literacy practices of children in a rural village in India: An ethnography

Namrita Batra

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Abstract

The Indian state is responsible for providing free and compulsory education to all its 6-14-year-old children. A significant majority of these children attend state schools and belong to some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged sections of the country. Researchers who document teaching in these schools continue to provide accounts of teacher-led instruction. Both international and Indian assessments of literacy also evidence of dismal levels of learning among children.

Unlike previous studies from India which have focused on teachers and teaching, this study broadens its focus to include children and learning. It does this by exploring the range of literacy practices that children engage with at home and school, and by taking into consideration the beliefs of caregivers and teachers shaping these practices. Theoretically rooted in a sociocultural theory, it shines a light on how children’s literacy practices are cultural and personal and, consequently, uncovers the relationship between home and school practices.

Ethnography provides the methodological framework for the study. The five participant children live in a resource-poor, agrarian village and attend the state school within the village. The literacy practices of two are discussed in detail in this current study. Participant observation of children’s practices in naturalistic settings, that is, their homes and school, and conversations with them lie at the heart of the fieldwork. Interviews with caregivers and teachers were also undertaken. Data were recorded with audio and video devices, in the form of fieldnotes, and children’s texts were captured through photographs. Consequently, it is the first known research to endeavour a qualitative exploration of children’s home literacy practices in India and to do so within a rural community.

This study makes significant contributions to theory. This has been possible because of the depth of its fieldwork and the theories it has chosen to draw on for analysis. The cultural nature of children’s practices has been highlighted using Gee’s (2002, 2012, 2014) conceptualisation of Discourse and identity.
and their personal nature has been examined using Hedges and her colleagues (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) theorisation of interests. As a result, this study has been successful in highlighting the personal nature of children’s literacy practices. It also provides evidence of the potential of both theories to illuminate on the nature of children’s literacy practices.
Chapter 1: The Researcher’s Quest

1.1 Introduction

Literacy in a country like India is an invitation to struggle for those who can still muster the courage to dream.

(Agnihotri, 1997, p. 206)

Literacy is a complex concept that continues to be defined in multiple ways. It is commonly understood solely as a cognitive concept which encompasses reading and writing skills that are acquired independent of their context (UNESCO, 2006). Historically, supporters of this conceptualisation have asserted that literate individuals and cultures are superior to their oral counterparts because of their ability to handle logic and abstraction, and differentiate between myth and reality (Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977). However, other researchers have shown that it is not the knowledge of the script, but the sociocultural context within which it is acquired (Scribner & Cole, 1978) and how power is distributed in this context (Street, 1984) that influence the benefits that accrue from it. The current study is rooted within this sociocultural conceptualisation of literacy, viewing literacy as a practice which is embedded in cultural and political contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1990, 2012; Street, 1988).

Both the home and the school are important contexts within which children can learn to engage with print. For many children in India who belong to socioeconomically disadvantaged families where parents may not read, schools are crucial for their literacy learning (Sinha, 2010). Their ability to read the word also enables them to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), and the significance of this for children who belong to disadvantaged backgrounds cannot be overemphasised. However, the manner in which children are expected to engage with print in state schools is often devoid of meaning, and this is believed to be an important reason for children “dropping-out” from school in the primary years (Kumar, 1993; Sinha, 2010). Thus, potentially,
both the home and the school present challenges to children becoming literate in various parts of India.

The present study focuses on a small sample of five children living in a resource-poor, rural village in India. It explores the range of their literacy practices in their home and school, engaging in greater detail with those of two. It also illuminates the beliefs of caregivers and teachers shaping children’s literacy practices. Being cognisant of the poor literacy levels of children in the primary years in state schools in India (Grades 1-5; ages 6-10) (discussed later in Section 1.2.1), it focuses on Grade 5 (age 10) children since the probability of a larger number of children reading in this class was the greatest.

In the following sections, I present my rationale for undertaking this study, and outline its research focus, and key theoretical and methodological ideas. Section 1.2 discusses the factors that have motivated this study. Section 1.3 lays down the definitions that guide it. Section 1.4 provides a brief note on its research focus, theoretical and methodological framing. Section 1.5 summaries the nine chapters of this thesis.

1.2 Impetus for the study

This study was prompted by several concerns: the poor quality of state schooling in India, a policy vision for a child-centred classroom, the literature on home-school literacy practices from other parts of the world, as well as a professional and personal desire to explore children’s literacy practices. I discuss each, in turn.

1.2.1 State schooling in India

The responsibility for providing free and compulsory education to all the 6-14-year-old children in India rests with the state. Of the children enrolled in school, a majority (66%) attend state schools (National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), 2017). State schools are also the primary providers of education for children belonging to socially marginalised groups (De et al., 2011; Sarangpani & Kumar, 2005). Thus, a
concern for the quality of state schooling is inextricably intertwined with a concern for social justice.

The World Development Report 2019 ranks countries based on a Human Capital Index which it calculates by accounting for how health and school education are contributing to the productivity of the country’s workforce (The World Bank, 2019). Of the 157 countries assessed in the report, India ranks 115, underscoring the poor quality of both basic health and school education provided to most of its children. Evidence of the low levels of learning in state schools is also provided by the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) published year after year since 2005. Particularly disquieting is the reading proficiency of children in the primary grades (Grades 1-5; ages 6-10): ASER 2018 estimates that only about 27% of the children in Grade 3 and 50% in Grade 5 can read a Grade 2 level text (Pratham, 2005-2018).

Research from different parts of India, including Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, has attributed the poor quality of state schooling to the predominance of teacher-led pedagogical practices which underscore rote and recitation in the classroom (Alexander, 2001; De et al., 2011; Majumdar & Mooij, 2012; Sarangapani, 2003; Sriprakash, 2012). Studies have also provided evidence of a deficit model of thinking, with teachers blaming the poor performance of children on their lack of intelligence and socio-economic conditions (Balagopalan, 2003; Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003; Majumdar & Mooij, 2012; Sarangapani, 2003; Sriprakash, 2012). Thus, research in Indian state schools illuminates teacher-led instruction and the ubiquity of deficit thinking within the education system.

1.2.2 The policy framework of school education in India

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 for school education in India (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2005) provides a very different vision for pedagogical activity in schools than that observed by researchers all over the country. It emphasises that “learning is active and social in its character” and gives primacy to a “child-centred pedagogy” where the “children’s experiences, their voices…their active
participation…and interests” get space in school (ibid, p.13). Consequently, it underscores the importance of “connecting [school] knowledge to life outside” (ibid, p. 5) and elaborates:

The child’s community and local environment form the primary context in which learning takes place, and in which knowledge acquires its significance. It is in interaction with the environment that the child constructs knowledge and derives meaning. This area has been neglected both in the conceptualisation of textbooks and in pedagogic practices. Hence, in this document, we emphasise the significance of contextualising education: of situating learning in the context of the child’s world, and of making the boundary between the school and its natural and social environment porous. This is not only because the local environment and the child’s own experiences are the best entry points, into the study of disciplines of knowledge, but more so because the aim of knowledge is to connect with the world. (ibid, p. 30)

Thus, NCF 2005 underscores children as active participants and considers their practices at home as resources for instruction. It also acknowledges that in India, largely speaking, these practices have not been utilised for curricular and pedagogical ends. If one takes cognisance of the deficit views that teachers hold, then it is not surprising that they tend not to look towards children’s homes for conceptual resources that can be used to enhance instruction. My review of the literature in Chapter 2 also does not identify any qualitative study which has illuminated on the home literacy practices of primary-aged children (ages 6-10) within India.

1.2.3 Contributions of research on home-school literacy practices

Researchers who have explored the literacy practices of children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in other parts of the world have found them to be productively engaging with print in their home contexts, often in contradiction with their learner identities at school (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Knobel & Lankshear, 2003; Rogers,
2003; Spencer, Knobel, & Lankshear, 2013). Others have been successful in identifying bodies of knowledge that lie in children’s families and peer cultures which can be utilised as resources for literacy instruction (Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a). Consequently, this body of research has gone a long way in challenging the deficit discourse shaping the school experiences of children belonging to marginalised backgrounds and has also provided conceptual resources to teachers for enriching their teaching. My study is very much in the spirit of this body of work.

1.2.4 A personal and professional aspiration

In addition to the factors discussed above, my reasons for undertaking this study are also professional and personal. With a firm belief that all children irrespective of caste, class, race, gender, and disability have a right to a good education and faith in the potential of education to improve human life, I started working with state schooling as a teacher educator in India in 2001. I initially worked with a small group of teachers in rural schools, observing their language teaching in the classroom for long periods and providing them with conceptual and material support for improving their practice. I then worked with a group of development professionals and university academics focusing on creating teaching-learning materials for children and teachers. During my 12 years of work, my interactions with children in schools have always affirmed my faith that all children have an immense capacity and desire to learn. However, much of the focus of my work was on teachers and teaching, and I got little opportunity to engage with children’s home learning.

Thus, undertaking this research is embedded in my faith that the keen learners I encountered in many classrooms are supported by caregivers who desire that their children learn to read and write, and are supporting them in varied ways to do so. It is also grounded in my need as a professional to design meaningful teaching-learning material for children which bridges the gap between their home and the school contexts and provide conceptual resources to teachers and teacher educators in India to improve literacy instruction.
1.2.5 Pulling the reasons together

State schooling in India predominantly caters for children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged households. It is plagued by poor learning levels of children, decontextualized nature of instruction, and a deficit model of thinking. On the other hand, NCF 2005 envisions learning as a child-centred process which needs to make space for children’s home experiences in the classroom. It also acknowledges that, in the past, these experiences have mostly, not been utilised for pedagogical and curricular ends. Research focused on the relationship between children’s home and school children’s literacy practices in different parts of the world, has provided alternate views of children’s capabilities and helped in providing conceptual resources for enriching literacy instruction. However, there is no known research from India which explores children’s home literacy practices and the few studies that engage with children’s school literacy practices restrict their focus to teaching.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices in one poor, rural village in India to address the fore mentioned gap in the literature and, subsequently, provide conceptual resources to teachers and teacher-educators for meaningful literacy instruction. It also wishes to challenge the deficit model of thinking shaping the views of many within state schools in India.

1.3 The definitions, research focus and theory

In this section, I offer my working definitions of the words: literacy, home, and school, because of their relevance to the focus of the study. I then outline the research focus and the theoretical ideas that frame this study.

1.3.1 Literacy

The word literacy is commonly used to refer to reading and writing (UNESCO, 2006). However, there is fluidity in the way the word has been interpreted by researchers. Kress and Street (2006) highlight that the word has been used as a metaphor to refer to one’s competence or ability to understand concepts, for instance, emotional literacy, computer literacy, and visual literacy. They argue against such a dilution of meaning and emphasise that the presence of
script is essential to the meaning of literacy. However, they also acknowledge that written texts are increasingly multimodal in current times, and any attempt to define literacy needs to make space for the spoken, visual, gestural, material, and spatial modes accompanying the written mode.

Researchers focusing on children’s early literacy learning also illustrate that multimodality is a key feature of children’s engagement with print. They provide evidence of children using talk, drawing and play when they are writing (Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a). Others wishing to give salience to a particular mode argue that there is a need to widen the meaning of the word *literacy* beyond the written mode. For Flewitt (2008), children’s oral renditions and their story listening are their multimodal literacies. Others view literacy as material. For instance, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) describe children’s literacies as “artefactual” where the object or artefact that the child has created forms the basis on which stories are told. On a similar note, Kuby, Rucker and Kirchhofer (2015) give time and space to children to play with materials during writing workshop time and refer to children’s interactions with materials as writing.

Yet others underscore the importance of pretend-play as a key resource for literacy learning. This is evident when Wohlwend’s (2011) identifies play as a literacy, “a live-action text among multiple players that invests materials and pretended meanings and slips the constraints of here-and-now realities” (p. 2). She further posits that play is a “literacy of possibilities” (Wohlwend, 2015) and a “tactic” (Wohlwend, 2011) in the hands of a sensitive teacher who allows children to reimagine their worlds, reposition themselves in empowered positions in the classroom and, in the process, enhance their relationship with reading and writing.

In India, policy documents continue to identify literacy as "the ability to read and write" (Government of India, 2020, p. 7; National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2005). So, this study considers it important to define literacy in a manner that does not lose its ties to script but also makes space for other semiotic resources valuable to children. Consequently, it views the definition for multimodal literacy provided by Heath and Street
(2008, pp. 21–22): “events and practices in which the written mode is still salient, yet embedded in other modes” as useful for its purposes, and draws on it for identifying literacy events.

1.3.2 Home and school

The home and school are both physical and conceptual spaces within which children learn to engage with print. Illuminating on this distinction, Pahl and Rowsell (2005) identify the home and school are “sites” as well as “domains”. They define a *site* as the “place where the literacy practice is actually engaged with” and *domain* as “the sphere where a literacy practice originally was created and used” (ibid, p. 50). Barton and Hamilton (2000) make a helpful addition to the meaning of the word *domain* when they describe it as “structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned” (p. 11). Thus, for researchers who have explored the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices, the home and school are both physical locations and rule-governed worlds which shape children’s practices.

Both these interpretations of the words are relevant to this current study. I discuss how these words have been utilised in this study, first as sites and then as domains. Being cognisant that the village was home to not only each child’s nuclear family but also their paternal lineage, and that children’s daily activities, including household chores and play, occurred beyond the physical space of their house (also discussed in Chapter 4), in this study the home as a site refers to the village. The school, on the other hand, refers to the clearly defined area of the school building and playground. Consequently, the words home and school have been used in the research questions (stated in the next sub-section) indicate the meaning of the words as sites.

However, when I examine the literacy practices, the domain-specific meanings of the words become relevant. Previous studies which have explored children’s home and school literacy practices have identified the *home* as the domain which is governed by the rules of caregivers, the *school*
by those of the teachers (Gregory & Williams, 2000) and peer cultures¹ by the children’s rules (Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a). This study also uses these words with a similar intention.

1.4 The research focus, theory, and methodology

Through this study, I explore the home and school literacy practices of five children living in a resource-poor, rural village in India, engaging in greater detail with those of two of the children. I also shine a light on the beliefs of caregivers and teachers’ shaping children’s literacy practices. Drawing on sociocultural theory (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Rogoff, 1995, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), I appreciate that these practices hold both cultural and personal meanings. In the same vein, I draw on New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1990, 2012; Street, 1984, 1988, 1995) in conceptualising literacy as a cultural and purposeful practice. Consequently, I explore how children’s home and school literacy practices are being culturally and personally shaped.

Methodologically, the present study is embedded in ethnography which enables researchers to become insiders to the practices of their participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This was crucial for me because I was an outsider to the children’s world in various ways. My age, socio-economic background, education as well as my residence in an urban area led the children to initially view me as a teacher, and it was the tools of ethnography that helped me to negotiate a space for myself as a non-teacher, friendly adult in their worlds. Consequently, I used participant observation of children’s literacy practices and open-ended conversations as primary methods of data collection. I supplemented these with interviews with children’s caregivers and teachers. Finally, it was my relationships with the participant children and the access that they allowed me to their lives that also encouraged me to write the two more-detailed child-focussed case studies.

¹ Corsaro and Eder (1990) define peer culture as “a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers” (p.197).
1.5 Outline of the thesis

The concluding section of this chapter outlines how the thesis has been organised in the form of its nine chapters. This chapter discussed the wider context the study and my rationale for undertaking it. It also introduced the focus of the study and the theoretical and methodological ideas that underpin it.

Chapter 2 reviews sociocultural research that explores the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices. It also justifies the study’s choices about theory, methodology and research focus. Consequently, it identifies the gaps in literature and the key themes that this study wishes to explore.

Chapter 3 discusses the sociocultural concepts that frame this study. These include conceptualisations of learning and literacy as well as the theoretical constructs that have been used to examine the nature of children’s literacy practices and the beliefs of parents and teachers. The chapter also articulates the research questions for the study.

Chapter 4 discusses the rationale for being methodologically rooted in ethnography in the context of the emerging research questions. It also provides a reflexive account of the choices that I have made during the process of data collection, analysis, and writing.

Chapters 5 to 9 present the findings of the study which, at times, differ in their focus, and, at times, in the manner of analysis. Chapter 5 focuses on the adults, that is, the teachers and caregivers, and investigates how their beliefs are shaping children’s literacy practices. Chapter 6 shifts its focus to the children, exploring the cultural and personal nature of their literacy practices by undertaking a cross-case analysis of these practices in the light of the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Subsequently, it underscores the need for theoretical concepts to examine the data. Chapters 7 and 8 present the in-case analysis of two of the five participant children’s literacy practices to highlight the personal nature of their practices. Chapter 7 focuses on Krish, one of the male participant children who was a fluent reader and Chapter 8 on
Pooja, one of the female participant children who did not seem to be choosing to read. Chapter 9 examines the cultural nature of children's practices and concludes with a discussion by drawing on it.

Chapter 10 presents the conclusions to the study. It addresses the research questions. It highlights the contributions that the study makes to theory, methodology, research, policy, and practice. It also discusses the generalisability of the findings and makes recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Mapping the empirical terrain

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review sociocultural research that explores the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices and subsequently, outlines the research focus for the study. However, before I undertake this review, I provide an overview of the body of research that focuses on home-school relationships to justify my choices with respect to research focus, theory, and methodology. Relevant review papers (Hall, 2013; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Knobel & Lankshear, 2003; Marsh, 2010; Nag, Snowling, & Asfaha, 2016; Spencer et al., 2013), handbooks (Hall, Cremin, Comber, & Moll, 2013; Hall, Larson, & Marsh, 2003; Larson & Marsh, 2013; Morrow, Rueda, & Lapp, 2009; Rowsell & Pahl, 2015), journals (for instance, Literacy and The Journal of Early Childhood Literacy) and databases (ERIC, Education Research Complete and Academic Research Complete) have been used to locate studies. Reflecting my participant children’s stage of schooling, this overview restricts itself to studies which focus on children who are attending primary school (Grade 1-5, ages 5-11).

Section 2.2 summarises the body of literature in terms of its geographical spread and demographic focus, and Section 2.3 based on its theoretical and methodological underpinnings. Section 2.4 turns its attention to sociocultural research, and it is in this section that a deeper engagement with individual studies is undertaken. As a result, this section forms a substantial portion of the chapter. Building on this section, Section 2.5 highlights the gap in the literature and consequently, outlines my research focus. Section 2.6 departs from this body of work and reviews studies focused on the teaching-learning interaction in state schools in India to provide the reader with a framework within which literacy instruction in India can be viewed. Finally, Section 2.6 provides a summary of the chapter.
2.2 Geographical and demographic overview

Research on the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices goes back to the early 1980s. The earliest studies were undertaken in North America (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) and the region accounts for much of the research on this subject even today (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2007; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a, 2016b, 2018; Hicks, 2002; Li, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers, 2003; Rogers, Tyson, & Marshall, 2000; Volk & de Acosta, 2001; Voss, 1996). Over the years, researchers from other parts of the world including, United Kingdom (Gregory, 2001; Gregory et al., 2007; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Long et al., 2007; Marsh, 2016; Maybin, 2007; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007; Williams, 2004), Canada (Li, 2002, 2006; McTavish, 2009, 2014), Australia (Freebody et al., 1995), Peru (de la Piedra, 2009), South Africa (Kajee, 2011; Stein & Slominsky, 2006), Kenya (Lisanza, 2011), Ghana and Zimbabwe (Ngwaru & Opoku-Amankwa, 2010), Iran (Oates, 2009) and India (Sahni, 1994) have also contributed to the growing body of scholarship in this area.

Much of this research has focused on families viewed within a deficit discourse by the school system and larger society. Consequently, most researchers in North America, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia have explored the literacy practices of children belonging to working-class, ethnic minority families (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2007; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013; Freebody et al., 1995; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Heath, 1983; Li, 2007, 2002; Long, Volk, & Gregory, 2007; McTavish, 2009; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers, 2003; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Volk & de Acosta, 2001) and working-class, white families (Freebody et al., 1995; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Li, 2007; Marsh, 2016; Maybin, 2007; McTavish, 2014). Only a few have investigated the literacy practices of middle-class children (Heath, 1983; Li, 2006; Taylor, 1983; Voss, 1996).

Researchers in South America, Africa and Asia have also shown interest in poor or working-class households, and just one study explores the literacy practices of children in both working and middle-class homes (Stein & Slominsky, 2006). Like most previous studies, the focus of my research is also
on families who are poor and belong to a cultural and linguistic minority community in India. Consequently, from the next section onwards, this review prioritises studies which focus on the literacy practices of children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Most researchers who have investigated the home-school relationship have shown interest in the literacy practices of 5-8 year-olds, with few focusing on children in the 9-11 age category (Gregory, 2001; Li, 2006, 2007; Maybin, 2007; Voss, 1996). This perhaps is not surprising since the home-school relationship is considered particularly important in the earlier years of schooling when children are expected to learn how to read and write. However, researchers have argued that the trajectory of literacy learning for children belonging to poor and working-class backgrounds, especially those that belong to cultural and linguistic minority communities, may be different from those of privileged backgrounds (Portes & Salas, 2009). This situation is also the case in this study; its 10-year-old participant children include both successful and struggling literacy learners.

To summarise, this investigation builds on previous studies, in sharing the predominant focus on children from a socio-economically disadvantaged background. However, very little of this research has been concerned with the literacy practices of children in the Indian sub-continent, and this study makes important contributions in this respect.

2.3 Theoretical and methodological overview

Researchers in this body of literature have pursued three lines of inquiry: They have focused on (1) children’s home literacy practices; (2) children’s school literacy practices; and (3) the beliefs of parents and teachers influencing these literacy practices. Those who have explored children’s home literacy practices form the largest part of this literature (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; de la Piedra, 2009; Freebody et al., 1995; Gregory, 2001; Gregory et al., 2007; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2002; Kajee, 2011; Long et al., 2007; Ngwaru & Opoku-Amankwa, 2010; Oates, 2009; Purcell-Gates, 1995; R. Rogers, 2003; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007; Stein & Slominsky, 2006; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Volk & de Acosta, 2001), with fewer
focusing on children’s school practices (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018; Freebody et al., 1995; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Lisanza, 2011; Marsh, 2016; McTavish, 2009; Sahni, 1994; Volk & de Acosta, 2001) and fewest on adult beliefs (Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2007; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002, 2007; Rogers et al., 2000; Volk & de Acosta, 2001).

Furthermore, very few researchers have also explored both home and school literacy practices (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Freebody et al., 1995; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Volk & de Acosta, 2001) and fewer still have investigated both practices and adult beliefs (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). Moreover, researchers who have focused on both practices and beliefs have restricted their focus to reading. This current study focuses on both children’s practices and adult beliefs, and in doing so, does not restrict itself to reading. Consequently, it is possibly the first study with such a broad focus.

This body of research provides evidence of considerable theoretical hybridity. Studies have been framed by sociocultural theory (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018; Gregory et al., 2007; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002, 2007; Lisanza, 2011; Long et al., 2007; Sahni, 1994; Williams, 2004), sociolinguistics (Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2007; Freebody et al., 1995; Heath, 1983; Maybin, 2007; Rogers, 2003; Rogers et al., 2000; Volk & de Acosta, 2001), multimodality (Marsh, 2016; McTavish, 2009, 2014; Stein & Slominsky, 2006) and sociological theory (Rowsell & Pahl, 2007). It is, however, sociocultural research which has paid attention to uncovering the concurrently cultural and purposeful nature of children’s literacy practices. Sociolinguists have restricted their focus to culture and multimodal researchers have often explored children’s interests.

Though theoretically diverse, methodologically, this body of research is marked with unity. Many of the studies adopt an ethnographic approach, a few use case study methodology (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Kajee, 2011; McTavish, 2009, 2014; Oates, 2009; Rogers et al., 2000) and one uses the general label “qualitative” (Ngwaru & Opoku-Amankwa, 2010). The predominance of ethnography in this field of research is not surprising since the focus here is on understanding the nature of children’s engagements with
print. So, observing these practices in naturalistic settings and understanding the beliefs of the various stakeholders, in situ, become prerequisites to this type of investigation. With a similar intent, my study is also grounded in ethnography.

Framed by ethnography, most studies have also engaged with a small number of participants over a relatively long period. Many have collected data from a few families, generally up to four, examining the literacy practices of one child within each family. The few researchers who have focused on 10 or more children seem to have been able to do so because they have worked as a part of a team (Freebody et al., 1995) or allowed participants to record their own literacy practices (Gregory & Williams, 2000). Working alone on my PhD study, I have also focused on five children and written case-studies of two.

To sum up, this study is both similar and different from past research that has explored the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices. It is in line with research which draws on sociocultural theory and ethnography, but has a broader focus, exploring both home and school literacy practices as well as adult beliefs shaping these practices.

### 2.4 Review of sociocultural research

This section focuses on sociocultural studies that have investigated children’s home and school literacy practices. However, before reviewing the findings of these studies, I introduce them by providing details about their focus, participants, and methods.

In their 4-year-long research, Gregory and Williams (2000) explored the home and school reading practices of 5-7-year-old children in six white and seven Bangladeshi families in England. They used “ethnographic techniques” including participant observation and interviews to collect data. Consequently, they observed children in their English classrooms, their Quran, and Bengali classrooms, as well as when they were reading at home. They also undertook semi-structured interviews with the children, their mothers, and their teachers. All the data were recorded using audio and video devices. In a subsequent year-long study, these researchers expanded their focus to eight white and
eight Bangladeshi families and 46 children aged 4-11, focusing particularly on the reading interactions between siblings and their school-play (Long et al., 2007; Williams, 2004). In yet another study, spread over a year again, they examined reading practices of 3-6-year-old children and their grandparents in three white and six Bangladeshi families (Gregory et al., 2007). The children and their families were also allowed to record data in the subsequent studies, and all studies were supported by research assistants of Bangladeshi origin (Gregory & Ruby, 2010).

Framed by a case study methodology, Azuara and Reyes’s (2011) explored both reading and writing practices of a 7-year-old girl in a rural village in Mexico. The first author undertook fieldwork through two rounds of 6-month-long data collection, spread over two years. The first round involved building relationships with the participant child and her family as well as collecting preliminary data about her everyday activities and literacy practices, while the second involved staying in the village and observing the child at home and school. All the participant observation and interview data were recorded in the form of field-notes, and with audio and video devices.

Different from the previous two studies, Li (2002, 2007) restricted her focus to children’s home literacy practices. During her 9-month-long ethnography focusing on the literacy practices of 6-7-year old children in four Chinese families in Canada, the researcher observed the children’s practices during her weekly visits, but largely, seems to have talked to parents about them (Li, 2002). She adopted a similar research design in her subsequent 2-month-long study, focusing on the practices of 11-12-year-old children in two Vietnamese, two Sudanese and two white families in North America (Li, 2007). Through her studies, Li (2002, 2007) provided a cultural description of children’s practices by drawing largely on her interview data.

Other researchers have solely focused on children’s school literacy practices. Framed by ethnography, Dyson’s (1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018) studies explored children’s school writing practices in North America. In each of her, year-long studies, the researcher investigated the practices of a few 6-8-year-old children (1-6 in number) belonging to socioeconomically disadvantaged
backgrounds. She observed children’s literacy practices during their composition time, and sometimes also observed them in the playgrounds. She recorded data using audio-devices and fieldnotes.

Again, with a focus on children’s school practices, Sahni (1994) provided an “ethnographic description and analysis” of both the reading and writing practices of Grade 2-3 children studying in a school in a rural village in India. She observed children’s practices for over a month and a half and interviewed parents and teachers. On a similar note, Lisanza’s (2011) “ethnographic case study” focused on the literacy practices of 5-8-year-old children in Grade 1 classroom in Kenya. Data collection spread over two and a half months and included participant observation of children’s practices and parent and teacher interviews.

Thus, all these sociocultural studies are either rooted in ethnography or use ethnographic techniques to collect data. However, few have explored both home and school literacy practices, and none have investigated the beliefs of parents and teachers in middle- and low-income countries. Moreover, none of these studies provide insight into the home literacy practices of children in the Indian sub-continent, which is the focus of my study. Having introduced these studies, I now turn to discuss their findings.

2.4.1 Diverse school literacy practices in high-income countries

In their review of research on literacy instruction in North America, United Kingdom and Australia, Hall (2013) elucidates that effective literacy teachers in this part of the world balance and integrate “the learning of the codes of written language with uses and purposes of literacy that are meaningful to the learner” (p. 524). Consequently, they provide “authentic literacy experiences” embedded in good literature, curricular content areas, and the children’s life experiences and interests (ibid, p. 526). She argues they also allow children to read and write in a variety of ways including “partner reading, shared reading, independent reading and book choosing” and compose in “journals and workshop settings” (ibid, p. 526). Thus, effective literacy teachers in high-income countries are known to use balanced approaches to literacy instruction which encourage children to participate in classrooms.
Despite the teachers’ faith in these methods in these countries, researchers have argued that adherence to market-driven policies that necessitate standardised testing in schools compels teachers to emphasize literacy skills to the detriment of meaning, allowing less space for children’s interests in the classroom (Dyson, 2013, 2016a; Street, 2000). So, it is unsurprising that, sociocultural researchers who have explored children’s school literacy practices in high-income nations have also found teachers using meaning-based methods, with varied emphasis on skills to cater to neoliberal policy mandates.

In their exploration of reading practices in two schools in England, Gregory and Williams (2000) provide evidence of the children in both schools being taught to read for pleasure. They were taught to engage with various linguistic cues (phonological, semantic, and syntactic) within the context of “meaningful texts”. The teachers also asked them to reflect on and interpret the texts based on their own experiences and provided them with opportunities to read for different purposes. At the same time, one of the teachers also explicitly focused on skills instruction using reading scheme books to adhere to policy regulations about teaching and testing. Thus, Gregory and Williams (2000) provide evidence of children reading by engaging with adult practices and their own practices. However, unlike this current study, they did not focus on individual children, and thus, their unique practices and purposes were not documented.

Undertaking a child-focused examination of children’s literacy practices in multiple child-centred primary classrooms in North America, Dyson (1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018) highlighted children’s own writing practices as their interests. In her earlier work, she focused on classrooms where teachers were working with a “permeable curriculum” allowing children to engage with these practices by writing what they wished and in their own manner (Dyson, 1997, 2003). Subsequently, she identified these practices as “hybrid” with children adapting/improvising their school-mandated tasks by drawing on the knowledge of their home, school, and peer culture practices, for instance, about superheroes, sports events, and church songs to write for their
purposes. She also recognised these practices as “playful” embedded in children’s sense of belonging in their worlds, their childhood/peer cultures, where the ‘rules’ allow children to imaginatively borrow, blend, and challenge practices from their various cultural worlds for their own purposes.

In one of these studies, Dyson (1997) focussed on two African American children, a boy, and a girl, who were struggling with literacy. She observed the children compose and ‘direct’ their stories about superheroes during authors’ theatre. She found the boy’s strong desire to compose to belong to a group of white boys and the girl’s desire to write to challenge cultural storylines, shaping their participation. So, when the boy’s compositions were enacted in the classroom by his classmates, he allotted more roles to his ‘friends’, had few roles for girls, and ‘girlfriends’ were always “slender, well dressed, and white” (ibid, p. 55). On the other hand, the girl wrote stories in which she took on the role of the ‘bad guy’. She also demanded to be the bad guy in the boy’s story. Over time, both the children took note of the feedback they got from their peers about their stories. The boy cast boys and girls in equal number, let girls be bad guys and stopped stereotyping girlfriends, and the girl moved to composing stories with strong female characters. So, in this study, Dyson (1997) showed the two children’s composition interests to be hybrid with the children improvising their school’s writing practices by drawing on those of their peer culture. She also recognised these hybrid practices as playful, rooted in their peer-cultures where the rules allowed children to do so. Finally, she highlighted children’s goals as framed by their various identities.

In her examination of children’s practices, Dyson (1997) also illustrated that these practices were not benign and reproduced inequitable social relationships, like those rooted in age, gender, class, and race, visible in society. She acknowledged that this presented challenges for instruction but argued that the presence of a teacher who encouraged a healthy dialogue between children about these inequities, contributed to building a more inclusive and reflective classroom.

In her subsequent work, Dyson (2013) shifted her focus to examining children’s practices in not-so-permeable classrooms where teachers were
focusing on helping children master the writing “basics” required by standardised tests. She provides accounts of classrooms where the purposes for writing were being defined by the teachers, with children being asked to compose about their ‘real’ life experiences of birthday parties, movie-outings and restaurant visits, experiences which were not reflected in the lives of those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. She also documents teachers instructing children to compose without ‘copying’ from one another and to write more and draw less. However, she found the children co-opting the teachers’ practices as their own by writing about imaginary birthday parties and outings by sharing ideas with each other, taking note of each other’s wishes, and heeding the writing basics required by their curriculum in collaboration with their friends, in these classrooms. Consequently, in these classrooms as well, Dyson (2013) described the children’s composition practices as “collegial”, that is, embedded in their desire to be a part of their peer cultures.

Finally, in her most recent work, Dyson (2018) explored the journey of a 5-year-old African boy from his play-based nursery to his test-driven kindergarten classroom. Different from the nursery, she observed the boy undertake alphabet-based tasks and writing exercises set by his teacher, at kindergarten. She also observed the kindergarten, not making adequate space for the boy’s practices as a member of a resource-poor, African community, and his need to collaborate with his peers. Consequently, Dyson (2018) concluded that while the boy engaged with writing skills required by his teacher to belong within her classroom, his desire to write blossomed when he was drawing on his own practices and again, identified these practices motivated by the child’s desire to belong within his peer cultures.

Summing up, sociocultural researchers who have explored children’s school literacy practices in high-income nations have focussed on either reading or writing. These practices included practices rooted in the adult world or the child’s world. Exploring the practices of particular children in child-centred classrooms in North America, Dyson (1997, 2003) highlighted children’s own writing practices as their interests, identifying them as hybrid, improvised
practices that drew on children’s multiple cultural repertoires. She also observed them to be culturally playful, framed by the rules of their peer cultures. In addition, Dyson (2018) found evidence of a child’s engagement with practices of the adult world to be rooted in his desire to belong within an inclusive relationship with his teacher. Like Dyson (1997, 2003, 2018), the present study also explores the practices of a few children to highlight children’s practices as their interests and extends its focus to reading.

2.4.2 Uniformity in literacy practices in middle- and low-income countries

In their review of research on literacy instruction in low- and middle-income countries in Asia, Africa, North and South America, Nag, Snowling and Asfaha (2016) illuminate the predominance of teacher-led, skill-based instruction in these regions with reading being limited to decoding and writing to copying. Sociocultural researchers who have explored children’s literacy practices in these regions provide evidence of children engaging with these adult practices.

In their exploration of the school literacy practices of their 7-year-old participant child in Mexico, Azuara and Reyes (2011) noted that reading was “about decoding, and writing about tracing clear letters” (p. 187). They further explained that reading instruction had a whole-classroom focus, including choral reading and round-robin reading, and the only texts available to read were the short passages in the textbook provided by the government. Subsequently, they described the participant child as a “passive” learner in the classroom.

On a similar note, the literacy practices of 51 children in a Grade 2-3 classroom in a school in rural India observed by Sahni (1994) involved reciting word-by-word after their teacher while pointing to the text in their textbooks. All reading in this class was also restricted to the small selection of texts provided in the textbook and writing to copying sentences from it. Library books were available but were not given to the children, lest they be torn. Consequently, the researcher emphasised that literacy was viewed as a “neutral, technical skill— writing as symbolically encoding not meanings but
sounds and reading as decoding phonics” (ibid, p.74). She also noted that while the teacher made no space for children’s literacy practices during class-time, the children’s “unofficial” practices included talking to each other about the pictures in their textbook and helping each other read texts during their free-time.

The situation was no different in Kenya where Lisanza (2011) observed a teacher undertaking basal tasks with the 89, 5-8-year-olds in her class. She asked them to read syllables, words, and sentences to her as well as copy words and sentences from their textbook and blackboard. Like in the Indian classroom, this teacher’s “official” practices did not make space for children’s interests. The children, however, engaged in their own literacy practices during their free-time, drawing and writing about their home experiences, for instance, vehicles.

To recapitulate, sociocultural studies that have explored children’s school literacy practices in low-and middle-income countries have focussed on both reading and writing. These researchers found children engaging with adult practices during teaching-time and their own literacy practices in the absence of teachers. However, they did not undertake a child-focussed examination of the former to illuminate children’s individual practices and purposes, as has been done in the current study.

2.4.3 Diversity in home literacy practices

Researchers have provided accounts of children’s home literacy practices to be culturally grounded in both the adult world and their world. In their exploration children’s reading practices, Gregory and Williams (2000) observed Bangladeshi children learning to read the Quran, and Bengali, their home language, in community classes in England. They found children memorising the Arabic and Bengali alphabet and repeating the Quran and Bengali language primers after their teachers, in these classrooms. Children were expected to read with accuracy and those who were not persevering with their learning were susceptible to punishment. Grandmothers in Bangladeshi homes were also observed helping children memorise the religious and moral choras by asking them to recite after them (Gregory et al.,
As in the Quran classrooms, this practice also required children to pay attention to the text and repeat after the grandmother with accuracy in intonation, vocabulary, and style. Consequently, the researchers described these practices as “serious” in nature requiring children to unquestioningly adhere to adult ways of reading.

Writing practices of a similar nature were observed by Azuara and Reyes (2011) in their investigation of the literacy practices of a 7-year-old girl in a village in Mexico. These practices involved copying letters that her mother used to write regularly, thanking a donor agency for the material support their family received. These researchers go on to argue that the girl’s practices were not of interest to her and evidenced her “passive” participation (ibid, p. 188). So, both Gregory and Williams (2000) and Azuara and Reyes (2011) illuminate on the passive nature of these practices.

Researchers have also documented children’s own literacy practices at home. Children in both white and Bangladeshi families were observed reading at home by Gregory and Williams (2000). In Bangladeshi homes, older siblings read English stories to younger ones, as did their teachers in their schools. However, in engaging with these “booksharing” practices, they did not only use strategies that they had learnt in their English classrooms (echoing, chunking of expressions and predicting) but also those in their Bengali and Arabic classes (repetitions and fast-paced reading). They also did not ask their younger siblings to engage with illustrations and emphasised accuracy like in their Bengali classes. Consequently, the researchers described these literacy practices as “syncretic” because children were blending their different home and school literacy practices to read for their purposes. At the same time, they identified these practices to be of a “serious” nature because children were drawing on their home reading practices and enacting “roles of the learner and teacher” which were “clearly defined and not negotiable” (Gregory and Williams, 2000, p.177).

Thus, this examination of children’s booksharing practices seems to have led to a conflation between the cultural roots of these practices and children’s motivations for engaging with them. These practices were, arguably, playful in
nature, framed by the children’s own world, that is, their peer cultures, where
the rules allowed children to adapt practices of their various cultural worlds to
read for their own purposes. Thus, the identification of children’s syncretic
practices as serious in nature might have been avoided with the use of
theoretical concepts to identify the cultural nature of children’s practices and
their goals.

Unlike the Bangladeshi children, the white children read individually for
pleasure, as at school but also drew on the reading practices of their home
and peer cultures, in the process. The children shared reading interests, for
instance, in nature and wildlife, with their parents and grandparents who also
acted as “guiding lights” for them by buying books and acting as role models.
They also read comics and other popular culture texts, practices they shared
with their friends, but not encouraged at school. So, while the researchers did
not identify these practices as syncretic and playful, they were plausibly so,
with children drawing on the practices of their various cultural worlds to read
for pleasure, providing evidence of the roots of children’s practices within their
peer cultures.

The writing practices of the 7-year-old girl were also documented by Azuara
and Reyes (2011) as “hybrid” and “play”. The girl had learnt to write letters at
school and used to regularly copy letters that her mother wrote at home
(discussed previously). Subsequently, when she wrote a letter to her cousin in
play, she did not include any of the formal features of letter-writing that she
had been taught at school and delivered the letter in an envelope, as at home.
At the same time, she wrote the message neatly, repeating the same
sentence structure as at school. The letter was also written in Spanish, but all
her interactions with her cousin were in Maya.

Both Gregory and Williams (2000) and Azuara and Reyes (2011) also
observed children engaging with print while playing school. When older
siblings played school with younger ones in the Bangladeshi homes, the
researchers observed topics like homophones and spellings being taught with
meticulous detail, the ‘teacher’ testing her students, and unquestioning
respect for the teacher being emphasised. At the same time, the testing was
light-hearted, and the ‘teacher’ praised the students, modelled correct answers, provided explanations, and did not expect children to repeat after her. Consequently, the researchers argued that this play was “syncretic” because children were blending the serious elements of their Bengali and Quran classes with the less-serious elements of their English classrooms.

School-play was of a similar nature when Azuara and Reyes (2011) observed cousins play school in Mexico. However, on this occasion, the children did not have any toys and used pieces of wood to construct the teacher’s table, and their old notebooks to take attendance and assign writing work. While playing, children were reading and writing in Spanish, the school language, and the oral interaction was in Maya, the home language. Consequently, the researchers identified these practices as “hybrid” because children were using both their home and school languages in play.

Summing up, sociocultural researchers have found children’s home literacy practices to be culturally embedded in the adult world or their own world. The former were described as serious by Gregory and Williams (2000) as they required children to adhere to the practices of adults. The latter were identified as syncretic or hybrid with children blending their home, school, and/or peer cultures’ practices. However, only the writing practices were recognised as playful. Different from these researchers, the current study undertakes a child-focussed examination of children’s home literacy practices, both reading and writing, to highlight their personal practices and goals.

2.4.4 Parent and teacher beliefs about literacy and learning

Sociocultural research has also shed light on the beliefs of caregivers and teachers in high-income countries (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002, 2007). The voices of the parents emphasise a teacher-centred understanding of literacy instruction. Drawing on their school experiences in China rooted in Confucian ideology, caregivers in the four Chinese families in Li’s (2002) study believed that literacy instruction in the early grades needed to emphasise correct pronunciation, spelling and grammar, and memorisation of texts in the later years. They also expressed disappointment that their children’s school in Canada did not use basal methods. On a similar note, the
Vietnamese and Sudanese parents in Li’s (2007) later study in North America also expected children who were struggling with reading to sound-out words while they were reading. They also wanted children to copy these words so that they could learn to spell and pronounce them correctly.

These studies also found that parents’ viewed learning as a serious endeavour in which the meaning of the text and the authority of the provider of text-meaning, the teacher, could not be questioned. Again, drawing on Confucian ideology, the Chinese parents in Li’s (2002) study underscored the authority of the text and required teachers to ‘teach’ children. Consequently, they viewed the school’s play-based methods of learning as enjoyable for children but did not believe that these contributed to their learning. Moreover, they expected their children to persevere and be disciplined learners. On a similar note, the Bangladeshi mothers in Gregory and Williams’s (2000) study conceived of reading in relation to reading the Quran and schoolwork and regarded these as serious activities in which the authority of text and teacher were non-negotiable. The Vietnamese and Sudanese parents in Li’s (2007) study also believed that the schools need to emphasise discipline and permit physical punishment.

In contrast to the views of the parents, teachers have been found to believe in child-centred approaches to literacy instruction. In their review of literature from high-income nations, Hall (2013) provides evidence of effective literacy teachers in North America, United Kingdom and Australia expressing their agreement with balanced approaches to literacy instruction. The two teachers in Gregory and Williams’s (2000) study also believed in teaching children to read for pleasure, allowing them to read for different purposes and encouraging them to interpret texts in multiple ways by drawing on their experiences.

To summarise, studies provide evidence of a cultural mismatch between the beliefs of parents and teachers about literacy instruction and learning in high-income nations. The former may tend to view literacy instruction as adult-led and learning as a serious endeavour in which the authority of the text and consequently, the teacher, cannot be questioned. On the other hand, the
latter might value learner-centred approaches to literacy instruction underpinned by a similar view of learning. However, this literature does not illuminate on the beliefs of caregivers and teachers in low- and middle-income nations.

### 2.5 Teaching and learning in state schools in India

Much of the research within elementary classes in state schools in India has taken place in the past 20 years. This research has largely focussed on teaching and not learning, and has been framed by psychological ideas, though a few studies have been rooted in sociology (Sarangapani, 2003) and sociocultural theory (Arvind, 2008; Sahni, 1994). Researchers have often examined teaching over multiple grades and subjects (Alexander, 2001; Clarke, 2003; Majumdar & Mooij, 2012; Sarangapani, 2003). However, research on teachers’ beliefs shaping instruction is scarce (Sriprakash, 2012).

Researchers who have examined classroom instruction, consistently point to two important features of instruction. First, they describe school knowledge to be of decontextualised nature, dominated by “fact transmission” and “propositional knowledge” (Alexander, 2001, p. 558; Arvind, 2008; Sarangapani, 2003). Second, they identify instruction to be teacher-led (Alexander, 2001; Arvind, 2008; De et al., 2011; Majumdar & Mooij, 2012; Sarangapani, 2003) with teachers attesting to their firm belief in their authority as providers of knowledge in the classroom (Sarangapani, 2003; Sriprakash, 2012).

Based on her ethnographic exploration of teaching in Science and Social Science classrooms in Grades 4 and 5, Sarangapani (2003) connects these two features of classroom instruction. She argues that a decontextualised view of knowledge gets strength from the child’s faith in the teacher’s authority, explaining that “for verbal testimony to function as knowledge and to be able to transmit knowledge, belief in the speaker is essential” (ibid, p. 192). She goes on to provide a nuanced explanation of teacher authority in Indian classrooms, identifying the source of this authority to be not only epistemic, that is, originating from the teacher’s command over subject and pedagogy, but also moral with its roots in the adult-child, parent-child, guru-shishya,
patron-protégé relationships and in the teacher’s belief that she is a patriot/martyr. I summarise Sarangapani’s (2003) framing of teacher authority in Table 2.1 (on the next page) and draw on it in Chapter 5 to discuss caregiver and teacher beliefs about teacher authority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of teacher authority</th>
<th>Social Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult-child</strong></td>
<td>The adult-child relationship forms the base of all other relationships. The child is an adult in the making and adults are naturally placed ahead of the child because of their larger knowledge of the world. Thus, adults are identified as providers of knowledge and children are positioned as the receivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-child</strong></td>
<td>Parents have absolute authority over the child and their actions are for the betterment of the child. Like the parents, the teacher also has the best interests of the child at heart and may even physically punish the child. Thus, parents are positioned as authority figures and children are expected to be obedient subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guru-shishya</strong></td>
<td>According to Hindu traditions of teaching and learning, the <em>guru</em> is the revered holder of knowledge, and the student is the <em>shishya</em>, an obedient disciple. In turn, the interaction between the two is characterised by the transmission of knowledge from the <em>guru</em> to the <em>shishya</em>. Thus, <em>gurus</em> are positioned as the providers of knowledge and children as the receivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patron-protégé</strong></td>
<td>Teachers are culturally superior to children and their families by virtue of, for example, their caste, class, and urban residence. Consequently, they position themselves as benevolent patrons who are providing cultural knowledge to their protégés, the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher as patriot/martyr</strong></td>
<td>Teachers position themselves as “good citizens” who are selflessly working for the betterment of the society and nation, often, in contrast to the students and their families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: A summary of facets of teacher authority provided by Sarangapani
Thus, according to Sarangapani (2003) teachers in state schools in India derive their authority from being the adult-parent-gurus who are identified as the knowledge-givers in society. They also position themselves as culturally and morally superior to the children and their families.

With teachers providing evidence of their firm belief in their authority over children through their words and actions, it is, perhaps, not surprising that researchers have also observed them using corporal punishment in the classroom (Alexander, 2001; Dyer, 2008; Majumdar & Mooij, 2012; Sahni, 1994; Sarangapani, 2003). Multiple studies have also found teachers voicing deficit views about parents, believing them to be incapable of providing a conducive home environment because of their poverty, illiteracy and perceived disinterest in education (Balagopalan, 2003; Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003; Dyer, 2008; Majumdar & Mooij, 2012; Sahni, 1994; Sarangapani, 2003; Sriprakash, 2012). So, research which has focussed on the teaching-learning interaction in Indian classrooms illuminates the ubiquity of decontextualised instruction and belief in teacher authority, which is, conceivably, influenced by a deficit discourse framing the children and their families.

2.5.1 Home and school literacy practices

There is a dearth of research on children’s literacy practices in India (Sinha, 2010). Echoing the larger body of school research, much of this literacy research uses the practices of the adults, be it the teacher or parent, to build a picture of children’s learning experiences. While some research on school literacy practices is framed by sociocultural ideas (Sahni, 1994 discussed in Section 2.4.2 and Gupta, 2013 discussed later), the remaining studies found following a review of available literature that focus on children’s home literacy practices adopt a cognitive or socio-cognitive lens and tend to restrict their focus to an urban population which constitutes only about 27% of India (Government of India, 2011c).

in 25 Grade 1 (age 6) classrooms in urban schools in Gujrat. She observed Gujrati instruction to be dominated by decoding and copying activities, with children’s home language not being used as a pedagogical resource. Like Sahni (1994), she also found teachers ascribing children’s inabilities to their impoverished socio-economic backgrounds and concluded that the “deficit discourse” surrounding the children was “detrimental to the equitable treatment of all children – not least because it conditions the amount of effort teachers are prepared to make to work with children from lower socio-economic strata, especially those whom they judge ‘weak’ (p. 245).

With a focus on English instruction, Gupta (2013) explored the literacy practices of children in three English-medium pre-schools. These establishments catered to children belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds in a town in Karnataka. The researcher observed instruction to be of a similar nature in the schools with the children being asked to “copy and recite the conventional sequence of letters, and reproduce them from memory” (Gupta, 2013, p. 40). This was followed by children being asked to memorise spellings. No attempt was made to connect these literacy practices to the various functions that print serves. Subsequently, Gupta (2013) argued that of the four children she focussed on in one school, three were bringing with them to the classrooms, notions of literacy that they had, in all likelihood, learnt at home. One wrote a lot to give the look of a page, the other was naming pictures and the third was representing the idea that words are letter strings. She concluded that instruction in the school was “bare bones” and left “children to figure out on their own (or with the help of caregivers) both the purposes of literacy and the alphabetic principle of English” (Gupta, 2013, p. 58).

Indian research has also explored how the home shapes children’s literacy practices (Kalia & Reese, 2007; Kalia & Vagh, 2008; Khurana & Rao, 2008; Shenoy & Wagner, 2019). Khurana and Rao (2008) focussed on 140 middle-class children from 10 pre-schools in Mysore city (in Karnataka), and provided a description of their home language and literacy experiences, based on parents’ questionnaires. They found that parents provided children with
storybooks; both read and told stories to children, though they preferred the later; provided exposure to environmental print in the form of newspapers and magazines; helped children identify the alphabet in various ways and encouraged them to talk about their experiences. The researchers also noted that while more parents (66%) read stories in English than in Kannada, the children’s first language, the situation was inverse for storytelling (54%) and oral activities (46%).

In a comparative analysis of home literacy environments (HLEs) by Kalia and Vagh (2008), the first author focussed on 78 middle-class children studying in two private, English medium pre-schools in Bangalore city in Karnataka and the second author, on 145 children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, attending Hindi-medium pre-schools run by a non-governmental organisation in Mumbai city in Maharashtra. The former collected information about the children’s HLE using parent questionnaires, and the latter used interview data. However, both authors built a picture of the HLE by gathering data on the following variables: (i) shared book-reading practices, (ii) parental teaching practices and (iii) child interest in literacy. Book reading practices were assessed based on information about the number of children’s books at home, frequency of book reading and the frequency of library visits. Teaching practices recorded parents’ attempts to teach children “to print and words to foster vocabularies” (p.29). Finally, child interest in the former study was assessed by parents’ reports of child requests for book reading and in the latter on children’s “autonomous or solitary engagement with print” (ibid, p.30).

The researchers found that families from middle-socioeconomic backgrounds provided a richer home literacy environment with many more providing access to books and reading stories to children than those of low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Kalia & Vagh, 2008). They suggest that parents in the latter group had experienced little or no schooling, lack resources for buying books, lacked the time and resources for making library visits which they argue were not “a culturally normative behaviour for Indian parents” (ibid, p. 28). The researchers also note that while both families from middle-and low-socioeconomic backgrounds engaged in teaching practices, parents from low-
socioeconomic backgrounds undertook teaching practices more frequently (59%) than book-reading practices (27%), arguing that this was because the two groups held “different beliefs about the role of teaching activities and of shared book reading in fostering their children’s early language and literacy development” (p. 30). Finally, in both these contexts children’s interest in their literacy practices were seen to be high with 95% of families belonging to middle socioeconomic backgrounds reporting child-initiated book reading sessions and 87% of the those belonging to low socioeconomic backgrounds reporting child’s autonomous engagement with print. Parents in the latter group viewed the child’s interest as a key to determining his future success. Consequently, the researchers concluded that “irrespective of socioeconomic backgrounds children are active agents in their own development” (ibid, p.31).

In contrast to studies which restrict themselves to providing a descriptive account of home practices, Kalia and Reese (2007) examined whether the HLE had an enabling influence on children’s English language and literacy skills. They focussed on 50 middle-class children studying in an English-medium pre-school in Bangalore city in Karnataka. The parents’ questionnaire collected information about their education and income, book reading practices, teaching practices and the amount of English spoken at home. In turn, children were assessed for vocabulary, emergent literacy practices and phonological awareness. Subsequently, the researchers concluded that parental book-reading practices and teaching practices (about 3 per week) had a positive influence on all three parameters of language and literacy learning.

With a focus on school-aged children (7-10-year-olds; grades 2-5), Shenoy and Wagner (2019) also explored the relationship between the frequency of parental book-reading practices and children’s language and literacy skills. Of the 104 children in the study, 64 attended a low-income private school and 40, a middle-high income private school in Bangalore city. The researchers noted that books were being read to children in both low-income and high-income homes. In the former, books were being read once a month in Kannada and in the latter, once a week in English. However, in contrast to Kalia and Reese
(2007), these researchers did not find any effect of reading frequency on students’ test scores in their Kannada and English assessments. Arguably, the difference in the results between Kalia and Reese (2007) and Shenoy and Wagner’s (2019) studies may be due to two factors. First, Shenoy and Wagner (2019) adopt, perhaps, a less robust indicator of parental book-reading practices by restricting this to frequency, in comparison to Kalia and Reese’s (2007) inclusion of the number of books at home and the number of library visits. Second, the frequency of children’s book reading events was much lower in this study in comparison to that in Kalia and Reese’s (2007) work.

Methodologically different from all the studies discussed so far, Bhattacharya (2013) undertook an ethnographic exploration of the home and school literacy practices of five children living in an orphanage and attending a low-cost English medium private school in suburban New Delhi. She observed children’s practices through classes 1 to 8 spanning English, Environmental studies, Social Studies, Mathematics and Science and found “no discernible difference in the manner in which the instructional medium was negotiated in these subjects” (ibid, p. 168). Consequently, she described the practices to be dominated by teacher-led instruction with the teachers’ providing the answers to all questions; privileging translation over communicative skills and emphasising memorisation of content. Reflecting the practices of the school, Bhattacharya (2013) observed children’s practices in the orphanage also to be dominated by memorisation tasks. While this ethnographic study found children’s ‘home’ literacy practices echoing their school practices, it is arguable that the institutionalised structure of orphanage life does not provide an authentic picture of children’s home literacy practices.

To sum up, there is a relative paucity of research on children’s home and school literacy practices in India. Moreover, the research on home literacy practices adopts a quantitative research design, focusing on a restricted range of children’s practices, that is, shared book-reading practices and teaching practices, and solely uses parents’ account to gage children’s
literacy experiences. All these studies have also been undertaken with an urban population which represents only about a fourth of India.

2.6 Identifying the gap in literature and articulating the research focus

Sociocultural research that has explored children’s home and/or school literacy practices has focussed on how children’s practices are being culturally shaped by the adult world and the child’s world (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2018; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994) and researching in child-centred classrooms in North America, Dyson (1997, 2003, 2018) identifies the latter as children’s interests. Drawing on this body of research, the present study seeks to understand how children’s practices are cultural and personal. Doing so, it deliberately explores the gap that exist with respect to a child-focussed examination of children’s home literacy practices, particularly, reading, by identifying their unique practices and goals. It addresses a similar gap in literature with respect to school literacy practices in middle- and low-income nations, and again, reading. Finally, it is the first known research to endeavour a qualitative exploration of children’s home literacy practices in India and to do so with a rural community, and to illuminate the beliefs of parents and teachers in a middle-income nation. So, the current study investigates the cultural and personal nature of the reading and writing practices of a few children in their homes and at their school in a rural village in India.

2.7 Chapter summary

Research that has explored children’s home and school literacy practices has largely focused on children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These studies have investigated their home and/or school literacy practices and, also, the beliefs of their caregivers and teachers. Methodologically, most of these studies have been either framed by ethnography or used ethnographic techniques to collect data. Theoretically, this research is diverse, and sociocultural studies seem to form the largest section of this literature.
My study also explores the home and school literacy practices and adult beliefs of children from socio-economically deprived homes, is methodologically grounded in ethnography, and is theoretically framed by sociocultural theory. Embedded in sociocultural theory, it seeks to investigate how children’s practices are cultural and personal. It does this by undertaking a child-focussed examination of the home and school literacy practices of a small number of children in a resource-poor village in India.
Chapter 3: The theoretical building blocks

3.1 Introduction

The review of sociocultural literature undertaken in the previous chapter illuminates the manner in which children’s home and school literacy practices are shaped culturally and personally. In this chapter, I outline the tenets of sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1990, 2012; Street, 1984, 1995, 1998) which frame the current study’s understanding of learning and literacy (Sections 3.2 and 3.3). I also discuss the sociocultural concepts that are crucial for highlighting the cultural and personal nature of children’s practices (Sections 3.4 and 3.5). Building on the review of literature in Chapter 2 and the discussion in Sections 3.4 and 3.5, Section 3.6 presents the research questions. Section 3.7 provides a summary of the chapter.

3.2 A sociocultural view of learning

Sociocultural theory takes the mutuality between human learning and culture as its point of departure (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). For Vygotsky (1978), human learning has a social origin and a social nature. It arises in interaction with others and is mediated by culturally constructed artefacts. For example, children learn by engaging with print in interaction with their parents at home. They also learn to read and write with their teachers and peers at school. Moreover, this home and school learning is mediated by cultural artefacts like children’s books.

While underscoring the social character of learning, Vygotsky (1986) argues that learning is not socially determined. He rejects the dichotomisation of learning and volition, arguing that the learner’s motivation is essential to learning. Expressing this idea, he states:

Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every
thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking (ibid, p. 252).

So, while Vygotsky (1978, 1986) views the social dimension of learning as primary, he emphasises that learning does not simply echo the social but is also personally rooted in the learner’s desires, needs, interests and emotions.

According to Vygotsky (1978), both the home and school are spaces for children’s learning. He pays particular attention to their learning at school and posits children learn at school by participating in activities under “adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (ibid, p. 86). Thus, he gives due emphasis to both the guidance that children receive and their active participation in theorising about learning.

In line with his theorisation, Vygotsky (1978) underlines the need for children’s literacy learning to be their interest, arguing that “writing should be meaningful for children…should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life” (p. 118). He posits pretend-play as such an activity for children, allowing them to draw on their reality and imagination (Vygotsky, 1967). He also describes play as “wish fulfillment [sic]” for children and argues that in play children appear a “head taller” than they would be in real life. Thus, for Vygotsky (1967, 1978) children’s literacy learning should be their interest, and he views pretend-play as a space where this is possible.

Vygotsky’s (1978) theorisation of learning is deepened by Rogoff (1995, 2003) who examines children’s learning in both home and school contexts. She defines development as “changing participation” in culturally valued practices (Rogoff, 2003). Consequently, she posits participation as an apprenticeship with guidance being provided by experts and cultural values and children bringing their experiences to the table, actively contributing to the direction of learning. Thus, for Rogoff (ibid), learning at both home and school involves engaging in cultural practices where not only adults but also children are constituting the learning process.

In their examination of empirical work that focuses on children’s everyday learning in their homes in Mexico and Central America, Paradise and Rogoff
(2009) again emphasise the active nature of children’s participation. They argue that children do not merely imitate or reproduce practices during these apprenticeships but learn by keenly observing, listening, and contributing to the practices of adults at home, motivated by their purposes. Consequently, they identify these initiatives and purposes as children’s interests, and posit that these interests are always intertwined with children’s “sense of belonging and desire to belong” within a community (ibid, p. 130). Drawing on Vygotsky’s (1986) theorisation of learning and Rogoff’s (1995, 2003) empirical work, this study also views children’s participation to be both cultural and personal. Consequently, it utilises multiple sociocultural constructs for illustrating the manner in which children’s practices are cultural and personal. These are discussed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.

3.3 A sociocultural view of literacy

This study draws on New Literacy Studies (NLS) to provide a sociocultural framing to literacy. I first provide a historical overview of this field of study and then discuss its tenets, relevant to this study. The 1960s and 1970s was a time when researchers informed by cognitive psychology’s skills-based view of literacy claimed that being literate brought various intellectual advantages to the individual; for instance, development of critical thinking, context free-abstract thought and logical thinking based on syllogisms (Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977). They also claimed that these advantages to individuals ultimately culminate in advantages to societies and distinguish “primitive” cultures from “modern” ones. However, researchers from social psychology (Scribner & Cole, 1981), sociolinguistics (Heath, 1983), and social anthropology (Street, 1984), challenged this conceptualisation of literacy as well as the description of the benefits it accrued.

Scribner and Cole (1981) did this through their investigation of the cognitive consequences of literacy for the Vai people in Liberia. The researchers observed the Vai becoming literate in three scripts: Vai, Roman and Arabic. They argued that cognitive advantages accrued to users of all three scripts; however, the nature of advantages was different and was closely related to the nature of the literacy activities that people engaged in while using the
different scripts. For example, they found Arabic literates doing better at text memorisation tasks, which reflected their Quranic learning, and English literates doing better at school-based tasks which required context-free, logical thinking. Consequently, they concluded that the benefits that accrue from literacy are dependent on the context in which it is practised.

This idea was strengthened by Heath (1983) in her ethnographic exploration of the effect that the home had on the literacy learning of pre-schoolers in three communities in North America: Trackton, a black working-class community, Roadville, a white working-class community, and Maintown, a middle-class community of white and black families. She found that the different cultural beliefs about childhood and parenting as well as the different rules of interaction socialised children to listening to stories and reading and writing differently in the communities. She subsequently concluded that reading and writing activities are embedded in larger socio-cultural practices and should be interpreted within them.

Based on his ethnographic work in Iran, Street (1984) also emphasised the situated nature of literacy and its benefits. He identified three types of literacy being used by youth and adults in rural areas in Iran: maktab literacy, associated with the teaching of the Quran; commercial literacy, associated with the management of fruit sales in the village; and school literacy, associated with state schooling. He observed that the advantages that accrued from these literacies were inextricably linked to how each was embedded in the socio-cultural milieu and relationships of power. In the light of his observations, he argued against the existence of one context-free, “autonomous” literacy and put forward an ideological model of literacy, positing literacies are multiple, always shaped by the context within which they are rooted and how power is distributed within this context.

This body of research laid the foundation for a field of studies which was called the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990). NLS conceptualises literacy, not as a set of skills, but as a set of practices which are socially constructed, culturally rooted and always ideological. The current study is informed by these ideas, and I explore four key aspects (1) literacy as a social practice (2)
literacies as multiple (3) literacy as ideological and (4) the autonomous and ideological models of literacy

3.3.1 Literacy as a social practice

To elucidate what they mean by literacy as a social practice, NLS researchers distinguish between the terms “literacy events” and “literacy practices”. Literacy events are described as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions” (Heath, 1982, p. 164) while literacy practices are “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (Street, 1984, p. 1) or “cultural ways of utilizing literacy” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Thus, a literacy event includes the presence of a scripted text and social interaction for making meaning from the text (Maybin, 2000) and the more abstract notion of literacy practice encompasses the cultural values and beliefs that underpin literacy events (Street, 1988).

Elaborating further on the cultural nature of “literacy practices”, Barton and Hamilton (2000) explain these interactions with print are rooted in the beliefs and values of the “domain” they emerge from which in turn illuminate children’s “social goals” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 12). They describe domains as rule-governed worlds, identifying both, the home and school as domains shaping children’s literacy practices, the former exemplifying the rules of the caregivers and the latter those of the teachers. Research undertaken by Dyson (1997, 2003, 2013, 2018) also highlights that children’s writing practices in child-centred classrooms in North America are framed by the rules of their own world, that is, their childhood/peer cultures (discussed in Chapter 2). This study examines the cultural nature of children’s literacy practices over Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

3.3.2 Literacies as multiple

Viewing literacy as a social practice, NLS researchers do not talk about ‘a’ literacy but multiple literacies, varying with context, time, and purpose. For example, storytelling may be a very different literacy practice in different homes and may also vary across generations within a home. Similarly, letter writing by children at school may be a very different literacy practice from
letter writing at home because children’s purposes for writing may alter in each context. This study sheds light on the multiple literacy practices of its participant children in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

### 3.3.3 Literacy as ideological

Framed by culture, literacy practices are also ideological in nature (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2012; Street, 1997). They draw on the belief-systems of the dominant communities, marginalising the practices of the ‘weaker’ ones. For instance, if teachers at school and caregivers at home hold a skills-based view of literacy instruction, children would be expected to enact their roles as decoders and copiers of texts, leaving little space for their volitional engagement to read and compose. This study draws on the beliefs of caregivers and teachers and the ways these shape children’s literacy practices using Gee’s (2012, 2014) conceptualisation of Discourse (discussed later) in Chapter 5.

### 3.3.4 The autonomous and ideological models of literacy

Finally, discussing the implications that NLS has on literacy education, Street (1995, 1997) explains that schools need to choose between an “autonomous” and an “ideological” model of literacy. He illuminates this by noting that when teachers subscribe to the former model, literacy is reduced to a set of neutral reading and writing skills which are taught independent from the child’s context. Consequently, this decontextualised instruction needs “content to be taught through authority structures” (Street, 1995, p. 118). Moreover, in positing literacy instruction as a neutral exercise, the autonomous model also masks its inherently ideological nature which necessitates an unequal relationship between the teacher, the holder of the skills, and the student, who needs to learn these skills. On the other hand, adopting an ideological model involves adopting a culturally sensitive view of literacy learning, where the point of departure is practices that are rooted in children’s experiences. Consequently, this model tries to address the unequal relationship between the teacher and the taught by giving space to children’s practices and knowledge in the classroom. I will be drawing on these models of literacy in Chapter 9.
To summarise, for NLS researchers, reading and writing are cultural ways of engaging with print. So, these researchers do not talk about a single literacy but multiple literacies, varying across contexts and in relation to the time and purposes they serve. They also recognise that literacy practices of the dominant community enjoy societal sanction, and marginalise the practices of non-dominant communities, giving literacy its ideological character.

### 3.4 Discourse and identity

Building on the tenets of NLS, one of its key thinkers, Gee (2002, 2012) theorises about the cultural nature of literacy practices through his conceptualisation of Discourse (discourse with a capital D) and identity. He defines Discourse as follows:

> Distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities (Gee, 2012, p. 152).

So, for Gee (2002, 2012) a Discourse is the dominant social practice of a community, that is, a socially acceptable combination of ways of acting, thinking, believing, and using artefacts which serve as “identity-kits”. Consequently, when a person enacts a Discourse, they are enacting “socially situated identities” and providing evidence of their desire to belong to a community. On the other hand, when they are resisting a Discourse, their identities are illustrative of their disengagement with the community.

According to Gee (2012) when children engage with print they are also operating within Discourses. These Discourses require children to read and write in ways required by a community. So, Discourses are analogous to domains, and Pahl and Rowsell (2012) unite these concepts when they describe a domain as “a way of being…a set of cultural beliefs, or a worldview” (p. 9). Thus, paying attention to the different Discourses shaping children’s literacy practices helps in highlighting the domain-specific cultural
nature of children’s practices, and identities illuminate children’s goals which are socially situated in these Discourses. This current study uses Gee’s (2012, 2014) conceptualisations of Discourse and identity for illustrating the cultural nature of children’s practices and their goals, respectively.

3.4.1 Empirical research on Discourse and identity
Research which has explored how Discourses shape children’s literate identities has focussed on reading. It uses talk with children, their caregivers, and their teachers as the primary method for data collection. These researchers draw on different theoretical conceptualisation of discourse and identity, however, their use of the concepts remains firmly sociocultural.

Drawing on Gee’s (1996) work, Rogers and Elias (2012) interviewed eight first and second grade children about their home and school reading practices in North America. The researchers found that the cultural model of reading being voiced by the children encompassed reading and enjoying stories and books at home and phonics and sounding out words at school. Furthermore, home reading was described as a collaborative practice while reading at school as an individualised one. The researchers concluded that the children reading as a “situated meaningful activity connected with positive relationships” within the home domain and a “de-contextualised activity, connected with grades, work and comprehension questions” at school (ibid, p. 277).

Subsequently, on examining three children’s sense of self as a reader vis-à-vis their home and school discourse of reading, Rogers and Elias (2012) noted that for two of the three children, the school was negatively influencing their identities as readers. For one, this was because of the individualised nature of interaction while for the other, both, the cultural model of reading at school and individualised reading was contributing to his “low sense of ability”, which the researchers described as “a passive stance towards reading and a lack of enthusiasm” (ibid, p. 288).

With a more intensive research design than Rogers and Elias (2012), Levy (2011) also explored how the home and school discourse was shaping 12 children’s identities as readers in England. She followed six nursery children
and six reception children over one academic year, interviewing and observing them at school as well as interviewing their parents and teachers. Consequently, she described the children’s home discourse about reading as broader than their school discourse with the former including “looking at books, enjoying books, reading pictures, guessing what print would say, using context, saying letters and numbers” (ibid, p. 41) and the latter limited to “decoding print in books often manifest in presenting a ‘correct’ performance to the teacher in school” (ibid, p. 55).

On talking to the six nursery children, Levy (2012) found three identifying themselves as readers, two as non-readers and one as neither. The non-readers believed that they could not decode print and viewed decoding print as “hard”, and the child who viewed himself as neither a reader nor a non-reader was only cognisant of print embedded in popular culture texts. Subsequently, when the children went to school, one of the readers who used both the textual and pictorial features of books to define reading developed as a confident reader. The other two who favoured reading pictures became less confident of reading beyond their reading scheme books. The negative perception of the two non-readers also strengthened and they described “proper” reading as equivalent to decoding print and picture reading to be of less consequence. The school discourse also impinged on the child who wished to read within contexts that were meaningful to him. Thus, while the school discourse was influencing the readers and non-readers differently, it was, for most children, strengthening a negative self-perception as readers.

To sum up, researchers have found that the home discourse shaping children’s reading practices is broader in comparison to the school discourse, with the home discourse more making space for both children’s practices and adult practices. Consequently, they have provided accounts of the school discourse having an adverse effect on children's identities as a reader but have also observed children with positive reader identities engaging better with the school discourse.
3.5 A sociocultural view of children’s interests

NLS researchers highlight children’s literacy practices as cultural (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984, 1988). Gee’s (2000, 2012, 2014) theorisation of Discourse and identity is useful for illustrating the cultural nature of children’s practices. However, this theorisation does not pay adequate attention to illuminating children’s initiatives and goals as personal. This current study draws on Hedges and her colleagues theorisation of interests (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) for underscoring the personal nature of children’s practices.

Based on their extensive participant observation in pre-schools in New Zealand, and their interviews with parents and teachers, these researchers have theorised children’s interests in order to develop a strong foundation for a child-centred curriculum in the early years (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016). Building on the tenets of sociocultural theory (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), they examine interests as socioculturally embedded, initiatives and purposes. At their point of departure, they identify children’s “spontaneous, self-motivated play, discussions, inquiry, and/or investigations that derive from their social and cultural experiences” (Hedges et al., 2011, p. 187) as their interests. They go on to show that children’s play, talk, and goals rooted in their peer cultures are stimulated by their practices in their family, community, and peer cultures. They posit these practices as children’s “funds of knowledge”, culturally accumulutated bodies of knowledge and skills important for familial and personal well-being (Moll et al., 1992).

Subsequently, they theorise children’s interests as their funds knowledge-based practices, but caution that not all such practices can be identified as their interests (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016). They advise teachers and researchers to explore children’s practices in their homes and schools, to identify their interests which they argue are motivated by their persistent goals, facets of their identities as “learners, enquirers, thinkers and citizens” (Hedges & Cooper, 2016, p. 317). Drawing on these researchers’ work, this current study explores two children’s funds of knowledge-based
practices across the home and school over a period for identifying their interests. The next sub-section discusses Moll et al.’s (1992) conceptualisation of funds of knowledge and empirical research which has utilised this concept to examine children’s interests.

3.5.1 Funds of knowledge

For several decades now, educational researchers have used the seminal sociocultural conceptualisation of funds of knowledge to challenge deficit views about socially, economically and linguistically marginalised communities in different parts of the world (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Hogg, 2010; Llopard & Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Moll et al., 1992). The concept “is based on a simple premise… that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). It was put forward by Moll et al. (1992) based on their ethnographic work with Hispanic households in North America. The researchers found that these households and the children and adults therein possessed bodies of knowledge and skills which they had accumulated over the years through their intra- and inter-household interactions within their communities, also, that this knowledge and skill could be potentially useful for enabling teaching and learning.

Formulating the concept using sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Moll et al. (1992) defined funds of knowledge as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). So, for these researchers, funds of knowledge are practices that are crucial for familial and/or personal wellbeing. They further emphasise that children, like adults, acquire funds of knowledge through their participation in everyday activities.

Funds of knowledge concept continues to be used extensively by educational researchers focused on various curricular subjects as well as on varied age-groups of children all over the world (Hogg, 2010; Llopard & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Researchers have helped teachers identify and use the children’s funds as resources in the literacy classroom (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Saubich & Esteban, 2011). They have
also found literacy practices in families to be sources of their funds of knowledge (Mercado, 2005; Moll, 1992).

However, researchers have found two significant limitations of the concept. First, teachers who took on the task of exploring children’s funds of knowledge by making regular home visits found it challenging to do so because of their already busy schedules (Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, et al., 2005). The task of using these funds of knowledge within curriculum units was also challenging (Cremin et al., 2015). Consequently, the researchers concluded that teachers needed “time and support to move from theory to practice, or from field research to practice” (Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, et al., 2005, p. 107).

Second, research tended to look towards the adult world as a source of children’s funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005). However, “children create their own social worlds, with accompanying funds of knowledge, which may be independent from the adults’ social life” and that these funds of knowledge need “careful elaboration in future studies” (ibid, p. 279). In agreement with Moll (2005), various researchers have examined children’s interests to provide accounts of children’s funds of knowledge (Chesworth, 2016; Cremin et al., 2015; Hedges, 2015; Hedges et al., 2011). I discuss some of these studies next.

3.5.1.1 Research children’s interests and funds of knowledge

Drawing on their exploration of children’s interests in two early childhood centres in New Zealand (discussed previously), Hedges et al. (2011) provide a detailed account of children’s funds of knowledge rooted in their experiences within their families, communities and cultures. They identified these funds to include the children’s knowledge of their family members household chores, occupations, leisure activities, and interests; their knowledge of their friends and teachers interests and activities; and their knowledge of cultural events and popular culture. However, they also noted that teachers were not always welcoming of children’s funds of knowledge, for instance, those about Valentine’s Day, Halloween and popular culture, as these allowed children to reproduce inequitable social relationships by
engrained in larger society. This was because the use of these funds presented challenges for the teachers, so the practices that tended to be used to create curriculum units “were often those that aligned with teacher interests and priorities” and not the children’s (Hedges et al., 2011, p. 199).

As a part of this larger study, Hedges (2015) also examined a 4-year-old girl’s interests using the funds of knowledge framework. She observed the girl helping her teacher take care of younger children in the early childhood care centre and playing with dolls by feeding them, pushing them in the pram and comforting them. She noted that while the girl’s play provided evidence of her knowledge about caring for younger children which she had gathered while helping her mother care for her younger brother at home, it also reinforced gendered ideas that women, and not men, were supposed to care for children. Consequently, she argued that rooted in children’s “repertoires of practice”, children’s funds of knowledge are useful pedagogical resources but require “critical thinking on the part of teachers” and a commitment to engaging with diversity (ibid, p. 94).

Similar to this research, Chesworth (2016) also examined the interests of 4-5-year-old children in a reception classroom in the United Kingdom using the funds of knowledge framework. She observed one child use wooden blocks and plastic crates to make a go-kart reflecting his experiences of working in the garage with his father, and another preparing food for a birthday party using playdough echoing her experiences of cooking and baking with her mother. At the same time, the researcher also observed that children who did not possess the same funds of knowledge were not being allowed into the play. So, while supportive of the use of children’s funds in the classroom, Chesworth (2016) agrees with Hedges (2015) that the use of this knowledge in the classroom presents pedagogical challenges for teachers.

The funds of knowledge framework has also been used by Cremin et al. (2015) to examine primary-aged children’s practices at home including their literacy practices. These researchers undertook a collaborative research project with 18 teachers in 10 schools in the United Kingdom, along the lines of Moll et al.’s (1992) work in North America. They supported the teachers to
take on the role of researchers with an ethnographic lens and explore children’s practices in their homes. In the “Learner Visits” that the teachers undertook, they became aware of a variety of children’s interests, such as, music, dance, sports activities, hunting, camping, digital technologies and popular culture. The teachers subsequently sought, some more successfully than others, to use these funds of knowledge to support children’s reading and writing in the classroom.

To sum up, researchers have found children’s interests being shaped and stimulated by their funds of knowledge and identify these funds as resources for instruction. However, they also caution that using these funds in the classroom can present pedagogical challenges.

3.6 Articulating the research questions

Rooted in sociocultural theory, this study appreciates that children’s literacy practices are both cultural and personal. Research reviewed in Chapter 2 provides evidence of children’s home and school literacy practices being culturally rooted in the adult world and the children’s world (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003; Gregory & Williams, 2000), and Dyson’s (1997, 2003) research also identifies the latter as children’s interests. Consequently, the research reported in this thesis undertakes a child-focused examination of children’s reading and writing practices at home and school to illuminate them as not only cultural but also personal. Doing so, it focuses on a small sample of children in a resource poor, rural village in India. To pay adequate attention to both these facets of children’s practices and accentuate the argument the study wishes to make, it draws on Gee’s (2000, 2012, 2014) conceptualisation of Discourse to underscore culture and Hedges and Cooper’s (2016) theorisation of children’s interests to emphasise the personal nature of children’s practices. Building on Hedges and Cooper’s (2016) it uses funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) to highlight children’s individual practices and identity (Gee, 2012, 2014) their unique goals.

Consequently, the primary and subsidiary research questions for the study are articulated as follows:
In what manner are five children’s home and school literacy practices in a rural village in India culturally and personally meaningful to them?

- How are the children’s home and school literacy practices shaped by their Discourses?
- How do children’s home and school literacy practices reflect their funds of knowledge?
- How do the children’s home and school literacy practices represent their identities?
- How are children’s home and school literacy practices related to each other?

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the sociocultural view of learning and literacy that this study adopts and the theoretical concepts that have been used to examine the data. Subsequently, it articulated the research questions in the context of these concepts.
Chapter 4: Methodology matters

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that this study adopted. I also provide a reflexive account of the choices that I made about the processes of data collection and analysis. Section 4.2 examines the methodological position of the study in the light of its research focus and philosophical underpinnings. Section 4.3 describes the research context. Sections 4.4 focuses on the methods of data collection and Section 4.5 on the processes of analysis. Section 4.6 discusses the ethical challenges. Each of these sections provides justifications for the various methodological choices that I have made, and my reflexivity is an integral part of my reasoning. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided in Section 4.7.

4.2 The Methodology

Ethnography provides the methodological framework for the study. This section first outlines the rationale for its choice and then goes on to explain what ethnography means for it.

4.2.1 The rationale

This current study focuses on the cultural and purposive nature of children’s literacy practices. It explores the manner in which children engage with print at home and school, the meanings they associate with their engagements, and the beliefs of caregivers and teacher that shape these practices. In alignment with this focus, the philosophical assumptions that frame this study are derived from sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 1995, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, the study takes an ontological stance that all reality is culturally constructed and adopts an epistemological view that all knowledge, including the children’s participation, adult’s beliefs, and the ethnographer’s findings, arise in interaction but are always culturally constituted. This study’s goals and assumptions about knowledge are echoed in its use of ethnography as its methodological framework.
4.2.1 Ethnography

Ethnography has a long tradition of research in Anthropology and Sociology (Delamont, 2004) and has been used by educational researchers for over 50 years (Hammersley, 2018b). There is, however, diversity in the way the methodology has been operationalised by researchers (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Walford, 2009). While acknowledging these differences, Hammersley (2018b) provides “a reasonably comprehensive list of…features that are often ascribed” to ethnography which reads as follows:

- relatively long-term data collection process,
- taking place in naturally occurring settings,
- relying on participant observation, or personal engagement more generally,
- employing a range of types of data,
- aimed at documenting what actually goes on,
- emphasises the significance of the meanings people give to objects, including themselves, in the course of their activities, in other words culture, and
- holistic in focus

(ibid, p. 4)

Each of these features is relevant to this study. I discuss how they have been actualised in this study, engaging with the first point in more depth because the rest have been addressed in detail over the course of this chapter.

Ethnographers are known to spend relatively long periods in the field. This is also true for those who have focused on literacy. For instance, Heath’s (1983) seminal work on children’s home literacy practices spanned over ten years. More contemporary literacy researchers, however, seem to be undertaking fieldwork for shorter periods, generally one to two years, and describe their time in the field in terms of some hours in the day and some days in the week (Dyson, 1997, 2003; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). The changes in the timeframe for ethnography from years to months is, at least in part, a reflection of the fact that audio and video recording devices allow researchers to collect large
amounts of data quite rapidly (Hammersley, 2006) and universities give researchers tighter timelines for their projects (Hammersley, 2006; Jeffrey & Troman, 2013). Working with both the advantages and constraints of current times, the fieldwork for this doctoral study spread over five months. During this time, I immersed myself in the lives of my five participant children for about 10 hours a day, for 5 days in the week, and generated about 500 hours of audio and video data in the process. This, I would argue, was a sustained interaction between me and the children for a relatively long period befitting an ethnography.

During my five months with the children, I became a part of their naturally occurring settings, that is, their homes and school. I was the main instrument of data collection (Heath & Street, 2008; Walford, 2009) and collected data from multiple sources. I observed children read and write and talked to them about their engagements, and collected their written work, drawings, and other artefacts. I also talked to caregivers and teachers since their practices shaped the participant children’s activities. I used fieldnotes, audio and video recordings and photographs to record data. This enquiry aimed to understand the concurrently cultural and purposeful nature of children’s practices. Thus, in how I collected the data and an interest in uncovering cultural meanings, this study uses ethnography as its methodological framework.

4.3 The research context

This section describes the research context of the study, funnelling from the macro context of the state to the micro context of the village and the school. An extended account of the village and the school has been provided to help the reader understand the cultural fabric within which the children’s literacy practices and adult beliefs are embedded.

4.3.1 The setting and the participants

The data for this study was collected from a tribal village in Udaipur district in Rajasthan. Rajasthan, a state in the northwest of India, has one of the lowest rates of literacy (67%) and the lowest rate of female literacy (53%) in the country (Government of India, 2011b). Udaipur is one of Rajasthan’s 33
districts and has a literacy rate lower than that of the state average (63%) (Government of India, 2011c). Most of Udaipur’s population resides in rural areas (80%), and this is more than that of the rest of the country (69%) (Government of India, 2011a, 2011b). Besides being largely rural, Udaipur also has a significant tribal population (50%) which resides in these areas (Government of India, 2011a).

Unlike tribal communities in North America and Australia whose tribal identity is defined based on their distance from that of the colonial settlers, tribal groups in India are so designated based of their relationship with mainstream Indian society (Béteille, 1986). Mainstream Indian society is Hindu and is characterised by the existence of a hereditary and hierarchical caste system. People from the Brahmin (traditionally priests), Kshatriya (traditionally warriors) and the Vaishya (traditionally traders) castes enjoy the status of the higher castes in this hierarchy, while the Shudras (traditionally farmers and labourers) are designated as the lower castes and socially discriminated against within the Hindu community. With their own cultural and religious practices, tribes stand outside mainstream Hindu society, have historically been unable to avail themselves of the benefits provided by the state (Béteille, 1986; Xaxa, 1999) and are considered one of the most deprived and marginalised sections of Indian society, even today (Sujatha, 2002; Xaxa, 1999).

The Government of India identifies tribal communities as scheduled tribes or tribes which are enlisted in the schedules of the Constitution of India for the purpose of receiving administrative and political benefits. The Constitution also lays down provisions for the protection to tribal cultures and languages. The Census of India 2011 provides details of 705 tribal groups in India, and these constitute about 9% of the Indian population (Government of India, 2013b). The village from which I collected data was inhabited by one such tribe called the Bhil tribe.

I chose to base my study in Udaipur because I was familiar with the area. While I have grown up in Delhi, I have spent all my professional years (12) in Udaipur. During this time, I have worked with the state education system in
Rajasthan and other states, and this offered me insider knowledge of state schooling practices. Having lived in Udaipur, I was also acquainted with its cultural fabric, and this, I believed, would help me build and sustain relationships with the teachers at school and the caregivers at home. I chose to move away from an urban setting and collect data from a rural village because of the paucity of research from these areas. I also wanted to take a closer look at the lives of, possibly, some of the most deprived children in the Indian society.

Since I planned to make daily visits to the children’s homes and school, I chose a village where a state elementary school was available, habitations were not too geographically scattered, and the journey from Udaipur city not more than an hour, to maximise fieldwork time. Seva Mandir, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in rural Udaipur, helped me choose the village for my study. I visited the state schools catering to the villages they suggested about six months before I started fieldwork. I selected one that not only fit the criteria mentioned above but also had a school where the teachers seemed amenable to a researcher’s presence. In the next sections, I provide a description of this village and school based on my observations during fieldwork and in the process introduce the reader to the participants of the study. All names of people and places provided from hereon are pseudonyms.

**Sitara Village**

Sitara village is located about 25 miles away from Udaipur city, an hour’s journey on the highway by bus. Kalyanpur, the nearest town-centre, is about three miles from Sitara and is accessible by public transport. Kalyanpur houses the police station, local court, banks, a government hospital, private clinics, a state secondary school, private schools, and the market. It is a print-rich environment with most shops and offices using billboards to convey information. Most billboards use Hindi; bilingual billboards, using English and Hindi, are few and include those that advertise banks, tractors, cement, and mobile phones and their service providers.
Flanked by the wooded hills of the Aravali range\(^2\) on one side, Sitara village spreads from the highway for one and a half miles into the hinterland and comprises both flat and undulating terrain. The habitations and farms within half-a-mile of the highway are referred to as Kesar and house families which have moved into the village about 70 years ago. Habitations and farms that are further away are referred to as Jamun. Jamun is the heart of the village because it is home to its original inhabitants and is also more populous.

During my fieldwork, Sitara was home to about 168 families and 810 people (Government of India, 2011a). The families belonged to two social groups: Bhil and Nath\(^3\). Most families were Bhil and were related to each other through lineage. The Nath community comprised seven families, and all but one belonged to the same lineage. The families belonged to the Vaishya caste (a high caste). The men in the family worked as juice-sellers, auto-rickshaw drivers, and construction workers, often commuting to Udaipur city for this work, and the women were responsible for household chores. These families did not till their agricultural land themselves but outsourced this work to Bhil families. At least one parent had received 5-8 years of school, in most of these families,

Like other tribal groups in India, the Bhil community in Sitara followed certain cultural practices that were different from the mainstream Hindu society in Udaipur city. They spoke Bhili\(^4\); this was different from Mewari, the language spoken in the city. The gods they worshipped and the festivals they celebrated were also different from those of the Hindu religion. Each lineage in the village had its group of priests who were responsible for the upkeep of their temple, conducting weekly prayers and performing religious ceremonies during the festival time. This group of priests also included the shaman who was believed to possess special powers to tell the future and was consulted

\(^2\) A range of low-lying forested mountains passing through Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujrat.

\(^3\) A sub-group of the Vaishya caste, an upper caste in Hindu society.

\(^4\) Language spoken by members of the Bhil tribe in Udaipur according to Ethnologue (n.d.). It shares common features with Gujarati (language spoken in Gujrat) and Marwari (language spoken in Rajasthan). It would be important to note that the residents of Sitara and the schoolteachers referred to the language as a home language and not as Bhili.
by families when they were having financial and/or personal problems, and for health-related matters.

The community’s customs about marriage were both similar to and different from those of Hindu society. In conformity with Hindu customs, marriage between a boy and a girl in Sitara was arranged for by the parents. However, unlike Hindu practices, the community also allowed for a custom called Naataa Prathaa. According to this custom, people who have lost their spouse because of death or estrangement could take on new partners of choice. This custom did not necessitate a marriage ceremony but required family sanction. Sometimes this practice was also used by men to marry twice. While this was not encouraged by the community, it was accepted.

While the Bhil community in Sitara lived within the cultural fabric of their community, I also found much evidence of their cultural, economic, and political integration with mainstream culture. Most men visited Udaipur city for work and could speak Hindi. Women generally spoke Bhili but could comprehend Hindi. The community celebrated Hindu festivals like Diwali and Holi, besides their own. They visited doctors for any major illnesses, childbirths took place in hospitals and children were duly vaccinated. A member of the community was the upsarpanch\(^5\) of the gram panchayat,\(^6\) and the community benefited from various government programmes on education, health, and poverty alleviation.

However, most Bhil families in Sitara were poor and classified as Below Poverty Line families\(^7\) (Government of India, 2013a). Agriculture was for subsistence, and the produce from the land was inadequate for their needs. The free-wheat ration from the government helped in meeting their requirements. The need for cash was met by the men, and sometimes the women, working as contractual labourers on construction sites in Udaipur city.

\(^5\) Vice-president

\(^6\) Village council: a state body whose members are elected by the people of the village.

\(^7\) A family of five earning less than 40 pounds per month and receives a free ration of wheat, sugar, and kerosene oil.
While working on such sites seemed to be the most common male occupation, some also worked as cooks in roadside restaurants, truck-drivers, and plumbers. A handful of families had a family member in a government job. The women in the village were responsible for a wide variety of household and agricultural chores: cooking, cleaning, washing utensils, getting firewood for cooking, fetching drinking water from the wells or the public tank, taking the cattle to graze, working on farms, processing the produce, and child-rearing.

Most children between the ages of 6-14 were enrolled in Sitara State Elementary School in the village, while a few went to private schools in Kalyanpur. The village had two early childcare centres, one was run by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) and the other was state funded. Many children in Sitara were first-generation students. All my participant children’s parents had never gone to school but uncles in two families had attended the first few years.

Very few homes in Sitara were completely made of brick and cement. Many of those that had brick and cement walls, had thatched roofs, and a significant minority were made of mud and stone. No homes in Sitara had toilets. Sitara was supplied drinking water through two community water tanks: one at Kesar and the other at Jamun. Families that lived around the water tank used to fetch water from it, but many depended on wells in their vicinity. The village enjoyed an electricity connection which generally powered a lightbulb and sometimes a table-fan in homes. Few homes owned televisions.

The Sitara State Elementary School

The Sitara State Elementary School (Grades 1-8) was in Jamun hamlet. It was connected to the highway by a minor road. The school comprised eight classrooms, a staffroom, and a kitchen area. Of the eight classrooms, six were in use for teaching; the other two were used for storing food, firewood, and old furniture. The classrooms were spacious, well ventilated, and enjoyed natural light from windows; the lightbulbs were rarely used. Each classroom had a blackboard. The only other available pieces of furniture were a table and chair for the teacher. The children sat on floor-mats. The staffroom had
chairs and tables, and cupboards which were occupied by textbooks, library books, stationery, files and registers, teachers’ personal belongings, and utensils for daily usage.

All the classrooms and the staffroom opened onto a veranda where the school congregated for assembly in the morning, for lunch, and to celebrate festivals. The open area beyond the school building was used by the children to play during lunchtime, but this space was inadequate for all of them. So, children also used to play in the open spaces outside the school premises or around their homes.

There were 204 children enrolled at Sitara School. While most of them were from Sitara, about 20 in grades 6-8 (ages 11-14) came from the neighbouring village which did not have an elementary school. Other than these 20 children and five others who were from the Nath community, all other children in school belonged to the Bhil tribe. Six teachers taught at Sitara school; three were Hindu and upper-castes, and a fourth followed the Jain religion, enjoying similar social standing as the higher-castes. All teachers commuted to school from Udaipur city. More details about the teachers have been provided in Table 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of teacher</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Subject(s)</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pradeep (head-teacher)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mathematics and Environmental Studies</td>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Environmental Studies</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>Jain religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Information about teachers

While all children aged 6-14 in Sitara village were enrolled in the school, attendance varied considerably. During the first two months of my fieldwork, about 75 per cent of the children enrolled seemed to be present. However,
over the next three months, only about 50 per cent of the children attended. I observed a similar fall in attendance for the teachers as well. Jaya was on maternity leave in the second half of my fieldwork, and no replacement was available for her. It was also not uncommon for at least one teacher to be absent from school for official or unofficial purposes, and occasionally, the school functioned with as few as two teachers.

Four subjects were taught in the primary grades (1-5): Hindi, English, Mathematics and Environmental Studies. In the upper primary grades (6-8), Environmental Studies was replaced by Science and Social Science, and Sanskrit was added. The medium of instruction in school was Hindi, which was different from the children’s home language, Bhili. Hindi is “one of the most widely understood languages of India” (Agnihotri, 2010). It is the state language in Rajasthan and is, thus, the language of administration and the medium of instruction in all state schools. It is also widely used in mass media including television, movies, radio, newspapers, and magazines. All teachers were fluent speakers of Hindi and Mewari. They could comprehend Bhili but did not speak it.

The school functioned six days a week, for six hours a day. During this time each teacher was supposed to take eight, 40-minute classes. There was no time allocated for music, dance, and art in the timetable. About half an hour was allotted for the assembly in the morning and as for lunch which was scheduled after the first four classes. It was often not possible for the teachers to follow this timetable. The lunchbreak extended to an hour to provide lunch to all the 204 children. The teachers also did their paperwork during class because no other free-time was available to them. With eight classes and six teachers, multi-grade teaching in the primary grades was the norm. Grades 1

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8 These are estimates based on my observations during morning assembly; this data could not be collected from the school as the teachers ‘adjust’ the attendance to avoid conflict with authorities. It was also not feasible to undertake a manual count each day.

9 Agnihotri (2010) describes the Hindi speaking region to include Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand
and 2 were taught together and by the third week of my fieldwork, this was true for Grades 4 and 5 as well.

**The Grade 5 class**

Within Sitara School, I focused on the children in Grade 5 (age 10). As mentioned in Chapter 1, I chose to do so because from among the primary classes, the probability of a finding the largest number of children reading in this class was the greatest. Grade 5 comprised 20 children: 12 boys and 8 girls. All but one boy belonged to the Bhil community. Suman was both the class teacher and the Hindi teacher of the class.

Of the 20 children, five could read their grade-level text; nine could not read their grade-level text, and six were largely absent from school. By the end of my first month in the school, I chose five 10-year-old children as the focus of my study. I disaggregated this sample based on caste, gender, and children’s reading-ability. The five children I chose include the boy from the Nath community and four from the Bhil community. Two children in the sample were girls, one could decode her Grade 5 textbook and the other recognised the alphabet. Of the three boys, two could read their textbook.

While I would have probably liked to have chosen all children who could read in my sample, this was not possible. This was because one of them refused to be a part of my study, the other seemed to be older than the 10-year-olds in Grade 5, and I sensed that the parents of the third child were looking for financial reimbursement from me. Table 4.2 provides this information about each of the participant children, on the next page.
Besides Krish, Sandhya, Pooja, Vijay and Ashish, their family members, the teachers in Sitara School also constitute the participants of the study. Having discussed my research setting and introduced my participants, I now pay attention to the processes of data collection.

### 4.4 Data collection

This section first outlines the schedule for data collection. It then discusses the various sources of data and how this data has been recorded. It concludes with a reflexive account of the researcher’s positionality during the data collection process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Reading level</th>
<th>Information about caregivers and family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krish</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Reads grade-level text fluently</td>
<td>Parents, aunt-uncle, grandmother • Only uncle could read • Agriculture and labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandhya</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Decodes grade-level text</td>
<td>Parents, aunt-uncle, grandparents • Only uncle could read • Agriculture, labour, and government job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pooja</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cannot read but recognises the alphabet</td>
<td>Parents, grandmother, stepmother, and stepbrothers • Stepbrothers could read • Agriculture and labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Decodes Grade 2 level text</td>
<td>Mother and grandmother • Agriculture and labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashish</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Upper caste</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Reads grade-level text with lesser fluency</td>
<td>Lives with grandmother • Parents died when she was a toddler • Two older sisters who had recently got married • Older brother works in a marble factory in Udaipur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Information about the children
4.4.1 The schedule for data collection

The data collection for this study spread over five months (113 days, including 86 school days and 27 holidays). On school days, I was with the children at school and at home, and on holidays I was in children’s homes for the whole day. On all days, I was with the children from about eight in the morning to about six in the evening.

In the first two weeks of my data collection, I interacted with all the children in Grade 5 and visited their homes, introducing myself to the family members. From the third week onwards, I started visiting the participant children’s homes. I visited Ashish, Krish, Sandhya, Vijay, and Pooja (in that order) for two weeks each and then repeated the same cycle, one more time. In the last week of my fieldwork, I visited all the children’s homes for a day each.

4.4.2 Sources of data

The ethnographic imagination entails a commitment to understanding the complexity of social life (Atkinson et al., 2003). This requires engaging with the various forms in which social life is performed, that is, actions, narratives, visual representations, texts, and material artefacts. This study engages with all these sources of data to provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of children’s literacy practices. I briefly outline my use of participant observation, oral accounts, documentary evidence and material artefacts, next.

**Participant observation**

Participant observation is described as the “central method of ethnography” (Delamont, 2002, p. 7) and the “heart of the ethnographic tradition” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 25). It involves becoming a part of the lives of the people one wishes to learn about over a sustained period to make what seems strange about their lives, familiar, and, at the same time, distance oneself from the familiar to render it strange (Atkinson et al., 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Being an ethnographer in Sitara required me to do both.

There was a lot about children’s lives that was unfamiliar to me. I am a Hindu, upper-caste woman who belongs to a middle-class family and has always resided in urban areas. My participant children belonged to a poor, rural
village. Thus, our life experiences were conspicuously different. I took on the task of making the children’s lives familiar to me by being with them in most of their waking hours. I was there when children were getting ready for school in the morning. I walked with them to school, and was with them during morning-assembly, Hindi class-time and during their free-time. I walked back home with them in the afternoon, and, at home, I was around when they were swimming in the lake; doing household chores; watching TV or enjoying videos on cell phones; reading, writing, and playing. During school holidays, I was in children’s homes for the entire day and on a few occasions during night-time as well. The intensity of this interaction helped me become an insider to children’s lives and consequently their literacy practices.

While I started as an outsider to children’s lives at home, I was not a stranger to their schooling practices. Children’s classroom practices echoed my years of professional experience, and this made it imperative for me to “fight familiarity” here (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995). I did this by taking Delamont’s (2002) advice of focusing on what was unfamiliar to me, that is, the children’s participation in the classroom, of which little has also been written about from India (see Chapter 2).

Becoming an insider to children’s lives was not a straightforward task. It involved positioning myself differently from the adults around, especially the teachers. It also involved simultaneously developing relationships with the children and the adults. I discuss my transition from a stranger to a friend in my participants’ lives, in detail, in Section 4.4.4.

**Oral accounts**

Solicited and unsolicited oral accounts provided by participants during fieldwork are also an important source of data. These accounts provide information about the phenomenon being investigated and the meanings participants’ attach to them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The nature of these accounts varies according to the needs of the study, and can “range from spontaneous, informal conversations in the course of other activities to formally arranged meetings in bounded settings out of earshot of other
people” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 112). I have utilised the range of these accounts in this study.

I learnt about the children through our many conversations and so never felt the need to interview them. Talk with family members included both conversations and interviews. It was easier to have conversations with the women because they were around in the day, and this was also possible with Pooja’s father because he was generally working on the farm. In Krish and Sandhya’s homes, the fathers were only available in the evening, and this was also the time when the entire family was around. As a result, the interviews in these homes took the form of group interviews where female members also contributed. All talk with men was in Hindi, and the women generally spoke in Bhili which was generally comprehensible to me. All interviews were conducted in my last days in the children’s homes, so benefit from the rapport I had built over the months with these families (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

My interactions with the teachers at school also included interviews and conversations. I interviewed the head-teacher and the Hindi teacher in the privacy of an empty classroom and undertook a group interview with all the teachers. I was also party to many staffroom conversations throughout my time at the school. All these interviews and conversations were in Hindi. The interviews were undertaken in the last month of my fieldwork so that I could also ask questions based on my observations.

**Documentary evidence and material artefacts**

With a focus on literacy, documents and material artefacts which are integral to children’s literacy practices also comprise data for this study. Documentary evidence included various “documents in context” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), that is, the children’s Hindi textbook, Hindi passbook, Hindi notebook, and the alphabet book used in the classroom. Material artefacts

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10 A compilation of texts of varied genre: stories, poems, plays, and riddles provided free of cost by the state government to all children.

11 A guidebook containing the answers to all the questions in the textbook, published privately.
comprised children’s drawings, paper constructions and the objects used during play. Other than the Hindi textbook and passbook, all other documents and material artefacts were carried back to England in the form of photographs. I discuss the various methods I used for recording the data, including photographs, in the next section.

4.4.3 Recording Data

The field is constructed with the ethnographer’s gaze, with what he or she decides to focus on and record during fieldwork (Atkinson, 1992). The tools that helped me record data and construct the field were my fieldnotes, audio recordings, video recordings, and photographs.

**Fieldnotes**

What ethnographers record as fieldnotes varies. For some, fieldnotes should only be about the participants while for others they also include ethnographers writing about themselves (Emerson et al., 1995; Jackson, 1990; Sanjek, 1990). My fieldnotes were “for the most part… a running description of events, people, things heard and overheard, conversations among people and conversations with people” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 93) but also included my reflections from the field (Atkinson, 1992).

I wrote fieldnotes every day, both at school and at home. At school, I wrote my fieldnotes after the Hindi class, which was the first in the day. I did this in the staffroom. In my initial days, this led to questions from the teachers and some also looked at my notes. However, since I was writing in English none of them showed an interest in reading them, and it seemed that they viewed this as a normal activity that a researcher would undertake.

While I wrote fieldnotes regularly, my notes were always selective and did not attempt to capture everything (Atkinson, 1992). This was not only a function of my memory but also a result of my gaze which was always “selective, purposed, angled” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 106) by my interest in the literacy practices of my four participant children. Consequently, I did not record every event that I witnessed or every conversation that I heard but only those that I judged to be relevant to the lives of my participant children and their literacy
practices. What I wrote in my fieldnotes each day made the field both “manageable and memorable” (Atkinson, 1992) for me and helped me understand the patterns in children’s lives and practices. However, my fieldnotes rarely provided me with details of children’s literacy practices. I used audio and video recordings and photographs to capture these.

**Audio recordings**

Over the course of my fieldwork, I recorded about 440 hours of audio data using a dictaphone. This included about 8 hours of interview data and much of the rest was in the form of continuous audio recordings from children’s homes. I had not planned to continuously record in children’s homes when I started fieldwork. However, in time, I found it necessary to do so because I was missing a good part of many valuable naturally occurring conversations by the time I switched on the recorder. Furthermore, on many occasions, when I attempted to switch on the dictaphone, some child around would take it from my hands to listen to a recording. Thus, I decided to leave the dictaphone always switched on when I was in children’s homes.

Consequently, on my return to England, I added what I call audio-notes to my fieldnotes while listening to these recordings. While this took my fieldnotes from about 100,000 words to 200,000 words, these recordings were very helpful on days when I was in children’s homes for the entire day. This was because I had no opportunity to write fieldnotes at these times and was exhausted by the time I got home to write detailed notes. Certain literacy practices in which children invited me to participate were also better captured as audio recordings than video recordings.

**Video recordings and photographs**

Video recordings with my flip camera and photographs from my iPhone also helped me record children’s literacy practices. Video was useful in capturing the details of interactions and photographs, the materiality of children’s literacy events (Pink, 2007). The video data included about 55 hours of classroom observations and about 5 hours from children’s homes.
While video-recording the Hindi class, I sat at the back of the classroom with my flip-camera in hand. Since my interest was in the interaction between the teacher and the participant children, I often moved the camera between the two. As a result, I could not take fieldnotes during this time, but the video helped me capture details which would not be possible with fieldnotes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Similarly, at home, some literacy practices, for example, Krish’s reading for pleasure, were best captured on video.

Using visual recording devices, and I would argue audio recording devices as well, within a context like Sitara requires the researcher to reflexively consider their appropriateness with respect to the cultural locations of the participants (Banks, 2007; Pink, 2007; Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). When I started fieldwork, I was aware that the children would not be familiar with the flip camera or the dictaphone and the touch-phone would also be a novelty. However, I was hopeful that the children would not be fazed by these recording devices. This proved to be true and the audio-visual recording devices proved to be “can-openers” (Collier & Collier, 1986) for my relationship with the children. The children were keen to use all my audio-visual devices themselves and did not require any guidance in operating my iPhone. They were also familiar with the idea of making videos and used my flip to do the same. The dictaphone seemed to intrigue them and they would invariably switch it on when they saw it in my hand. Thus, while these devices were new to the children, they seemed amenable to being both the recorder and the recorded during our interactions. Data collection did not only require me to make choices about the methods of collecting and recording data but also about my role in the field.

4.4.4 A reflexive account of my relationship with my participants

Doing fieldwork in Sitara required me to become an insider to children’s lives. However, for an adult researcher to gain access to children’s cultural worlds is not a straightforward task. There are differences in age, size, cognitive development, and social power between children and adults, and these need to be addressed by a researcher who wishes to become a part of children’s lives (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; James, 2007). Mandell (1991) asserts that the
differences between adults and children are overstated and ask researchers to take on a “least adult role” and suspend all adult-like characteristics except age and be a “responsive, interactive, fully involved participant-observer” (p. 42). She does this by joining children in the sandpit and swings, and by avoiding intervening in children’s disputes.

However, other researchers who have taken on the least adult role have found it difficult to pass unnoticed as adults and give up their responsibility towards children’s wellbeing (Epstein, 1998; Lappalainen, 2002). In turn, it has been argued that while the power differentials between the children and researchers need to be addressed, this does not require researchers to be child-like (Christensen & James, 2008; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Mayall, 2008). Fine and Sandstorm (1988) recommend that the adult researcher be a friend to one’s participants and state that “the key to the role of a friend is the explicit expression of positive affect combined with both a relative lack of authority and a lack of sanctioning of the behaviour of those being studied” (p. 17). Similarly, Corsaro and Molinari (2008) describe the researcher as an “atypical, less powerful adult” and literacy researchers have also found it beneficial to be a “nonthreatening adult friend” to children (Dyson, 2013b).

Christensen (2004) makes a helpful addition to this debate when she states that “power is not, as such, nested in categorical positions, such as ‘adult’ or ‘child’, but rather in the social representations of these that we make, negotiate, work out and work with, in social life” (p. 167). Thus, for her, the power differential between the adult researcher and the child is negotiated within a social context, and the researcher needs to heed what it means to be an adult within her context.

Researchers from India have often described the relationship between children and adults as one based on extremely unequal power relationships. The child is viewed as inexperienced and incompetent: an adult in the making who must learn from adults and be obedient to them (Chawla-Duggan et al., 2012; Kakkar, 1983; Kumar, 1989; Sarangapani, 2003). The relationship between the teacher and the student derives strength from not only the power...
asymmetry between the adult and the child but also the socio-cultural acceptance of the *guru-shishya* tradition, where the teacher is the *guru* or the knowledge giver and the student is the shishya or the obedient learner (Sarangapani, 2003).

When I started fieldwork in Sitara, I was conscious that the children would, in all likelihood, view me as a teacher-like adult. Pooja’s words confirmed this:

**Pooja**: *Madame, the first day I saw you in school, I was petrified.*

**Researcher**: *Why?*

**Pooja**: *I thought you were a new teacher, and you would ask me a question. I would not know the answer and you would slap me.*

So, while literacy researchers going into children’s homes have been known to take on the role of tutors, especially when engaging with children who are struggling with literacy (Hicks, 2002; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers, 2003), researchers in India have not wished to be viewed as a teacher by children and positioned themselves as a friendly adult (Chawla-Duggan et al., 2012; Sarangapani, 2003). Being cognisant of the asymmetrical adult-child and teacher-student relationships common in India, and an interest in understanding children’s practices, I also chose to negotiate a space for myself as an un-teacher like, less powerful, friendly adult at Sitara (Christensen, 2004).

Besides negotiating a space for myself in children’s lives, I also negotiated relationships with their parents and teachers. In the following sections, I provide an account of how these relationships developed and argue that maintaining all these relationships simultaneously was a question of building trust with both children and adults (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Russell, 2005). Whenever pertinent, I also discuss how my gender, caste and class-based identities were affecting my developing relationships.

**Being an un-teacher like adult**

Researchers interested in engaging with children’s perspectives and collecting data within schools have found it challenging to distinguish
themselves from the teachers in school (Lappalainen, 2002; Russell, 2005). Both Lappalainen (2002) and Russell (2005) have not only avoided taking on teacher roles but also tried to minimise their interaction with teachers during school time. Working within a very different physical and sociocultural space, I could not avoid the staffroom, or drinking tea and having lunch with the teachers. My presence at school largely depended on the teachers’ approval of me and understanding their views was important for my research.

Initially, both teachers and children saw me as a teacher-like adult. In such a situation, positioning myself as un-teacher like adult required me to periodically remind the teachers that I would not be able to take on any teacher roles. Often this conversation took place in front of children, and this underscored my un-teacher like status with the children. In addition to this, my interactions with children were qualitatively different from children’s interactions with their teachers.

The children first met me in their Hindi classroom. Suman (the Hindi teacher) did not introduce me to the children. I sat at the back of the class, on the floor with the children, took notes and left after class with Suman. On the third day, my departure was delayed by Vijay, Ashish and Shankar who approached me curious about what I was writing. I handed my fieldnotes register to them. They read what was written in Hindi and got excited when they read something that had been said in class. When I started video recording with my flip-camera, the boys again wanted to investigate what I was doing. They came and sat next to me to see what was viewable from the flip-screen and were soon taking videos of their own.

Towards the end of my first week in school, Ashish brought an old and battered mobile phone into class. He and Krish took turns to play a game on it while the other boys crowded around them, watching them play. I was told that the boys were trying to play a game, but the phone kept switching off because it did not have a memory. Not completely sure of what they meant, I asked what a memory was. Many boys answered together. I was told that a memory is a small black thing that enabled them to watch songs and videos on the mobile phone. Shankar added that it helped them make calls too but
was immediately corrected by Krish and Ashish: “No it does not. You need a sim card to talk, not a memory”. This was the first conversation that I had with a larger group of Grade 5 boys. Eventually, Suman walked into class and confiscated Ashish’s phone, telling him that he was not allowed to bring one to school.

While letting them “react” to my presence worked as a strategy to initiate contact with the boys (Corsaro, 1985) with the girls, who only glanced curiously at me, I initiated contact. This happened during my second week when Suman was not in class. Suman requested me to teach during this time. I refused politely but assured her that I would remain in class with the children. Suman seemed satisfied and left the classroom telling the children to copy the passage on Independence Day from their passbooks. As soon as Suman left, children started doing different things: some ran out of class; some enjoyed a scuffle; some continued with the work allocated by her and some video recorded with my flip-camera. Without heeding the activity, I went and sat with the girls. The girls giggled with shyness, and Sandhya could barely raise her head to look at me. With gentle persuasion, I asked the girls to tell me their names and told them about myself.

I began visiting the children’s families from my second week at school. Suman instructed the children to take me to their respective homes. The teachers’ directives were received in two different ways by the children: they either ran away from me, and I had to reach their homes with the help of other children who lived in their neighbourhood, or they accompanied me with a mixture of curiosity and dutifulness. Suman also wanted me to carry her message to the parents: Send children to school regularly. I politely refused again, telling her that I did not want the parents to view me as a teacher. It was really during the home visits that I formally introduced myself to the child and the family. I explained that I was not a teacher but a college student who had undertaken a project which involved spending time with their son or daughter in school and at home. No caregivers raised any objections to my presence in their children’s lives.
From among the Bhil children, Krish’s was the first home I visited. While both Krish and his mother had agreed to have me home, Krish seemed apprehensive the first day I accompanied him to his house because the teachers had told him that I was going to his house to check if he studied or not. At home, I greeted Krish’s mother and realised that she had recently given birth to a baby girl. I talked with his new-born sister, and both the mother and the son smiled watching our exchange. I then accompanied Krish and his friends, for a dip in the nearby pond. After Krish came back home, he was sent to run an errand from the shop on the highway and then asked to take the goats out to graze. I was with him on both occasions. The next day, when I was leaving school with Krish and his friends, Arjun (Grade 4; Krish’s neighbour) asked:

Arjun: Why are you walking with us? It is far away. Why don’t you get onto an auto like the other teachers?

Researcher: No, I won’t. I go to the pool with you, I take the goats out to graze with you. I am your friend. I will walk with you.

Fieldnotes

I was rewarded with beaming smiles from the boys. It was an exceptionally hot day and Karan took off his cap and put it on my head. I told him that I would use my chunni12 but the boys insisted that I wear the cap, and Krish informed me that the cap was his. We walked back together, chatting along the way, and Krish’s two younger brothers were holding my hands on both sides.

At home, Krish again went for a swim and took the goats to graze. He also watched videos on his father’s mobile phone and read a storybook that his older brother had got from school. Seeing her grandson read, Krish’s grandmother looked at me and remarked: “He can read.” So, like Krish’s teachers, Krish’s grandmother also seemed to feel that I was there to check on her grandson. I assured her that I was aware of Krish’s ability. Over time, as I continued to join the children in whatever they were doing and was appreciative of their activities, both the children and their families seemed to

12 A long scarf that can be used by women to cover their heads
understand that I was not there as a teacher. Observing our interactions, one of Krish’s uncle’s commented: “These children look like they are your teachers.”

At school, the teachers wanted me to teach the children English. I continued to refuse using all possible excuses: I don’t want children to view me as a teacher; I am not a qualified teacher and, ultimately, my supervisors would disapprove. At times, I was asked to slap a child who was not participating in the morning-assembly. I ignored these directives. On one occasion, I was in class chatting with Krish and his friends before Suman’s arrival. The class was noisy, and Mohan (teacher) came in and told the children that if they did not quieten down, I would slap them. Krish replied: “This madam does not hit”. Arguably, Krish had started viewing me differently from his teachers, even when he was at school.

By the time I visited Sandhya, Pooja, and Vijay, I had a reputation: I let children do what they wanted to; I did not expect them to study; I did not slap them; I audio and video-recorded their activities; I could take them for excursions, and I also let them take photos and watch the videos on my iPhone. So, all three children did not seem to display any apprehension when I started visiting their homes. Towards the end of my fieldwork both Vijay and Pooja identified me as an un-teacher-like-adult, and my conversation with Vijay (and his sister Gayatri) exemplifying this is given below:

Vijay: Madam, does a madam like you visit all other schools as well?
Researcher: No.
Vijay: They don’t?
Researcher: No, it is only me. Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
Vijay and Gayatri (answer together): It is a good thing.

Here, Vijay and Gayatri identified me as an adult who was different from those in their school and felt that it was a good idea for adults like me to visit schools.
To sum up, in the manner I interacted with the children, in the freedom I allowed them to take in using my technology, in the way I visited their homes, in the curiosity I showed about their lives, and in the way I avoided taking teacher roles in school, I negotiated an un-teacher-like position for myself in the first one and half months of my fieldwork which seemed to strengthen over time.

**Being a friendly adult**

Besides negotiating an un-teacher like position for myself, I also positioned myself as an unusual sort of adult in front of the children: one who was more interested in spending time with them than adults; one who did not tell them what to do but could be directed; one who would not tell on them; and one who was arguably friendlier than the adults around. Conversations, where children were free to ask me what they wanted and I could do the same, formed the basis of this relationship. In the following conversation, Vijay (Grade 5), Shankar (Grade 5), Gayatri (Grade 7), and Jagdish (Grade 7) were trying to get to know me while they were playing marbles in the common village space:

Jagdish: *Madam is this your job?*

[...]

Researcher: *This is not my job. I am studying.*

Jagdish (in an exasperated tone): *How much more does one have to study?*

Researcher: *You might have to. You can have long periods of study.*

Gayatri and Vijay asked together:

Gayatri: *You leave your child and come here?*

Vijay: *Don't you get a salary?*

Researcher: *I get a stipend through the period of my study.*

Shankar: *What does that mean?*

Researcher: *A stipend is an amount of money you get while you are studying for household expenditures and the expenditure I incur when I come here.*

Gayatri (asks again): *You leave your child and come here?*

Researcher: *Yes, my daughter lives very far away.*

Jagdish: *Delhi?*
Researcher: *Further away, she is in another country. There is a country called England. The English, do you remember studying about the English ruling our country?*

Gayatri: *Yes madam.*

Researcher: *Yes, that country.*

[...]

Gayatri and Shankar asked together:

Gayatri: *Madam, don’t you cry?*

Shankar: *You must miss her?*

Researcher: *Yes, I do.*

[...]

Gayatri: *Madam, doesn’t your daughter cry?*

Researcher: *Her father is taking care of her. She is older now; she does not cry. She is five years old.*

Gayatri: *Madam, I would be scared if I was in her situation.*

The children were trying to get to know me. Their realities were different from mine, and they were finding it difficult to understand that a woman of my age would still be studying and for that purpose living away from her family. However, they could appreciate that my situation would not be easy for me or my daughter and seemed to understand that my studying would involve some financial benefit. My conversations with children also took place in school. The children would ask me to come into their class during a free-period or would come and meet me in the staffroom when the other teachers were not around. Besides such conversations, the children also got to know me through the various videos and pictures I received from my family during fieldwork, and I would concur with Russell (2005) that children feel encouraged to share their lives with the researcher if they feel they are being allowed similar access.

Mid-way through my fieldwork, I acquired a new name: *madamii* as evidence of our growing friendship. The name was an alteration of the word, *madame* which children used to address me by, similar to their teachers. Altering names in this manner was a common practice in Sitara and children largely addressed each other with their altered names. The children’s parents and
teachers did not approve of my new name, but I liked it, and both boys and girls continued to call me madamii whenever they wished. On a similar note, Russell (2005) observes that with time, children in her schools in England and Sydney stopped calling her “miss” and addressed her by her name. Operating within a very different socio-cultural context, the children in Sitara probably could not address me by my name but did change my title to one that indexed a friendlier relationship.

The children also used various friend-like strategies to show their approval or disapproval of me. The girls displayed their approval by inscribing our names into a heart while the boys did this in the form of a smack on my back or a wink of their eye. Disapproval came in the form of reprimands from both the boys and the girls, and the girls would also pull on my clothes, make faces at me and threaten to stop talking to me. On more than one occasion, I found parents watching our interactions with amusement, and on one occasion, when I was not at Pooja’s house, her neighbour had asked: “Where is your friend today?”

My relationship with Pooja and Sandhya also had a gendered dimension to it, and I enjoyed being a girl with them. I would compliment the girls on their appearance when they wore make-up and jewellery, and they would compliment me on my choice of bangles. The girls were disappointed that I did not wear saris, did not have my nose pierced, and did not wear anklets. They encouraged me to do all three. They also wanted me to refrain from wearing black clothes and replace my walking shoes with sandals. Arguably, my female identity also encouraged the girls to introduce me to their boyfriends (discussed in Chapter 8).

I also found that being a friend to the children meant that I could not tell on them (Russell, 2005). So, when Sandhya skipped school and was playing near the lake, all day long, I kept it to myself. On another occasion, I warned Vijay who had been absent from school for over a month from frequenting the house next to the school to watch movies because Suman was on the lookout for him. And, on yet another occasion, I kept Vijay and Shiv’s smoking escapade to myself. Children’s literacy practices of writing chithiiz [love letters]
also had to be kept under wraps from both their teachers and parents (discussed in Chapter 8).

Being friendly with children did not, however, mean that the children viewed me as a child or that I positioned myself as one. The children told me that in comparison to them, I climbed hills too slowly and reminded them of an elephant when I got up from the floor. I was also completely inept at much of their play: swimming, climbing trees, playing tag, and sliding down the road on ‘skateboards’ and did not attempt to join them in their games. As an adult, I also took responsibility for children’s wellbeing when they were with me. For example, on one occasion, when I was with Pooja and her friends, I warned them to stay away from some medical waste including syringes that we came across. Thus, during my fieldwork, I presented myself to the children as “an unusual type of adult, one who is seriously interested in understanding how the social world looks like from children’s perspectives…without making a dubious attempt to be a child” (Christensen, 2004, p. 174).

**Being a good guest**

It did not take me long to realise that my acceptance in children’s lives was not only dependent on how the children viewed me, but also on whether their families and community accepted me. Literacy researchers engaging with families in England have been known to take on the role of “good guests” in children’s homes (Yee & Andrews, 2006). I also took on a similar role in my participant children’s homes. The first step in becoming a good guest was helping the family members to get to know me. Some questions that are not uncommon to researchers who work in Indian contexts were put to me by participant families: Was I married? How many children did I have? Why did I only have a girl? Where did my in-laws live? Where did my parents live? (Anandalakshmy et al., 2008) and I was forthcoming in my answers.

My role as a good guest also involved being sociable with all members of the family and the larger community. My gendered identity as a woman was a resource in this process because it was the women and the children who were at home most of the time in the day. I chatted easily with the mothers, aunts, grandmothers and older sisters of my participant children and entertained
young children by giving them horse and camel rides on my knee. I was invited into neighbours’ homes for tea, and I accepted these invitations graciously. Unlike my interactions with the women and children, my interactions with the men in the family were less frequent and more formal, partly because of my gendered identity. At the same time, I believe that my relationships with the women and children in the house did have a positive effect on their communication with me.

While my gender helped families view me as an insider, my caste did make the Bhil families apprehensive about whether they should offer me food and water. I had no reluctance in drinking water and eating in any home. I often shared my food with them and ate what was cooked in their homes. Thus, unlike Yee and Andrews (2006) who had to decide whether being a good guest in children’s homes in England should involve accepting refreshments, for me researching in a tribal village in India, this was a necessity.

Besides belonging to a higher caste than the families, my better financial status again made families apprehensive about whether I would be comfortable in their homes. I was asked questions about what my home was like, what electronic devices I had and whether I owned a vehicle, during my early days in all homes. I answered all questions honestly, and the families felt that I would not be comfortable in their homes. I reassured them that I felt no discomfort in their homes and was appreciative of the efforts they were making to sustain themselves. I also occasionally bought sweets, fruits, and other treats for the families and gave them photographs that I took of them. I also took my participant children and their small group of their friends to the park in Kalyanpur, treating them to samosas and sweets, on these occasions. Thus, while differences in caste and class would always render me an outsider to the families, what seemed pertinent to being a good guest was treating the children and families with respect and care.

**Being an acceptable researcher at school**

When I started fieldwork, the teachers also saw me as a teacher-like person. In the process, they asked me to deliver their messages to parents, to slap children and teach when they were short-staffed (discussed previously).
However, I continued to refuse to take on these tasks, making it apparent that I did not want to be viewed as a teacher by the children. At the same time, I made myself useful in school with some non-academic roles. I took on the duty of carrying a packet of milk from Udaipur city, for everyone’s daily tea at school. I helped the teachers in filling records for attendance and examinations. I was also a listening ear for both the teachers and the head-teacher who were, periodically, unhappy about each other’s actions, and was careful not to take sides during these interactions. Towards the last leg of my fieldwork, I also taught eighth grade because the English teacher went on maternity leave and the head-teacher insisted. Taking on teaching at this stage did not seem to affect my non-teacher status with my participant children, and in the same vein Russell (2005) observes that interacting with teachers became less of a threat for her once the children had got to know her.

During my time at school, I also continued to approach the teachers’ practices concerning corporal punishment with a non-judgemental attitude. I chose to refrain from expressing my opinion of Suman’s teaching throughout my time at the school and was appreciative of her efforts when I took leave. In time, all the teachers talked to me about the personal hardships and challenges they faced as state schoolteachers.

To sum up, both the children and the adults seemed to view me as a teacher-like adult when I started fieldwork. Over time, I negotiated and renegotiated my relationship as “the other” in children’s lives (Christensen, 2004), and the children came to identify me as a different sort of adult, one who was akin to a friend. Parents came to view me as a family guest who was appreciative of their children and them, and teachers accepted me as an adult who did not take on teacher-like responsibilities but was otherwise helpful and respectful. When I was leaving, Suman and the other teachers were unanimous in their assessment of me and observed: “You behaved very well, madam.” Suman also assessed my relationship with the children and commented: “You have become one with the children”. Thus, it did seem like in Suman’s opinion, I had been able to balance my relationships with both them and the children.
and present myself as a person who could be trusted (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Having discussed data collection, I now turn to discuss the processes of data analysis.

4.5 Data Analysis

This section first discusses how the data was constructed in the form of transcripts. It then outlines the methods of analysis and illustrates some of the analytic work undertaken. It ends with a note on the writing of ethnography.

4.5.1 Transcription

Transcription is a crucial stage in the process of analysis when audio- and/or video-recordings are used (Baker, 2014; Duranti, 1997). It involves selecting, editing, and representing spoken interaction captured through these recordings in the form of script (Atkinson, 1992). Transcripts can also utilise photographs as data and may involve translation and issues of selection and representation remain pertinent here as well (Duranti, 1997). Ochs (1979) describes transcription to be a “selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions” (p. 44) and one which involves practical considerations, and the researcher’s interpretation remains an integral part of this process (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Mishler, 1991). In this section, I discuss the various choices I made for constructing my transcripts.

Transcription requires researchers to make choices about the content and layout of the transcript. The content of my transcripts is influenced by the study’s roots in sociocultural theory. Consequently, like other sociocultural researchers who have focused on literacy, transcripts have been constructed not only for children’s literacy practices but also their play, since the latter is viewed as a key resource for enriching literacy instruction (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). Furthermore, a multimodal conceptualisation of literacy has required me to pay attention to both the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of children and the experts and peers around them (Heath & Street, 2008). The verbal behaviour that I have chosen to translate includes extended pauses, immediate responses, overlaps, elongation of syllables, and aspects of voice quality like resignation and excitement, and the non-verbal behaviour includes
actions, facial expressions, and silences. My choice of the verbal and the non-verbal behaviour is based on my interpretation of these as pertinent to the literacy interaction.

Besides making choices about the content of the transcript, I have also made choices about its layout. To construct a transcript as a “readable” text (Atkinson, 1992), a “standard transcription layout with speaking turns following one another in sequence” reflecting normal patterns of conversations has been adopted to represent verbal behaviour (Swann, 2010, p. 10). Again, to facilitate readability and not make the transcript too detailed and difficult to follow, verbal behaviour like pauses and overlaps have been mentioned without using any linguistic conventions, and punctuation has been used conventionally. All speech in the transcripts has been italicised, so that it can be clearly distinguished from the verbal and non-verbal behaviour mentioned previously. All omissions have been represented using [...] and portions that are incomprehensible are represented using xx symbols.

Non-verbal behaviour has also been represented in the form of photographs. Literacy researchers like Hamilton (2000) have found photographs useful in exemplifying the interaction around texts, and others have used photographs to show the texts that have been composed by children (Dyson, 1997, 2003; Pahl, 2002). Such realist use of photography to “support and illustrate written points” (Pink, 2007, p. 152) has often been criticised on the grounds that photographs do not provide an unbiased view of the world and can also be interpreted by readers in ways that are not intended by the writer (Banks, 2007; Pink, 2007; Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). At the same time, Pink (2007) has also argued that such a use of photography is not always inappropriate. I also use photographs to exemplify the reality of children’s practices. This reality is material, embodied and spatial, and I intend to use photographs to help a reader whose knowledge of children’s literacy practices may primarily come from high-income nations. However, in doing so, I am cognisant that the photographs are a part of the reality that I am choosing to construct and can be interpreted differently by readers.
Transcription has also required me to make linguistic choices. All my audio and video recordings were either in Hindi or Bhili, and I have transcribed most of this data myself. I transcribed in these languages to prevent the loss of meaning due to translation into English at this stage. I transcribed myself, despite this being a time-consuming task because the recordings could only be meaningfully transcribed by someone present when the recorded events occurred and because they required me to make choices about what to transcribe.

While I am a fluent speaker of Hindi, I do not speak Bhili. When I started fieldwork, I could comprehend a few words and phrases in the language because of its affinity to Mewari (the language spoken in Udaipur city). However, during my fieldwork, my ability to comprehend the Bhili spoken around me improved, and I also started using various words and short phrases in Bhili. Consequently, when I started transcribing, I found that the long hours that I had spent in the field had also significantly improved my capacity to understand Bhili in the transcripts. Transcribing Bhili was also possible because talk between children often involved short stretches of Bhili and my conversations with children and adults involved both Hindi and Bhili.

For parent interviews where answers were exclusively in Bhili, I hired three transcribers residing in Udaipur city who were fluent speakers of Mewari and could comprehend Bhili.

I coded the Hindi and Bhili transcripts and translated only those that I have presented as data in this thesis. Duranti (1997) discusses the various formats in which researchers can present the original transcript with English translation. However, I have chosen to present only the English transcript because my focus is on what was being said and the interaction and not the language. Providing the transcripts in Bhili and English would also have significantly affected the word limit of the thesis. I had help with my translations from a colleague who is again an inhabitant of Udaipur city and is also a native speaker of multiple Rajasthani languages. I provide an example of a Bhili and Hindi transcript and its translation into English in Appendix 9.
To summarise, the data that I have constructed in the form of transcripts has required me to make various choices about the content, layout, and languages of transcription. These have been governed by various theoretical and practical factors and my interpretation has been a key element in this process.

4.5.2 Methods of analysis

In alignment with the research questions, the two focus areas for this study were children’s literacy practices and adult beliefs. Children’s literacy practices were analysed using processes of in-case and cross-case analysis while adult beliefs were analysed by generating themes across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2006). The five participant children were the cases or the “bounded” units in this study (Stake, 1995). The in-case analysis was used for highlighting children’s literacy practices as their interests/ disinterests by taking in account the specificities of the case/child and the cross-case analysis for illuminating the cultural nature of the practices (Dyson, 2008; Stake, 2006).

For analysing adult beliefs, I read and re-read the parent and teacher interview transcripts, audio transcripts of morning assembly-time as well as my fieldnotes of staffroom conversations. The coding of these transcripts highlighted three prominent themes: teacher authority, skill-based instruction, and student interest in learning. My knowledge of the culture of teaching in state schools in India, a review of literature on caregiver beliefs shaping children’s literacy practices, as well as Sarangapani’s (2003) research examining teacher authority in India also aided me in constructing these themes. Eventually, I examined these themes using Gee’s (2002, 2012) conceptualisation of Discourse and re-named them as Discourses. These themes have been discussed in Chapter 5. Appendix 8 presents the codes and themes for caregiver and teacher beliefs.

Data from all five children have been used to generate themes with respect to their literacy practices. The relevant audio or video transcripts of each literacy practice highlighted two codes (1) the child’s purpose for engaging with print and (2) the ways in which the child was using/ not using cultural practices. For
instance, the recurrent instances of Krish reading at home were coded (1) for pleasure and (2) borrowing and altering school practices. At this point, drawing on the literature (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018) children’s literacy practices were identified as playful or serious and as interests or evidencing their lack of interest, and presented in the form of emerging themes for the study.

Subsequently, Hedges and Cooper’s (2016) theorisation of children’s interests was utilised, and two children’s data were re-examined using funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and identity (Gee, 2012, 2014) leading to a refining of the theme with respect to children’s serious interests. The children chosen for the case studies present contrasting cases: Krish was a boy who was a keen reader while Pooja was a girl who did not seem to be choosing to read. They also periodically engaged with print at home. Their case studies are presented in chapters 7 and 8. Eventually, the cultural nature of children’s literacy practices was highlighted by drawing on the analysis in chapters 6, 7 and 8 in Chapter 9 by using Gee’s theorisation of Discourse.

4.5.3 Writing the ethnography

Writing the ethnography is an essential part of doing the ethnography. It requires researchers to make decisions about the textual/ rhetorical strategies and authorial style they wish to adopt (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This study uses narrative as its rhetorical strategy. I chose to use narrative because it underscores a mode of reasoning that is “contextually embedded”; helps in understanding the “whole by integration of its parts”; looks for explanations by investigating “connections between events”; and does not pursue universal truths, and these ideas are in synergy with the situated and socially constructed view of reality that frame this study (Richardson, 1990, p. 21). The narrative is evident in Chapters 6 and 7 which have been constructed as case studies which focus on children’s interests.

Writing the ethnography has also required me to make decisions about my authorial style. Conventional ethnographers tend to distance themselves from their data, while post-modern ones find it difficult to disentangle their voice from that of their participants in their use of textual styles like poetry and
plays. Few educational ethnographers present their work using poetry and
dialogue (Delamont et al., 2000) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) argue
for a “proper balance between a totally impersonal authorial style that elides
the agency of the observer-author and an exaggeratedly literary form in which
the author seems more important than the rest of the social world” (p. 211).
Therefore, in writing my narratives, I am neither an impersonal author who
wants to distance herself from her data, nor do I make opaque the distinction
between my voice and those of my participants. I use both description and
inference together in the vignettes, but qualify my inferences (Wolcott, 2009).
For example, when presenting data about Pooja’s writing practices, I describe
the events and make inferences about Pooja’s feelings based on her facial
expressions. However, I qualify my inferences and write “Pooja seemed
disappointed” rather than “Pooja was disappointed”.

4.6 Ethics

This study is guided by the Ethical Guidelines of Educational Research (2011)
provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). It received
approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Open University;
the sanction letter has been provided in Appendix 2. Both sets of guidelines
require researchers to obtain voluntary informed consent from participants
before the initiation of the study; protect participants from any harm that may
come by their way due to the study; and protect their privacy throughout the
process of research and in any subsequent publication. When the participants
of the research include children, the Ethical Guidelines of Educational
Research (British Educational Research Association, 2011) also require that
in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
“the best interests of the child…be the primary consideration” and “children
who are capable of forming their own views…be granted the right to express
their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age
and maturity” (p. 6). At the same time, researchers are required to seek
consent from responsible adults like parents when children’s age or
circumstances limit their understanding of the research process.
In the same vein, childhood researchers also reiterate the importance of respecting children’s autonomy, protecting them from harm as well as protecting their privacy during the research (Alderson, 1995; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Morrow & Richards, 1996). Emphasising children’s right to autonomy, Morrow and Richards (1996) explain that children’s capacity to give consent is not entirely dependent on their age: their context and what they are being asked to consent to are also important determining factors. At the same time, they acknowledge that children are vulnerable in comparison to adults and emphasise an adult researcher’s responsibility of protecting children from harm. Christensen and Prout (2002) further argue that while the relationship between the child and the researcher cannot be socially symmetrical, it should be an “ethically symmetrical” one where a researcher takes decisions paying due heed to children’s context, interests, and values.

Researching within a village and a state school in India presented challenges with regards to gaining informed consent from the participants as well as doing this before the initiation of the study. In this section, I first discuss how I dealt with these challenges to make consent meaningful and informed for my participants and argue that the ethnographic nature of the study was a resource in this process. I then explain how the challenges to the ethical principles of confidentiality and protection from harm were addressed with respect to the children and the teachers in this study.

4.6.1 Informed consent

Undertaking research in a state school in India requires official sanction from the education department. Vidya Bhawan, an NGO working with the state education system in Udaipur helped me with the process while I was in England. The District Education Office (DEO) at Udaipur sanctioned my study (sanction letter in Appendix 1) based on the relationship between the Department and Vidya Bhawan; Sitara school teachers were not consulted in this process. In a culture of state schooling which is bureaucratic and expects teachers to obey orders, this is a common practice, and I had little choice but to adhere to this system to initiate my study. However, I was cognisant that
this access did not amount to receiving consent from the teachers and that I would have to work towards making this access consensual.

At school, the teachers were able to remember me from my previous visit when I had asked them for their preliminary consent for my study (discussed in Section 4.3.1). I provided them with the sanction letter from the DEO’s office and re-initiated our acquaintance, introducing myself as a PhD student from England who was undertaking a study on the home and school literacy practices of children. I discussed the research purpose and processes in detail and provided them with a leaflet carrying all this information. I explained that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent anytime during the course of the study. I assured them that their identity and the identity of the school would be kept confidential in any report that I would subsequently write. I also provided the consent forms to Suman (the Hindi teacher) and Pradeep (the head-teacher). All the documents that I provided were in Hindi and written in simple language. The English version of the consent forms and information leaflet are provided in Appendices 3-6.

Even though I came with an officially sanctioned permission, Suman and Pradeep did not sign the consent forms immediately. Both viewed me as someone akin to an inspector in my initial days at the school. This was not surprising because state officials who visited the school, two during my fieldwork, personified this role. To allow the teachers to see me differently, I refrained from voicing my opinion of Suman’s teaching, and when Suman and Pradeep wanted my opinion on teaching children who had not learnt how to read, I reiterated my position as a PhD student who was learning and had little knowledge about such matters. I believe that it was my non-intrusive approach towards Suman’s teaching as well as my helpful and non-judgemental manner at school (discussed in Section 4.4.4) that helped the school staff to trust me, over time.

On my request, Suman and Pradeep handed me their signed consent forms in my third week at the school. However, I would argue that a more culturally appropriate affirmation of their consent only came towards the end of my fieldwork when all the teachers told me that I had “behaved very well” during
my stay (also discussed in Section 4.4.4). Around this time, all the teachers also agreed to a group interview for which they signed consent forms as well. They also gave me verbal consent to use any conversations that I might have had witnessed in the staffroom on matters pertinent to my research questions. Thus, while my access to school had been possible by official order, it was the time and processes that ethnography allowed me that resulted in meaningful consent from the teachers.

The challenge of obtaining informed consent from the children and their parents was of a different nature because my research concerns and their life experiences had little meeting ground, and this did limit their understanding of my research. The children had allowed me in their homes with a mixture of dutifulness and curiosity, and their parents, in all likelihood, saw me as someone coming with the sanction from the school. This initial access did not amount to informed consent, and it was only over time, as I interacted with the children and their families, showed them what data collection involved and conversed with them about why I was undertaking the study and what I intended to do with the data, was I able to help the children and families become informed about my research. Thus, my ethnographic engagement with them was a resource if not a necessity in helping them understand my research better. Consequently, I requested the children and parents to sign the consent forms towards the end of my first round of fieldwork.

In keeping with cultural norms which value a reciprocal relationship of responsibility between children and adults, I often requested the children and their parents to sign consent forms when they were together. Wherever necessary, I read the consent forms to the parents and children and explained verbally. All the consent forms were in Hindi and the one for children was in the form of a letter addressed to them. I observed all the participant children smiling when they read/heard details like audio and video recording and shadowing the child on their consent letters because of their familiarity with the activities and they seemed pleased that I would be eventually writing about them. I also received signed consent forms from my participant
children’s friends and siblings who were significant in their lives and could appear in the thesis.

To sum up, the ethical guidelines provided by BERA (2011) advise researchers to obtain informed consent and require researchers to obtain this consent prior to the initiation of the research. Researching within the cultural context of an Indian village and state school, gaining informed consent from the teachers as well as the children and their families involved giving them time to gauge whether I was the kind of person they wanted to trust as well as understand what the research processes involved. This was possible because of the ethnographic nature of study which did not strictly conform to anticipatory ethical regulation (Delamont & Atkinson, 2018; Murphy & Dingwall, 2007) made it possible for me to gain meaningful consent from my participants.

4.6.2 Confidentiality and protection from harm

During fieldwork, I often had to make a choice between the ethical principles of confidentiality and protection from harm. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) describe preadolescents (10-12-year-olds) as children who "have increased mobility, increased privacy, and knowledge of previously taboo subjects" (p. 55) and argue that this can raise ethical dilemmas for researchers who are committed to maintaining children’s confidentiality and simultaneously protecting them from harm. For me, this challenge arose not only in my engagements with the children but, also, the teachers

As discussed in Section 4.4.4, I also observed my participant children skipping school, exchanging love letters, and experimenting with smoking, and I judged smoking as injurious to their health. I chose to respect children’s right to privacy and not inform their parents and teachers of their activities because I saw more harm coming out of this course of action than benefit for both the children and the study (Alderson, 1995; Hammersley, 2018a). Informing parents and teachers of children’s actions would have, in all likelihood, led to children being severely reprimanded and caused embarrassment to parents. On the other hand, it would not have affected children’s practices which were a part of peer cultures and, arguably, resistant
to adult censure. Me telling on the children could also have led the children to lose their trust in me. Thus, my decision to value children's confidentiality and autonomy was not only ethically motivated but also involved an appreciation of the practical situation in the field.

The challenge to teachers' confidentiality arose when they asked me to use their original names in my thesis. I politely refused to do so because I felt that this could cause them some unforeseen harm in the future. Doing so, I gave primacy to the teachers' right to protection from harm over their right to autonomy. In the same vein, the names of the children and parents have also been anonymised in this study and so has the name of the village and the town centre. Furthermore, the photographs that have been used do not reveal the face of the child. All the data from the study has been stored on a secure Open University server throughout the time-period of the study.

To conclude, I encountered ethical challenges to informed consent, confidentiality, and protection from harm during my fieldwork. Overcoming these challenges involved reflecting on the cultural context within which I was researching as well as the ethical values underpinning these ethical requirements (Hammersley, 2018a). Consequently, decisions taken by me did not always adhere literally to the ethical procedures required by BERA and required me to privilege one ethical value over another, on occasion. However, this was done to ensure that the research was carried out in a humane and sensible manner (Delamont & Atkinson, 2018).

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the study. Ethnography complements the study’s focus on exploring the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices. It is also in synergy with the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study, which emphasise the socially constructed nature of knowledge. The field was constructed with my activities, gaze, and the relationships of trust that I developed with all my participants, during data collection. Analysis was an interpretive exercise where my judgement was inextricably intertwined with both theoretical and practical considerations. Finally, my response to the ethical challenges
involved adhering not only to ethical principles but also to cultural realities, and ethnography proved to be a resource for this. In the next chapter, I shift my focus to the findings of the study and begin by examining the practices of the adults in Sitara village.
Chapter 5: The beliefs of the teachers and caregivers

5.1 Introduction

This is the first of the three chapters that discuss the findings of this study. Here, I focus on the beliefs of adults, that is, the caregivers and teachers, which are shaping children’s literacy practices. I use Gee’s (2012) conceptualisation of Discourse for doing so. For Gee (2012), Discourses are the dominant social practices of a community which when voiced or enacted lead individuals to get identified as members of the community (discussed in Chapter 3). Children’s literacy practices are embedded in Discourses valued by their caregivers and teachers. In this chapter, I shed light on these Discourses and sketch a picture of how they position children as learners.

Based on over five months of participant observation in the homes and school of the five participant children (Krish, Pooja, Sandhya, Vijay, and Ashish), oral accounts obtained from the caregivers and teachers, as well as the typology of beliefs uncovered from the review of the literature (discussed in Chapter 2), I have identified three Discourses shaping children’s literacy practices:

- The literacy instruction Discourse
- The teacher authority Discourse
- The student interest in learning Discourse

Sections 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 attend to these Discourses. The concluding Section 5.5 discusses the relationship between caregiver and teacher beliefs.

5.2 The literacy instruction Discourse

Suman, the Hindi teacher at Sitara State Elementary School voiced a skill-based literacy instruction Discourse. This Discourse reflected the dominant social practice of her teaching community, which believed that reading and writing are skills which can be taught independent of context, and so, meaning
is not something that is constructed in interaction but provided by the teacher to the student.

5.2.1 At school

Suman taught the texts in the Hindi textbook and undertook basal tasks for children who could not read during class-time. The Hindi textbook was the primary teaching-learning material in the class and contained texts of varied genres: stories, poems, plays, and riddles. Suman was expected to teach the textbook following a schedule provided by the state education department and periodically test children on its content. Library books were available, but Suman did not use them during teaching-time. Moreover, she only issued these books to children in Grades 6, 7 and 8, to read at home.

Suman's faith in a skill-based approach to reading instruction was evident when she firmly stated during her interview:

*The children have their textbook. They must look at it and make an effort to read and if they cannot read then they have to first learn to recognise the alphabet, the vowels and the consonants.*

Suman viewed memorising the alphabet as a prerequisite for learning to read and engaging with a meaningful text. Moreover, she expected children who did not read as per their grade to pick up their textbook and learn to read on their own. She did not seem to view a teacher's support in helping the child engage with meaning as important in such a situation.

Suman also viewed basal work as beneficial for children who did not read and talked about her approach as follows:

*For children who do not read, I have done the best thing. I have started from the beginning. I wrote all the consonants on the blackboard and made children recognise them. I then made words using the consonants: two-letter words, then three-letter words, then four-letter ones. I then used these words to make small sentences. I asked children to copy these words and sentences in their notebooks and instructed them to read as they write. After this, I introduced one vocalic diacritic marker\(^{13}\) at a time with all the consonants. First 'aa' with all the consonants. I again made words like kaalaa [black], maamaa [mother's uncle]. Then I made small sentences using these.*

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\(^{13}\) The Devanagari script represents vowels sounds with both letters and diacritic markers
words. Then, one by one, I took on the 'i', 'ii', 'u', 'uu' and other markers with the all the consonants, making words and sentences again.

In undertaking basal tasks, Suman first asked children to recognise a set of letters (or syllables) written on the blackboard. She then provided children with words and sentences composed from these letters and asked them to read these ‘texts’ while copying them in their notebooks. Here again, Suman’s words illuminate her belief that reading is a skill that does not need to be contextualised with texts and interaction that was meaningful for the child.

Consequently, Suman regularly instructed children who did not read to purchase an alphabet book and use it to memorise the alphabet in their free-time. The basal lessons she undertook, instructing children to recognise letters and decode long lists of decontextualised words and sentences, encompassed more than half of her Hindi classes. In this manner, she reminded me of the practices of a teacher in Kenya who was also asking children to read basal words and sentences to her (Lisanza, 2011).

While the emphasis on skills and not meaning was conspicuous in Suman’s words and basal practices, how she taught the texts provided in the textbook also seemed to underline her belief that text-meaning does not need to be contextualised in interaction but is provided by the more-knowledgeable teachers to less-knowledgeable students. As a result, when Suman taught the texts in the textbook, she read them to the class and then provided their meaning to children through verbal explanations. She did not pay attention to children’s attempts to connect the texts to their lives, and all the questions she asked the children were either closed or rhetorically framed.

This was visible when Suman taught a story in class about Baldev, a 10-year-old boy who skipped school and went to see the circus (discussed in detail Chapter 6). In the following two examples, Suman appeared to ignore Jatin and Shankar’s spontaneous comments while she explained the story:

Suman: Baldev thought that he needlessly bought the one-rupee ticket and wasted his money. He should have played ball with his teacher and friends at school.

Jatin: They used to take less money in olden times, madam.
Suman: *When Baldev saw the three-legged dog then he started thinking about who could have taken the dog’s leg.*

Shankar: *The tiger!*

In the first example, Jatin keenly observed that the tickets in olden times used to be much cheaper, and in the second, Shankar spontaneously imagined that the tiger could have eaten the three-legged dog’s foot. However, Suman did not heed their reflections and imaginative ideas.

The questions that Suman asked children while teaching also required children to recount text information or were rhetorically framed. An example of the latter is given below:

Suman: *The circus was advertising that the tiger and the goat would come and have water from the same bowl. Have we ever seen such a thing?*

Many children: *No.*

Suman: *Have we ever heard such a thing?*

Many children: *No.*

Suman: *But the circus people were saying this. If children hear such a thing, then they are curious about going and seeing such an event. How will the tiger drink water? Will he not eat the goat? Children think like this.*

Here, the obviousness of the answers to the rhetorically framed questions did not allow for any constructive engagement with the children's experiences, and in line with her rhetorical questioning, Suman concluded that children were bound to be curious about watching the tiger and goat, without asking them if they were. Thus, the manner in which Suman taught children to read using basal texts and transacted texts from the Hindi textbook seemed to underscore her belief in a decontextualised skill-based approach to reading instruction which positioned children as decoders and receivers of text meaning.
Suman’s writing instruction also underscored skills and did not provide children with any space to compose. Similar to the observations of some researchers in India, Kenya and Mexico (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994), all writing tasks that Suman undertook in class expected children to copy neatly. Suman wrote the answers to the questions in the textbook on the blackboard and asked children to copy them. She also expected children to copy answers from a passbook: a guidebook containing the answers to all the questions in the textbook and asked the children to copy the answers from the passbook. When I asked Suman why she did not let children write answers on their own, she responded as follows:

*I don’t tell them to answer the questions on their own, because they will not be able to. They will just write the answer in one word and not frame it as a proper sentence. They will also get their spellings wrong. The answer needs to be correctly written. Also, children who do not read cannot answer the questions on their own, they must copy.*

For Suman, writing skills: neatness, sentence structure and spellings, seemed to constitute writing tasks. She was also aware that many children in her class would not be able to manage curricular tasks except by copying.

Besides asking children to copy questions and answers, Suman also expected children to copy passages about national and religious festivals, as well as official letters (generally, addressed to the school principal requesting leave). As with the questions and answers, these texts were either provided by Suman or were copied from the passbook. A translation of the passage on Diwali¹⁴ that Krish copied from his passbook is provided below:

**Diwali**

India is a large country. Many festivals are celebrated here. Diwali is one of the main festivals celebrated. This festival is celebrated on no moon day of the Kartik month¹⁵. It is said that on this day, Lord Ram returned to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile in the forests. To celebrate this event people light lamps in their houses.

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¹⁴ An important Hindu festival

¹⁵ As per the Hindu calendar
People start cleaning their homes 10-15 days before Diwali. People buy new utensils on the day of Dhanteras\textsuperscript{16} and celebrate small Diwali on the next day. Lamps are lit in homes on new moon day and the goddess Laxmi is prayed to. Children burn crackers. There is light and festivity all around. Special food is cooked in homes, and people eat sweets. Everybody celebrates this festival with much joy. People visit each other's homes. Diwali is a festival of mutual goodwill and brotherhood.

Suman explained her rationale for asking children to copy the Diwali passage from the passbook as follows:

*I ask children to copy the passages from the passbook so that they learn the correct information about the festival like why it started. If the children write the passage on their own, they will only write about how they celebrate it at home.*

Suman gave greater importance to decontextualised knowledge that children ought to know about Diwali, over articulation of their experiences of celebrating the festival. Thus, writing 'correctly', be this in terms of the mechanics of writing or the content of what was being written, was the focus of Suman's writing instruction. In the same vein, based on her observations in an Indian state school, Sarangapani (2003) noted that “even essays had ‘right answers’ – the one that conformed to the essays given in the guidebooks” (p. 142).

To summarise, Suman's words provide evidence of her faith in a skill-based literacy instruction Discourse. This was visible in her emphasis on children memorising the alphabet before engaging with meaningful texts. It was also evident when she did not attempt to contextualise the meaning of texts in interaction with her students. Suman also believed that what children wrote needed to be written correctly, both, in terms of the mechanics of writing and content. Consequently, in voicing this skill-based Discourse of literacy instruction, Suman was positioning children as decoders, copiers, and receivers of decontextualised knowledge.

\textsuperscript{16} The day before Diwali
5.2.2 At home
Of the four participant families, caregivers in three had never been to school and could not read. Consequently, they believed that children should learn to read and write in ways that the teacher expected them to, and Sandhya’s father asserted that children should learn “whatever the teacher teaches”. Krish’s uncle could read, and his words echoed the skill-based literacy instruction Discourse. He was concerned about his son Karan’s inability to read, even though he was in Grade 5, and talked about asking his son to read to him as follows:

I ask him to read to me. He is not able to. I tell him to read letter-by-letter, but he cannot even recognise his letters.

Krish’s uncle gave importance to his son being able to memorise sound-symbol relationships to read, based on his own experiences in Sitara school, and his views were no different from those of some Chinese parents in Canada (Li, 2002) and some other Vietnamese and Sudanese parents in North America (Li, 2007) who also drew on their own school experiences while voicing their skill-based understanding of literacy instruction. Thus, caregivers in Sitara who had never gone to school believed that children needed to learn to read and write in ways that their teacher expected of them and those who had were acceptive of the school’s skill-based literacy instruction Discourse.

5.3 The teacher authority Discourse
Both teachers and caregivers at Sitara had faith in the teacher authority Discourse. For examining these beliefs, I draw on Sarangapani’s (2003) framework of teacher authority detailed in Chapter 2. Sarangapani (2003) posits that belief in the teacher’s authority over children in Indian society has both epistemic and moral basis. Consequently, she explains this authority is not only rooted in the teacher’s knowledge of the subject, but also in his/her identity as a parent-like adult who has the best interests of the child in mind, and a guru who is the revered teacher and the holder of knowledge in Hindu society.
Sarangapani (2003) further argues that teachers in state schools also draw authority over children by viewing themselves as patrons because of their ‘superior’ caste, class and urban residence and their students as their protégés. Finally, she views this authority to be rooted in the teachers’ belief that they are patriots/martyrs who are selflessly serving their country, unlike their students and their families. Suman’s words and actions provide evidence of all these facets of teacher authority, and I discuss this in the next section.

5.3.1 At school

Suman voiced and enacted the teacher authority Discourse on multiple occasions at school providing evidence of her firm belief in her authority over her students as an adult-parent- guru, a patron, and a martyr.

The teacher as the adult-parent-guru

On this occasion, I saw Suman addressing the entire school during morning-assembly and drawing her authority from being an adult-parent- guru:

Suman: You must respect your elders and listen to what they say. Your first teacher is your mother. And after you come to school, it is your teacher. Now tell me, where do we get light from?

Many children: The sun.

Suman: And what will happen if the sun goes away.

Many children: There will be darkness.

Suman: Yes, there will be darkness. Just like this darkness, there exists darkness inside of us too. This darkness exists inside us because of a lack of knowledge. And what does away with this lack of knowledge?

One child: Knowledge.

Suman: Very good. This darkness that is caused by a lack of knowledge is dispelled by the guru. The guru is the person who takes you from darkness to light.

Suman then makes children repeat after her: The guru takes us away from darkness to light.

Here, Suman voiced the teacher authority Discourse and identified herself as the source of knowledge because of her age, parent-like status as well as her
role as the \textit{guru}. In turn, she positioned the children as beneficiaries of her knowledge.

Being the adult-parent-\textit{guru}, Suman also seemed to believe that she had a right to physically punish children when this was warranted by their behaviour. She asserted:

\begin{quote}
If a child is hungry then he must get food, and if he is doing something wrong, then he must be reprimanded, warned, or beaten according to his mistake.
\end{quote}

Suman's belief was shared by the other teachers at the school as well, who gave various reasons for hitting children: “if they are not listening”; “if they have not learnt what has been taught”; “so that they fear us”; “so that we can control them”; and “to ensure that they are disciplined”. Thus, Suman's authority as the adult-parent-guru included her roles to provide knowledge to children and to punish those who were not receiving this knowledge in dutiful ways.

\textbf{The teacher as the patron}

On other occasions, I saw Suman position herself as a cultural patron who was superior to the children and their families by virtue of being a Brahmin, a city dweller, and a Hindi speaker, and was providing her protégés, the children, with the requisite cultural knowledge.

\textbf{Being a Brahmin}

Suman belonged to the Brahmin caste, the caste that enjoys the highest status within Hindu society. Traditionally, people from this caste have been responsible for being teachers and priests. The children Suman was teaching were tribal: They were not Hindu, and folklore often describes them as immoral and dishonest. During her interview, Suman talked about her role as a Brahmin patron, as follows:

\begin{quote}
I believe that if a child has studied and got a degree but does not have moral values, then his education is completely useless. Children should not only study but also be moral. Children first learn moral values within their family. Their first teacher is the mother and the other adults in the family… Children are not taught moral values in their homes over here. I still try my best to inculcate moral values in these children. I tell them to be honest. I explain
again and again. Our Indian tradition also tells us that the gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh, reside in our hands. I tell the children to get up in the morning to cover their face with their hands and remember God. They don’t need to light a lamp for this, just feel the presence of God. They should get up in the morning and touch their elder’s feet.

Suman seemed to believe that the children’s families were morally deficient and did not teach children to be honest and respect elders. She also believed that they lacked knowledge of Hindu culture. In turn, she identified herself as a Brahmin patron who was responsible for educating her protégés, the children, in moral and Hindu ways.

Suman performed her duties as a Brahmin patron regularly during morning-assembly and class-time. She took a keen interest in celebrating Hindu festivals at school. She informed children about the significance of the festivals during assembly-time and wrote passages about these festivals for children to copy during class-time. Besides educating children about Hindu customs during assembly-time, Suman also repeatedly emphasised the importance of moral values such as obeying parents and teachers and being honest. The oral stories, that I heard Suman tell children also had roots in Hindu mythology and/or emphasised moral values. Thus, Suman appeared to position herself as a religious-moral patron in various ways at school, identifying the children as her protégés in the process.

**Being a city dweller**

Suman also positioned herself as a city dweller who was more concerned about cleanliness and hygiene than the children and their families. On one occasion, when the children told her that they did not wish to open the classroom windows because of bad odour, Suman responded: “Well, then why do you, village people create so much dirt?” Echoing her thinking, she lamented during her interview:

> They [children] should then take a bath…it is every child’s responsibility to be neat and clean. This is their greatest weakness. Over here, parents also do not remain neat and clean.

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17 All state schools in Udaipur were provided with a list of Hindu festivals which they are allowed to celebrate in school.
Suman believed that both the children and the parents at Sitara did not take care of personal hygiene. I also observed her periodically remind children to take a bath regularly, to wash hands before and after meals, keep food covered at home, and keep their home and surroundings clean.

Like Suman, Pradeep (the head-teacher and a Brahmin) also enacted his role as the city patron. On one occasion during morning-assembly, he undertook a demonstration to ‘motivate’ children to be clean. He asked six children, three of whom he considered to be clean, to wash their hands in front of the entire school and displayed the water that was used by each in six separate glasses. He used this demonstration to conclude that certain children in school did not take baths regularly and he ‘encouraged’ children to do so. Thus, Suman and Pradeep seemed to be positioning themselves as urban dwellers who were concerned about cleanliness and hygiene and identified children (and their families) as negligent, educating them in this respect.

**Being a speaker of Hindi**

The medium of instruction at Sitara School was Hindi, the state language for Rajasthan. The language that children spoke at home was Bhili. The children used Hindi to communicate with Suman but spoke to each other in Bhili. Suman and the other teachers did not forbid Bhili in class but considered it inferior to Hindi and ‘encouraged’ children to speak ‘correctly’. This was visible when the school celebrated the Hindi Day, and Pradeep extolled Hindi, asking children to speak Hindi because, unlike Bhili, it was a language that did not contain any expletives. Suman shared Pradeep’s sentiment, and on the following occasion positioned herself as a patron of Hindi in the classroom:

Suman asked children to name the days of the week and children did this in unison. After the recitation, Shankar commented that people in the village call Sunday, *Diitwaar*\(^{18}\) instead of *Ravivaar*\(^{19}\):

Shankar: *Madam, people in the village call it Diitwaar. I don’t like it.*

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\(^{18}\) Means Sunday in Bhili

\(^{19}\) Means Sunday in Hindi
Suman: It is not Diiitwaar. When you speak in the village language you spoil the name. You are all literate; you need to teach the village people. Tell them to say Ravivaar and not Diiitwaar.

[...]

Suman: You all must also say Ravivaar.

Shankar: I say Ravivaar.

Suman: If you will say Diiitwaar and the village people say Diiitwaar, then what is the difference between a literate and an illiterate person? We teach you to speak correctly over here, and you should teach the village people who speak incorrectly.

Here, Suman equated Bhili to an incorrect way of speaking and as a way in which illiterate people speak and appeared to be enacting her role as a patron of Hindi, asking children to speak the language and educate the village people to do the same.

**The teacher as a patriot/martyr**

Suman also drew her authority from viewing herself as a patriot and a martyr. This was often visible during morning-assembly when she was unhappy with the children’s behaviour. On the occasion below, many children had been late in coming to school and Suman’s reprimand was infused with her authority as a patriot and a martyr:

Suman: We are spending so much money to reach school on time. Our purpose is to give more and more to you all. If you all will come late then all of us will also do the same. We can get a lot of home-chores done in one hour. We leave our morning tea and breakfast half-eaten when we are getting late for school. We do all our morning chores in a hurry. And you all stroll into school when you want to without any consideration of time.

[...]

Suman: You are wasting the government’s money.

Raman: Where is the government getting the money from? It is getting it from taxpayers, like us.

Suman: The government spends money that it collects from us in taxes.

Raman: The government is giving you books and food. It is doing everything for you all.
Here, Suman identified herself and the other teachers in the school as martyrs who were making personal sacrifices to get to school on time to teach the children. She also positioned them as good citizens who were paying taxes and thus, contributing to the welfare measures being undertaken by the government for the children. In the process, she arguably positioned the children as irresponsible and potentially unpatriotic citizens.

In summation, this section provides evidence of Suman as well as other teachers at Sitara school voicing and enacting the teacher authority Discourse. Doing so, the teachers seemed to be identifying children as receivers of knowledge. They were also recognising children who were not imbibing this knowledge as less responsible, and thus, susceptible to the teacher’s wrath. Finally, because of children’s rural and tribal roots, the teachers also appeared to be positioning themselves as patrons of cultural and linguistic knowledge and children as their protégés.

5.3.2 At home

The families of the participant children also voiced the teacher authority Discourse, believing that teachers had the authority to physically punish their children if they were not learning as required of them. Stating his view on the matter, Pooja’s father asserted:

Yes, a teacher has the right to hit children. Children should learn what is being taught. If Pooja is not able to write what the teacher tells her to write, then the teacher will hit her. If she is not able to write, then I will hit her too. I am being quite candid.

Pooja’s father believed that children needed to learn what the teacher was teaching and that adults, be they, teachers, or parents, had a right to hit children to ensure this learning. The situation was not different in Krish’s family, and his uncle noted:

It is a teacher’s job to ask a question. If he asks a question and the child is not able to answer, then the child will get a beating. Teachers need answers to their questions.
Krish’s uncle also showed his acceptance of the teacher’s authority over the children in the teaching-learning process: the teacher would ask questions and children should know the answers, and if they did not then the teachers were within their right to hit them. So, caregivers did not appear to be questioning the teacher’s authority over their children’s learning and believed that as parents and adults, they also had similar authority. Thus, the teacher authority Discourse was not only the dominant social practice of the teacher community but also the caregiver community at Sitara.

5.4 The student interest in learning Discourse

Both the teachers and parents in Sitara also voiced the student interest in learning Discourse, viewing the children’s interest in learning as crucial and consequently holding children responsible for their lack of learning.

5.4.1 At school

Suman and the other teachers in Sitara School believed that key to children’s learning at school was their interest. The teachers described interested students as those “who have regular attendance”, “who are studying as we tell them to” and “who are learning”. However, they seemed to believe that most children in school were disinterested in learning. This was evident from Suman’s statement at the end of her interview:

*I wish to be immersed in the ocean of knowledge so that I can retrieve pearls and give them to these children, but these children do not want to take them.*

On this occasion, Suman emphasised that the children she was teaching were not interested in the pearls of knowledge that she wished to give to them. She again voiced her belief in the Discourse when she recounted her conversation with Vijay’s mother due to his month-long absence from school:

*I asked her (Vijay’ mother) if Vijay had been in the village and had not been coming to school and she said yes. I reminded her of her responsibility as a parent to send her son to school and she told me that she goes to work in the morning and once she leaves, Vijay does not come to school. I told her to hit him with a stick and stop giving him food. She told me that she is a single mother and has eight children. These people need to have lesser children. The government does so much for them, gives them free food-grains, oil,*
Suman identified Vijay’s mother as disinterested in her son’s schooling because she could not ensure that he was regular at school. She also believed that the government was doing enough for poor people like her, and so the poor needed to act responsibly. However, heeding the mother’s circumstances, she concluded that it was Vijay’s responsibility to show interest in learning and be regular at school, and his mother could do little about the situation.

The student interest in learning Discourse was also evident in Shiv (Social Science teacher) and Raman’s (Mathematics teacher) responses to me when I noted that many children across all the classes could not read, during the half-yearly examinations:

Shiv: Madam, this is the situation here. What can we do? The situation does not change, no matter how much we explain to the children and no matter what we do. You have spent three-four months here now, so you must have also understood how these children are thinking...these children only have one job, to play and have fun...only three-four of them want to study.

Raman: These children are not interested in studying. They just want a free lunch. They don’t open their books when they go home. They just want to dance and have fun. There are only a few children who study, and you can see this in their result.

Both Shiv and Raman vocalised the student interest in learning Discourse and identified disinterested children as those who were not learning in the ways required of them. They also believed that they could do little to help such children. Thus, trusting in the student interest in learning Discourse, the teachers in Sitara school seemed to view children’s interest as crucial to their learning. In turn, they identified children who were not attending school regularly and not learning in ways expected of them, to be uninterested learners.
5.4.2 At home

Like the teachers, family members also voiced the student interest in learning Discourse. Krish’s family were quite vocal about this matter. His mother voiced the family’s commitment to supporting their sons to study as follows:

*We will let them study till they want to study. We will see good times and bad times, but we will continue to send them to school. However, if they decide not to study then we can do little about it. We will send them to school till they want to go. We will not tell them to leave school if they want to study.*

Krish’s mother affirmed her commitment to continuing her sons’ education, despite their limited means, but with the caveat that her sons must desire to continue their schooling. The family was also aware that aside from Krish none of the other children seemed to be reading. Krish’s father, uncle and grandmother had been to the school and raised the matter with the teachers. The teachers, they reported, had told them that they were doing what was needed to be done, and the children also needed to study at home. The family did not disagree with the teachers’ assessment. Krish’s grandmother observed:

*They (the children) should learn how to ride a cycle and climb a tree. They should play bat-ball and kabbadi*[^20], *but they should also study.*

Thus, while the grandmother appreciated that children being children will and must play, she also believed that children needed to be self-motivated about their study.

Krish’s uncle seemed especially frustrated with his son Karan’s inability to read and believed that: “The teachers need to pay more attention to him. They only pay attention to children who have learnt, not to those who haven’t.” At the same time, he noted that Karan was not taking interest in his school learning:

*I can read and write. I know everything. I tell these children to study in the evening. But they don’t. They just run away. They loiter around.*

[^20]: An Indian game involving two teams of seven players each.
He also did not seem to feel that corporal punishment was an adequate reason for children to feel demotivated to study:

Researcher: *Don’t you feel children feel disheartened when they are hit?*

Krish’s uncle (shaking his head in disagreement): *We tell children to study, but these children, they are careless.*

In Krish’s uncle’s view, Karan’s commitment to learning was key to his learning. Consequently, he seemed to believe that Karan needed to overcome his desire to play or any demotivation he may feel when punishment was meted out to him at school. Thus, Krish’s family members voiced the student interest in learning Discourse in various ways, identifying the children who were not learning as required by their teachers as disinterested learners.

I conclude this section with an interaction I viewed in the staffroom where the teacher authority Discourse and the student interest in learning Discourse being voiced by Suman and was being accepted by a parent emphasising that these Discourses were shared by the adults at home and school in Sitara:

Sudhir was a boy in Grade 6. I recognised him because his house was right in front of Krish’s. His father worked in the local court in Kalyanpur town-centre as a typist and was visiting the school to talk to Pradeep about some paperwork. Suman came across Sudhir’s father in the staffroom. She expressed her unhappiness about Sudhir’s behaviour in the classroom, saying that he used to be an obedient boy in the primary grades but did not seem interested in studies anymore. Pradeep agreed with Suman’s assessment. Sudhir’s father asked for Sudhir to be called into the staffroom. When Sudhir walked into the room, the father moved to slap him, but Suman asked him not to. Suman had the following conversation with him:

Suman: *Do you like studying? Tell me, do you like studying?*

Sudhir stood with his head bowed down and did not answer.

Suman: *If you do not feel like studying then your father will make you leave the school. Go and do some work at someplace, earn some money. You don’t study when you come to school.*

Sudhir’s Father: *Yes. I have also decided. If he wants to study, he should study properly. If he does not, then it is up to him.*
Suman identified Sudhir as a disinterested learner because he was not engaging with his studies in ways required by her. Consequently, she encouraged him to do something useful with his life by leaving school and contributing to his family’s earnings. Sudhir’s father seemed to agree with Suman and was also visibly upset with his son. Sudhir seemed to have little choice but to accept the label of a disengaged learner. Thus, when the teacher authority Discourse and student interest in learning Discourse were voiced by both teachers and parents, they deepened the already disempowered position of the children as learners.

5.5 Summative discussion: A cultural congruence between caregiver and teacher beliefs

Children’s engagements with print are ideological practices rooted in relations of power between them and the adults around them (Street, 1984, 1995). Both caregivers at home and teachers at school are dominant communities that influence how children engage with print (Gee, 2012). Their beliefs about literacy and learning shape children’s literacy practices (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002).

Sociocultural researchers who have explored these beliefs in high-income countries have found there to be a difference in how adults at home and school view literacy instruction and learning (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002). Consequently, caregivers in these countries have been found to identify literacy instruction as a skill-based process and learning as a serious endeavour where the authority of the text, and subsequently, the teacher are unquestionable (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002). On the other hand, teachers voice their faith in meaning-based methods of instruction which allow children to bring their interpretations to the text into the classroom (Gregory & Williams, 2000). Thus, this body of research posits a cultural difference between the home and the school with parents voicing beliefs rooted in their schooling experiences in their home countries which are different from those of their children’s teachers.

In contrast to this body of research, the current study finds evidence of cultural continuity across the home and school with beliefs of parents echoing
those of the teacher. The teacher, Suman, voices her faith in a skill-based view of literacy instruction which requires “content to be taught through authority structures” (Street, 1995, p. 118). However, it is not only Suman’s belief in a decontextualised view of reading and writing that forms the basis of her faith in her authority over her students’ learning. Suman’s belief in her authority is also morally rooted in her status as a parent-like adult who has the best interests of her students in mind and her identity as a guru, the revered teacher and the holder of knowledge in the Hindu society. Consequently, she believes that children need to learn to read and write in ways she advocates and identifies students who are not doing do as disinterested in learning. Thus, like the working-class parents in high-income nations, Suman also believes that learning is a serious endeavour where the teacher’s authority over children’s learning is non-negotiable; however, unlike them, her belief in her authority is not simply epistemic, but also morally rooted.

Viewing Suman as a parent-like adult and a guru, caregivers in Sitara accept her authority over their children’s learning and believe that children need to read and write as Suman expects of them. Consequently, in accepting teacher’s authority, caregivers also accept a skill-based view of literacy instruction, and like Suman, hold the children responsible for their lack of learning. Arguably, their belief in Suman’s authority and the children’s responsibility is also influenced by their limited schooling and weak financial circumstances. Thus, the beliefs of caregivers in Sitara echo those of their children’s teachers, and the beliefs of both groups of adults are rooted in a serious view of learning which requires children to learn in ways advocated by the teacher.

As a result, to be identified as literacy learners, children are expected to enact the role of obedient copiers and decoders of texts, and children who do not accept these roles are identified as disengaged students. So, while both teachers and parents in Sitara adhere to a serious view of learning, their beliefs, arguably, position children as non-agentic learners. In the next three chapters, I turn my attention to the literacy practices of my participant children, drawing on the practices of all five, in the next chapter.
Chapter 6: The cultural and personal nature of children’s practices

This chapter turns its focus from adult participants in this study to the children. It explores the primary research question of the study which investigates the manner in which the home and school literacy practices of five children living in a rural village in India are being culturally and personally shaped. The themes discussed in this chapter emerge from a cross-case analysis of the participant children’s home and school literacy practices and draw on literature discussed in Chapter 2. Section 6.1 provides an overview of children’s practices at home and school. Section 6.2 presents the themes capturing the simultaneously cultural and personal nature of children’s home literacy practices and Section 6.3 does the same with respect to their school literacy practices. Section 6.4 concludes by drawing on the previous two sections to address the main research question.

6.1 Children’s practices at home and school

The village of Sitara was home to Krish, Vijay, Ashish (boys, age 10), Pooja, and Sandhya (girls, age 10); the five participant children in this study. The children were in Grade 5 and attended the state elementary school in the village. They belonged to resource-poor families where caregivers were constantly occupied with activities that were necessary for their sustenance. Consequently, they believed that children needed to play but must also learn household chores and undertake them unquestioningly when required by the adults at home (discussed in Chapter 4). At school, Suman, the Hindi teacher was a highly salient figure. She believed that children needed to read and write in ways advocated by her and recognised those who did not do so as uninterested in learning (discussed in Chapter 5). The parents did not disagree with her assessment and thought that children needed to learn as expected by Suman (discussed in Chapter 5). Thus, both caregivers at home and their teacher at school saw the children’s ability to adhere to adult practices as evidence of their learning.

In my over five months of extensive observation of children’s activities in their homes and school, I observed differences in how the participant children
engaged with the practices of the adult world. While Sandhya and Vijay undertook these diligently at home, the other three also resisted them in various ways. On the other hand, it was Krish and Sandhya who were engaging with their literacy practices at school. At the same time, all the five children were keenly involved in their own peer culture practices in both spaces. I provide an overview of all five children’s practices in this chapter. I attend to Sandhya’s, Vijay’s, and Ashish’s practices in more detail since those of the other two are the focus in the following two chapters.

All five children were expected to undertake household chores. With an older sister at home, Sandhya was not expected to cook, graze the cattle, or fetch firewood. Her chores were restricted to sweeping her home, washing utensils, and fetching drinking water from the tank situated just outside her home (the family owned a tube-well which pumped water to the tank from a well that was much further-off). Sandhya engaged with these duties earnestly, well-aware that this was expected of girls in her family and community and important for her family’s wellbeing (Figure 6.1).

Vijay’s mother was a widow and needed her children to support her with household work, every day. Vijay took the cattle out to graze in the morning and
collected them in the evening and seemed to take pride in rearing two large buffaloes successfully (Figure 6.2).

![Figure 6.2: Vijay grazing cattle](image)

Unlike these two children, Krish, Pooja and Ashish also showed their lack of engagement with their chores. Krish was expected to take the cattle to graze, especially when his mother was unable to. Krish undertook the task but did not enjoy it, often delegating it to his cousin. Pooja was the oldest sibling in her family, and both her parents were occupied with agricultural work. As a result, she was expected to undertake multiple household chores, including, cooking, washing utensils, sweeping her home, fetching drinking water from a distant well, and was often procrastinating or refusing to carry out her allotted duties.

Unlike these four children, Ashish had lived with his grandmother since his parents had passed away when he was a toddler. His sisters, Indu and Jaya, had taken their Grade 12 examinations and moved out of their grandmother’s home following their marriages in the past year. Ashish’s brother had dropped-out of school in Grade 9 and worked in a marble factory in Udaipur. The family also seemed to be in a better financial situation than those of the other participant children. The grandmother received an old-age pension, a wheat ration from the government and was also financially supported by her sons working in Udaipur.
and Bangalore city. Consequently, she was not dependent on agriculture for sustenance and, subsequently, did not need to rear cattle. In turn, Ashish was only expected to give fodder and water to their one buffalo (kept for milk) and fetch water from a common water tank. Ashish was very fond of “Ritu” (he had named his buffalo) and undertook his chore diligently. However, he often seemed to disappear when he was asked to get drinking water for his home.

![Figure 6.3: Ashish giving water to Ritu](image)

While the family did not require Ashish to undertake chores around the house, they did expect him to engage with his schoolwork. Both sisters had diligently engaged with their studies at home and school. They also had read for pleasure at home and showed me some magazines that they had read from and a scrapbook in which they had used to copy their favourite stories and poems.
The sisters were, however, concerned that Ashish did not share their interests and would follow in his elder brother’s footsteps and give up schooling. They regularly checked Ashish’s school notebooks to ensure that he had copied what was required of him. They also emphasised mathematics as they viewed this as important for getting a job, in the future. So, much of Ashish’s interaction with print at home was in form of copying script and doing mathematics. In the vignette given below, Indu (older sister) asked Ashish to memorise the 14 times table:

Ashish, Indu and their neighbour Rama (Grade 9) were sitting in the open space outside their house, as were his grandmother and Rama’s mother. Indu told
Ashish to get his English notebook. She checked it to make sure he had completed all the copy-work required of him and told him to improve his writing. She also told him to learn to copy faster, identifying portions of the text that she and Rama had copied for him, on previous occasions because of his slow pace. Indu then told Ashish to get his school bag. Ashish started making sobbing sounds and said that he did not want to memorise the times tables. All of us laughed, and Indu told Ashish that he would have to carry on memorising the times tables as he was doing the previous night.

Ashish complied with Indu’s instruction, bringing his school bag to her, but said that he wanted to draw. He took his drawing book out of the bag and asked them to look at a page where he had drawn the picture of a “double-decker” bus and a buffalo. Indu told him to put the book back into the bag and memorise the tables, sternly. Ashish did not comply, and Rama put the book back into his bag. Ashish looked unhappy and took it out again, keeping it beside him. Rama started flipping through the book. Indu commented that Ashish did not draw well, and that Jaya was the artist in the family. As if in agreement, Ashish pointed to a drawing that Jaya had drawn in his book. Rama came across his drawing of the bus and the buffalo (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: The picture of the double decker bus and buffalo on the right

Indu asked Ashish if he had drawn a truck. Ashish said that he had drawn a passenger vehicle. Indu guessed that it was a “double-decker” and Rama called it a “sleeper-coach”. They also seemed amused that a buffalo was drawn under the sleeper coach. Ashish said that he would buy a new drawing book as this one was full. Rama told him that she had one which she would give him. He looked happy and took his notebook out. While he was doing this, Indu and his grandmother chatted as follows:
Grandmother: *I would like it if he would study sincerely.*

Indu: *He is not interested. He does not get tired of playing with his vehicle-toys and drawing peculiar drawings. It is Jaya who draws well in this house.*

Ashish showed his sister the multiplication sums he had done and the tables he had written up to 10 in his notebook. Indu told him to get to the task of memorising the 14 times table. Ashish started making sobbing sounds, as before. Indu reprimanded him, and Ashish appeared to have tears in his eyes. However, he smiled when Jaya teased Indu for behaving like a “tuition teacher”. Ashish went to the page with the 14 times table written on it. He said that he had memorised up to 14 times 5 and started reciting the table by reading from the paper.

**Ashish:** Fourteen times one is fourteen. Fourteen times two is twenty-four. Fourteen times three is forty-two. Fourteen times four is fifty-six. Fourteen times five is seventy. Fourteen times six is eighty-four.

Ashish’s grandmother called out to Indu, and he got distracted. Indu instructed him to continue memorising. He rubbed one of his cheeks and said: “I am feeling very scratchy”. Indu got him back to task reading from his paper: “Fourteen times three is forty-two and fourteen times four is fifty-six.’ Ashish carried forward.

**Ashish:** Fourteen times five is seventy. Fourteen times six is eighty-four.

Indu (reading from the paper): Fourteen times seven is 96. No, it is 98.

Ashish: 98 is not written here.

Indu appeared not to heed Ashish and went on reading from the paper.

Indu: Fourteen times eight is one hundred and twelve.

Ashish (echoed his sister): One hundred and twelve.

Indu: Fourteen times nine?

Ashish: One hundred and twenty-six.

Indu: Fourteen times nine is one hundred and twenty-six. Fourteen times ten is one hundred and forty. At present, you are learning the number-names. You also need to learn to recognise the numbers.

Ashish (flipping the paper): I have written the 14 times table using numbers here.

He then recited the table until fourteen times six. In the meantime, Jaya gave Indu water to drink and sat with Ashish to draw in his drawing book. Ashish realised that there was no pencil around for Jaya to draw with and went into the house to get one. He came back with a pencil box which had the picture of spiderman on it. He sharpened the pencil for his sister and gave it to her,
requesting her to draw a picture of spiderman. However, Jaya told him that she did not know how to draw spiderman. Ashish then took his crayon box out which had the picture of *Chhotaa Bheem* on it (a popular cartoon character on TV) and asked his sister to draw *Bheem*. Jaya replied as before. Jaya started drawing and Ashish looked on with interest.

Jaya: *Stop looking at what I am doing and do your “homework”*.  
Ashish: *Ok. Do fill the picture with colour.*  
Jaya: *Ok.*

After Ashish had recited the 14 times table twice, Jaya asked:

Jaya: *So, what is fourteen times eight?*  
Ashish: *One hundred and twelve.*  
Jaya: *What is fourteen times nine?*  
Ashish: *One hundred and thirty-six*  
Jaya: *It is twenty-six not thirty-six.*  
Ashish: *Ok, twenty-six.*

Jaya: *Fourteen times ten.*  
Ashish: *One hundred and forty.*  
Jaya: *Fourteen times five?*  
Ashish: *Fourteen times fiveee. Oh god, I don’t remember the answer. Madam, I cannot memorise these times tables.*  
Researcher: *Just try.*

Ashish’s sisters required him to memorise the times tables, something they believed was required at school and for his success in his later life. Ashish’s disregard for these practices was evident in various ways. He told Indu that he did not want to memorise the times table but wanted to draw. When he had to undertake the task, he continued to remain disengaged with the task, getting easily distracted when his grandmother and sister started to talk. He also gave up memorising to help Jaya draw, requesting her to draw cartoon characters that he
was familiar with. Finally, he expressed his despair at not being able to memorise the tables and seemed to give it up.

The children also engaged differently with their school’s practices. Both Krish and Sandhya read and wrote as required by Suman (discussed in Section 6.3). Krish was an engaged reader and was also recognised as a competent one by his family, friends, and teacher (discussed in Chapter 7). Sandhya viewed herself as a reader, as did the children and adults around her. This was visible when an inspector of the education department visited the school. As Sandhya got up to read, the boys in class announced: “Sir, she can read!” Confirming the boys’ statement, Sandhya read, albeit softly and with lesser fluency. The inspector seemed satisfied with her performance and asked her to stop when she was reading her third sentence. On this occasion and various others in the Hindi classroom where children were expected to read along with Suman, Sandhya was not expected to provide evidence of her ability to engage with textual meanings. So, it was perhaps not surprising that when I read with her at home, she did not wish to answer the comprehension questions I asked of her. Thus, while Krish and Sandhya were visibly reading in the classroom, recognised themselves as readers, and were viewed so by their classmates and adults, reading, arguably, did not mean the same thing for them.

Vijay and Pooja were regularly absent from school and were either unable to engage with their literacy practices or were resisting them in various ways. The children recognised themselves as non-readers because of their inability to read texts aloud, as did their classmates. This was visible when they were asked to read by the inspector and their classmates informed him that they could not. The inspector gave both children an opportunity to read but both did not (Vijay discussed in Section 6.3 and Pooja in Chapter 8). Predictably, Suman viewed both children as uninterested learners who did not attend school regularly and could not read their grade-level texts.

21 I had asked Sandhya to read a text from Khushi-Khushi (Grade 5), a textbook for children produced by Eklavya, Bhopal.
Ashish’s lack of involvement with his school practices at home was also reflected in his reading and writing practices at school. The following vignette sheds light on this:

Suman recognised Ashish as “the most intelligent child in her class”. She identified him as one of the readers as did the inspector who seemed satisfied with the two lines Ashish read with lesser fluency. She also appreciated his oral responses but acknowledged that he did not read and write in ways expected of him. Echoing Suman’s thinking, Ashish showed more interest in listening to stories and answering questions than reading along with her from his textbook or copying texts.

So, when Suman taught a text entitled Gavri, and asked the children to read along with her from their textbooks, Ashish responded as follows: “I will not read, I will listen”. Suman appeared to ignore what he had said and carried-on with the reading. Ashish looked in his textbook, occasionally, and seemed to be more interested in the pictures than the text, when he did so. He also did not join in when Suman asked children to recite some parts of the text, after her. At the same time, Ashish did answer Suman’s questions based on what he heard. Ashish’s engagement with his school’s reading practices seemed similar when Suman taught a story entitled a cheetah on the hot air balloon: He took his textbook out of the bag when Suman reprimanded him for not doing so and listened more than he read.

Ashish’s disengagement was also apparent when Suman asked children to copy the word-meanings and the answers to the questions to a poem entitled Books that she had taught previously. The task spread over two days, and the children were expected to copy the word-meanings on the first day and the answers on the second. On the first day, Ashish got reprimanded for not writing a word throughout class. On the second, he got rebuked in the beginning of class: “You have not even opened your copy!” Towards the end of class-time, Suman went around looking at the children’s work. Ashish tried to hide what he had written by bending over the work. Suman asked him to sit up, stating: “I particularly want to look at your work.” She looked disapprovingly at what she saw but did not comment. On the next day, she undertook basal work in class, asking children to blend different consonantal sounds and make words. Ashish volunteered various words for Suman to write on the board and Suman appreciated his responses. However, when she realised that he had not written a word in his copy, she smacked him on his back and scolded: “You want to do nothing but talk in class!”

Fieldnotes and 080815,100815,110815, 010915, 030915, 281015-videos

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22 I had asked Ashish to read a text from Khushi-Khushi (Grade 5), a textbook for children produced by Eklavya, Bhopal. He was able to answer the questions I asked with respect to the story and expressed his delight on reading about the friendship between two animals.
Ashish was viewed as a reader by Suman, and he also identified himself as one. However, he showed no engagement with decoding and copying at school. Consequently, he was often the subject of Suman's ire.

While the five participant children engaged differently with adult practices, all were interested in engaging with their own peer culture practices at home and school. Both boys and girls played active games like marbles, tag, and hide and seek. They also enjoyed playing pretend, and I observed Sandhya and Pooja play marriage, and Krish, Vijay and Ashish race their gaardis [vehicle-toys]. Other interests included watching Bollywood movies, sitcom episodes, and cartoons on the TV and mobile phones, drawing and chatting with each other.

I discuss Sandhya’s and Vijay’s practices next (Krish’s and Pooja’s are examined in Chapters 7 and 8). The first vignette has been constructed based on my observations of Sandhya’s practices over my two visits to her home and conversations with her:

Sandhya spent much of her time talking and playing with her siblings and cousins at home, and these practices often illuminated on her strong desire to belong within her home as a ‘good’ girl. She climbed trees in her vegetable garden, swung on make-shift swings they constructed, played kabaddi,23 danced to songs they sang, and asked riddles of her brothers and sisters. She also enjoyed dressing-up using make-up and jewellery, and she shared this interest with not only her friends but also her older sisters and young aunt.

While Sandhya attended school regularly, reading and writing as expected of her, she did not always like being there and wished she could go back home. Probably, reflecting her thinking, I observed her skip school twice. On the first occasion, she was dressed-up in her aunt’s jewellery, admiring herself in the mirror, when I reached her home, after school. On the second, she and her friends left home for school, but got waylaid by the water stream, playing around it, all day. Sandhya also showed little interest in reading and writing at home and questioned the purpose of continuing schooling in the light of her parent’s expectations of her to be a wife and mother, in the future. On the following occasion, I was walking towards school with her and Durga (cousin, Garde 4) in the morning, and the girls provided evidence of their thinking:

Sandhya: For how many years have you studied, madam?

23 An Indian sport played by teams of seven where the players tag or capture opponents and must repeat the word kabaddi while doing so.
Researcher: *I have studied for 12 years at school. I then did my college for 5 years. So that is a total of 17 years, and I am still studying.*

Sandhya: *Ohhhhhh. That is too much.*

Durga: *We will not study for so long.*

Researcher: *Ok. So, till which grade will you study?*

Durga: *Till the 8th grade. Mummy says that my brother will study longer.*

Researcher: *So, what will you do when you leave school?*

Sandhya: *Play laddo-laddi.*

The girls laughed.

Researcher: *What do you mean?*

The girls explained that playing *laddo-laddi* meant enacting the role of the bridegroom (*laddo*) and the bride (*laddi*) during a marriage ceremony, and that they played this game with their cousin Kiran (Grade 6). I requested the girls to play for me.

When the girls did play, Kiran became the bridegroom, Durga, the bride, and Sandhya, the priest. Kiran’s younger brother was also around and joined in the latter part of the play. The first thing the girls did was alter their clothes to play the male and female roles. Kiran altered her long skirt and made it into a dhoti, a dress that would be worn by the bridegroom during the marriage ceremony. She also tied a colourful cloth around her head as a turban. Durga covered her head and face with a pink coloured *ordhani* and Sandhya also wore a dhoti like Kiran.

The play started with Sandhya, the priest, tying the bride and bridegroom’s hands with a part of the bride’s *ordhani*. The bride’s *ordhani* kept slipping off her face and Sandhya reprimanded her for letting this happen, and often pulled the *ordhani* down to cover the bride’s face, herself. She then became the fire and instructed the girls to encircle her. She asked Durga to make wailing sounds as brides often did during these ceremonies. After the bride and bridegroom had encircled the fire several times, she asked the couple to sit down and placed the bride’s outstretched palms on that of the bridegroom. She then placed an old wallet on the outstretched hands, sprinkling it with mud. She did the same with a leaf and Kiran’s brother used some fruit from the farm for the purpose. After the ‘gifts’ were given to the couple, the priest declared the couple married and there was some dancing.

Sandhya also became a part of her peer culture’s practices of sending and receiving *chithiis* [love-letters] when she received one, from one of the boys in her class (practice discussed at length in Chapter 8). I was not there when event occurred, and Pooja and Indu came to the staffroom to inform me of it. I asked

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24 A loose piece of cloth worn by men in the lower half of their body

25 A long piece of cloth worn by women to cover head and face, often tied around the waist.
Sandhya about the letter when we were all leaving school in the afternoon. Sandhya responded angrily: "I tore up the letter. I do not accept it".

Fieldnotes and 160915, 180915, 230915, 070116-videos

Sandhya played laddo-ladddi, not allowing the bride to breach the social custom which required her to cover her face during a marriage ceremony, adorned herself with make-up and jewelry, did not accept the love-letter she had received and talked about leaving school in a few years’ time in line with her family’s expectations of her. Doing so, she drew on her knowledge of the way in which the women in her family and her friends dressed-up, the marriage practices of her community, and challenged the practices of her peer culture of having boyfriends motivated by her desire to belong within her family and community as a good girl.

On a similar note, Vijay’s play was motivated by being a male within his community and his desire to travel. The next vignette has been again constructed by drawing on my interactions with him:

Vijay was a boy who always seemed to be in motion. He walked less and sprinted and dashed about more. He was rarely ever ‘at home’ and enjoyed exploring his village for new things to see and do. So, when a crane visited the village to deepen a well, he was there to investigate; when a tractor pulled in, he examined it with curiosity; and when Navratri festival celebrations were underway, he was enthusiastic about beating the drums. At the same time, being in the village did not always engage him, and he lamented: “There is nothing new to see anymore”. As a result, he often visited his sister’s homes in neighbouring villages. He also insisted on taking trips to the park in Kalyanpur (the town-centre) on both occasions I visited. On our return from the first visit, he excitedly announced: “I want to travel madam, to Udaipur, Jaipur, Delhi!”

Being a boy who had a strong desire to travel, Vijay was interested in everything that had wheels, around him. So, when a shiny red motorbike was standing on the road, he could be seen admiring it, and when an auto-rickshaw was parked near his home he got into it and switched on the headlights without turning on the ignition. He was trying his hand at riding a cycle. The only cycle that he had access to, was an adult-sized one lying in his uncle’s house, and the fact that his feet did not reach the pedal, did not seem to deter him. And after a few months of effort, he proudly proclaimed: “I can ride the cycle now”. Vijay’s aspirations for his future life included owning a pick-up truck and travelling to new places, and this was visible in his play where he was running around with his “loading truck” and “tanker truck”.

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During Christmas break, he was running around with feverish excitement. He had paid Ramesh, a boy in Grade 8, ten rupees\textsuperscript{26} to make him his \textit{gaardii} [vehicle]. In the two days that Ramesh took to get the job done, Vijay visited Ramesh’s home many times and could be heard shouting: \textit{I am about to get my gaardii!} When Vijay did get his \textit{gaardii}, he raced his friends who had their own \textit{gaardii}s, and could not be parted from it even when he was doing chores like carrying grass for the cattle. After his initial euphoria of racing his \textit{gaardii} ebbed, Vijay started transforming it in various ways. He tied a broken metal pencil box to it and called it a “loading truck”. After driving the loading truck for some time, he replaced the pencil box with a plastic bottle and referred it as a “tanker truck”.

![Figure 6.6: Vijay's loading truck](image1) ![Figure 6.7: Vijay's tanker truck](image2)

After a few days, I found Vijay dismantling the truck completely and re-assembling it, putting in new rubber grooves between the metal rods. He claimed that he was making the truck longer. Kajal (Grade 5) was watching him with the truck, and I asked her if she played with \textit{gaardii}s. Vijay responded sharply: \textit{“These gaardii are not for girls to play with”} and Kajal expressed her agreement with a shy smile and nod. His mother asked him to get the buttermilk from the neighbour’s house so that she could cook the vegetable, take a bath, and go to work, but Vijay continued to play. He would often break into a song from Bollywood while hammering away.

Vijay (sings): \textit{My heart is now yours, tibi tibi tibi, oo papard papard papard}

Vijay’s mother (calls out): \textit{Vijay!}

Vijay: \textit{What is it?}

Vijay’s mother: \textit{Go and get the buttermilk.}

\textsuperscript{26} roughly equivalent to 10 pence
Vijay appears to ignore his mother.

Vijay: *Look at this madam, dig dig dig, dig, dig, dig, dig (sings)*

Vijay’s mother: *My water is getting cold, and I am getting late.*

Vijay: *My truck is already late.*

Vijay’s mother (warily): *Does your truck have to reach somewhere?*

Vijay: *Of course! It must reach its destination, that is why I am making it.*

Fieldnotes and 311215-video

I observed Vijay’s play to be quite animated; he improvised with his trucks and created a storyline around his play in conversation with his mother. He also seemed to believe that girls did not need to play with gaardis. Predictably, these practices drew on practices of his peer cultures where boys played with vehicles and his community where male members earned a living being truck drivers and was fueled by his desires to enact a male role model in his community and, possibly, to travel.

At school, the children’s peer cultures’ practices were visible when Suman was not in the classroom. The children talked to each other at these times, and these conversations seemed to reflect their experiences, desires, and emotions. Ashish, Vijay, and some other boys talked appreciatively about the shiny, red motorbike standing outside their school building. The girls chatted about the jewellery they bought from the seller who regularly visited the village. Mithun told Krish about seeing a ghost in the night, and Krish informed me, quite firmly, that they existed and were white all over. There was much conversation and excitement among all children when a magician performed at Kalyanpur and when Gavri performances took place in the village. The trips I took with the children to Kalyanpur park and Udaipur also became the subject of children’s conversations. Talk and activity amongst children was also motivated by objects they brought with them from their homes in their schoolbags. These included a nail polish, a new hairclip or earrings, a small piece of mirror, a barely functioning mobile phone, a new pencil-box, or a scrapbook.
The children also drew when teachers were not around. Except for Vijay, all the children owned a drawing book and coloured pens and appeared to enjoy drawing. While the school timetable did not make any space for this, Suman made drawing books and coloured pens available to the children to buy along with the other stationery required for schoolwork. She explained: “Children like drawing, I get these for children so that they can use them in their free periods.” On the occasion below, in the third week of my fieldwork, I observed Krish and Ashish draw for the first time:

Suman was reading a long list of basal words from Mithun’s notebook. She instructed the children to repeat after her. When she had read about 30 words, she realised that Krish and Ashish were drawing in their drawing book and not repeating after her. She reprimanded both and told them to draw at home or during a free period. Ashish looked reluctant to stop drawing and Krish looked upset at being sighted. Suman went back to reading the words, and Krish joined his classmates in repeating after her while Ashish did not join in the activity. When Suman finished reading, she praised Mithun for writing 72 words. Krish immediately reacted by saying that he had written 127.

Both Krish and Ashish had been drawing a picture of a cluster of flowers from a poem entitled Books that they had recently read in class, when Suman had entered the class. Both continued to draw until they were caught by Suman. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Krish seemed repentant on being spotted by Suman and Ashish looked reluctant to stop drawing. So, Krish was acceptive of Suman’s practices while Ashish challenged them, but both drew when Suman was not around from thereon.

The children’s pictures again carried traces of their home, school, and peer culture practices and seemed to be motivated by their wishes and feelings. So, Ashish’s drawing of a buffalo (Figure 6.4) was embedded in the animal rearing practices of his community and reminiscent of his affection for Ritu. The boys
also drew pictures of the Indian flag reflecting Independence Day celebrations in their school and, arguably, their sense of belonging to their country.

The boys in Grade 5 also enjoyed drawing vehicles including buses, trucks, cycles, and motorbikes illuminating their enjoyment of riding these vehicles and their desire of possibly owning them in future. These pictures reflected their peer cultures’ practices which encompassed talking about, admiring, drawing, and playing with gaardis and home practices where these vehicles made travel comfortable and were both a source and symbol of prosperity. Figure 6.9 captures Krish’s depiction of an auto-rickshaw and a bus. His drawing reflected his vast knowledge of vehicles rooted within his experiences at home. He gave attention to not only the outer frame of the vehicles, but also various smaller parts like the rear-view mirrors (in both vehicles), driver and passenger seats (in the bus), and the steering wheel, headlights, exhaust pipe and steps (in the auto-rickshaw) in his drawing. He also decorated the vehicles in ways not dissimilar to the ones around him: the front glass of the bus was adorned with streamers, the outer body of the auto-rickshaw was decorated red flowers and had Ṣ [om]²⁷ written on it, and both the vehicles had flags in the front.

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²⁷ A sacred sound in the Hindu religion used during prayers written in Devanagari script (the Hindi script)
Like the boys, the girls also enjoyed drawing pictures of the flora and fauna around them. However, different from them, they often drew pictures of mehndi designs and rangolis, and these have been discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Finally, the children also cut out their drawings, transforming their images into three-dimensional objects which seemed to have special significance to them. On one occasion, Krish drew a picture of a cell phone and then cut it out (Figure 6.10). I asked him who the cell phone belonged to, and he smiled and said that it belonged to him. On another, both Krish and Mithun were cutting out hearts, and I asked if I could have them and they laughed and gave them to me (Figure 6.11). Ashish was often tracing coins and cutting them out. One such occasion he held them in his hand and said: "Look madam, I have money". As with the drawings, these artifacts were drawing on their home and peer culture practices, and were illuminative of their desires to use and, possibly, own cell phones, their need for money, and their curiosity about matters of love.

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28 Mehndi refers to decorative designs generally made on hands and legs by using a paste made of powdered dry leaves of the Henna plant. It is a popular form of skin decoration in India.
To encapsulate, the five participant children engaged differently with the practices of the adult world. On the other hand, their peer cultures’ practices (which on occasion included engaging with print) at home and school were their interests. These practices included their play, talk, drawing, artifact constructions, and interactions with digital technologies, which borrowed from their various cultural worlds and were motivated by their varied goals.

6.2 Children’s literacy practices (the literature)

Researchers who have explored children’s home and school literacy practices have found them to include adult practices and their own practices. Those who have focused on children’s home literacy practices have described the former as “serious”, culturally rooted in the rules of the adult world which require children are required to adhere to particular social practices (Gregory & Williams, 2000). On a similar note, others who have examined children’s school literacy practices in middle- and low-income nations have described children’s engagement in such practices as “passive” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011). On the other hand, children’s own literacy practices at home have been identified as “syncretic” (Gregory & Williams, 2000) or “hybrid” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011) with children blending the practices of their different cultural worlds to read and write. Research undertaken
by Dyson (1997, 2003) in child-centered classrooms in North America also recognises children’s writing interests as “hybrid”, improvised practices which draw on their multiple cultural repertoires. She also refers to these practices as “playful”, culturally rooted in their peer cultures, where the rules allow children to adapt practices for their own purposes. The following sections on children’s home and school literacy practices discuss the themes which have been constructed to highlight the cultural and personal nature of children’s literacy practices.

6.3 Home literacy practices

Of the five participant children, Krish, Pooja, and Vijay engaged with print at home. While all three initiated their own practices, Krish was also expected to engage with the practices of the adult world. The following themes capture children’s engagement with their literacy practices at home:

6.3.1 Playful literacy practices as interests

Krish, Pooja, and Vijay engaged with their own literacy practices at home. Krish read for pleasure, adapting his school’s practices in the process (discussed in detail in Chapter 7). Pooja read and wrote as a decision-maker, who wished to affirm her relationship with her boyfriend and demonstrate her sense of belonging to her group of friends. In the process, she improvised her peer culture practices (discussed in detail in Chapter 8). Vijay also read for his own purposes by drawing on the practices of the adult world. The vignette given below exemplifies Vijay’s reading practices being his interests:

Vijay’s desire to be a boy and travel was also visible in his interactions with print. During my first visit to Vijay’s home, I asked him to take pictures of print around his home to gage whether he was aware of it. He took pictures of various social slogans written on walls of homes around him. After a few days, I saw flyers of various Bollywood movies stuck on the walls of Vijay’s house, and he and his older sister, Gita, informed me that someone in their neighbourhood wanted to dispose them, and they had decided to stick them on their walls (Figure 6.12). When I asked, the children to read from the flyers, Gita identified some English letters while Vijay did not.
Subsequently, when we visited the park in Kalyanpur, he read the name of the bus we travelled in, reading Chowdhary Travels as Chandni Travels. The Park housed statues of two historic figures: a king wearing his armour and sword and a tribal warrior holding his bow and arrow. Vijay read their names from the inscription (he also knew who the two figures were). On returning home, he took his elder sister’s school reader titled Mahabharat\(^{29}\) out of her bag (Figure 6.13). Reflecting his experiences in the park, he went to a page that had pictures of men holding bow and arrows and began reading from it.

He asked me to explain what was written. I told him to try and read again, but he flipped to the other pages with pictures. I asked him what was happening in one of the pictures, and he correctly noted that the kings were playing a game. He asked me whether I recognised the leaves of the plant in another picture, and I said I did not. He said that they were the leaves of the plant that we had plucked in the park. He then came to a picture of an old man flying in the air and asked what was happening. However, he started reading before I could answer. He read a line, reading only the frequently occurring words correctly. He again asked me what was written. I again asked him to try and read again, but he refused: “I cannot do it”. I then asked Vijay why he had started to read as soon as we reached home, and he answered: “because I wanted to”.

\(^{29}\) An Indian epic
On another occasion, when I asked Vijay to read from his school textbook, he enthusiastically stated that he would read a text about travel. He flipped through the pages of the textbook looking at the pictures and concluded with disappointment: "There is none!"

Vijay was a boy who wanted to travel and ‘see the world’. He also wished to read about travel and was disappointed that his textbook did not have texts to cater to his interest. When he read the name of the bus and the inscriptions on the statues of the in the park, he seemed to have adapted his home practices which encompassed taking pictures of print in his neighbourhood and ‘reading’ English flyers for me, conceivably, inspired by his fascination with vehicles, kings, and warriors, arguably, as a boy who was a member of his male peer groups and larger community. On a similar note, in wanting to read the Mahabharat, he improvised his school reading practices, by reading from his sister’s school reader, using pictures to build meaning different from his school practices but also decoding and depending on me, arguably, the teacher, for text-meaning, as at school, and on this occasion, as well, his practices were motivated by his desires as a boy. So, in agreement with Dyson (1997, 2003, 2013, 2018) who frames children’s writing interests as hybrid, improvisations that draw on their various cultural worlds, Vijay’s own literacy practices (and Krish’s and Pooja’s discussed in the following two chapters) were his hybrid interests.
6.3.2 Serious literacy practices as possible interests

Krish engaged with the print-based tasks required of him by his family and larger community (discussed in detail in Chapter 7). His grandmother worked as a midwife for a local NGO and was required to fill-out a *post-delivery health check-up coupon* every time she assisted with the delivery of a child. Krish helped his grandmother on these occasions, filling-in details that he was aware of and asking his grandmother about those that he was not by reading meaningfully from the coupon, cognisant that his practices would contribute to the financial wellbeing of his family. Krish was also a part of an NGO-programme which required him to read and write letters to penfriends in different parts of the world. Consequently, he read out a letter from his friend in Korea to the children in his village, accepted her interpretation of the text, and wrote back to them in a manner that was expected of him by the NGO functionaries, aware that the development activities of the NGO promoted the welfare of his larger community. Arguably, in reading the letter, Krish also drew on his own practices of reading for meaning, however, these meanings were not given space during the interaction.

So, on both occasions, Krish’s interaction with print was culturally serious and required him to adhere to the practices of the adult world. Doing so, it echoed the observations of past researchers who have focused on these practices in children’s homes (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Gregory & Williams, 2000). However, distinct from these studies, the child-focussed examination that this current research undertakes suggests that while Krish was earnestly participating with his literacy practices on both occasions, only his letter-reading practices, which involved adapting his school’s reading practices to read for meaning, were his hybrid interests.

6.4 School Literacy practices

All the five participant children were expected to engage with print at school in ways required by Suman. While Krish and Sandhya engaged with these practices, they were of scant interest to Vijay, Pooja, and Ashish. Krish also initiated his own literacy practices when his teachers were not around.
6.4.1 Serious literacy practices as possible interests

The children in Grade 5 were expected to read and write at school in ways advocated by Suman. This meant reading from their textbook along with her, accepting her interpretations of texts, and copying answers to questions provided by her. It also meant copying and reading basal words and sentences that Suman provided. Other researchers who have explored children’s school literacy practices in low- and middle-income countries have also encountered similar practices in classrooms (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994).

Both Krish and Sandhya engaged with these serious literacy practices in the classroom but seemed to be motivated differently. Krish read for meaning, voicing his interpretations of text meaning (Krish’s practices are discussed in detail in Chapter 7). At the same time, when his interpretations were different from Suman’s, he accepted those being provided by her. Moreover, his writing practices encompassed copying texts provided by Suman. Thus, while Krish was engaging with his school’s reading and writing practices, only the former can be identified as his hybrid interests.

Different from Krish, Sandhya was decoding texts, depending on Suman for text-meaning. She moved her finger along the text as Suman read-aloud, listened carefully to Suman’s interpretations of text-meaning, never expressing her own and copied the “correct” answers being provided by her. She talked about her practices in the classroom as follows: “We have to keep our head down and keep doing what the teacher tells us to.” Unsurprisingly, the only time I saw Sandhya speak in class was when Suman asked her a direct question which involved making a word using two consonants. So, Sandhya was adhering to her school’s practices which involved listening, speaking, reading, and writing in ways that were favoured by Suman, and her practices seemed to be motivated by her desire to belong within her classroom as an obedient student and a well-behaved girl.

Thus, Krish and Sandhya were engaging with their serious literacy practices at school which required them to adhere to their teacher’s instructions, reverberating the observations for other researchers investigating children’s school practices in low- and middle-income countries (Azuara & Reyes, 2011;
However, like the situation with respect to children’s serious practices at home, the present examination of Sandhya’s and Krish’s school practices lends to solely identifying Krish’s hybrid reading practices as his interest.

6.4.2 Serious literacy practices evidencing lack of interest

Undertaking a child-focussed examination of children’s practices, this study also provides evidence of Vijay, Pooja, and Ashish’s lack of interest in their school’s practices. Pooja’s practices are discussed in detail in Chapter 8 and Ashish’s have been outlined previously, so I focus on Vijay’s practices next. However, I first describe how he identified himself as a reader and was recognised as one by others around him.

Vijay viewed himself as non-reader, as did his classmates. This was apparent when an inspector visited and asked all the children in class to read for him. When Vijay stood up to read, he was greeted with his classmates’ comment: “Sir, he does not know how to read”. The inspector asked the boys to keep quiet and told them that he would be the judge of Vijay’s reading ability. Vijay stared intently at the print on the book, and it seemed like he was attempting to decode what was written. The inspector waited for Vijay to begin reading and when he did not, told him to sit down.

On the above occasion, both Vijay’s classmates and the inspector positioned Vijay as someone who could not read. However, Vijay’s attempts to engage with print left me in doubt of whether the inspector’s assessment was entirely correct. The next day, I requested Vijay to read from his textbook and then, another story30 from a passbook which I judged to be of a Grade 2 level. While reading from his school textbook, Vijay decoded the high frequency words correctly, however, was unable to decode most others, often, because he did not recognise the vocalic diacritic markers31. On the other hand, he read the story in the

30 The story was entitled “a greedy farmer”. It was about 50 words long. The sentences were 5-10 words long and all words were either mono or disyllabic.
passbook without any errors, needing my help with only one word. I was quite surprised and exclaimed: “You can read!” Vijay looked as surprised by my comment as me illuminating his perception of himself as a non-reader.

In conformity with Vijay’s perception of himself as a non-reader, Suman also recognised him as a student who was uninterested in learning and regularly absent from school (absent in about two-thirds of the classes, I observed). She questioned Vijay about his absence from school in my first week of observation:

   Suman: Vijay, you take too many holidays!
   Several children started responding, and Krish’s voice was the clearest.
   Krish: He runs away madam.
   Suman: Krish, you do not need to speak. Let Vijay speak
   […]
   Krish: Madame, he runs away during lunch break.
   Mithun: He runs away.
   Suman: Both of you, not again!
   Suman: Vijay look at me. Where had you gone?
   Vijay (looking uncertainly at the teacher): I had gone to visit my relatives.
   Suman looked unhappy with Vijay’s response but did not question it.

100815-Video

On the next occasion, Vijay was again in class after a long spell of absence and did not answer when Suman called out his name while taking the register. One of his classmates informed her of his presence and that he had been in the village but had not been coming to school. Suman took Vijay to task:

   Suman (angrily): You have only come to school for 3-4 days in this month. Is the school a funfair where you can walk-in whenever you want? I don’t think you can even read?
   Vijay did not respond and looked uncertainly at Suman.
   Suman: I want to have a look at your work. Take your notebook out.
   Suman continued to reprimand him.
   Suman: Why can you not answer your roll call when I take attendance!

190915-Video
The above interactions between Vijay and Suman illustrate two things. First, they show that Suman viewed Vijay as an apathetic learner who was not attending school regularly and could not read. Second, they provide evidence of Vijay’s disengagement with his literacy practices. This was also clearly visible in his interaction with print in the classroom.

Suman expected Vijay (and children like him who were reading below their grade level) to “make an effort” to read from their textbook and the basal words and sentences she was providing. The two vignettes given below provide an account of how Vijay was engaging with these literacy practices in his Hindi classroom:

Suman entered the classroom (Grades 4 and 5 were sitting together). She wrote some syllables on the black-board and asked the Grade 4 children to make words from them. She told the Grade 5 that she would be teaching a story entitled *a cheetah on a hot air balloon* from their textbook. She read the text aloud, stopping at regular intervals, providing explanations of the portions she had read by paraphrasing it in her own words. She told the children to move their finger along the text in their textbook and silently, read along with her. Vijay continued to move his pen along the text, not only when Suman read from the textbook but also when she provided explanations. Mukesh, a boy in Grade 4, came and sat next to Vijay and realised that Vijay did not have his finger at the right part of the text. He started moving his finger along the text that was being read by Suman. He did this for some time, and Vijay continued to follow his finger. Mukesh stopped after some time; Vijay took over but was soon in a similar situation as before, being caught unaware when his classmates turned to the next page.

Suman undertook basal work in class. She wrote sentences using the ‘i’ syllables (for instance, *ki, mi, gi* and *li*) on the blackboard. She read aloud each sentence that she wrote. She instructed the children: “You need to read and then write these sentences. First, look at the board, read what is written. Don’t just copy. All of you read silently and then write. If you do this, then you will learn to read.” Suman first wrote sentences on the right side of the board. When she reached the bottom of the board, she started writing sentences in the empty space in front of the already written sentences. Vijay regularly raised his head to copy, and he seemed to copying letter by letter.

Vijay’s work has been produced below. Red marks incorrectly copied portions (vocalic diacritic markers have been put incorrectly or have not been put). The blue portions represent missing words, and the purple sentence is incomplete. The green ones are new sentences written in front of previously written sentences.
It is day.

Farmer plough your field.

The postman got a letter.

Daddy write the accounts.

Nisa go and get the wheat grains ground

Kavita play the sitar the deer ran in the jungle

Sarita and Radha play the drum Ram open the door

Amit make the bed

Ram go to school on the cycle

Kiran on the bed

On the first occasion, Vijay tried to read along with Suman but was only able to do this when Mukesh helped. On the next, he could have decoded the short basal sentences which were meant to help him read but did not do so. He made several mistakes while copying, also mechanically copying one sentence after the other without comprehending them as separate ones. Thus, Vijay was either unable to participate in his school’s serious reading practices or seemed to be superficially engaging with them providing evidence of his disengagement. Arguably, this was because these practices did not make place for his own reading practices which encompassed reading about travel, vehicles, kings, and warriors.

6.4.3 Playful literacy practices as interests

While the participant children’s peer culture practices during non-teaching time at school did not often include engaging with print, I did observe Krish read on occasion with his friends. Other researchers who have explored children’s school literacy practices in middle- and low-income nations have also found children engaging with such “unofficial” literacy practices by talking about the pictures in their textbook and helping each other read texts (Sahni, 1994) and writing and drawing (Lisanza, 2011) during their free-time.
Mithun created a scrapbook with pictures and poems (from his old textbooks) that he liked (Figure 6.14), and Krish enjoyed looking at the pictures and reading the texts. He also sang a poem from his textbook entitled *Let us make our country beautiful* to his classmates who sat around him enjoying the rendition.

In reading from Mithun’s scrapbook, Krish was drawing on his own reading practices and his peer cultures’ practices to pursue his desire to read. In reading and singing aloud the poem from his textbook, Krish was again blending his reading practices and his school’s morning-assembly practices which required children to copy motivational songs in their notebooks to memorise and sing aloud. Arguably, he was doing this not only for his own pleasure but that of his friends. Thus, when Suman was not around, Krish engaged with his reading interests, hybrid practices that drew on his various cultural worlds. Culturally, these practices were rooted in their peer cultures where the rules allowed children to engage with such practices.
6.5 Summative discussion

This chapter focuses on the primary research question of the study which explores the manner in which the home and school literacy practices of five children living in a rural village in India are being culturally and personally shaped (discussed in Chapter 2). In this concluding section, I address this question. I also illustrate how my need to utilise Hedges and Cooper’s (2016) theorisation of children’s interests arises from this examination of data and taking cognisance of the context from which, it was collected.

Research which has explored children’s home and/or school literacy practices has found these practices to include adult practices and children’s own practices. The former have been identified as “serious” with roots in the adult world where the rules required children to adhere to the practices of this world (Gregory & Williams, 2000). On the other hand, the latter have been described as “playful”, embedded in the children’s world, their peer cultures, where children adapt their various cultural world practices (Dyson, 1997, 2003). The latter have also been identified as children’s interests because of their hybrid character.

The cross-case analysis of children’s practices undertaken in this chapter has also found children’s home and school literacy practices to be culturally, serious, or playful. It also concurs with past research which shows that children’s playful literacy practices are personally rooted, that is, are children’s interests because of their hybrid nature. However, it also highlights that children’s serious practices which require them to adhere to adult ways of reading and writing may also be their interests. This, arguably, requires a more careful examination of children’s serious practices. Consequently, this present study draws on Hedges and Cooper’s (2016) sociocultural theorisation of children’s interests to examine how children’s serious practices can be identified as children’s interests. Doing so, it focuses on two children, Krish and Pooja, who present contrasting cases with respect to their desire to read. They also periodically engage with print at home. The following chapter explores Krish’s practices.
Chapter 7: Krish’s Interests

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on one of the participant children: Krish. I explore his home and school literacy practices to understand how these practices are culturally and personally rooted. Section 7.2 outlines Krish’s family structure and economic circumstances. Section 7.3 explores his peer culture practices at home and school to highlight his interests. Subsequently, his home literacy practices are examined in Section 7.4 and Section 7.5 engages with his school literacy practices. Finally, Section 7.6 summarises the relationship between his home and school literacy practices.

7.2 Krish’s family

Krish’s family comprised his parents and four siblings. He had three brothers: Ramesh (Grade 6), Kailash (Grade 3), and Himmat (Grade 1), and his sister was less than a month old when I started visiting his home. Krish’s father worked as a contract labourer on construction sites in Udaipur. His mother handled the household chores and agriculture-related work. Krish’s father could sign his name, his mother had never been to school.

Krish lived next door to Karan, his cousin who was studying with him in Grade 5; the boys’ fathers were brothers. Karan’s family comprised his grandmother, parents, and two younger siblings. His father also worked as a contract labourer on construction sites. He could read but his wife had never been to school. The boys’ grandmother worked as a mid-wife for a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) and received half-day’s wage every time she ensured the safe, hospitalised birth and vaccinations of a baby in her neighbourhood.

Krish and Karan’s households functioned as separate economic units; however, the ladies of the houses supported each other in their chores, and it appeared that the households operated as one. Both families held above poverty line.

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32 All names mentioned in this chapter are pseudonyms

33 A family of five earning more than 40 pounds per month.
ration cards which entitled them to a monthly wheat ration. Krish’s home comprised one room (about 150 square feet) and was made of brick and cement. The only furniture in the house was a single, metal bed. Karan’s home was similar in size and made of mud and stone. Both homes used the community water tank which was right in front of their houses for drinking water, and the lightbulb in the homes was the source for light after sun-down. Neither of the families owned a TV, but the fathers and grandmother owned mobile phones.

7.3 Interests at home and school

Within the sociocultural world, children’s interests are recognised as culturally embedded practices and purposes (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). Building on this sociocultural scholarship, Hedges and her colleagues (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) identify children’s play, talk and goals for participation embedded in their peer cultures’ practices as their interests, at their point of departure. Subsequently, they theorise these interests as children’s funds of knowledge-based practices (Moll et al., 1992) that are motivated by their recurring goals, facets of children’s identities as learners. They ask researchers to explore children’s practices at both home and school to identify these interests. In this section, I explore Krish’s peer culture practices to do so.

While Krish spent much of his time playing at home, he was also expected to contribute to household chores by his family members. His mother affirmed her views when she firmly stated: “Yes, Krish needs to undertake chores at home. I don’t ask him to help if he is with his books, but if he is free, he needs to help… he needs to learn how to make rotis. It is especially needed when I cannot do it.” The mother’s words reflected her present circumstances: she was caring for her new-born daughter and could not carry on with her chores as usual.

As a result, I saw Krish and his cousin Karan take their cattle out to graze after returning from school, on various days. The boys scaled to the top of a hill with their goats, watched over them to ensure that they did not stray away from the herd or eat plants which were harmful to them and gathered them when it was time to leave. When I asked Krish whether he liked grazing cattle, he responded as follows: “No, I don’t” and reflecting his views, also delegated the task to his cousin. On one occasion, he was also reprimanded by his grandmother for
wanting to play marbles and not undertake the task. So, Krish seemed to resisting his home-based funds of knowledge about grazing cattle (Moll et al., 1992) providing evidence of his lack of interest in them.

Different from his participation in the cattle-grazing practices of his community, Krish regularly engaged with “spontaneous self-motivated play” identified as children’s interests by Hedges et al. (2011). This was evident when I asked him why he did not help Karan and Arjun (both struggling readers) to read at home:

Researcher: *Tell me one thing, why don’t you all sit together and teach each other to read?*
Arjun reacted immediately and firmly.
Arjun: *We just don’t.*
Krish: *We don’t because we play marbles at home.*
I asked Karan and Arjun, the next question.
Researcher: *Why don’t you sit with him? Does he scold you?*
Arjun: *No.*
Karan: *No madam. We play together at home.*
Researcher: *Ok*
Krish: *We play together, we don’t study together at home.*
Researcher: *You play together but don’t study together at home?*
Krish: *We study together at school.*
Researcher: *What happens at home?*
Krish: *We play, we play at home.*

Karan and Arjun refuted my suggestion that they did not read with Krish because he was tough on them. All three boys were also quite adamant that learning to read was something they did at school and the home was a space in which they played together. Doing so, they identified themselves as playmates, and true to their word spent much of their time in each other’s company at home.

Krish played a variety of games with his friends. He played marbles during daytime and hide and seek was reserved for evening hours. He swam in the lake in the summer months and flew kites and played cricket during the school-break time in winter. He also enjoyed *chingaa-battii*, a homemade version of ludo
(Figure 7.1). The ‘board’ for the game was drawn on the floor with charcoal, and pebbles and seeds of different plants were used as counters. Five seeds of the tamarind plant (having a white and black face) were used as a dice. Getting all five, white meant that you could move one of your counters, 24 spaces, straight to home, which was marked by ॐ written on it. With a series of rules about ‘killing’ your opponents, protecting yourself and getting extra turns, I saw him playing the game on multiple occasions.

![Figure 7.1: Chingaa battii](image)

Krish was also fond of racing on “bearings” with his friends. Bearings were ‘vehicles’ made by the children, initially with support from their older siblings and fathers, from ‘waste’ including wooden planks, sticks, metal wires, nails and bearings (Figure 7.2). Karan and Arjun were adept at making these vehicles, and Krish enjoyed the rides. The boys took turns riding; one would sit on the bearing, holding on to the ‘steering’ and the other would push from behind (Figure 7.3).

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34 A sacred sound in the Hindu religion used during prayers written in Devanagari script (the Hindi script)

35 Metal rings: waste generated from flour-grinding shops in Kalyanpur, the town-centre
Krish’s play illuminated his cultural knowledge and skills of his own world, his peer cultures, and frequently, engaging with these funds of knowledge gave place to his identities as a friend, playmate, and a boy, crucial for his personal wellbeing (Moll et al., 1992).

Krish and the children in his neighbourhood also played school, and unlike the play discussed above, on this occasion, the children’s practices were drawing on their school-based funds of knowledge. I present an account of this play below:

It was a Sunday. I had stayed the previous night at Krish’s home. In the morning, children from the neighbouring homes kept coming to ask me if I had slept well so there were many children around. I asked the children if they ever played school. Like in the case of my other participant children, the children said they didn’t. Sudhir (Grade 6 boy), however, seemed to feel that it would be fun and told all the children around that they would be playing school.

Eleven children varying in ages from 4 to 14 seemed to ‘naturally’ position themselves in the play. The oldest one, Tarun (Grade 9 boy) took on the role of the teacher and went and sat on the bed, the only elevated space in the room. The rest of the children took their place on the floor. Krish continued to sit on the bed with Tarun. Tarun asked me what he should teach, and I told him to teach whatever he wanted. Tarun picked up a leaflet about self-help groups lying beside him. Sudhir asked me whether they could do a ‘comedy’, and I gave him a non-committal shrug. As if taking a cue from Sudhir, Ajay (Grade 5) got up and asked the teacher:

_Ajay: Sir, can I go to the toilet? Sir, can I go to the toilet?_
Tarun: No, you cannot. Sit down, you just came from the toilet.

Ajay sat down and Sudhir got up immediately.

Sudhir: Sir, can I go and drink water?

Tarun: No, sit down.

Sudhir sat down, and Krish, who was still sitting next to Tarun, smiled at the boys acknowledging their mischief. Karan, who was sitting on the floor next to Sudhir and Ajay, commented:

Karan: You both are going to get a tight slap soon.

Tarun seemed to ignore all this activity and started asking children questions.

Tarun: What is a women’s self-help group?

Ajay and Sudhir continued with their comedy.

Ajay: Women’s self-help group?

Sudhir: Nobody knows.

Tarun: Tell me quickly. I taught you this today.

Sudhir: Should I answer?

Tarun: Yes.

Sudhir: A woman is an old biddy.

Ramesh repeated after Sudhir:

Ramesh: An old biddy

The children started to giggle, and Ajay and Neeta (age 4) turned to me and smiled with glee.

[...]

Tarun did not seem very happy with the self-help group leaflet and started looking into Krish’s school bag for a book. He seemed to notice Krish for the first time and told him to go and sit on the floor. Krish said he would but continued to sit on the bed. Krish told Tarun to use a particular book that he said was interesting. Tarun responded:

Tarun: No, I won’t. Now go and sit on the floor.

Krish got up and went and sat on the floor. In the process, he gave Ramesh (his older brother) a light whack on his back, took the textbook that he was holding and handed it to Tarun. Tarun did not heed the book and started asking the children questions from the passbook he had found in the school bag lying next to him.

Tarun: These questions that I am asking will come in the exam. These questions are important, they will come in the exam.

[...]

Sudhir: I am not going to give the exam.
Tarun ignored his response and asked the children various questions.  

[...]  
Tarun: *How many festivals do we have in a year?*  
Many children: *Five*  
Sudhir: *Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen*  
Tarun ignored Sudhir and went on asking questions.  
Tarun: *Which ones?*  
Ramesh: *Holi*  
Karan: *Holi, Diwali*  
Ravi: *Holi, Diwali*  

[...]  
Sudhir stood up and asked Tarun permission to go to the toilet.  
Tarun: *Go, you idiot. Get out of here.*  
The children started giggling and Tarun told them to be quiet. Sudhir came back quickly and then Tarun asked the class:  
Tarun: *Who else wants to go to the toilet?*  
4-5 children raised their hands and said they wanted to go.  
Tarun: *Only one of you will go to the toilet.*  
Krish quickly got up and ran ‘out’.  
Tarun: *Now, listen all of you. If there are lice in your head you should take it out, just like I took this boy out of the class.*  
The children giggled again. Krish appeared to look upset. He did not join the rest of the children on the floor and sat with Tarun on the bed.  

221115(1)-Video

In contrast to some literacy researchers in England and North America who have observed children play school at home (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Williams, 2004), I did not find Krish (or my other participant children) doing the same. On this occasion, Krish and the children in his neighbourhood played school, in part, because I raised it, and, in part, because they seemed to want to challenge “their status as powerless children” (Dyson, 1997, p. 166) and to re-position themselves within this imaginary world. Thus, they were improvising their school-based funds of knowledge, plausibly, to position themselves as disobedient children who would annoy their teacher.
Sudhir and Ajay were the protagonists of this “comedy” and subverted the authority of the teacher in multiple ways. They regularly asked to be excused from the class for a drink of water and to visit the toilet. They openly claimed not to know the answers to Tarun’s questions or gave incorrect ones. Eventually, they were successful in infuriating Tarun who referred to Sudhir as an idiot. During this time, the rest of the children played obedient students answering the teacher’s questions. They were, however, quite aware of what Sudhir and Ajay were up to and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the comedy, laughing, and giggling every time Sudhir and Ajay got away with a prank.

In contrast to Sudhir and Ajay’s initiatives, Krish’s actions were illustrative of his desire to behave in school-sanctioned ways in his classroom. When play started, Krish wanted to be the teacher but could not since Tarun, an older boy, took on the role. Consequently, Krish did not take-on the role of a student and seat himself on the floor, till he was firmly told to do so by Tarun. Moreover, before he did this, he playfully hit Ramesh, as teachers were entitled to in his school. On becoming a student, Krish tried to join Ajay and Sudhir in their comedy, but his actions were nowhere near as convincing as theirs. Finally, looking quite upset at Tarun’s rebuke, he joined him back on the bed. So, adhering to school practices seemed to be crucial to Krish for his personal wellbeing and, consequently, challenging these practices, even in play, bought him discomfort. Arguably, Krish’s school practices were his own funds of knowledge which eventually dissuaded him from play, illuminating on his sense of self as an obedient student.
Krish’s practices at home also included watching movies, viewing videos, and playing videogames on the TV and mobile phones. Both the TV and mobile phones were scarce commodities, yet I often saw Krish entertaining himself with these videos with his friends and siblings (Figure 7.4). Krish was also curious about how my flip-camera and dictaphone worked and listened with interest when I explained. He used the former to make videos of his friends dancing. While there were no touchscreen mobile phones around him, he did not need any help in figuring out how my iPhone worked and was unhappy that it did not contain any video games. These practices were again encouraged by his own funds of knowledge about popular culture including Bollywood movies and digital technologies that were engrained in his peer cultures. Arguably, these practices would also be recognised as Krish’s interests, his own funds of knowledge acquired in interaction in his peer cultures, by Hedges et al. (2010).

![Figure 7.4: Krish and friends watching videos on a cell phone](image)

Discussions between children have also been identified as their interests rooted in their peer cultures by Hedges et al. (2010). I became a part of two such

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36 Mainstream Hindi cinema
discussions which were fuelled by the children’s funds of knowledge about popular culture. In the first conversation, Krish’s knowledge and skill about technology (and those of his classmates) rooted in their peer cultures are apparent.

Ashish had bought an old and dysfunctional mobile phone to class. Krish played a videogame on it for about a minute, but the battery ran out. Ashish started acting as if he was trying to take photos with the phone.

Researcher: Ashish, what are you doing?
Ashish: Madam, I am using the camera.

Vijay (implying that Ashish would not be able to take a photograph): This phone does not have a memory.

[...] 

Ashish: If it did have a memory then I could do everything with it.

Researcher: What does a memory mean?
Krish and Vijay: You can hear songs.

Ashish: Madam it is small, black and fits into the cell phone.

Vijay was a little surprised that I did not know what a memory was and asked me:

Vijay: Don’t you know what a memory is? Doesn’t your phone have one?

I was not sure what the boys meant by memory and continued with my questions:

Researcher: If you put the memory in the phone then what happens?
Krish: You can hear songs.

Researcher: And?

Mithun: You can see films.

Kamlesh: You can make calls.

Ashish: You cannot make calls.

Krish: You need a SIM to make a phone call.

While we were having this conversation, Suman entered the classroom, confiscated Ashish’s phone reprimanding him for getting it to school.

Here, Krish illustrated some of his knowledge about mobile phones and videogames. He was aware that mobile phones were not only used to make calls, but also to take pictures, listen to songs, watch movies, and play video games. He knew that the technology that supported these functions was different: one needed a SIM to make calls and a memory to store songs, movies, and
photographs. He also seemed familiar with videogames. So, Krish’s funds of knowledge about mobile phones were helping him to participate in the conversation, and, in turn, illuminating his identity as a technology enthusiast.

In the next discussion, Krish’s funds of knowledge about mainstream Hindi cinema, again, engrained in his peer cultures are evident. It involved Krish and his friends choosing names for themselves for my study, and the names they chose were those of heroes and superheroes in Bollywood movies:

Krish: I want my name to be Krish.
Researcher: You had suggested that as your father’s name.
Krish: No, it will be mine.
Researcher: Ok, let’s call you Kishan.
Krish: No, it must be Krish.
Researcher: It cannot be Krish.
Krish (emphatically): It can.
Researcher: No one is called Krish in a village.
Mithun: What about Kanhaiya?
Krish did not heed his friend.
Krish: No madam, I want it to be Krish. Write Krish, write Krish, write Krish.
[…]
I asked Krish to think of a name for Tarun.
Krish: Madam, let’s call him Tarzan.
I started laughing.
Researcher: Tarzan is a man who lives in a jungle and runs around in his briefs.
Krish, Ajay and Arjun look upset at my comment.
Arjun (seriously): No madam, Tarzan is a car.
Me: No, Tarzan is a man who lives in the jungle and runs about in his briefs.
Some children around me start laughing, but Krish, Ajay and Arjun did not look amused and persist.
Krish: No madam, Tarzan is a car. It runs on its own.
Arjun: It is also a car.
Ajay: Yes madam, it is a car.
Krish’s wanted to be named Krish, a superhero in a Hindi movie. I tried my best to dissuade him from taking on this name because it was an uncommon name for a rural setting. However, I eventually had to give in to his persistence. On a similar note, Krish and his friends also wanted to name Tarun, Tarzan because they recognised that to be the name of a ‘wonder’ car featured in another movie.

So, during this conversation, Krish was drawing on his funds of knowledge about Bollywood, to choose names for himself and his friends. This knowledge was contributing to his confidence and stimulating his conversation with me, and, in all likelihood, was inextricably intertwined with his sense of self as a boy.

Krish’s interests also included drawing, and I observed him draw on multiple occasions at school with his friends. He again drew on his funds of knowledge rooted in his home, school, and peer cultures’ practices illuminating his varied identities (also discussed in Chapter 6). His picture of Baldev (Figure 7.5), the 10-year-old protagonist in the story *the cheetah on the hot air balloon*, probably evidenced his enjoyment of reading the story while engaging with literacy practices at school.

He also drew a bus and wrote his father and grandmother’s name, his father’s phone number, and the name of his hamlet on the body (Figure 7.6)
Recognising the names of his family members on the picture, I initiated the following conversation with him:

Researcher: Krish, why have you written your father and grandmother’s name on the bus?
Krish: The names of the owners of a bus, are written on it.
Researcher: And what about the phone number?
Krish: If someone wants to contact us to hire the bus, they can.
Researcher: And the name of the hamlet at the back?
Krish: You write the name of the place that the bus belongs to over there.

Krish was a boy who belonged to a poor family where-in travelling by buses was common practice but owning one, a distant dream. A handful of households in the village owned an auto-rickshaw, and owning a bus signalled both greater wealth and a regular source of income. Krish’s drawing reflected his knowledge of these practices at home and was, in turn, highlighted his need for much better circumstances for his family rooted in his sense of self as a son and grandson.

To sum up, Krish’s practices at home included those rooted in the adult world and his peer cultures. In grazing cattle, he was drawing on his familial funds of knowledge illuminating on his sense of self as dutiful son. The latter included his play, interactions with digital technologies, talk, and drawings. These interests were stimulated by his funds of knowledge rooted in his home, school and peer
cultures and illuminated on his various identities as a friend, playmate, Bollywood fan, technology enthusiast, boy, son/grandson, an engaged reader, and obedient student.

7.4 Home literacy practices

Krish’s home literacy practices included reading for pleasure and helping his family and community with print-based tasks, and these practices seemed to be of interest to him.

7.4.1 Playful literacy practices as interests

Krish’s mother not only identified him as a competent reader but also as one who was interested in reading. While talking about her sons’ study habits, she observed: “Unlike the rest of my sons, Krish always has a book in his hand. He even reads when he is just back from school”.

My observations of Krish confirm his mother’s words. The following are vignettes of the occasions I saw him read for pleasure:

Krish, his brothers and I had just come back from school. Ramesh (older brother) took a storybook out from his bag which looked like it was from the school library and handed it to him. Krish promptly started reading from the book. He had read a few lines when his grandmother asked him to fill out a coupon for her
(discussed in Section 7.4.2). After filling the coupon for her, he went back to his reading and read all the three stories in the book (about 3000 words each). His brothers and grandmother were talking to one another during this time, but he continued to read.

010915-Video

Krish’s grandmother asked him to run an errand from the shop on the highway. I did not accompany him because he wanted to go on his cycle. As soon as he came back, he started reading from Ramesh’s Social Science textbook; he read for about 20 minutes. His father had just returned from a week-long pilgrimage, and all the family was around chatting and looking at the gifts he had got for them. His father also answered a phone call during this time. However, he kept reading throughout this activity.

Some older children in a neighbour’s house came and requested me to video-record them dancing. I agreed, and Krish came along with me. A boy in Grade 1 (studying in a private school) had his schoolbooks out. Krish started reading a poem from his book while the children danced around.

040915-Video and Field-notes

Krish came back after riding on the bearing with his friends (discussed in Section 7.3) and started reading the short stories (about 500 words each) from his passbook. His younger brothers, Kailash and Himmat, came and sat next to him. Himmat would break into a poem he remembered, but Krish continued reading.

110915-Video

It was my last week at Krish’s house, and I had never seen him ask Suman for library books lying in the staffroom. When I asked him about this, he did not seem to be aware that such a library existed. I reminded him of the picture books that Suman had given them in class once, and he said that he didn’t like reading those books as they had too many pictures and were very short. I told him that the storybooks that Ramesh got from the school were also from the library and that seemed to pique his interest. The next day, Krish came into the staffroom when I was there and asked me for the library books. I showed them to him, and he chose two books like the ones Ramesh got for him and went back to his class. During lunchbreak, I was passing-by his classroom and saw him reading from the book. He was reading alone; a handful of children were playing marbles on the other end of the classroom.

201115 and 211115-Fieldnotes

In the first episode, Krish came back from school and almost immediately started reading the storybook handed to him by Ramesh. In the second, he read from Ramesh’s textbook, and like on the previous occasion, read irrespective of the
talk and activity around him in his house. After some time, he chanced upon some new books in a neighbour’s house and started reading them, again, irrespective of what was happening around. On the third, he came back from play and promptly started reading stories from his passbook, and in the final episode, which was clearly affected by our conversation, and I would argue also Krish’s desire to read, he read during his lunchbreak at school.

Krish’s reading practices were his own funds of knowledge. These were practices that he had acquired at school in interaction with his teachers. However, he had adapted these practices to read as a meaning-maker, different from the school’s expectations. He also chose to read school-texts in a manner that varied from at school and favoured texts that were considered beyond his grade-level. He read stories from his passbook, which teachers expected him to use to copy texts and used his elder brother’s school textbooks and library books for his reading pleasure, books that were considered longer and ‘harder’ for children in the primary classes. The book he chose for himself from among the library books was also a long story with few pictures. At the same time, Krish read by giving his complete attention to reading, as at school. This was evident when amidst much activity and excitement in his home on his father’s return from his pilgrimage trip, he continued to read oblivious of all activity. It was also visible when his younger sibling came and sat next to him and recited a poem, but he continued to read without getting distracted.

Theorising children’s interests, Hedges and Cooper (2016) posit them as funds of knowledge-based practices. Krish’s reading practices were his interests, his own funds of knowledge, school practices that he adapted to read for meaning, and engaging with these practices nourished for his sense of self as an engaged reader. Investigating children’s writing practices in child-centered classrooms in North America, Dyson (1997, 2003) also identifies their writing interests as “hybrid”, improvisations which involve borrowing, blending, and adapting practices of their various cultural worlds. She also identifies these interests as culturally “playful”, embedded in children’s peer cultures where the ‘rules’ allow children to adapt their cultural world knowledge for their own purposes. Being hybrid, Krish’s own reading practices were also playful.
Researchers who have explored children’s own literacy practices at home have also identified these improvised practices as “hybrid” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011) or “syncretic” (Gregory & Williams, 2000) providing evidence of children blending practices of their different cultural worlds. In their examination of Bangladeshi and white children’s home reading practices in England, Gregory and Williams (2000) observed the former “booksharing” with older siblings teaching the younger ones to read in English by drawing on not only their school’s practices but also those of their Bengali and Quran classrooms, and the latter reading for pleasure reflecting their school practices and those of their parents and grandparents at home, and those of their peer cultures. Subsequently, the researchers recognised the Bangladeshi children’s practices as syncretic but culturally serious. Arguably, these syncretic practices, improvisations of children’s school literacy practices, were playful practices rooted in children’s peer cultures. Furthermore, while the researchers did not recognize the white children’s reading practices as syncretic, they were conceivably so and so, playful in nature.

7.4.2 Serious literacy practices as interests

Krish’s family identified him as a competent reader and believed that his ability to read and write was an asset to the family. His mother explained: “We do not need to go the neighbours for help with reading a paper as Krish helps with this. He also helps his grandmother with whatever writing she requires.” In agreement with his mother’s observation, I saw Krish help with print-based tasks at home. The following vignettes evidence his engagement with these practices at home:

I came back from school with Krish and his brothers, and his grandmother handed him a post-delivery health check-up coupon to fill in. It was required by the NGO she worked for. Krish filled in the required details, for instance, the name of the women who had gone for the check-up to the doctor, the name of the mid-wife, and the name of the village. Whenever he was not sure about what to fill in, he asked his grandmother.
Sitara village was enrolled in a child sponsorship program by the NGO that Krish’s grandmother was working for. One of the projects under the programme required a few children in the village to be pen-pals with children in different countries. Gita and Mukesh, two workers from the NGO, came to meet Krish about the project. They told him that he had received a letter from his penfriend from Korea and required him to write back to his penfriend. Gita showed him the original letter written in English and its Hindi translation. She asked him to read the Hindi version to the boys sitting with him. Krish first read the letter silently and then, aloud. Gita provided her interpretation of the read-aloud letter to the children. She then told him to write a letter back to his pen-pal by telling him about his village life. She dictated the letter, and Krish wrote it down. I asked Krish add his own experiences about his life in the village, but he refused.

Exploring children’s practices across their home and school highlights their interests, their funds of knowledge-based practices which are motivated by their persistent goals (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). On both occasions discussed above, Krish’s writing practices can be identified as these interests.

On the first, Krish’s practices were embedded in his strong desire to contribute to the wellbeing of his family as a dutiful son/grandson, and this was also apparent in his varied practices at home and school. When grazing cattle, Krish drew on his home-based funds of knowledge to contribute to the sustenance of his family,
even though he did not enjoy the activity, highlighting his sense of self as a dutiful son/grandson. Similarly, his drawing of a bus with his grandmother and father’s name on it reflected the cultural practices of his community and was motivated by his desire for better circumstances for his family. Subsequently, when Krish filled-out the health coupon for his grandmother, his practices were, arguably, his interests that utilised his grandmother’s occupation-based funds of knowledge but were motivated by his strong desire to contribute to the wellbeing of his family as a dutiful grandson.

On the second occasion, Krish’s practices were embedded in his desire to write like an obedient student. His desire to be such a student was evident when he and his friends played school (discussed previously), and on the numerous times he copied in Suman’s classroom (discussed ahead). So, when the NGO worker, conceivably, the ‘teacher’ on this occasion, dictated the letter by utilising her occupational funds of knowledge, Krish copied earnestly, also refusing my suggestion to write about his own experiences. Engrained in his sense of self as an obedient student, these practices were, arguably, Krish’s interests. Krish’s reading practices, on this occasion, were also conceivably, his interests, his own funds of knowledge, which encompassed reading for meaning.

Finally, Krish’s literacy practices were serious practices, culturally rooted in the norms of the adult world at home which required children to adhere to adult ways of reading and writing. So, on the first occasion, he filled-out a health coupon as required by his grandmother, knowing that they money she would receive would contribute to the sustenance of his family. Similarly on the second, he read the text aloud on being asked, accepted textual meanings provided by the NGO worker and wrote as required by her, also refusing my suggestion to write about his own experiences, cognisant that the developmental activities of the NGO contributed to the wellbeing of his family and community. In this manner, his practices resembled the practices of the 7-year-old girl in Azuara and Reyes’s (2011) study who followed her mother’s instruction and copied thank-you letters addressed to a charitable organisation.
7.5 School literacy practices

At school, Krish undertook reading and writing tasks required by his teacher. His reading practices included reading texts along with Suman and accepting text-meaning provided by her, and all writing that he undertook in the classroom comprised copying texts. Suman either wrote these texts on the blackboard or expected children to copy them from the passbook37. Before discussing Krish’s literacy practices, I focus on how Krish was viewed as a reader at school as well as how he viewed himself as one.

7.5.1 Krish: An engaged reader

Krish was one of the few children in Grade 5 who attended school regularly. His desire to belong within his school was related to his desire to read. The former was apparent in the following conversation, as was his reason for it:

Researcher: *Do you like to go to school, Krish?*

Krish immediately answered:

Krish: *Yes!*

Researcher: *Why? Ok, what do you like about it?*

Krish: *I like to read.*

Researcher: *What do you like to read?*

Krish: *Stories.*

Researcher: *Is there something you don’t like to read?*

Krish: *There’s nothing that I don’t like to read.*

Krish identified himself as an engaged reader, someone who enjoyed reading and seemed quite clear that his desire to be at school, a space which provided him with opportunities to read, was entangled with his desire.

Krish’s ability to read was recognised by both his classmates and teachers. In my first week of fieldwork, the boys in his class informed me that Krish was “the best reader in their class”. In response to his friends’ accolades, Krish smiled shyly and responded by returning the compliment to his classmate: “Madam, Mithun

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37 The passbook is a guidebook containing the answers to all the questions to the texts of textbook. The passbook is published privately.
also reads well”. So, though humble in his response, Krish also identified himself as the best reader in his class.

The children’s assessment of Krish’s reading ability was officially affirmed in my second week at school when an inspector from the education department visited and asked all the children of Grade 5 to read for him. As Krish got up to read, his friend, Mithun announced: “He reads very well, sir”. Unlike the rest of the children in the class, Krish read with fluency, accuracy, and confidence. The inspector congratulated him and told the rest of the children to clap for him. Thus, Krish was recognised as a competent reader at school, and he also identified himself as one.

7.5.2 Serious literacy practices as interests

Suman taught four prose texts and one poem during my fieldwork. Of these five texts, she undertook writing-work for three in class. She taught both prose and poetry in the same manner. I provide evidence of Krish’s reading practices using vignettes from two of the prose texts and of writing practices from the poem.

**Gavri**

*Gavri*, a text in the children’s textbook, is the name of a festival celebrated by people of the Bhil tribe living in Udaipur. The highlight of the festival are musical-drama performances depicting a tussle between Lord Shiv and Bhasmasur[^38]. Every tribal village in Udaipur has its group of Gavri performers, and this was true for Sitara as well. The children of Grade 5 had seen many such performances, in and around their village and were quite excited about seeing more that season. The text in the children’s textbook was about one such performance. Suman started teaching the text by asking children to identify what they saw in the picture provided along with the text:

[^38]: Respectively, a god and a devil in Hindu mythology
Suman: You all are going to be celebrating Gavri this month, so I am teaching you this text now.

[---]

She then asked the children to look at the picture in their textbook.

Suman: What do you see in the picture? What do you see in the background?

More than one boy started responding to her first question:

Ashish: Madam, there are lots of people.

Karan: There are women and people.

Samir: I see an umbrella.

Suman did not acknowledge these responses and drew the children’s attention to the background of the picture:

Suman: Do you see the village? Do you see the temple?

Few children: Yes.

Suman: Do you see the flag on the temple?

Few children: Yes.

Suman: People are sitting in a circle.
Many children: Yes.

Suman: *You all have seen Gavri. So, tell me who is standing in the circle? Raise your hands to answer.*

Krish raised his hand. Suman called upon another boy who had also raised his hand. Meanwhile, some boys continued to answer out of turn identifying things that Suman appeared not to be interested in a trishul[^39], a dholak[^40], an umbrella and people.

Suman: *Yes, you can see an umbrella, but who are the two people standing under the umbrella?*

Children answer out-of-turn:

Karan: *They are the people who play Gavri.*

Suman: *They are the people who play Gavri.*

Mohan: *They are the dancers; they are the dancers.*

Suman: *They are the dancers.*

[...]

Suman: *These people must have names. What are their names?*

Krish had his hand raised, but Suman did not ask him to answer. Ashish and Ajay answered out-of-turn and named two characters mentioned in their notebook. Suman appreciated their responses with both her tone and her words: “*Well done, very good*.”

010915-Video

Suman started by asking children to respond to the picture in their notebook. While the children enthusiastically identified various things that were visible, Suman did not heed their answers. She was more interested that they identify the temple and the village and drew their attention to them. Suman then asked the children to name the people who played Gavri. The children responded to her question by referring to the people as dancers and Gavri players, something I had heard them do in the village. Suman emphasised that children name the characters. Krish wanted to answer, but Suman did not permit him to, and he did not answer out-of-turn like some other boys. Eventually, Ashish and Ajay provided two names which were mentioned in the textbook and Suman seemed happy with their answers.

[^39]: A three-pronged metal dagger symbolising Lord Shiva

[^40]: An Indian drum
On this occasion, Suman allowed her students to participate in reading the picture but retained control over distinguishing the ‘desirable’ answers from the rest. Suman’s understanding of the desirable answers was influenced by what she seemed to view as important in the picture as well as what was written in the textbook, and she seemed to show little interest in the connections that the students were making between the picture and their life experiences. In turn, Krish adhered to his school’s practices by raising his hand to answer Suman’s question and not transgressing the rules of turn-taking laid down by her, unlike some of his classmates. So, like when Krish played school (discussed previously), his practices in the Hindi classroom provide evidence of being his strong his sense of self as an obedient student.

When Suman started teaching the text, she instructed children to be completely silent and pay attention to the text in the textbook. She read the text aloud (read-out text in red), asking children to read along with her and periodically paused to provide explanations:

Suman: *taa dhin din tak, taa dhin dhin tak. This kind of music plays when the Gavri performance is going to start. Then we hear a sound. The sound of the maandal deepens and the Gavri performers, adorned in different types of clothes, dance around forming a circle. The maandal is a musical instrument.*

Suman got up and wrote maandal and its meaning on the board. As she was writing, she asked the children:

Suman: *What is a maandal like?*

Jatin: *It's round.*

Suman did not heed Shankar’s response and continued explaining.

Suman: *It is a musical instrument. The voice of the maandal deepens. The Gavri performers are dressed in decorative clothes, and they can be seen moving all around.*

Karan: *They dance slowly.*

Suman did not acknowledge Karan’s comment and continued to read.

Suman: *Come along nana, come along Khaatraa, come along Manaal, the Gavri performance has begun. Someone is shouting from the audience: “Come along, come along Khaaturdi”. Now if we were having a Gavri performance in our village.*

Ashish (excitedly interrupts): *Yes, we do.*

Suman did not heed Ashish’s interjection and went on explaining.
Suman: *If a Gavri performance was going to start in our village, then people begin calling to each other, don’t they: “Champalal come along, Bhawri come along, the Gavri performance is about to start. Nana come now; the Gavri performance is going to start”. People call out to each other like this.*

1-2 children (softly): Yes

Suman continued to teach without acknowledging the children’s responses, and the children eventually stopped contributing. Children who could not read listened to Suman. Others who were less fluent readers looked at their textbooks but often seemed to lose track of where Suman was. Some asked to be excused to go to the washroom and were granted permission. Krish, Mithun and Mohan continued to read along with Suman throughout class-time.

Suman guided children in understanding the meaning of the text by providing them with the meaning of words and paraphrasing the prose. She also attempted to link the text to children’s experiences by replacing the names Khaatraa, Manaa, and Khaaturdii with children’s names. In turn, some boys attempted to contribute their Gavri experiences: Shankar tried to explain what a *maandal* was; Karan tried to share his experience of how the Gavri performers dance, and Ashish also seemed to want to share his experiences of watching Gavri performances. Identifying herself as the provider of knowledge, Suman paid no attention to the children’s responses and carried on with her explanations. A similar pattern of teacher-student interaction was also evidenced by Sarangapani (2003) in her exploration of Science and Social Science primary classrooms in India.

On this occasion and others when Suman taught a text, Krish read along with her, did not contribute to the text-meaning being provided by her but, unlike many of his classmates, did not get disengaged with the task. Krish’s reading practices drew on his school-based funds of knowledge and he accepted Suman’s interpretations of the text motivated by his desire to be an obedient student. Arguably, he also drew on his own funds of knowledge about reading which allowed him to read as an engaged reader. The latter was clearly visible on the next occasion when Suman had finished teaching another text.

The story *a cheetah on a hot air balloon* was about a boy called Baldev who skipped school and went to see an animal circus. There, he encountered a
cheetah who had escaped his cage. Both Baldev and the cheetah found themselves on top of a hot air balloon. The cheetah finally lost his balance and fell to the ground and died. Meanwhile, Baldev unplugged the hole of the hot air balloon, albeit a little too quickly, and the balloon started losing altitude fast. Baldev jumped into a river over which he was passing and saved himself.

Eventually, when Suman had read and explained the text, she asked children what lesson they had learnt from it:

Suman: Ok, what did you learn from this lesson, cheetah on a hot air balloon? This is the most important question; it will come in the exam.
Krish (immediately): You should not run away without asking an adult!
[…]
Suman: What else, what else does this lesson teach us? No, that is not the correct answer. In this lesson, cheetah on a hot air balloon, which is about circus animals, what message do you get? […]
Mohan repeats what Krish has said:
Mohan: You should not leave without telling an adult.
Suman nods no.
Suman: The answer is related to animals.
Sudhir: xx
Suman nods no.
Shankar: You shouldn’t listen to your teacher.
Suman: No, no.
Ashish: I know!
Suman: What is it?
Ashish: You should not unplug the hole of the hot air balloon quickly.
Suman (nodding her head): No
Suman: Ok, answer this question. The circus owner locks up so many animals, is that the right thing to do?
Many children: No
Suman: Will we like it if someone locks us up in a room?
Some children: No
Suman: Then will the animals like it if they are locked up in their cages?
Some children: No
[…]

Suman: So, this story teaches us that we must not bear any ill will towards any animal and must care for all of them.

Krish, Mohan, Ashish, and Shankar all gave perfectly plausible answers of what they could have learnt from the text. Krish and Mohan felt that a child should not run away without asking an adult. Kailash seemed to feel the opposite, he probably viewed Baldev’s adventure in a positive light, and Ashish had learnt that when you unplug the hole of a hot-air balloon you need to do it slowly. However, the only interpretation that Suman allowed in the classroom was her own. Suman’s assessment of the correct answer was based on one of the questions in the textbook which suggested that she talk to the children about the cruel side of an animal circus, and it was not surprising that the children did not answer as per Suman’s expectations. A similar privileging of the textbook’s answer over the children’s, by the teacher, was also noted by Sarangapani (2003).

Krish was the first to respond to Suman and did so with confidence. However, when Suman judged his response to be incorrect, he did not question her assessment. Krish’s practices were illuminative of his perception of himself as a playful learner who wished to engage independently with textual-meaning; however, in accepting Suman’s assessment of his response as incorrect they were also illustrative of his identity as a serious learner, an obedient student who wished to learn in school-sanctioned ways by accepting text meaning being provided by Suman. Krish’s interests were also evident when I asked him if he thought his response to Suman had been wrong. He responded as follows: “No it was not wrong, but madam’s response was more correct”.

In stating that his response was “not wrong”, Krish expressed confidence in his ability to independently make meaning from the texts but in accepting Suman’s answer as “more correct” he prioritised his interest in being an obedient student whose inference should not be “interpreted as being in conflict with the teacher’s testimony” (Sarangapani, 2003, p. 214). Thus, Krish drew on his own funds of knowledge about reading and those of his school. He adapted his school’s reading practices to read for meaning motivated by his sense of self as a textual meaning-maker. However, when these practices were in conflict with his school-
based funds of knowledge, rooted in his sense of self as an obedient receiver of textual meaning, he gave precedence to the latter. In this manner, Krish’s practices were also reminiscent of the practices of a boy in Levy’s (2011) study whose sense of self as a reader was not diminished with his teacher’s expectation that he engage with skill-based tasks. A similar pattern of interaction was observable when Krish was writing in his classroom.

**Books**

One of the texts that Suman taught in class was a poem entitled *books*. A translation of the poem is given below:

They talk to us
About times gone by
About the world, about people
About today, about tomorrow
About every moment
About joys, about sorrows
About flowers, about bombs
About winning, about loosing
About love, about beatings
Will you not listen to these books?
Books want to talk to you.
They want to stay with you.

Birds twitter in books
Crops sway in books
Brooks babble in books
Books tell you stories about fairies
Books tell us about the feats of rockets
Books are the voice of science
There is a big world out there in books.
Books are full of knowledge
Don’t you want to go into their world?
Books want to talk to you.
They want to stay with you.
The transcript given below provides an account of the interaction between Suman and her students while she was undertaking the questions provided by the textbook. Suman started by instructing children to copy the question and answers she wrote on the board in their notebooks in neat handwriting. She then read the first question aloud; unlike the following two questions, the first question was a multiple-choice question:

Suman: *What is the meaning of the phrase “books talk to us”? Now I am reading the four options. Whoever knows the answer will raise their hands. Is the answer “we increase our knowledge by reading books?”*

The children did not raise their hands and always answered together.

2-3 children (including Krish): *Yes.*

This was the correct answer, and Suman continued to read the other options:

Suman: *Is the answer “books are all talk, no substance”?

Many children (softly, in unison): *Yes.*

Krish: *No.*

Suman did not look happy with the majority response and asked again:

Suman: *Is that the correct answer?*

Children (loudly, in unison): *It is correct.*

Krish (loudly): *No, it is wrong.*

Suman nods her agreement at Krish’s response and does not acknowledge the response of the majority. She then reads the next option:

Suman: *Is the answer “books increase our work”?*

Many children (softly, in unison): *Yes.*

Krish and Mithun: *No-no-no.*

Suman (firmly): *That is the wrong answer.*

She continued reading the options:

Suman: *Is the answer “books take us away from play”?

Only Krish and Ashish answered:

Krish and Ashish: *No.*

Suman: *The correct choice is “a”. Write “a” in the bracket in your textbooks next to the question. […] Now we will copy this question in the notebook. You can copy the question from the board or your textbook.*

Suman then wrote the question and its answer on the board, speaking aloud, what she wrote. Krish copied the question and the answer in his notebook. Suman then went on to the next question.
Suman (writes and reads aloud): Which books do you have?

Mithun (answers while Suman is writing the question): Hindi, Maths

Mohan: English

Suman (in a censuring voice): First, write the question.

The children did and like in the previous question Suman read the question aloud as she wrote. After she has written she started speaking:

Suman: Now we have subjects. You have books from all four subjects- Hindi, English, Maths and Environmental Sciences in your bag. Besides these, you get books from the library which include books of songs, poems, and knowledge.

Mithun: Books about intelligence

Suman (dismissively): The word knowledge includes intelligence.

Suman then asked Mithun what books he had in his bag, but Mithun did not answer. Krish raised his hand to answer, but Jeevan and Ashish started answering out-of-turn. Suman asked Ashish to answer:

Ashish (slowly): I have Hindi, Maths, English

Jeevan: Environmental science

Ashish: Environmental science

Suman: You need to say the names of all four subjects. The correct answer is “I have books for Hindi, English, Maths, Science, songs, poems and knowledge”. Let’s write it now.

She again wrote the answer on the board, speaking it aloud. Krish copied the answer in his notebook.

[...]

Suman: The next question is “why do books want to stay with you”?

While she was writing the question Mithun and Krish answer:

Mithun: So that we study.

Krish: So that we get knowledge.

Suman did not acknowledge their answers and continued writing on the blackboard with her back to the children. After she had written the question, she provided the answer:

Suman: The correct response is “books want to tell us lots of things”.

Suman wrote the answer on the board, and Krish copied it. Suman did not undertake all the text-based questions provided with the poem. Krish pointed this out to her: “Madam you have not done Question 4 with us?” and was told: “Do what I am telling you to do. I will do what needs to be done”. On my examination of the textbook, after class, I found that Krish had been referring to the following question: What kind of books do you like?
On the above occasion, Suman asked the children three different types of questions. The first question was a multiple-choice question and required choosing one correct response. While the response needed to be based on the poem, the children seemed to be responding to the statements from their experience and seemed to agree with the statements: *books are all talk, no substance* and *books increase their workload*. However, Krish disagreed with the statements and felt that books did not take him away from play and it seemed like his responses were rooted in his sense of self as a reader. Suman did not seem concerned about why most children were responding the way they were and established that the correct answer was the first option, following the text of the poem.

The second question required children to answer based on their experience. While Suman was writing the question, Mithun and Mohan started answering by naming the subject books that they had in their bags. Suman told them to write the question before answering, and the boys did as they were told. After writing the question on the board, Suman told the children that the answer was subject books and library books (books of songs, poems, and knowledge). Taking his cue from Suman’s response, Mithun added that they had books about intelligence, but Suman again dismissed his response as an unnecessary addition. It was probably not surprising that when Suman finally asked Mithun to answer, he did not. Krish raised his hand to answer, but Suman did not permit him to, and he did not answer out-of-turn. Suman wanted the children to voice a particular answer, but the children continued to name the subject books they had in their bag. Suman finally ‘improved’ on their response and told them to copy the ‘correct’ answer from the board.

The third question *why do books want to stay with you* required a response based on the text of the poem. The poem gave children the scope to answer this question differently, and Krish and Mithun did. However, Suman ignored their interpretation, and again framed the correct answer and expected them to copy it.

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41 In my more than 5 months at the school, Suman gave children picture books to read in class once, in my first week of my fieldwork.
Suman also expected children to only copy the questions that she asked them to, and this was evident when she admonished Krish for suggesting otherwise. Krish copied all the answers that Suman wrote on the board and did not undertake the fourth question as per Suman’s instructions.

Krish drew on his funds of knowledge about reading which allowed him to position himself as a textual-meaning maker. He answered Suman’s questions, interpreting the first question differently from the rest of the children. He was also able to provide a sensible answer to the third question which was different from Suman’s. However, the answers he wrote in his notebook were the ‘correct’ answers provided by Suman. On one occasion, he expressed his desire to write his views, however, Suman told him to refrain from attempting the question and he did as he was told. Doing so, he drew on his school-based funds of knowledge, writing practices which required him to copy and not compose answers, and adhering to these practices seemed to be important to Krish’s sense of self as obedient student (also visible in his school-play and letter-wring practices, discussed previously). Consequently, his practices reminded me of those of a boy in Dyson’s (2018) study who engaged with writing skills required by his teacher to be viewed favourably by her.

Writing passages

Krish was also expected to copy passages about national and religious festivals that Suman wrote on the board as well as from his passbook (discussed in detail in Chapter 5). The only occasion on which Suman asked the Grade 5 children to write a passage about their experience was triggered by a trip that I took with them to Udaipur to visit the children’s park and the zoo, towards the end of my fieldwork. Suman came in class and told the children that she was busy with work related to the upcoming examinations. She instructed the children to write about the trip they had recently taken with me and then get their passage checked by me. She instructed me to tell the children what to write and left the class. I did not attempt to tell the children to write anything, and Krish immediately started writing on his own. The only question he asked me while writing was the name of the park that we visited. The translation of his passage is given here:
We went to Rajiv Gandhi Park. There were lots of swings and slides over there. We went to Sajaan Gardh. We saw a tiger, bear, crocodile, lion, rabbit, tortoise, panther, deer, blue bull, swamp deer, and many other animals. There were lots of swings and slides there too. We went to Narayan Seva Sansthan. We saw a train there. We saw a man walk on a rope. We went into a large mouth. We went to the Fateh Lake.

After Krish finished writing, he came and showed me what he had written. I read and appreciated his writing and asked him if he preferred copying passages from the passbook or writing as he had just done. He promptly responded: “I like writing like this”.

On the above occasion, Suman positioned me as the knowledge-giver in the classroom, in her absence. Krish did not seem to view my authority in the same manner as Suman and seemed keen to write about his experiences and immediately positioned himself as the composer of a text. He also acknowledged that he found composing more enjoyable than copying. However, he was not allowed any opportunities to do so during my observations.

To sum up, Krish’s literacy practices included reading along with Suman, accepting her interpretations of text-meaning, and copying texts provided by her. These were serious practices, culturally rooted in the adult world, which required Krish to adhere them. At the same time, both Krish’s reading and writing practices were his interests. The former were his own funds of knowledge which encompassed adapting his school’s reading practices to read as a textual meaning-maker. Subsequently, when his interpretation of the text conflicted with the teacher’s, he drew on his other interest, his school-based funds of knowledge rooted in his strong sense of self as an obedient student, accepting the latter (also visible when he played school and engaged with serious literacy practices at home). Consequently, this did not seem to be adversely influencing his identity as a reader. On a similar note, Krish’s writing practices were his interests, his school’s funds of knowledge which required him to copy texts provided by the teacher, and his participation in these practices was again rooted his self-perception as an obedient student. Thus, Krish’s serious school reading and

42 large models of parts of body
writing practices were his interests with the former drawing on his own funds of knowledge and goals and the latter strongly motivated by his goals.

7.5.3 Playful literacy practices as interests

Krish also engaged with his own literacy practices at school when Suman was not around (also discussed in Chapter 6). Other researchers who have explored children's school literacy practices in middle- and low-income nations have also found children engaging with such “unofficial” literacy practices by talking about the pictures in their textbook and helping each other read texts (Sahni, 1994) and writing and drawing (Lisanza, 2011) during their free time. Krish’s unofficial literacy practices encompassed reading for pleasure. These practices were again his interests, his own funds of knowledge as he was adapted his school’s practices to read for meaning. He read from his Mithun’s scrapbook, drawing on his peer culture practices. He also read and sang aloud a poem from his textbook to his friends, borrowing from his school’s morning-assembly practices which required children to copy motivational songs in their notebooks to memorise and sing aloud. Conclusively, these interests were “hybrid”, improvisations which allowed Krish to borrow, blend, and adapt practices of his various cultural worlds and, thus, playful, culturally rooted in his peer cultures where the rules allowed children to engage with such practices.

7.6 Chapter summary

Krish’s interests included various peer culture practices encompassing play, talk, interactions with digital technologies, and drawings. These practices illuminated on his funds of knowledge rooted in their home, school, and peer cultures and, in turn, his persistent identities as a player, friend, technology enthusiast, Bollywood fan, boy, reader, son/grandson, and obedient student.

Krish’s home and school literacy practices included both serious and playful practices, and these practices were his interests for similar reasons in both spaces. His playful practices at both home and school encompassed reading for pleasure. These practices were his interests, his own funds of knowledge, and he adapted his school’s reading practices to read for meaning providing evidence of his strong sense of self as an engaged reader. His serious practices included
both reading and writing practices. The former were again his interests being his own funds of knowledge. On the other hand, the latter were drawing on his funds of knowledge embedded in the adult world but were motivated by his strong sense of self as a dutiful grandson or an obedient student (also visible in his play and drawing).
Chapter 8: Pooja’s Interests

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shift my focus to Pooja to examine the relationship between her home and school literacy practices. This chapter is organised like the previous one. Section 8.2 provides a brief account of Pooja's family and economic circumstances. Section 8.3 explores her peer cultures’ practices at home and school to highlight her interests. Her home and school literacy practices are examined subsequently in Sections 8.4 and 8.5, and the concluding Section 8.6 summarises the chapter.

8.2 Pooja’s family

Pooja’s (age 10) family comprised her parents, grandmother and two younger siblings. Her brother, Vishal (age 6), was in Grade 1 and her sister, Leela (age 5) attended the anganwadi. Both of Pooja’s parents worked on a farm in the neighbouring village; they did not own the farm but used to till it, in return for rights to half the produce, which they then sold for a cash income. Her father preferred doing agricultural work in and around his village, although on occasion he and his wife worked on construction sites in Udaipur. Her father also performed the duties of a shaman (discussed in Chapter 4; p. 2-3) in his community. Both parents had never attended school.

Pooja was also a part of a stepfamily. Her father’s first wife lived with her elder son’s family, comprising his wife and two daughters, in the house next door. The son worked on construction sites in Udaipur. The younger son worked in a roadside restaurant in Gujrat and visited home 3-4 times in a year, mainly during festival times. Pooja’s family and stepfamily operated as separate economic units, but within the cultural milieu, they were considered one and seemed to interact with one other on amicable terms.

43 An early childcare centre run by the government

44 Pooja’s mother was her father’s second wife; their relationship was sanctioned by the Naataa Pratha customs discussed in Chapter 4.
Pooja’s family held a below poverty line card which entitled them to free monthly wheat, sugar, and kerosene ration. Her home comprised of one room (about 150 square feet) made of brick and cement. It had no furniture. Pooja’s stepfamily lived in a similar space, again with no furniture but owned a television. Despite the community water-tank in the vicinity, both families preferred to get drinking water from the well which was further away. The source for light after sunset was a single lightbulb in both homes. Pooja’s father did not own a mobile phone, but her older stepbrother’s phone was available to her when he was at home.

8.3 Interests at home and school

Within the sociocultural world, children’s interests encompass their initiatives and purposes for participation (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). Drawing on this sociocultural scholarship, Hedges and her colleagues (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) identify children’s peer culture practices including their play and talk and their goals for engaging with these practices as their interests. Subsequently, they theorise these interests as children’s funds of knowledge-based practices (Moll et al., 1992) that are motivated by their recurring goals, aspects of children’s identities as learners. They ask researchers to explore children’s practices at both home and school to identify these interests. In this section, I explore Pooja’s peer culture practices with this objective.

Pooja’s family identified her to be skilled at her household chores. Her mother informed me that Pooja had started helping at home when she was about seven and was proud of her daughter for being able to handle all her chores independently. During my visits, I observed Pooja wash utensils, sweep her home, get drinking water from the well, and cook for the family on multiple occasions. On days that Pooja’s mother had to work on the farm, all the housework became Pooja’s responsibility.

While Pooja’s caregivers believed that she was skilled at her household chores, they were unhappy that she did not undertake these chores dependably. Reflecting their woes, I often saw Pooja procrastinate, ignore her mother’s and grandmother’s instructions, and at times, refuse chores. Pooja’s defiance was often a cause of conflict in the house. On one occasion, I found her sulking when her grandmother had hit her for refusing to do her chores. On another, her
mother told me to smack Pooja because she had been watching TV and avoiding her duties, and on yet another, her father commented: “She makes me angry because she does not do her chores and keeps playing here and there with her friends”.

In the following conversation, with her grandmother and me, Pooja also voiced her disengagement with her daily chores:

Pooja had not been to school that day. When I reached her house in the afternoon, it seemed to be a mess. Her grandmother was telling her to wash the utensils and sweep her home. I told Pooja that I would take her picture while she was sweeping.

Pooja (with indignation): You are going to take my picture while I am sweeping!

Researcher (imitating her indignation): You are going to take my picture while I am sweeping!

Pooja: I don’t like sweeping.

Researcher: Ok. So, which house chore do you like?

Pooja: I don’t like any.

Researcher: None of them?

Pooja: Yes, none of them.

Researcher: So, what will you do when you are married?

Pooja (softly): I will not get married.

Researcher: You will not get married?

Pooja’ grandmother: Her husband is going to weep. He is going to wonder, what to do. He will leave her.

Researcher: Yes.

Pooja: We will travel together.

Researcher: Ok.

Pooja: I will not do housework.

Pooja was decisive about not wanting to undertake her chores challenging her family’s expectation of her. For perhaps a split of a second, she also challenged the idea of being married but then seemed to be amenable to being a wife who would travel with her husband and not have to undertake housework. So, Pooja did not seem to be keen on engaging with her funds of knowledge about
household chores, practices that were historically and culturally rooted in home and community and were essential for her family’s daily functioning (Moll et al., 1992). Her lack of motivation to participate seemed to be rooted in her sense of self as a decisionmaker who wished to undertake her chores on her own terms, and her inability to do so was a source of unhappiness for her. On a similar note, she also seemed to desire to shape her future life on her own terms. Thus, Pooja’s household chores were her funds of knowledge-based practices which were conceivably not her interests.

Echoing her father’s view, Pooja often played with her friends against her parent’s wishes. Doing so, she engaged with the “spontaneous self-motivated play” described as children’s interests by Hedges et al. (2011). She played with her friends, Sona (neighbour, Grade 2) and Priya (cousin and neighbour, Grade 3) and on occasions, her siblings, Vijay and Leela also joined them.

8.3.1 Playing pretend

Pooja played marbles with girls and boys of various ages living around her home. She also enjoyed playing catch and thrash games which included rhymes, songs, and actions that drew on their practices at home. These games were a part of a storyline that necessitated the catching and thrashing, contributing to the element of pretend in them. In one such game, the children sat in a circle with Sona enacting the role of the person who had been bitten by a scorpion45. She swayed her body in a circular motion while the other children sang and clapped.

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45 According to https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/scorpion-stings/symptoms-causes/syc-20353859 scorpion bites can be extremely painful leading to the following physical reactions: difficulty in breathing, muscle twitching and thrashing, unusual head, neck and eye movements, drooling, sweating, restlessness and excitability.
The two songs that the children sang one after the other were as follows:

**Song 1**
This is an illness caused by an earthly creature
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
The poison is spreading through my breadth
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
The poison is spreading through my hands
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
The poison is spreading through my feet
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
The poison is spreading through my fingers
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
The poison is spreading through my nose
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
The poison is spreading through my skin
Come wise people cure my illness, I have been bitten by a scorpion
And so on…

**Song 2**
Do send a letter to my mother
I have been bitten by a poisonous scorpion
As the children sang, Sona continued to get increasingly restless and started rolling on the ground. Ultimately, she was so overtaken with her 'pain' that she got up to thrash all those around her. At this point, the children ran away from her, but she was successful in catching each one and thrashing them.

Pooja’s enjoyment of *catch and thrash* was also reflected in another game. On this occasion, Vishal started by asking: “who ate my roti?” Pooja, Priya and Sona responded with names of various animals: “dog”, “cat”, “parrot”, “rabbit” and so on. Finally, Priya shouted “me” and ran off. Vijay ran behind her to catch her.

Another game that emulated a cultural storyline, which Pooja and Priya were fond of playing together was *mummy, mummy the roti is getting burnt*. In this play, Pooja became the mummy and Priya, the daughter. The girls sat in front of each other, with Pooja bringing the palms of her feet in contact with each other, giving it the shape of an imaginary *chullah*. Priya then placed her hand on the *chullah* and shouted “mummy, mummy the roti is getting burnt”. Pooja responded by telling Priya to “turn the roti around”, and Priya flipped her hand. This sequence of events was repeated two more times, and on the second occasion, Pooja instructed Priya “take it off the chullah!”.

Thus, Pooja’s play was drawing on her funds of knowledge rooted in her peer cultures, illuminating on her identities as a friend, playmate and often, a girl.

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46 A small earthen stove used to cook food; fuel used is either firewood or animal dung
Pooja also played more elaborate pretend games with Priya and Sona. These included playing house and marriage. I discuss these in detail, next.

**Playing house**

Sociocultural researchers who have gone into children’s homes looking for literacy practices have found girls playing house (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Williams, 2004), and I observed Pooja do the same in Sitara. The extended vignette that follows describes this imaginary play that continued over three days:

It was examination week at school. The children in Grade 5 were supposed to be in school after lunch for their exam. I reached Pooja’s house in the morning and found her mother cooking. Hearing my voice, Pooja called out to me to join her in her stepbrother’s partially constructed house (the walls were done but most of the roof was not). Pooja was sitting on the half-constructed roof of the room, and it looked like she was cooking (Figure 8.2). Pooja confirmed that she was making rice. Almost as soon as Pooja’s words were out of her mouth, Sona appeared and asked Pooja to pull her up onto the slab. She said she would cook *rotis*.47 Pooja told her to wait as she was cooking and was rewarded with a few expletives. Pooja ignored her and kept cooking.

![Figure 8.2: Pooja and Sona cooking](image)

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47 A flat round bread baked on a griddle
Pooja put the rice (grainy soil) into a diya. She broke green beans (which were growing in front of her house) into small pieces and added them to the rice saying that she was adding green chillies. She then added some salt (sourced from her mother’s kitchen) and oil (water in a plastic bottle) and mixed the contents with a tiny metal spoon. Pooja’s mother called out to her to wash the utensils. She told her mother not to fuss and that she would wash the utensils later. She finally added the spices (a mixture of cumin and coriander sourced from her mother’s kitchen) and put the rice to cook, on the chulha. She covered the rice with a small metal plate. She then pulled Sona onto the slab.

The first thing that Sona did on entering Pooja’s house was to try and wear the necklace that Pooja had placed on the photo of her bavji (God) (Figure 8.3). Pooja reprimanded her: “Don’t touch the necklace. I have placed it on the bavji”. Sona looked unhappy but complied. Pooja then announced that the rice was done and asked me if I wanted to eat it. I said I did. Pooja put some rice onto a small metal plate (Figure 8.4). Sona tried to hand me the plate, but Pooja told her not to and did it herself.

I tasted the rice and told her that it was a little hot. Sona instructed Pooja to reduce the heat, but she appeared to ignore her friend’s comment and said that she would make tea. Sona replied that she also wanted to make tea. However, Pooja told her to make rice and gave her some utensils (Figure 8.5), instructing her to use less water. Both the girls started cooking.

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48 A small cup-shaped oil lamp made of baked clay resembling the clay utensil to cook rice in homes.
Pooja first washed the utensils that she needed for making tea. She then asked me to hand her a small piece of rust coloured brick and a harder stone, lying near my feet. I did, and Pooja started grinding the brick into dust, using the bigger stone, explaining that she was grinding the ginger for the tea.

In the meantime, Sona had started making rotis (matchbox flaps), something she wanted to do since she entered this make-believe home, along with rice. She moulded the dough, put the rotis on the griddle, turned them a couple of times and finally took them off the griddle. She also kept an eye on the rice that was cooking. At one point, she turned to the rice and exclaimed: "Oh my god, the rice is burning. Oh my god, the rice is burning! Let me reduce the firewood. Oh! Now my hand has got burnt because of the firewood!" Pooja, who had her back to Sona, turned around to see what was cooking, looking disapprovingly at the rotis, and then turned back to grinding the ginger:

*Sona*: Pooja, I have made all these wheat rotis. I am keeping them here. The rice is also getting done. Should I blanch the sweet potato now?

*Pooja (with irritation in her voice)*: Do it.

[...]

Pooja had finished grinding the brick finely. She turned to Sona’s cooking and asked:

*Pooja*: Is this the rice?

*Sona* nodded, and Pooja put some of the brick-dust into the rice saying:

*Pooja*: This is the chilli powder.
Sona: Ok.

Pooja then put some water in Sona’s rice saying that it required more water. Pooja’s mother called out to her to get the grass from their farm, and Pooja told her that the grass was not on the farm and continued to play.

Sona: What should I blanch the sweet potatoes over?

Pooja: On the chulha. It is over there.

Pooja gave the chulha to Sona who put the mug on it. Pooja then put some the brick-dust into a small metal bowl and poured water into it.

Sona: What are you doing?

Pooja: I am making milk-tea.

Sona tried to touch the tea, and Pooja screamed at her:

Pooja: Don’t do that. What is your problem, Sona! I will slap you.

Sona looked annoyed but refrained from touching the tea and said that the rice was done. Pooja continued to mix the ingredients of the tea using a metal spoon. She then instructed Sona:

Pooja: Get a cup for madam. She must have tea.

Pooja’s mother again told her to wash the utensils, but she said that she would do it later. This time the mother screamed at her, and Pooja said that she would wrap-up her play. The mother left for the farm, instructing Pooja that she wanted to see all the utensils washed when she came back. Pooja then poured tea in a cup and handed it to me. I told her it tasted good. She then gave me Sona’s rice and asked:

Pooja: Is it good?

Researcher: Yes, this one is better than the one before.

Pooja: That one was from the night before. This one is fresh.

Pooja then asked me if she should switch on her TV and showed me the mirror she was using as the TV. I asked her if this was her house and she smiled and nodded. Sona then showed me the rotis and the sabzi [vegetables] that she had made (Figure 8.6). I told the girls that it was time to get ready to go to school for their exams, and they agreed and stopped playing.
The next day, when I reached Pooja’s house in the morning, I found the two girls playing house again. Pooja told me that Sona was her wife and she had given birth to a baby in the night. Swaying the cradle (made with a green piece of plastic and pages of an old textbook) (Figure 8.7) Pooja instructed Sona to give me tea. Sona smiled shyly and did what she was told. Similarly, on the day after, the husband and wife were again in their house cooking and taking care of their child. Sona was cooking rotis and vegetables, and Pooja was making sweets. Pooja had got her wife a gas-stove, and Sona claimed that she would now make her rotis faster.
While playing, Pooja was cooking as she was expected to do for her family in everyday life. Consequently, she was drawing on her funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) about cooking that she had acquired in interaction with her caregivers at home. This was the knowledge that she had authority over, and she was using it to make her play more authentic and quite possibly more pleasurable for her. Pooja’s funds of knowledge were reflected in her choice of ‘utensils’. She had collected utensils that resembled those that she used in daily life: a mud bowl to cook rice; a metal one to make tea, a metal spoon to stir it and plastic cups to serve it; and a metal plate to serve rice. Her ‘recipes’ also reflected her knowledge: the brick dust used to make tea made the tea rust-coloured, grainy soil reflected the texture of rice, green beans were replaced as chillies and real spices were used. Pooja’s response that Sona’s rice was better because it was fresh, as well as her response that she was grinding ginger, was also evidence of her knowledge of cooking practices.

Pooja’s house-play also illuminated on her sense of self as a girl who wished to be a decision-maker, someone who was in control of her activities and took her own decisions within her home. This was visible in how Pooja constructed her home. She equipped her home with materials she desired: ingredients and utensils which would enable her to cook a range of dishes, a ‘TV’, and a photograph of her bavji. These materials also included spices from her mother’s kitchen and a mirror from her home, and Pooja had acquired these objects, despite her mother’s disapproval, illustrating her keen interest to build her home in the manner she wanted. The lack of toys did not seem to discourage her, and she collected various objects available around her for ‘furnishing’ her home, as did a 7-year-old girl living with similar economic constraints in Mexico while playing school (Azuara & Reyes, 2011).

Pooja’s desire to be a girl and a decision-maker was also visible in the way she played. Pooja chose to cook what she liked to eat and drink, that is, rice and tea and continued to exercise control over Sona’s actions, throughout the play. On the first day, she allowed Sona into her house at a time of her choice, even though Sona had been asking to be let into the house for some time. When Sona entered, she did not allow her to touch the necklace on the bavji’s photo and
instructed her to make rice, even though Sona wished to make tea. She did not allow Sona to hand me the rice and ignored her suggestion about reducing the heat. She appeared quite unhappy with Sona when Sona started cooking rotis and sabzi along with the rice and when she wanted to blanch the sweet potato. She put chilli powder into her rice without asking her and instructed her to use less water. Her unhappiness with Sona’s initiatives within her home seemed to finally lead her to reprimand Sona for simply touching her tea. By the second day of play, Pooja’s desire to be a decision-maker had received social sanction. She and Sona were no longer simply identifying each other as playmates, but also as husband and wife, and Pooja’s right to instruct his wife and Sona’s duty to comply these instructions was echoing social practices within their community. Hedges and Cooper (2016) theorise children’s funds of knowledge-based practices rooted in their persistent goals as learners, as their interests. This seems substantiated in Pooja’s case whose cooking practices were her interests in play and not in real life because the former was strengthened by her sense of self as a decision-maker.

Finally, while Pooja’s play allowed her to use her funds of knowledge about cooking to pursue her desire to be a decision-maker within her home, it was imbued with the unequal ideologies of gender and age visible in her community, and, arguably, larger society. Consequently, it enabled an older girl to infringe on a younger girl’s right to make choices, and when the girls became husband and wife, it was reinforcing the inequitable gender relationships, with the husband being the decision-maker and the wife being the follower. In this manner, Pooja’s play reminded me of a girl in Hedges’s (2015) study who was taking care of baby dolls in her nursery, reinforcing her thinking that women, and not men, are supposed to care for children

**Playing marriage**

Pooja also played laado-laadii [bridegroom-bride] with Sona, Priya and Vishal. She took on the role of a well-to-do bridegroom, Sona was her bride and Priya was the orahvant⁴⁹. The vignette given below describes the play. I requested

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⁴⁹ The bride’s friend who stays with the bride during the ceremony
Shankar (Pooja’s cousin and neighbour; Grade 5) to video-record for me since he could climb onto the roof slab that the girls were playing on to get a better view of the play. Vijay (Shankar’s friend; Grade 5) accompanied him.

The first thing that Pooja did for playing marriage was to alter her long skirt and make it into a dhoti\(^50\), a dress that would be worn by the bridegroom during the marriage ceremony. She then put some dry leaves (plucked from an old broom) and old textbook pages together and lit a real fire using matches. She told her younger brother, Vishal to become the priest and ensure that the flame did not extinguish. She held Sona’s hand and the girls encircled the fire. Vishal and Vijay started chanting *om swaha*\(^51\). The girls smiled and giggled shyly as they encircled the fire.

After a few circles, the girls sat on the floor. Pooja instructed Vishal to place their outstretched palms on each other. She asked him to place the picture of the bavji on their palms and sprinkle some water on it. She asked me what I would gift them. I told her that I was not sure, to which she asked whether we gave utensils on marriage in our community. I informed her that we gave money, and she did not seem to approve of the idea. Subsequently, she asked Vishal to give a necklace and utensils as gifts. She asked him to sprinkle water each time he placed a gift on their palms. She then asked Shankar to play guest and give them more utensils as gifts. In the process, the water in the jug spilt and the children stopped playing.

The next day Pooja took her new bride and orahvani, shopping. Jagdish (Grade 6, neighbour) joined the play and became the shopkeeper. The interaction between the shopkeeper and the bridegroom is given below:

Pooja: *How much is this anklet?*

Jagdish: *The anklet is for two hundred rupees.*

Pooja handed him the money (paper) and bought it.

Sona: *I will wear it. I will wear it.*

Pooja gave the anklet to Sona. Priya picked up an anklet lying in front of the shopkeeper, and Pooja told her not to. Priya kept the anklet back and Sona commented:

Sona: *That anklet is meant for me.*

Pooja pointed to a necklace and asked the shopkeeper:

Pooja: *How much is this?*

Jagdish: *Fifty rupees.*

Priya got into an argument with Sona over the anklet:

\(^{50}\) A loose piece of cloth worn by men in the lower half of their body

\(^{51}\) Sanskrit chants used during prayers
Priya: *Will that anklet even fit you!*

Sona: *It will fit, quite all right.*

Priya: *It will, my ass!*

Pooja did not heed the argument and bought the necklace and gave it to Sona again. She then asked the shopkeeper:

Pooja: *And this lipstick?*

Jagdish: *It is for twenty rupees.*

Pooja: *No, ten.*

Jagdish: *No, twenty.*

Priya: *We get it for ten in Kalyanpur.*

The shopkeeper agreed to the lower price, and Pooja again handed the lipstick to Sona. Her brother Vishal who was not a part of the play said that he also wanted something, but Pooja ignored him.

Pooja: *What about this phone?*

Jagdish: *It is for a thousand rupees!*

Pooja handed him the money and giggled happily when she bought the phone.

Jagdish: *Madam, these people are buying everything in one go!*

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*Figure 8.8: The things being sold by the shopkeeper*

Pooja’s play was illustrative of her funds of knowledge rooted in her home and peer cultures. These funds of knowledge included her community’s marriage
customs, familial shopping routines, and feminine practices of using cosmetics and jewellery. In this manner, they were no different from children’s play in other parts of the world which was also stimulated by their funds of knowledge embedded in their home, community and peer cultures (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011).

Pooja’s play was “wish fulfilment” because it made place for various identities as a decision-maker, a girl, an avid mobile phone user and allowed her to challenge her sense of self as a member of a resource poor household (Vygotsky, 1967). She enacted the role of a well-to-do bridegroom who bought all the jewellery he wanted as well as a mobile phone. Jagdish’s astonishment at her buying “everything” did also suggest that this would not have been possible in a resource-poor household like hers. To sum up, Pooja’s play was drawing on her funds of knowledge framed by her home and peer cultures, and this play was consistently illuminating on her identities as a decision-maker, girl, and playmate.

8.3.2 Drawings

Pooja also enjoyed drawing at both home and school. Figures 8.9 and 8.10 are Pooja’s pictures of a mehndi and a dancing girl.

Both drawings were stimulated by Pooja’s fund of knowledge rooted in her home and peer cultures where girls and women made mehndi on each other’s hand and enjoyed dancing. In turn, they illuminated on facets of her identity as a girl.
8.3.3 Playing the game of love

All my participant children and their friends seemed to be aware of the practice of having a girlfriend/boyfriend. Those who were not a party to this practice would tease each other, leading to vehement denials. Pooja, Raveena and Kajal were participants of this practice and used to smile shyly when friends teased them. Much of my understanding of this practice comes from conversations that I had with them as well as observations of their practices.

The girls’ practices echoed the “game of love” being played by children in a primary school in America which encompassed the children talking about “going out” and “getting dumped”, friends reporting on the turn of events in the relationship, and the couple expressing their affection for each other by composing texts (Dyson, 2013a). Living within a very different socio-cultural milieu from these American children, the girls in Sitara also engaged with these practices, but away from the adult gaze. Their practices included professing a fondness for their boyfriend to one another, teasing one another about them, being dismissive of heartbreak on being dumped and writing letters covertly to communicate with them.

These practices were the children’s interests, their own funds of knowledge, improvisations which borrowed, blended, and adapted their knowledge rooted in their peer cultures. This encompassed knowledge of romantic storylines of Bollywood movies where the boy and girl fall in love, often, in conflict with their parents’ wishes and societal norms, chithiiz (love letters) embedded in these storylines, and lyrics of songs and dialogues from Bollywood movies. Similar texts were also viewable in mobile phones and the body of public vehicles like buses, jeeps, and auto-rickshaws.

Some popular texts referred to as shaayarii [poetry], by the children are provided below:

- Don’t laugh crazy girl, I will fall in love with you
- Don’t cry crazy girl, I will come back soon.
- Don’t look at me crazy girl, I will fall in love with you.
- Just like a red tomato will never turn green, I will never betray you.
I observed the first two statements to be written at the back of an auto-rickshaw in Kalyanpur (script encircled in Figure 8.11). Drawing on Bollywood, these storylines positioned girls as culprits who by looking at boys and laughing with them encourage them to fall in love. So, while this peer culture practice was the children’s interest, it was reinforcing unequal gender relations visible in their community, and, arguably, larger society.

The heart shape inscribed with the *I love you* message or the names of the couple, a popular symbol in visual media as well as on the body of public transport, was also a valuable text for the girls (Figure 8.12).
In keeping with the covert nature of the practice, Raveena, the only one among the three girls who could read, wrote the letters, inscribing hearts with the English initials of the couple’s names. She also used pseudonyms for herself and her boyfriend Lalit (Grade 7), and the initials of these names in her letters. On my request, Raveena wrote fake letters to help me understand her writing practices. Figure 8.13 presents one such letter that was addressed to her friend, Lalit:

A translation of the text reads as follows:

I have given you my heart, now what are you going to do about it. Just like a red tomato will never turn green, your friend will never betray you.
Raveena’s letter started with a sentence which reminded me of both dialogues and lyrics of songs in Bollywood movies. She then wrote *shaayarii* which was often visible on the body of public transport around her. She finally drew a heart shape, inscribed with the English initials of her name and Lalit’s name, and the *I love you* message. In another letter that she wrote on behalf of Kajal to Jagdish (Grade 6) and recreated for me, the heart looked different:

![Figure 8.14: From Kajal’s letter to Jagdish](image)

On this occasion, Raveena had not only inscribed the heart with the English initials of Kajal and Jagdish’s name (the initials on top of the line in Figure 8.14), but also that of her pseudonym and Pooja’s name (the initials below the line in Figure 8.14). When I asked her about the extra initials, she explained that she did this to indicate that the girls were one group by virtue of their status as girlfriends. Thus, Raveena’s letter writing practices were her interests, her funds of knowledge-based practices which illuminated on her sense of self as a girlfriend.

Unlike Raveena, Pooja’s practices were restricted to inscribing heart shapes with the English initials of her name along with that of Vimal. I saw her do this on multiple occasions, both at home and school (Figure 8.15). She also received a *chithi* from Vimal which instructed her to stop taking holidays and start attending school, and Pooja seemed keen to comply with Vimal’s instruction (discussed in the next section). At the same time, unlike Kajal, Pooja did not ask Raveena to write letters on her behalf to Vimal. When I asked her about this, she replied: “I feel shy, madam.” The Hindi word that Pooja used to mean *shy* was *sharam*. The word *sharam* refers to the shyness one feels or should feel when they are acting inappropriately and/or immodestly.
Pooja’s practices were her interests. She drew on her funds of knowledge rooted in her peer cultures, letter writing practices which incorporated inscribing hearts with the English initials of the boy and girl. At the same time, she did not ask Raveena to write letters back to Vimal as she felt *sharam* [shy]. Doing so, she accepted the gendered practices of her community which required girls to adopt meek roles in relationships. Pooja’s funds of knowledge-based interests again provide evidence for her sense of self as a decision-maker who, on this occasion, wished to express her affection for Vimal. They also illuminate on her sense of self as a girl who wished to adhere to her gender role, visible during her pretend play, as well.

Pooja’s ‘writing’ practices were both similar to and different from the writing practices of a girl in Dyson’s (1997) study. They echoed each other’s because both girls challenged their powerfulness in larger society through their practices. However, situated in diverse socio-cultural contexts, Pooja challenged the authority of adults, positioning herself a “head-taller” than the adults around (Vygotsky, 1967) who disapproved of her practices while the girl positioned herself as a ‘male bad guy’ and wrote about strong female characters in her superhero stories, resisting her gendered identity.

### 8.4 Home literacy practices

Pooja engaged with her own literacy practices at home which involved reading and writing her friends’ names.

![Figure 8.15: Inscriptions on Pooja’s arm](image)
8.4.1 Playful literacy practices as interests

Pooja seemed keen on reading and writing her friends’ names at home. These practices drew on her peer culture’s writing practices (discussed in the previous section) and were again motivated by her sense of self as a decision-maker who wished to engage with print to belong within her peer groups. The vignettes discussed in this section provide an account of how I saw these practices develop. The first one focuses on how I came across these practices:

It was my third day at Pooja’s house. I accompanied her, her stepmom, and her siblings to their farm, where all of us intended to have lunch. I took my bag along because it had my lunchbox in it. After we had lunch, Pooja’s stepmom left to graze the cattle (about 100 meters away from where we were sitting). Pooja asked me for a pen and paper. I took my notebook out, and she started flipping through its pages. Seeing my fieldnotes (in English), she asked me what I had written, and I explained that I had written about what I observed at school and in homes like hers. I had not been able to locate a pen in my pen-case and told her that I did not have one. Pooja searched through my bag and found one.

Pooja continued to flip through my notebook and came across a page on which my daughter had drawn a flower. She asked me if she could draw a flower, and I told her that she could. After she finished drawing, I requested her to write *phool* [flower] next to it. She said she could not write *phool* but would write *kamal* [lotus]. She wrote *Kamla* instead, the name of one of the girls in her class. I told her that she had written *Kamla* and asked her to remove the extra vocalic marker, and she did. I asked her to write *kal* [tomorrow] (a word without any vocalic marker) but she wrote her name. The vocalic markers in her name were missing, and I added them for her. I asked her to rewrite her name and she did. Pooja then wrote the names, Sandhya (her friend’s name) and Vimal (a boy’s name). She had written Vimal correctly. I rewrote Sandhya’s name explaining that the vocalic marker was in the wrong place, and Pooja seemed to be paying attention to what I wrote. Not recognising Vimal’s name, I asked who he was. Pooja responded that she had wanted to write Vimla, the name of one of the girls in her class. I told her that Vimla required a vocalic marker and added it to the word.

Pooja asked me to write the following names: Pooja, Sandhya, Kajal, Kamla, Vimal, Kamla, Jamuna, Sona and Raveena. As I wrote each name, I spoke it aloud, and Pooja, again, seemed to paying attention to what I was writing. She then wrote Vimal’s name again and asked me to read what she had written. I replied: “You have written Vimal. It’s the name of a boy in Grade 6 or Grade 7.” She replied: “He is in Grade 6.” Unable to comprehend the significance of the name, I wrote some basal words, like those being used by Pooja’s Hindi teacher at school and asked her to read them. I first wrote *maamaa* [maternal uncle]. Pooja was unable to read it, and I helped her recognise the vocalic marker for ‘aa’, blend the sounds, and read the word. Pooja wrote Vimal again and asked me to read it. I did, and she again said that he was a boy in Grade 6. Without
heeding her actions, I continued to write some more words: kaakaa [father’s younger brother], paapaa [father], gaanaa [song], and kaalaa [black] and asked her to read them. Pooja read the words with my help but seemed disengaged with task and started investigating the things in my bag.

She came across my pen-case and wanted it for herself. I told her that I could not give it to her since it was a present from my sister and had my initials NAMI on it. Pooja seemed disappointed. After looking through my bag, she went back to her friends’ names that I had written, moving her finger across each word, and reading aloud the names. During much of the time that Pooja and I had been writing together, her stepmom had been telling her to go home and get a pot to fill water from the well. Pooja had been ignoring her but had to get up when she came back.

Pooja’s reading and writing practices were her interests, her own funds of knowledge. For writing, she adapted her peer group’s writing practices which encompassed writing the initials of the couple’s name along with those of the girl’s friends. Consequently, she wrote names, instead of initials of names: Vimal’s, Sandhya’s and her own, illuminating on her sense of self as a decision-maker who wished to write to introduce me to Vimal. For reading, she drew on me as a resource for writing her friend’s names and initiated her own practice of reading these names and this practice again provided evidence of her self-perception as a decision-maker who wished to belong to her group of friends. In contrast, her practices provided evidence of her lack of interest in engaging with her school-based funds of knowledge which included reading basal words like those being undertaken by Suman in class (discussed in next Section 7.5), and these practices again seemed to be motivated by her desire to be a decision-maker who wished to acquaint me to Vimal.

On the next day, I observed Pooja receive a chithii from Vimal. Pooja had not been going to school for three days. The reason for her absence was a fallout between her friends, Kajal and Sandhya. Kajal had asked Pooja not to talk to Sandhya, and Pooja did not like to be in school in this situation. The vignette below provides an account of the occasion on which Pooja received the chithii:

I was with Pooja in the common village area. She was playing marbles with Vijay, Jagdish, and a few other children. Kajal ran to her, handed her a piece of paper, and whispered something in her ear. Jagdish commented that Pooja had
received a chithii. Aware of the disagreement between the girls, I asked her if she had received a letter from Sandhya. I asked her to show the letter to me, as did Kajal. Vijay lunged towards her to get hold of the letter. Pooja screamed and immediately tore the letter and ran towards her house, holding on to the pieces. I followed her.

When we reached the house, I asked Pooja if the letter was from Sandhya. She said the letter was from Vimal and that such letters were not shown to everyone. At that point, I realised her reason for repeatedly writing Vimal’s name, the previous day. I asked her if I could have a look at the torn pieces of paper, and she let me. I put them together and read the message as follows:

*If you don’t come to school tomorrow, I will get your name struck-off the register.*

On hearing the message, Pooja immediately asked me for a paper and pen. I told her to write in my notebook, but she insisted on writing on a paper. She wrote her name followed by Sandhya’s and Kamla’s but was unable to write Kajal’s. She tore the page into half and asked me to write what she spoke on the blank half. She told me to write her name followed by Kajal, Sandhya and Kamla’s names. This was followed by her instruction to write the following line: Sandhya, we can talk if you want. Finally, she asked me to sign off with her name. She took the paper from me and wrote the English initials of her friends’ names. She called out to Priya and asked her to deliver the letter to Sandhya, at school. I realised that Pooja had asked me to write a letter for her. Pooja continued to hold on to my pen when we went back to the common village space. She wrote NAMI on her hand and showed it to me. I complimented her for remembering how to write it. One of her classmates Kusum was around and she also wrote Kusum on her hand, after asking her how it was written.

In receiving the chithii, tearing it up when Vijay tried to read it and in wanting to come back to school after learning the contents of the chithii, Pooja identified herself as Vimal’s girlfriend. Subsequently, she decided to write a *let’s get back together* letter to Sandhya so that she could return to school as instructed by Vimal. This letter that I wrote, and Pooja composed drew on her peer group’s writing practices. She composed a short message and adorned it with the English initials of the names of her classmates to index their entity as one group. At the same time, she also wrote the names of her group of friends, conceivably, because she did not feel that the letter warranted the same degree of secrecy as the love letters and would be clearer in conveying her membership to her peer group which she seemed to have lost because of the argument with Sandhya.
So, Pooja’s ‘writing’ practices were her interests, her own funds of knowledge, improvisations of her peer culture practices, which illuminated her identity as a decision-maker who wished to belong in her relationship with Vimal and her friends. In their explorations of the literacy practices of a 7-year-old girl in Mexico, Azuara and Reyes (2011) also observe the child writing letters to her cousin by blending the letter writing practices of adults at home and school. Arguably, these practices were also the child’s interests.

Towards the end of the event discussed above, Pooja also seemed to be identifying me as her friend (as friends help each other read and write letters) and communicated this to me by writing the English initials of my name on her hand. After this day, I noticed her write on two occasions in my company for expressing her affiliation to me:

I was with Pooja on her farm. Her stepbrother came along, and I started talking to him about his schooling experiences. Pooja took a pen out of my bag and wrote her name, my name, and Sandhya’s name on her hand.

071015-Audio and photograph

I read the consent form to Pooja, and she smiled as I finished reading it. She signed the consent form and then drew a flower, wrote my name and kamal [lotus] on my hand.

Figure 8.16: Pooja’s writing on my hand

211015-audio and photograph
Once more, Pooja’s ‘writing’ practices were her own funds of knowledge, improvisations of her peer culture practices, which illuminated her identity as a decision-maker who wished to belong in her relationship with Vimal and her friends. In writing my name along with hers and Sandhya’s, Pooja indicated that the three of us were one group of friends (Sandhya was also my participant child). She also seemed to view me in a friendly light when she signed the consent form for my study, composing a text on my hand that was reminiscent of the first time we had written together.

Besides these two writing events, Pooja also wrote her name on her home door on one occasion. While it is difficult for me to gauge Pooja’s motivation behind her action since I was not around when it happened, it does illustrate both her desire and confidence in writing her name. Pooja’s name writing practices also remind me of the practices of a 4-year-old girl in England who viewed herself as a poor reader but showed interest in writing her name (Levy, 2011).

When I visited Pooja the second time around, her reading and writing interests were flourishing. The next vignette captures one such occasion:

It was my last few days in Pooja’s home. I sat with her to write down the pseudonyms that she had finalised for herself and her siblings. Pooja told me that she had also chosen names for all her friends. Cognisant that the girls had been discussing their pseudonyms for some time, I noted these names down. I realised that Pooja had taken on her three-year-old niece’s name. She chose names for Sandhya, Kajal and Priya by drawing on the names of heroines in Bollywood movies. Durga’s name was the same as the name of a ‘good’ girl in the seventh grade who she idolised.

After I wrote all these names in my fieldwork-journal, Pooja took her textbook out and flipped to the last page. I saw the pseudonyms: Raveena, Pooja, Sandhya and Kajal written in one line and repeated in the next as Kajal, Sandhya, Pooja, Raveena and Priya. Pooja read out the names, moving her finger across each name. She read the first line with lesser confidence than the second. She proudly stated: “We wrote these, madam!” and explained that while she had thought of all the names, Raveena had written. She asked if she had done good, and I said she had. While I took pictures of what was written, Pooja read both the lines twice, this time with more confidence. Priya’s name in the second line seemed to be written by Pooja.

Pooja asked me to write Durga, Ira and Kyra (Ira and Kyra are my daughter and niece’s names which Pooja chose as names for her nieces), I complied. She asked me to draw a heart shape and wrote the English initials of her name and
the names of her friends within it (Figure 8.14). She pointed to each letter and spoke-aloud the name of the friend it represented. Pooja’s stepmom had been telling her to undertake her chores for some time and now raised her voice to ensure that Pooja did what she was being told.

![Image of English initials of the girls' names](image)

Figure 8.17: English initials of the girls’ names

Pooja wished to draw on her own funds of knowledge, practices which included reading and writing the names of her friends, and these practices made space for her sense of self as a decision-maker who wished to belong to her group of friends, and, arguably, me. She wanted to write pseudonyms that she had chosen for her friends, for my study. Consequently, she asked Raveena to write these names in her textbook and read them several times illuminating her desire to recognise them (like in the first vignette). In writing the pseudonyms, Raveena had restricted herself to writing the names of girls who she recognised as participants in the practice of sending and receiving *chittiiz*. However, Pooja wanted to write the pseudonyms of her other friends. She wrote Priya’s name, in all likelihood, with Priya’s help, and took my help with Durga’s name. Her triumphant announcement “we wrote these names” suggests that she viewed herself as a co-author of what was written and seemed to feel pride a sense of pride in this. Subsequently, she borrowed her funds of knowledge rooted in her peer culture and inscribed the English initials of her friends’ names within a heart shape.

Like the children in Dyson’s (2013a) research in North America who made space for their friends’ preferences in their texts, Pooja’s choice of names for her friends was also “collegial”. She gave names of heroines to her friends who enjoyed
acting and dressing up like actresses. In the process, she also drew on her own funds of knowledge, popular culture practices of watching Bollywood movies rooted in her home and peer cultures, and her practices echoed the practices of children in Dyson’s (1997, 2003) studies in a very different part of the world who were also using their knowledge of popular culture as resources for writing. Pooja also chose to name her nieces with the names of my daughter and niece, and it did seem like she was trying to give space to my preferences within her composition, as she had done for her friends. Unsurprisingly, the name that Pooja chose for herself was that of her niece who she said she was most fond of within her home.

In the next vignette, the last in this series, Pooja was writing her friends’ names:

It was my last day at Pooja’s house. Pooja took her textbook out from her bag and started writing something on one of its last pages. I saw that she had written the pseudonyms: Priya, Raveena, Pooja, Sandhya and Kajal, on the page. Priya came in and told Pooja that she had to go and throw the cow dung on her farm. Pooja asked her to take on her chore, but Priya sat with us. Pooja’s younger siblings and one of her stepbrother’s daughters were around, and the children kept running about, laughing, and bumping into us. Finally, Pooja’s aunt told them off and they stopped.

Pooja took my pen from my bag and wrote my name, and I appreciated her effort: “Very good”. She wrote her name and Sandhya’s name, and I complimented her again. She wrote Kamla and asked if she had written it correctly, and I said yes. She wrote Kamla again saying that there were two Kamlas in her class. She asked for help with writing Kajal, and I complied. Pooja started to write Jamuna but then cut her name out saying that she was not in their group and said the same about Vimla. She counted the names she had written including mine and said we were a group of six friends. I exclaimed: “I am also in the group, yaaaaa”. Pooja smiled and said: “Yes, you are also in it”. She then looked at what she had written and exclaimed: “Oh my god! I forgot to write Raveena’s name”.

Pooja asked me to write her name in English. I wrote it on my hand and told her to copy it. She wrote it and then cut it out saying that she wanted to write her pseudonym in English. I wrote her pseudonym on my hand, and she copied it. Pooja then wished to write Sandhya’s name in English. She said that she would write S and I should help her with the rest. I spoke aloud the letters and she wrote them. She then wanted to write Raveena and I asked her to do this on a fresh sheet in my notebook since the writing on the page was getting cluttered. Instead of writing Raveena’s name in English, Pooja wrote the pseudonyms, in Hindi. She then had to get up to undertake her chores.
On my last day at Pooja’s house, she wanted to show me that she could write her friends’ names and pseudonyms independently. She included my name in the group of her friends. She also wished to learn to write the pseudonyms in English. Pooja’s writing practices were her interests, her own funds of knowledge providing evidence of her sense of self as a decision-maker who wished to write to belong within inclusive relationships with her friends and me.

Reading across the vignettes presented in this section, one finds that literacy practices initiated by Pooja were hybrid practices, improvisations of her peer culture’s practices. Researchers who have examined children’s own literacy practices at home have also identified them as either “syncretic” (Gregory & Williams, 2000) or “hybrid” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011). Such practices have been described as playful, culturally rooted in peer cultures, by Dyson (1997, 2003) in her examination of children’s writing practices at school. Consequently, Pooja’s literacy practices and those of the children in these studies can be identified as playful.

These reading and writing practices were also her interests, her own funds of knowledge. Initially, she improvised her peer group’s writing practices and subsequently, initiated her own practices of reading and writing practices her friends’ names. These interests provided evidence of her sense of self as a decision-maker who wished to read and write for her purposes which included being in inclusive relationships with her boyfriend, friends and on occasion, me. Pooja’s practices at home were very different from those at school, and I discuss them next.

8.5 School literacy practices

Pooja’s school literacy practices included copying and reading the alphabet, basal words, and basal sentences. Neither did these practices accommodate her own funds of knowledge, nor did they provide evidence of an inclusive relationship with the teacher.
8.5.1 Pooja: A non-reader

Pooja identified herself as someone who could not read, as did her classmates. Like Krish, the only time that she was expected to read a text aloud in class was to the inspector from the education department. When she was asked to get up and read, she remained seated. Vijay observed: “Sir, she cannot read”. In turn, Mithun, Ashish, and Shankar started teasing her: “Sir, she reads very well. She is the fastest reader.” Realising that the boys were pulling her leg, the inspector asked Pooja if she could read. Pooja shook her head. The inspector accepted her assessment and moved on to the next child.

Suman also identified Pooja as a non-reader. So, she did not expect her to engage with textbook-based reading and writing practices but did require her to enact the role of an obedient student when these practices were being undertaken in class. This was exemplified on the following two occasions. On the first occasion, Suman was reading the story *a cheetah on the hot air balloon* with the children:

Suman was teaching *a cheetah on the hot air balloon* today. She read the text and provided the meaning through her explanations (discussed in detail Chapter 7). Pooja had her textbook open. At times, she looked up at Suman and at other times into her textbook. Sometimes she peeped into Sandhya’s textbook and a few times towards the classroom door. In contrast to her, Sandhya remained focussed on the text in front of her while Suman read.

Suman had continued to teach beyond class-time, and I could hear Raman’s (maths teacher) voice from outside the classroom. Suman was still teaching, and Pooja asked if she could go to the toilet. Suman seemed to get irritated with her and said: “Just go.” Kajal got up along with her. Suman reprimanded her and said that she had permitted only one of them. Suman then noticed that Pooja, Kajal and Sandhya had shut their textbooks. She reprimanded them and told Pooja and Kajal that they could not go to the toilet together. She pointed to Pooja and scolded her: “You don’t come to school. I am teaching, and you want to go to the toilet. Are you three viewing a funfair over here?” The girls remained seated and silent.

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52 Pooja could recognise most Hindi vowels and consonants, but not the vocalic diacritic markers. Consequently, she was not able to blend letters to read words (based on my interactions with Pooja)
Suman expected children to be obedient students and read along with her as well as listen attentively when she explained the text. While Pooja could not read, she attempted to listen to Suman’s explanations but did not seem engaged with the activity. Subsequently, when she and her friends heard Raman approaching, a teacher who was quite infamous among the children for using corporal punishment, the friends wanted to ‘escape’ (the girls often left the classroom after the Hindi lesson, chatting with each other near the toilets, away from their teachers’ gaze, returning towards the end of the Maths lesson). In the process, Suman identified Pooja as a demotivated learner, who was not attending school regularly and did not seem interested in listening to what was being taught. Pooja seemed to have little choice but to accept the label quietly.

On the next occasion, Suman was undertaking questions and answers to a text in the textbook that she had taught:

Suman came into class and told the children that she would be doing the question and answers from the poem *Books* with them. She told Pooja (and a few other children) to copy the vowels from her alphabet book in her copy. After about ten minutes she noticed that Pooja was not doing the work allotted to her and questioned her. Pooja told her that she did not have her alphabet book with her. Suman looked displeased and asked the children around for an alphabet book. Vijay gave Pooja his book. Pooja copied the alphabet for the rest of her class-time.

Suman believed that children who were not reading their grade-level texts needed to pick up their textbook and make an effort to read it on their own, and those who did know the alphabet needed to first memorise it (discussed in Chapter 5). She identified Pooja to be in the latter category. So, she did not ask Pooja to copy the question and answers that she was undertaking in class but to copy the alphabet from her alphabet book. Pooja did not seem to be interested in copying the alphabet but had to do as told. However, her disobedience again led her to be recognised as a demotivated student by Suman. Thus, on the occasions above, Pooja, identified herself as a non-reader, as did her friends and teacher. Pooja’s lack of desire to engage with the reading and writing practices being allotted to her by Suman also led her to be recognised her as a student who was disinterested in learning.
Pooja's presence at school was inextricably intertwined with her desire to be with her friends. This was evidenced by the following conversations I had with her during my fieldwork. Both Pooja and her classmate and friend, Kajal could not read, but Pooja was in school for more than half the classes while Kajal was there for about a fourth of these. The difference in the girls’ views was evident in the following conversation:

Kajal (in a soft voice): Madam, I don't know how to read.
Researcher: It does not matter, you can learn.
Pooja: Yes, you can.
Kajal (talking about Pooja): She does not read, madam.
Pooja smacks her hand.

[...]
Researcher: Do you like school, Kajal?
Kajal: I don't like it at all.
Pooja: Well, I like it.
Kajal: I don't like it because I can't read, madam.
Researcher: What about you Pooja?
Pooja: I like it.
Researcher: What do you like about school?
Pooja: I like school.
Researcher: What do you like at school?
Pooja: Anything.
Researcher: Like what?
Pooja: Everything.

[...]
Researcher: Kajal does not like school because she cannot read. What about you?
Pooja: I like studying.
Kajal: She does not know how to write, madam.
Researcher: Hmmm. Do you still like school?
Pooja confidently nodded yes.
Researcher: So, what do you like about school?
Pooja: One can learn to read at school.
Kajal’s reason for not wanting to be at school was her inability to read. Pooja was aware that she could not read but remained adamant that she wanted to be at school, despite her inability. However, she was not very forthcoming with her reasons and finally, seemed to be echoing my advice to Kajal.

In time, I understood that Pooja’s desire to be at school (and in the Hindi classroom) was entangled with her desire to be with her friends, and her absences were also motivated by her disagreements with her friends (shown earlier). The former was evident in the following conversation, where Pooja discussed the Christmas-break with Gayatri (Grade 7), Sona (Grade 3) and Kamla (Grade 5):

Pooja: The holidays were such a waste.
Researcher: What?
Sona: No, we must have holidays.
Kamla: No, the holidays should not be there.
Pooja: We should not have holidays, madam. I don’t like it. They make us work at home. We play at school.

[...]
Gayatri, the oldest of the girls, said that she had to do housework even if she went to school, and Pooja reacted:
Pooja: I just leave for school without doing any work.
Gayatri: I must work. I make the roti\textsuperscript{53} and then go to school.

Pooja and her friends disagreed about the usefulness of the Christmas break. Pooja felt that they should not have holidays because school provided them the opportunity to be with friends, play and avoid chores.

8.5.2 Serious literacy practices evidencing lack of interest

Suman expected Pooja to read and copy basal texts. These basal texts were in the form of ‘simple’ words and sentences which introduced the Hindi alphabet in a graded manner. The Hindi alphabet contains 36-42 consonants and 10 vowels (Agnihotri, 2010). The vowels are written as both letters and diacritic markers.

\textsuperscript{53} baked flatbread
The combination of consonants and vocalic markers creates syllables. For example, when the ‘k’ consonant is written with the 10 vocalic diacritic markers we get symbolic notations for the following sounds: ‘ka’, ‘kaa’, ‘ki’, ‘kii’, ‘ku’, ‘kuu’, ‘ke’, ‘kai’, ‘ko’ and ‘kau’.

In undertaking the basal tasks, Suman first asked children to recognise the 36 consonants. She then provided them with words and sentences by combining these consonants, to copy and read. From thereon, she introduced one diacritic marker at a time with each of these 36 consonants and asked children to recognise the 36 syllables (36 consonants coupled with diacritic markers). This was again followed by providing children with various words and sentences using these syllables, to read and copy.

On the day that Suman undertook the first basal activity, she announced in class:

*Children who cannot read their textbook must read every word I write on the board before they write them. Don’t just copy the words, read them, and then write them. Read every letter and then write it. If you do this, you will learn how to read.*

The two vignettes that follow provide an account of her participation in these tasks. The first vignette is of the first two days of basal activity that Suman undertook in class:

Suman came into class and asked the children if they had done their homework which involved writing the 36 consonants of the Hindi alphabet in their notebooks. Nobody responded. Suman wrote the date and day on the blackboard. She then wrote the consonants: *ka, kha, ga* and so on. She asked the children to identify them as she wrote them on the board. Very few children did, so she instructed: “I cannot hear you. Speak up”. More children joined in, but they were not answering in one voice, so Suman admonished: “Why are you not answering together? Don’t you know your alphabet?” Children started reciting louder. Pooja did not join in. She seemed to be copying the date and day written on the board, in her notebook.

When Suman finished writing the consonants, she asked children to make words using the consonants while she took the register. As an example, she wrote the word *kamal* [lotus] on the board, and Ajay commented: “Madam we will be able to do it. You don’t write”. Suman told him to listen to what she was saying and

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54 Unlike English consonants, Hindi consonants have the “a” sound inherent in them.
asked the children for a few more words. Krish, Mithun, Mohan and Ajay volunteered words. After writing five words on the blackboard, Suman asked the children to make more words on their own. During this interaction, Pooja continued to copy the consonants in her notebook. She regularly looked up at the board while copying.

After taking the register, Suman asked the children for the words they had written. Krish, Mithun, Mohan, Ajay, and sometimes Ashish (boys who could read with different degrees of fluency) volunteered words. Suman wrote the words that the children suggested and those she thought of on the board; she spoke aloud each word before she wrote it. Sometimes, when Suman thought of a word, she gave children clues to guess it. For example, on one occasion, she asked the children: “What do we call a naughty child?” and on another, she said: “A particular festival is approaching. Tell me who ties a rakhi on this occasion?”. She asked the children how they celebrated Rakhi at home, and various boys started answering. Suman addressed her question, but Sandhya seemed too shy to answer. Ashish and Amit told her what they did at home. She agreed with them and told them about the relevance of the festival and its historical roots. Some words that Suman wrote on the board included, naughty, moment, fruit, house, water, sky, spoon, wear, roof, and quickly.

During this time, Pooja continued to copy from the board and like the rest of the girls in the class did not volunteer any words. She stopped copying about 10 minutes before the lesson ended. She opened her school bag and seemed to be looking for something. She then sharpened her pencil and doodled for a bit on the cover page of her notebook. She then started talking to the girl sitting next to her and stretched out her arms. This caught Suman’s attention and she asked Pooja to bring her notebook to her. Raman came into class and Suman got up to leave. On her way out, she glanced at Pooja’s copy and told her to complete copying her alphabet. She also told the class to make sentences using the words that she had written on the board as homework, before leaving.

The next day, Suman asked the children if they had written any sentences at home, but no one responded to her question. Suman checked Pooja’s copy and told her that she had written very few words, on the previous day and asked her to copy more words from a classmate in a free period. She also asked Pooja to copy the sentences that she was going to write on the board. Pooja nodded her head in agreement. Suman told the class to copy the sentences she was writing in their notebooks. She instructed them to first read what they were writing and then copy. All the children quietly copied the sentences that Suman wrote on the board, throughout class-time.

180815 and 190815-Video

Suman initiated teaching by asking children if anyone had done their basal homework, but no child answered in the affirmative. She wrote the 36 consonants on the blackboard and asked them to recognise these, chorally. Children seemed
to participate in the activity with less enthusiasm, and Pooja did not join in at all. Suman then provided children with opportunities to suggest words. Children who could read, albeit with different levels of fluency, suggested words to Suman. About ten minutes before the end of the lesson, Pooja stopped copying; it seemed like she did not want to copy anymore. When Suman checked her copy, she noted that she had not copied all the consonants and had copied very few words. On my return to England, I compared Pooja’s and Krish’s notebooks and found that Pooja had copied 20 words while Krish, 127.

The next day, none of the children had done their basal homework again. Moreover, none of them suggested sentences. Suman also did not ask them for sentences and expected everyone to copy what she wrote on the board. This was perhaps not surprising since the logic behind the formulation of basal sentences is sound and not meaning, and these sentences exemplify “unnatural language patterns” which would be difficult for children to construct (Sinha, 2000). For Pooja, the second day seemed to look no different from the previous one, and she quietly copied what Suman wrote on the board. Again, on comparing Pooja’s and Krish’s notebooks, I found that Pooja had written 14 sentences while Krish had written 28.

On the above occasion, Pooja’s school-based funds of knowledge included copying and reading words and sentences provided by Suman. However, she did not seem to be drawing on these practices and copied without reading the text. Arguably, her practice was motivated by her sense of self as a non-reader and, in turn, reinforced it, and this was also true for two girls in Levy’s (2011) study who viewed themselves as non-readers and strengthened their perception of self when they engaged with the school’s skill-based practices. Subsequently, Pooja did not copy as much as required of her, and Dyson (2010) also reminds us that copying which is not engrained in the child’s volition can be “enormously difficult and physically taxing, even arguably abusive” (p. 10). Finally, by the latter half of the lesson, she stopped copying, resisting her school-based funds of knowledge providing evidence of her sense of self as a decision-maker who, conceivably, did not wish to engage with practices that did not make place for her own funds of knowledge.
Suman undertook basal tasks with the ‘aa’ syllables, next. Pooja copied quietly but did not copy as much as required of her, again, writing 30 words in comparison to Krish’s 100. This was followed with similar basal activities with the ‘i’ syllables, and, on this occasion, Pooja did not undertake the basal tasks:

Suman came into class and asked the children if they had written the 36 syllables with the ‘i’ diacritic marker at home. Only Mithun said that he had. Suman told the children to write the syllables in their copy while she took the register. Before taking the register, she wrote the date and day on the blackboard and informed the children that budhvaar [Wednesday] was the day for Lord Ganesh\(^{55}\), the god who gave everyone intelligence and who was prayed to when any new task was undertaken. She also told them that budh [Mercury] was the name of one of the planets in the solar system\(^{56}\).

Unlike other days when all the girls sat in the front of the class, Pooja, Kajal, and Mala sat at the back today because of their argument with Sandhya. Suman noticed the change and instructed the girls to write the syllables in their notebooks while she took the register. She wrote all the syllables on the board, calling out the sounds. She asked children to repeat after her. Some children did. During all this time, Pooja sat with her notebook open and a pencil in her hand but did not write anything.

Suman then wrote words on the board. Children who could read contributed words. Suman instructed the children to read and then copy the words. Pooja sometimes looked at the board, sometimes on the roof, and sometimes around, but did not have anything written in her notebook. This contrasted with her friends Kajal and Mala who sat next to her and copied as expected. By the end of the lesson, there were about fifty words on the board but none in Pooja’s notebook.

Pooja wrote nothing in her notebook, resisting her funds of knowledge entrenched in her school and again seemed motivated by her sense of self as a decision-maker who did not wish to engage with practices that did not make space for her own. Subsequently, on the next occasion, Pooja sat in the front of the class but again resisted her school’s literacy practices, writing only four words with the ‘u’ marker in her notebook in comparison to Krish’s 80.

It was around this time that I visited Pooja’s home for the first time and became a part of her home writing practices. I saw Pooja’s desire to read and write the

\(^{55}\) A Hindu god

\(^{56}\) According to the Hindu calendar
names of her friends grow over the course of my fieldwork (discussed in Section 7.4), her participation in the basal reading and writing tasks continue to evidence her disengagement. When I asked Pooja about her incomplete work in her notebook, she responded defiantly: “Yes, I have not done it” and her assertion was again infused with her desire to be in control over the reading and writing practices she wished to engage with.

Research undertaken by Dyson (1997, 2003) in schools illustrates that children are keen composers if they are allowed to adapt their school’s practices by drawing on their knowledge rooted in their various cultural worlds. It also shows that children’s engagement with skills is encouraged when these practices are rooted in children’s desire to belong within an inclusive relationship with their teacher (Dyson, 2018). Pooja’s school literacy practices were culturally serious and required her to solely draw on her school’s funds of knowledge. Consequently, they did not make space for her own. Neither did they provide evidence of an inclusive relationship with her teacher. Consequently, after the first few classes, Pooja resisted these practices providing evidence of her lack of interest in them.

8.6 Chapter summary

Pooja’s interests included playing, drawing (discussed in Chapter 6), watching Bollywood movies, and engaging with her peer culture’s letter writing practices. These practices drew on her funds of knowledge rooted in her home and peer cultures and illuminated on her various identities as a decision-maker, girl, friend, girlfriend, and Bollywood-fan. Pooja’s home literacy practices were playful while her school literacy practices were serious in nature. The former were her interests, her own funds of knowledge, improvisations of her peer culture’s practices which allowed her to position herself as a decision-maker who wished to belong within her peer cultures. On the other hand, her school’s literacy practices provided evidence of her lack of engagement in them. She was expected to engage with her school-based funds of knowledge which did not make place for her own. Consequently, she was resisting these practices, arguably, motivated by her sense of self as a decision-maker who did not wish to
engage with such practices. So, even though Pooja was largely writing words at both home and school, she showed engagement in the former and not the latter.
Chapter 9: Examining literacy at the intersection of culture and volition

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the concurrently cultural and purposive nature of Pooja and Krish’s literacy practices that have been described in the previous two chapters. Section 9.2 introduces the theoretical concepts that have been used to examine the nature of children’s literacy practices. Section 9.3 and 9.4 summarises the literature, and Section 9.5 examines Krish and Pooja’s home and school literacy practices in the light of the theory and literature. Finally, Section 9.6 discusses the relationship between the children’s school learning and interests.

9.2 The nature of the children’s literacy practices: The theory

New Literacy Studies (NLS) researchers identify children’s engagement with print as cultural and “purposeful and embedded in social goals” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 12). Consequently, Gee’s (2002, 2012) examines the cultural nature of children’s literacy practices with his theorisation of Discourse (discourse with a capital D) and identity. Gee (ibid) identifies a Discourse as the dominant social practice of a community: ways of doing, thinking, and believing that serve as identity-kits. He explains that when children engage with print their practices are being shaped by Discourses. Consequently, in conforming to a Discourse, children are enacting “socially situated identities” that are valued by a community expressing their desire to belong to it. On the other hand, in challenging a Discourse they are resisting these identities providing evidence of their disinterest in being a member of the community. Thus, paying attention to the different Discourses shaping children’s literacy practices helps in understanding the cultural nature of children’s practices, and situated identities illuminate children’s social goals for engaging with their practices.
For attending to the personal nature of children’s practices, this study draws on the work of early childhood researchers, who identify children’s initiatives to participate in cultural practices as their interests and theorise that these interests are motivated by children’s identities as “learners, enquirers, thinkers and citizens” (Hedges & Cooper, 2016, p. 317).

9.3 The nature of children’s literacy practices: The literature

Sociocultural researchers find children’s home literacy practices to include both skill- and meaning-based practices (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Gregory & Williams, 2000) (discussed in Chapter 2). Consequently, Gregory and Williams (2000) identify skill-based practices as “serious” in nature because they require children to unquestioningly conform to the literacy practices of adults, and argue that children’s participation in these practices is rooted in their desire to belong within their home. On the other hand, Azuara and Reyes (2011) describe these practices to be of disinterest to a child.

On the other hand, meaning-based practices are recognised to have a “syncretic” (Gregory & Williams, 2000) or “hybrid” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011) nature, with children reading and writing for their purposes, and drawing on the practices of their different cultural worlds, in the process. Dyson’s (1997, 2003) research, albeit in school, contributes by identifying these hybrid practices as playful because of their roots in peer cultures where the ‘rules’ allow children to pursue personal goals, and, in the process, draw on the practices of their various cultural worlds, that is, their home, school and peer cultures.

Research on children’s school literacy practices in high-income nations finds these practices to be meaning-based with skills being emphasised in classrooms to serve policy mandates of teaching and testing (Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018; Gregory & Williams, 2000). Children’s engagement with skills is documented to be motivated by their desire to belong within inclusive relationships with their teacher (Dyson, 2018). In contrast to children’s school literacy practices in this part of the world, their practices in middle- and low-income countries are predominantly skill-based, allowing children to only read and write in ways required by their teachers (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Lisanza,
2011; Sahni, 1994). Consequently, these practices have not been observed to be of children’s interests.

9.4 Children’s interests and identities: The literature

Early childhood researchers who have explored children’s interests in literacy classrooms and nurseries argue that children’s play and playful literacy practices makes space for their various identities and strengthen their relationship with reading and writing (Dyson, 1997). At the same time, researchers also highlight that children who hold positive identities as readers are, often, not demotivated with the school’s skill-based focus, but those who view themselves as poor readers end up reinforcing their negative perception of self as readers (Levy, 2011; Rogers & Martille, 2012).

9.5 The nature of children’s literacy practices: An examination of the findings

Krish and Pooja are 10-year-old children studying in Grade 5 in a state elementary school in Sitara, a rural village in India (in chapters 6 and 7). Both belong to poor, agrarian families where caregivers have not attended school. However, Krish identifies himself as a reader while Pooja views herself as a non-reader.

9.5.1 Home literacy practices: Both serious and playful

Krish’s home literacy practices include both skill- and meaning-based practices. The skill-based practices involve helping his family and community with tasks involving print. He fills out a health coupon for his grandmother, based on which she receives payment for her services as a midwife. He also pens down a letter to ‘his’ pen-pal in Korea about his village life dictated to him by an NGO worker, cognisant that the NGOs initiatives contributed to the financial wellbeing of his family and village.

Children’s engagements with print are shaped by Discourses (Gee, 2012). Conforming to a Discourse requires enacting identities valued by the Discourse community. Krish’s literacy practices are being shaped by the serious learning Discourse, the dominant social practice of the adult community which requires children to read and write in ways required by them. Consequently, he writes
what his grandmother and the NGO worker ask of him, enacting the role of a
dutiful grandson and a responsible member of his community who wishes to
contribute to the economic wellbeing of his family and community. Thus, Krish’s
practices are serious in nature and illustrate his sense of self as an obedient
learner who wishes to write in ways required by adults at home to belong within
this community.

In this manner, they are reminiscent of the serious Bengali and Quran reading
practices of Bangladeshi children in Gregory and Williams’s (2000) study which
were rooted in their desire to belong within their home. However, while Gregory
and Williams’s (2000) do not highlight the personal goals shaping their participant
children’s practices, this study shows that Krish’s participation is motivated by his
identity as an obedient learner. On the other hand, Krish’s practices are both
similar to and different from the practices of the 7-year-old girl in Azuara and
Reyes’s (2011) study who follows her mother’s instruction and copies thank-you
letters addressed to a charitable organisation but is identified as disinterested in
this activity by the researchers.

Krish also reads for pleasure at home. His practices are being shaped by the
playful learning Discourse, the dominant social practice of his peer culture in
which children read and write for their purposes by accepting, adapting, and
challenging practices of their various cultural worlds including their home, school
and/or peer cultures. Consequently, he reads to pursue his desire to read and
draws on as well as adapts his school’s reading practices, while engaging with
these practices.

So, when his father comes back from his pilgrimage trip and the family members
are excitedly talking and looking at their gifts, Krish continues to read like an
engaged reader and an obedient student who is expected to learn, oblivious of all
the distractions around. He also continues to read by giving his complete
attention to the task when his younger sibling sits next to him and starts reciting a
poem. At the same time, Krish’s reading practices at home are wider than those
required at his school. He reads stories from his passbook, while his teachers
expect him to use the passbook to copy answers to texts in his textbook. He also
reads his elder brother’s library books and textbooks, books that were not meant
for children in the primary classes. Thus, Krish’s reading practices are playful in nature, illuminating his identity as a keen reader and his sense of belonging to his school.

In this manner, they are reminiscent of the serious Bengali and Quran reading practices of Bangladeshi children in Gregory and Williams’s (2000) study which were rooted in their desire to belong within their home. However, while Gregory and Williams’s (2000) do not highlight the personal goals shaping their participant children’s practices, this study shows that Krish’s participation is motivated by his identity as an obedient learner. On the other, hand, Krish’s practices are both similar to and different from the practices of the 7-year-old girl in Azuara and Reyes’s (2011) study who follows her mother’s instruction and copies thank-you letters addressed to a charitable organisation but is identified as disinterested in this activity by the researchers.

Krish’s playful practices are similar to and different from the reading practices of both white and Bangladeshi children in Gregory and Williams’s (2000) study. They echo the reading for pleasure practices of the white children and the syncretic “booksharing” practices of the Bangladeshi siblings as in both cases, the children initiate the practices and draw on the reading practices of their cultural worlds. However, while the white and Bangladeshi children’s practices are hybrid, drawing on both, their home and school reading practices, Krish’s practices are solely rooted in his school. Moreover, Gregory and Williams (2000) do not highlight children’s purposes for engaging with their practices, but this has been done in Krish’s case.

It would also be significant to note that while I identify Krish’s reading practices as playful, Gregory and Williams (2000) recognise the Bangladeshi children’s practices as serious. Conceivably, this difference is because the concept of syncretic literacy does not help them differentiate between the domain shaping children’s practices and their goals. Reviewing this data with a Discourse lens, I would argue that the reading practices of Bangladeshi siblings are playful in nature, but are supported by their ‘serious’ identities as obedient students of Bengali and Quran classes.
Unlike Krish, Pooja’s home literacy practices only include meaning-based practices. Pooja and her friends Raveena and Kajal are participants of their peer practice of having a boyfriend. These practices include writing *chithiiz* (love letters) to the boyfriend. Raveena, the only one among the girls who could read, writes these letters. She decorates these letters with heart shapes inscribed with the English initials of the couple’s names, and at times, the initials of her two girlfriends, indicating not only the couple’s affiliation to one another but also the girls’ sense of belonging to their group. Pooja is participating in these practices by receiving letters from her boyfriend, Vimal, and inscribing heart shapes with the English initials of her name along with his. However, she does not ask Raveena to write *chithiiz* to Vimal on her behalf because she feels *sharam* [shy] in doing so.

Pooja’s literacy practices are shaped by the playful learning Discourse, the dominant social practice of her peer culture which allowed her to write for her purposes by imaginatively borrowing, adapting and challenging practices of her cultural worlds. She is writing to express her affection for Vimal, blending her peer group’s practices with gendered practices of her community. Consequently, she inscribes hearts but does not write back to Vimal, enacting the role of Vimal’s girlfriend as well as a female member of her community who is expected to adopt meek roles in relationships. At the same time, by engaging with these practices, Pooja is also challenging the authority of adults who frowned upon these practices. Thus, Pooja’s practices are playful in nature, illuminating on for her sense of self as a decision-maker who wishes to write to pursue her desire to be Vimal’s girlfriend.

Pooja also writes to introduce me to Vimal. These practices are again being shaped by the playful learning Discourse. She alters her peer group’s practices, writing names and not initials of names: her name, Vimal’s name as well as Sandhya’s (her close friend) name together for introducing me to him. Pooja’s writing practices are again challenging the authority of adults at home. During our interaction, she also resists reading basal words, practices valued at school but shows interest in reading her friends’ names. Consequently, her playful practices are again illuminating her sense of self as a decision-maker who wishes to read
and write for her purposes, and these encompassed pursuing her desire to belong within her relationship with Vimal as well as her group of friends.

Over time, Pooja begins reading and writing her friends’ names to express her affiliation with her group of friends. She not only learns to read and write her friends’ names but also their pseudonyms that she chooses by drawing on her knowledge of the names of heroines in Bollywood movies. She draws on her knowledge rooted in her peer group’s writing practices and popular culture practices for engaging with her literacy-based interests. Thus, Pooja’s literacy practices, be they inscribing hearts with English initials or reading and writing the names of her friends are playful practices, illuminative of her sense of self as a decision-maker who wishes read and write to belong to inclusive relationships with her boyfriend and friends, and she draws on her knowledge rooted in her peer cultures for pursuing her interests.

Pooja’s practices echo the playful literacy practices a boy in Dyson’s (1997) study who also writes to belong within his peer groups and draws on his popular culture knowledge about superheroes, for doing so. They are, however, both similar to and different from the writing practices of the girl in Azuara and Reyes’s (2011) study who writes a letter to her cousin in play. They are similar because, like Pooja, the girl initiates the event and draws on the practices of her cultural worlds for pursuing her desire to write. However, they are different because the girl’s practices are hybrid and draw on the letter-writing practices of both her home and school, while Pooja’s practices solely draw on her peer cultures’ practices. Moreover, Azuara and Reyes (2011) do not highlight the girl’s purposes for engaging with her practices, but this has been done in Pooja’s case.

Drawing on both, the findings discussed so far and the literature, I find that this study both agrees with and contributes to sociocultural research that explores children’s home literacy practices. Concurring with past research, it finds skill-based practices to be of a serious nature requiring Krish to write in ways required by adults at home (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Gregory & Williams, 2000). It also illustrates Krish and Pooja’s meaning-based practices to be of a playful nature with children initiating reading and writing events to pursue personal goals.
At the same time, it contributes to the literature by identifying the personal goals motivating children to participate and finding them rooted in children's identities as learners, readers and writers. Consequently, in agreement with Gregory and Williams (2000), it shows that Krish’s participation in serious, skill-based practices is rooted in their desire to belong within their home, but contributes by highlighting that this desire is rooted in his identity as an obedient child. On a similar note, it finds both the children’s participation in playful, meaning-based practices to be motivated by their various identities. Krish’s engagement with his reading practices was rooted in his identity as an engaged reader and obedient student, while Pooja’s reading and writing practices by her identities as a decision-maker, friend, and girlfriend.

The study also shows that meaning-based practices do not have to be hybrid in nature, that is, draw on children’s different cultural worlds, but are motivated by their desire to belong within worlds that strengthen their identities. Krish’s desire to read was entangled with his sense of belonging to his school, a place that provided him opportunities to pursue his desire. On a similar note, Pooja’s desire to read and write was rooted in her desire to belong within her peer groups where she was allowed to be the decision-maker.

Finally, while this study agrees with Dyson (1997) that children’s literacy-based interests are rooted in their identities, it, arguably, enriches her conclusion. This is because Dyson (ibid) researches in writing workshop classrooms where teachers view children as playful learners and allow them to compose for their purposes, by drawing on their various identities. However, this study shines a light on not only children’s personal goals as readers and writers but also their desire to be playful learners in a context where teachers at school and caregivers at home expect them to learn in serious ways. Thus, this study underscores children’s desire to be the playful learners, probably, like no other study before.

9.5.2 School literacy practices: Solely serious

Krish and Pooja’s school literacy practices are skill-based practices. They are being shaped by the serious learning Discourse (Gee, 2012), the dominant social practice of the adult community at school which requires children to read and
write in ways advocated by the teachers. However, the children are engaging differently with the Discourse.

Krish’s literacy practices provide evidence of his acceptance of the serious learning Discourse. He reads as an independent textual-meaning maker at school, however, each time his interpretation of the text conflicts with Suman’s, he accepts text-meaning provided by her privileging his identity as an obedient student over that of a reader. He also copies the ‘correct’ answer provided by Suman and does not attempt to write his interpretation of the text. These practices remind me of the practices of a boy in Dyson’s (2018) study who writes more and more in a classroom where his teacher is emphasising skills to belong within it, in ways favoured by his teacher.

Krish’s school literacy practices are also his interests because they are motivated by his desire to read. He says he is in school because he enjoys reading, and his positive reader identity is not negatively influenced even though Suman expects him to be a receiver of text-meaning in class. In this manner, his practices are reminiscent of a boy in Levy’s (2011) study who continues to view himself positively as a reader, despite his school’s skill-based focus which does not require him to pursue his desire to read meaningfully, as at home.

Unlike Krish, Pooja is resisting the serious learning Discourse. Suman expects her to read and copy the basal words and sentences she is providing, to learn to read. However, she is not able to keep pace with the amount of copying required of her and is recognised as a disinterested student by Suman in the process, arguably, strengthening her identity as a non-reader. Pooja’s practices again remind me of two girls in Levy’s (2011) study who view themselves as non-readers and reinforce this perception of self when they are expected to engage with reading as solely a skill at school in contrast to their homes.

Pooja practices also provide evidence of her disinterest in the serious practices of her school. This disinterest is evident even in the first lesson where she stops copying before the class ends. Her early disinterest quickly grows into disengagement and she either copies very little or not at all in the subsequent classes. Research undertaken by Dyson (1997, 2003) illustrates that children are
keen composers if they are allowed to write for their purposes. It also shows that children’s engagement with skills is encouraged when these practices are rooted in children’s desire to belong within an inclusive relationship with their teacher (Dyson, 2018). Pooja’s school literacy practices do not allow her to read and write to pursue her desire to belong within her relationship with her friends. Neither does it provide evidence of an inclusive relationship with her teacher. Thus, these practices are, arguably, her disinterests. In this manner, they are reminiscent of the practices of the girl in Azuara and Reyes’s (2011) study who is also required to decode and copy texts at school and is described as a “passive learner” by the researchers when she is doing so.

This study both agrees with and contributes to literature on children’s school literacy practices. Concurring with literature, it shows both Krish and Pooja engaging with serious, skill-based practices at school (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994). It also finds Krish’s initiatives to be motivated by his desire to belong within his school (Dyson, 2018) and illuminates on the practices being of disinterest to Pooja (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994). However, it contributes by showing that Krish’s practices are his interests because they are drawing on his identities, including his identity as an obedient child, and Pooja’s practices are her disinterests because they do not make place for her identities.

9.5.3 Summarising the section

Sociocultural research that has explored children’s literacy practices in homes and/or schools has found these practices to be both skill-based and meaning-based. The former are serious practices which require children to adhere to the reading and writing practices valued within the adult world. They are either of disinterest to children or rooted in their desire to belong within the adult world. The latter are playful practices motivated by children’s purposes/identities, and children draw on the practices of their different cultural worlds for engaging with these practices.

This study explores the home and school literacy practices of two children. Both the children engage with playful practices and are also expected to participate in skill-based practices. Playful practices are of interest to both of them because
they make space for their identities. Moreover, the children do not draw on the practices of their different cultural worlds while engaging with these practices, but on the practices of cultural worlds that strengthen their identities. Serious practices are of interest to one of the children. This is again because they make place for his identities. Thus, this study argues that what is crucial for children’s learning at school is making place for playful literacy practices, which allow for the identities of a larger number of children.

9.6 Discussion: School learning and children’s interests

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 for school education in India emphasises that “children’s experiences, their voices…their active participation….and interests” need to be given space in the classroom (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2005, p. 13). It also underscores the importance of “situating learning in the context of the child’s world…not only because the local environment and the child’s own experiences are the best entry points, into the study of disciplines of knowledge, but more so because the aim of knowledge is to connect with the world” (ibid, p. 30). Thus, NCF 2005 supports a child-centred view of pedagogical activity that makes place of children’s interests in classrooms.

The findings of this study suggest that this requires moving away from an autonomous view of literacy to an ideological one (Street, 1995). The former view, illustrated by Suman’s practices in Sitara, underscores reading and writing as skills which can be learnt independent of the child’s context (discussed in Chapter 5). Consequently, these practices are serious practices where content is taught through “authority structures” (Street, 1995, p. 118) which only require children to be obedient receivers of textual-meaning and copiers of text. On the other hand, the ideological view of literacy, emphasises making children’s interests, that is, their purposes and practices, the point of departure for their literacy learning. This study provides evidence of children’s play, talk and playful literacy practices being their interests, and argues that making place for these interests would allow teachers to shift to an ideological view of literacy.

Researchers who have explored children’s practices in primary schools and nurseries show that allowing children to play with artifacts and storylines rooted in
their various cultural worlds enables children to bring their various identities and
their knowledge rooted in their home and peer cultures, into the classroom
(Dyson, 1997, 2003; Wohlwend, 2011). They also illustrate that this play
strengthens their desire to read and write. On a similar note, they show that
children’s play and conversations reflect their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez,
Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll et al., 1992), and illuminate on children’s motivations
to participate. They also posit that children’s funds of knowlledge are an
“important way in which children’s interests can be recognised, engaged with and
extended” by the teacher as a resource for curricular planning (Hedges, 2015;
Hedges & Cooper, 2016, p. 318; Hedges et al., 2011).

While playful learning had no place in Suman’s classroom, Krish’s and Pooja’s
play at home, and their conversations illuminate on their funds of knowledge and
their identities (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). Pooja plays house and marriage
providing evidence of her identity as a decision-maker and her knowledge of
cooking, marriage customs, shopping routines, jewellery, and make-up. On the
other hand, Krish’s school-play highlights his identity as an obedient student and
my conversations with him elucidate his knowledge of Bollywood storylines and
digital technology. Both the children also initiate literacy practices at home which
draw on their identities, and Pooja also uses her funds of knowledge rooted in
peer culture’s letter-writing practices and popular culture practices of watching
Bollywood movies. Thus, encouraging children to play, talk and read and write for
their own purposes holds promise for allowing for child-centred instruction in the
Indian classroom.

Nevertheless, this does present challenges. Not all funds of knowledge that
children draw on in their play are valid indicators of their interests (Hedges et al.,
2011). This is also true for Pooja’s use of cooking in her home play. While this
play is stimulated by her funds of knowledge about cooking, the activity is not her
interest in real life. Moreover, it was only possible for me to understand this by
having conversations with her about her household chores. Thus, recognising
practices that children represent in their play as their interests requires teachers
to not only watch children at play but also listen “interpretively and
metaphorically” to what they are saying to gather resources for planning reading and writing tasks (Hedges & Cooper, 2016, p. 318).

Children’s funds of knowledge rooted in their peer cultures, particularly their knowledge of popular culture, would also be considered inappropriate by teachers for use in the classroom. Researchers in other parts of the world also provide evidence of the teacher’s reticence in using children’s popular culture knowledge for curricular purposes (Dyson, 2013a; Hedges et al., 2011). However, this study does illuminate that this knowledge is children’s interest. Both Krish and Pooja love watching Bollywood movies. The pseudonyms they choose for themselves and their friends are rooted in their knowledge of Bollywood. Pooja’s letter-writing practices are also influenced by storylines rooted in Bollywood movies.

On a similar note, not all literacy practices that would be of interest to children would conform to the teacher’s idea of ‘appropriate’ literacy learning. For instance, the children’s practices of writing love-letters would, in all likelihood, not be given space in the classroom, and Dyson (2013a) also observes a similar situation in North American classrooms where the children were pursuing these literacy-based interests during their free-time.

The teachers’ lack of enthusiasm in allowing children’s interests to enter the classroom is, perhaps, not without foundation. Children’s interests are not benign and reinforce social identities and inequitable power relationships visible in society, for instance, those rooted in age and gender (Dyson, 1997). This is evident when Pooja plays house and infringes on her younger friend’s right to cook what she wants, as well as when the girls became husband and wife, with the husband taking decisions and the wife following instructions. It is also visible in the children’s practices of writing love letters which draw on Bollywood storylines which often position girls as culprits who by looking at boys and laughing with them ‘compel’ them to fall in love with them, as well as when Pooja decides not to write back to her boyfriend reinforcing the gendered practices of her community that require girls to adopt meek roles in relationships. In this manner, Pooja’s practices are reminiscent of a girl’s play in Hedges’s (2015)
study who takes care of baby dolls in her nursery, reinforcing her thinking that women, and not men, are supposed to care for children.

So, while children’s interests are useful pedagogical resources which would strengthen children’s identities as readers and writers in classrooms, they would require “critical thinking on the part of teachers” for their use (Dyson, 1997; Hedges, 2015, p. 94). Such effective teachers would probably not allow children to write love-letters in the classroom, something, I believe that the children would also not be keen on doing with their teachers. However, they would be willing to initiate a dialogue with them and among them about their funds of knowledge rooted in Bollywood. They would also use play as a “literacy of possibilities” (Wohlwend, 2015) and a “tactic” (Wohlwend, 2011) for allowing children to reimagine their worlds, reposition themselves into empowered positions in the classroom, and, in the process, enhance their relationship with reading and writing.
Chapter 10: The conclusions

10.1 Introduction
This final chapter addresses the research questions and highlights the contributions that the study makes to theory and methodology. Section 10.1 focuses on the research questions. Section 10.2 discusses the study’s contributions to sociocultural research on children’s home and school literacy practices, and its limitations. Section 10.3 reflects on the advantages and challenges of being rooted in ethnography. Section 10.4 discusses the generalisability of the findings of the study. Section 10.5 makes suggestions for Indian teacher professional development and practice and Section 10.6 for future research. Finally, Section 10.7 provides a concluding comment on the thesis.

10.2 Addressing the research questions
This study has explored the home and school literacy practices of children in a poor, rural village in India and the beliefs of their caregivers and teachers shaping these practices. Embedded in sociocultural theory, it has done this with the purpose of highlighting the cultural and purposeful nature of children’s practices with the following research questions:

In what manner are five children’s home and school literacy practices in a rural village in India culturally and personally meaningful to them?

- How are the children’s home and school literacy practices shaped by their Discourses?
- How do children’s home and school literacy practices reflect their funds of knowledge?
- How do the children’s home and school literacy practices represent their identities?
- How are children’s home and school literacy practices related to each other?

This study finds the home and school literacy practices of the children being shaped in a similar manner. Culturally, practices at both home and school are
shaped by the rules of the adult world and the child’s world. Again, in both spaces, these practices are the children’s interests when they are motivated by their own goals. Furthermore, their lack of engagement in their practices is also rooted in these goals. This conclusion is substantiated with the responses in the subsidiary research questions discussed next.

10.2.1 Discourses and children’s literacy practices
Children’s home and school literacy practices are being shaped by the same Discourses. Practices initiated by adults are framed by the serious learning Discourse, the dominant practice of the adult community which requires children to read and write by conforming to practices. On the other hand, those initiated by children are being shaped by the playful learning Discourse, the central practice of their peer cultures where-in children to read and write by improvising practices, that is, borrowing, blending, and adapting practices of their various cultural worlds.

10.2.2 Funds of knowledge and children’s literacy practices
Children’s home and school literacy practices are stimulated by children’s funds of knowledge. In both spaces, children’s playful practices are their own funds of knowledge, practices which children improvise by drawing on their multiple cultural repositories. Children’s serious practices at both home and school tend to draw on their funds of knowledge rooted in the adult world. At the same time, children may draw on their own funds of knowledge while engaging with these practices motivated by their identities as learners.

10.2.3 Identities and children’s literacy practices
Children’s home and school literacy practices can be identified as their interests when they are shaped by their identities. In both spaces, children’s playful practices are motivated by their identities. Their serious practices are their interests when they are motivated by their identities. Furthermore, children’s lack of interest in their literacy practices is also embedded in their identities.
10.2.4 Relationship between home and school literacy practices

By and large, the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices provides evidence of a “one-way traffic” (Marsh, 2003) from the school to the home. As a result, children were drawing on their school-based funds of knowledge while engaging with print at home, but the school did not make place for their funds of knowledge rooted in their home and peer cultures.

10.3 Theoretical contributions and reflections

Research that has explored how the home-school relationship shapes children’s literacy practices provides evidence of considerable theoretical hybridity. Studies have been framed by sociocultural theory, sociolinguistics, multimodality, and sociological theory (discussed in Chapter 2). While few, arguably, reflecting the theoretical hybridity of the field, sociocultural studies form possibly the largest part of this literature and are situated in both high-income and middle- and low-income nations (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Li, 2002, 2007; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994). This study has also been framed by sociocultural theory and contributes to this literature in various ways.

Sociocultural researchers who have explored children’s home and/or school literacy practices have tended to discuss its cultural nature. They have shown practices at home and school to be either culturally “serious” (Gregory & Williams, 2000) or “playful” (Dyson, 1997, 2003). The former are rooted in the rules of the adult world which require children to adhere to practices (Gregory & Williams, 2000). On the other hand, the latter are embedded in the rules of children’s peer cultures which enable children to engage with “syncretic” (Gregory & Williams, 2000) or “hybrid” (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Dyson, 1997, 2003) literacy practices that draw on their multiple cultural repositories. In agreement with past research, this study also finds children’s home and school literacy practices to be either playful or serious.

The personal nature of children’s literacy practices has been the subject of exploration for solely Dyson (1997, 2003). She focuses on the writing practices of individual children in writing-workshop classrooms in North America where
children draw on their own purposes for writing, and subsequently identifies these writing interests to be hybrid. While this study agrees with Dyson (1997), it arguably, enriches and contributes to her conclusion in various ways. First, it shines a light on children’s personal goals as readers and writers in a socio-cultural context where teachers at school and caregivers at home expect them to read and write by adhering to practices. Second, it illustrates children’s non-hybrid practices as their interests. Third, it illuminates on both reading and writing interests. Fourth, it provides evidence of children’s home literacy practices being their interests. Finally, it also highlights children’s lack of engagement in their literacy practices to be motivated by their purposes.

This has been possible for this study because it drew on Hedges and her colleagues (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) sociocultural theorisation of children’s interests. At their point of departure, the researchers identify children’s play, talk and goals for participation embedded in their peer cultures’ practices as their interests. Based on their examination of these, they theorise interests as children’s funds of knowledge-based practices (Moll et al., 1992) that are motivated by their recurring goals, facets of children’s identities as learners. They ask researchers to explore children’s practices at both home and school to identify these interests.

Undertaking this investigation with respect to Krish and Pooja’s practices has proved valuable in identifying their non-hybrid practices which are rooted in their persistent identities as learners as their interests. It has also helped in identifying their peer culture practices, other than their play and talk as their interests, namely, their drawings, and interactions with digital technology. These, in turn, have illuminated children’s funds of knowledge available in their homes and peer cultures. Arguably, this supports the study in fulfilling its larger objective of challenging deficit views shaping children’s schooling and providing conceptual resources for instruction. Last but not the least, the findings of this current study provide empirical evidence to support the theorisation of children’s interests put forward by Hedges and her colleagues (Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) and also widen its scope by extending it to primary-aged children.
While the use of Hedges and Cooper's (2016) theorisation of children's interests holds promise for helping researchers pay adequate attention to the personal nature of children's participation, it has one significant limitation. This limitation lies in the depth in fieldwork it requires to illuminate on children's identities. It demands an ethnography which is both extensive and intensive, that is, broad in its scope in documenting children's literacy practices at home and school, and rigorous in its comprehensive use of participant observation. So, such a study is perhaps a challenging undertaking in a PhD program, and I discuss all this in the next section.

The use of Gee’s (Gee, 2002, 2012, 2014) theorisation of Discourse and identity has also proved useful in avoiding a possible conflation between cultural rules shaping children's practices and their goals. Such a conflation was visible in Gregory and Williams (2000) examination of the syncretic “booksharing” practices of Bangladeshi siblings in England. The researchers observed younger siblings reading to older ones by blending their home and school reading practices but concluded that these practices were serious in nature. This is because the use of syncretic literacy did not allow the researchers to distinguish between what is, arguably, the playful nature of children's practices, and the children's ‘serious’ goals of being obedient students, like in their Bengali and Quran classes. On the other hand, the use of the Discourse lens allowed me to differentiate the serious nature of Krish’s school practices and his ‘playful’ identity as a reader.

In using the Discourse lens, this current study also contributes to past research by broadening the scope of studies within its gamut. previous studies which have explored how Discourses shape children’s literate identities has focussed on reading. Furthermore, they use talk data as the primary method for data collection. This study not only focuses of reading but also writing and uses participant observation as its principal method of data collection.

10.4 Methodological contributions and reflections
Sociocultural researchers who have investigated the relationship between children’s home and school literacy practices have been either rooted in ethnography (Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a; Li, 2002) or have used ethnographic techniques to collect data (Azuara & Reyes, 2011; Gregory, 2001; Gregory &
Williams, 2000; Li, 2007; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994). This current study is also methodologically framed by ethnography. Consequently, it is the first known research to endeavour a qualitative exploration of children’s home literacy practices in India and to do so with a rural community, and to illuminate the beliefs of parents and teachers.

The study has, arguably, been able to use ethnography to a greater advantage than previous studies because of the extensive and intensive nature of data collection. Most previous sociocultural researchers have either restricted themselves to the school (Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2013a; Lisanza, 2011; Sahni, 1994) or the home (Li, 2002, 2007). Plausibly, Dyson’s (1997, 2003) success at illustrating children’s personal goals shaping their practices is rooted in her focus on classrooms where teachers are asking children to draw on them to compose. This has not been possible for Sahni (1994) and Lisanza (2011) who researched in skill-based classrooms. On the other hand, Li’s (2002, 2007) research on children’s home literacy practices, gives primacy to caregiver beliefs than children’s practices.

Different from these researchers, Gregory and Williams (2000) investigate children’s home and school practices, but unlike this current study do not use participant observation, the “central method of ethnography” for a sustained period in children’s homes, thus, preventing them from highlighting the personal goals shaping children’s practices (Delamont, 2002, p. 7). The reasons for this, in all likelihood, are two-fold. One, the rules of being a “good guest” in Sitara are different from those in England (Yee & Andrews, 2006). Two, the cultural affinity between myself and the participant children in this study being of a similar Indian origin, is not available to the researchers in England. Consequently, while I did not face social barriers preventing me from being with the children for most of their waking hours, for various days together, this would have not been possible for Gregory and Williams (2000). Moreover, my Indian origin also provided me with insider knowledge of the serious nature of children’s practices which as Gregory and Ruby (2010) argue can be a challenge for researchers who are of different ethnicity from their participants.
Unlike Gregory and Williams (2000), researching in a rural village in Mexico, Azuara and Reyes (2011) used participant observation intensively. The first author undertook fieldwork, staying in the village and collecting data over two, 6-month long periods. The researcher and the participants also seemed to be of a similar ethnicity. However, despite her extensive fieldwork and insider advantage, she does not focus on children’s personal goals. Thus, the synergy between methodology and theory in the current study enables me to highlight the concurrently, cultural, and personal nature of children’s practices.

Finally, this study also contributes to debates around anticipatory ethical regulation concerning informed consent (Delamont & Atkinson, 2018; Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). The ethical guidelines provided by BERA (2011) advise researchers to obtain consent from participants prior to the initiation of data collection. While I did obtain verbal consent from my participant children and their families when I started visiting their homes, I requested them to sign consent forms only towards the end of my first two weeks in their homes. I did this to get informed consent from the children and their families.

My participant children and their families lived in a poor, rural village in India and their life experiences and my research imperatives had little meeting ground. Observing me during the first round of data collection, allowed them to understand how I was collecting and recording data. It also enabled them to ask questions about my purpose for undertaking the study, as well as opportunities to refuse me access, if they so wished to, for the next phase of my data collection. The pleasure that the children took in signing their consent forms, did, I believe, provide evidence that this consent was meaningful to them, and I doubt if this would have been the case had I asked them to give my signed consent on the first day in their homes. Thus, I would argue ethnographic methods were a resource if not a necessity in helping me gain informed consent from the children and their families in this agrarian village in India.

While the use of ethnography allowed me to collect rich data about children’s home and school literacy practices, processing and analysing this data took considerable time. My decision to keep the scope of this study broad, including both children’s home and school practices, required me to spend long hours in
the field collecting data. Towards the end of the second month of my data collection, I felt the need to keep my audio recorder on at all times in children’s homes because my fatigue that had set in temporally affecting my ability to write detailed fieldnotes when I reached home. This, inadvertently, led me to collect about 440 hours of audio data which took time to process.

On my return to England, I started working with a multimodal conceptualisation of literacy encompassing children’s play and oral practices. I transcribed all the audio files for all my four participant children. This also contributed to the longer duration of the study. Eventually, when I analysed children’s practices, I focused on the three children whose home lives provided a clearer picture of their print-based practices, namely, Krish, Pooja and Vijay. However, in the interest of time, I decided against writing Vijay’s case study. Thus, while ethnography has enabled the study to collect data which has complemented its use of a sociocultural framework, choosing from this data, and processing it, took more time than expected as it necessitated selection and focussing on a lesser number of the case study children.

10.5 Generalisability of the findings

What professional contribution can be made through close observation of small numbers of children, given the thousands of children in our schools? To answer that question, one might turn it on itself and ask, what can be done with thousands of children, but count them?

Dyson, 2008, p.117

For more than 20 years of research focused on children’s literacy learning, Dyson (1997, 2003, 2013a, 2018) has examined children’s practices using ethnographic case-studies. Consequently, she argues that while case study research does not involve producing law-like generalisations which are applicable across time and space, they do provide a “means for identifying and talking about the dimensions and dynamics of …learning” (Dyson, 2008, p. 117).

While researchers working within the qualitative tradition seem to agree with Dyson (2008) that interpretive case-studies do not involve predicting outcomes,
they do not reject the idea that findings from one situation can inform decision making in other contexts. For some, the onus of responsibility for making connections between the case and the world lies largely with the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Stake, 2000), while for others it requires the researcher to design and conduct the research in ways that allows readers to make inferences for a larger population (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000).

Agreeing with the former view, Stake (2000) argues that people can make “naturalistic generalisations” about what they learn from a case to other relevant contexts based on their knowledge of people and how things are done. On a similar note, Lincoln and Guba (2000) explain that case studies offer “working hypothesis” and readers judge the “transferability” of their hypothesis to other cases based on the “fit” that they see between the case and the situations they encounter. At the same time, both underscore the need for the researcher to provide a “full and thorough knowledge of the particular” to help readers generalise (Stake, 2000, p. 22).

Supporting the latter view, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) argue that while processes of naturalistic generalisation and transferability will always be utilised by readers, case study researchers “must be directed towards drawing general conclusions” (p. 102). In turn, they recommend that researchers need to either conduct a study with the objective of making theoretical inferences or present evidence to allow readers to empirically generalise based on the cases. They explain that the former involves studying contrasting cases and reaching probabilistic conclusions about social phenomenon.

This study also claims generalisability through theoretical inference. The two contrasting cases for this study are Krish and Pooja, one viewing himself as a competent reader and the other viewing herself as a non-reader and the social phenomena under investigation were their literacy practices. Consequently, the study shows through these cases that children’s literacy practices are their interests when they are rooted in their identities. Moreover, the lack of interest in practices is also rooted in identities.
10.5 Suggestions for policy and practice

Indian policy documents that envision school and teacher education in India, namely, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 for school education (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2005) and the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009 (National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), 2009) describe pedagogy as “child-centred” and epistemologically rooted in a constructivist philosophy. Subsequently, they identify learners as “active”, conceptualise learning as an individual “process of…construction of knowledge” and view interaction as a resource in the teaching-learning process (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2005, pp. 17–18; National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), 2009).

Subsequently, NCF 2005 views “input-rich communicational environments…a prerequisite for language learning, whether first or second” (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2005, p. 39). It underscores the need for children reading with understanding and identifies textbooks, learner-chosen texts, class libraries, texts in more than one language, magazines, newspapers, and other authentic materials, as useful inputs for achieving this objective. On a similar note, the Position Paper on the Teaching of Indian Languages 2006 views the child as a writer who is “encouraged and trained to choose her own topic, organise her ideas, and write with a sense of audience” (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2006, p. 10). Shoudering the responsibility of re-conceptualising the curriculum and pedagogy for teacher professional development in India, the NCFTE 2009 draws on NCF 2005 and aspires to train teachers “to teach for meaning and understanding” (Batra, 2014; Nag et al., 2016, p. 17).

However, rooted in constructivism, both these documents identify children’s literacy practices within an “autonomous” model of literacy (Street, 1995, 1997) where their school’s practices are accepted as the ‘correct’ ways of engaging with print. An epistemological shift for policy to sociocultural theory would allow teachers, teacher educators, researchers, education-based NGOs, and administrators of education to broaden their vision and recognise children’s
literacy practices rooted in their home and peer cultures as authentic practices which require space in the classroom. Furthermore, their peer culture practices, including their play, talk, drawings, and, arguably, their interactions with digital technology, would also get their due place in the literacy classroom.

Children’s play, arguably, the subscript of their peer cultures, offers a multifaceted resource for their literacy learning. Watching children pretend-play helps teachers learn about their students, their funds of knowledge rooted in their home, community and peer cultures (Cremin et al., 2014; Hedges, 2015; Hedges et al., 2011) and their goals as learners (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). Enacting cultural storylines that children have read or wish to write about, strengthens their relationships with reading and writing (Dyson, 1997). Literacy-infused pretend-play also allows children to engage with print in ‘real’ social situations (Marsh, 1999). Similarly, other peer culture practices including drawings and interactions with audio-visual media have the potential to deepen a teacher’s knowledge of her students and their interactions with reading and writing. Last but not in the least, adopting this culturally sensitive “ideological” model of literacy which makes space for children’s funds of knowledge and identities would go a long way in addressing the unequal relationship between the teacher and the taught visible in schools today (Street, 1995, 1997).

Sound initial and continued teacher education are crucial for the preparation of teachers. In the absence of such pre-service and in-service teacher courses, teachers will continue to bring their own “experiential, cultural and ideological background to shape classroom practices” including their beliefs about the children and their families (Nag et al., 2016, p. 47). NCFTE 2009 underscores the need for “social exclusion of children who come from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), minority and other communities, girls and children with diverse learning needs” and to “equip teachers to overcome their biases in this regard and to develop professional capacities to address these challenges” (National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), 2009, p. 13). Consequently, while describing the teacher’s role, it starts as follows:
Teachers need to be prepared to care for children, enjoy to be with them, seek knowledge, own responsibility towards society and work to build a better world, develop sensitivity to the problems of the learners, commitment to justice and zeal for social reconstruction (ibid, p. 20).

Undoubtedly, teacher education programs sanctioned by NCFTE 2009 will continue to give due importance to developing teachers who value inclusion and social justice. However, it would be fair to say that these programs would not be successful without the teachers’ will. Teachers in India, as in any other parts of the world, are a part of a socio-cultural fabric that is often divided along various lines including gender, caste, and class. So, to be able to identify all the children who sit in their classrooms as educable and not view them otherwise because of their ascribed identities requires teachers to, perhaps, go the distance, and show an ethical commitment to their children.

**10.6 Suggestions for future research**

The 1960s and 70s was a time that various ethnographers in North America explored the schooling experiences of children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Talking about one of these studies Spindler and Spindler (1983) explain that the study portrayed “the intense brutality of a system that does not seem to ‘see’ children” (p. 666). About 50 years later, this ethnographic study from India has sought to help the teachers, teacher educators or administrators in India to “see” its children, by documenting five young learners’ everyday literacy lives at home and school.

Past research in India has almost exclusively focussed on teachers and teaching in state schools. It has continued to provide evidence of this schooling being characterised by teacher-led instruction which is rooted in a decontextualised view of knowledge and deficit thinking about the students and their families (in Chapter 2). This study does examine the nature of school instruction but also turns its gaze to the children and their learning. In doing so, it has been able to illustrate the extremely agentic character of children’s literacy learning and has done so for, perhaps, one of the poorest sections of Indian society (and the world). It has been able to show that children’s homes do not lack resources but are rich in funds of knowledge that children have authority over and whose use
offers them pleasure. Consequently, it has successfully challenged the deficit view that children belonging to disadvantaged backgrounds are not interested learners and that their homes do not have resources to encourage learning.

Thus, this study argues that if researchers in India, and possibly in the Indian sub-continent, are interested in being a part of the solution to the ‘problem’ that state schooling presents, they need to help the teachers believe in their students by helping them “see” them for the keen learners they are (Spindler & Spindler, 1983). This would be possible if researchers in different parts of India were committed to providing constructive accounts of children’s practices. Consequently, this study posits that a research agenda that is focussed on children’s learning needs to replace the current, arguably, unhelpful emphasis on teaching in India.

10.7 The concluding comment

In the epilogue of their book, Gregory and Williams (2000) argue that children “have a treasure trove upon which to draw” (p. 203) while engaging with their school literacies. This study agrees with the researchers and argues that this treasure trove is rooted in their volition, their interests, which, I argue needs to be afforded space in the Indian classroom. At the same time, it appreciates that poorly trained teachers working in under-resourced classrooms need support for making this possible.
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Appendix 1: Sanction letter from District Education Office, Udaipur

Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology

The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1908 555 354
Fax +44 (0) 1908 555 429
cre@enquiries@open.ac.uk
www.open.ac.uk

Sahayog,

Shri Gajendra Pratap Singh,
District Education Officer,
Udaipur

This is to certify that the project titled "Impact of Technology on Learning Outcomes" has been approved and sanctioned by the District Education Office, Udaipur.

Date: 15.05.2015

Sahayog,

Namita Babbar
Principles Officer
Sanction Letter

[Stamp]
निम्न विशेष आयोग [कार्यालय सार्वजनिक शिक्षा, उड़ानपुर]

उपाध्ये: - जिले/प्रांशु/उपग्रह/लैपटॉप/लैपटॉप/2015/

1684 - दिनांक-26.6.15

याथा: कलिका ने जन्म लेने का आदेश दिया है।

उपेक्षा निर्धारण करने के लिए आयोग ने कार्यकारी शिक्षा मंत्री के लिए स्थानीय रूप से रिकॉर्ड्स अधिकृत बनाना चाहिए।

इन स्थानीय अधिकृत बनाने की अनुमति अदान की जाती है।

[प्रारंभ की ओर से हस्ताक्षर]

[प्रारंभ की ओर से हस्ताक्षर]

[प्रारंभ की ओर से हस्ताक्षर]
Appendix 2: Sanction letter from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Open University

From Dr Duncan Banks
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee
duncan.banks@open.ac.uk
Extension 59198

To Namrita Batra, CREET, FELS

Subject “Home and School Literacy Practices of Children in Rural India.”

HREC Ref HREC/2015/2050/Batra/1
AM5 ref
Submitted 13 July 2015
Date 14 July 2015

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. Please note that the OU research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of grant awarding bodies and their Frameworks for Research Ethics.

Please make sure that any question(s) relating to your application and approval are sent to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk quoting the HREC reference number above. We will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible so that your research is not delayed in any way.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Regards,

Dr Duncan Banks
Chair OU HREC

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (number RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (number SC 036302)
HREC_2015-2050-Batra-1-favourable-opinion
Appendix 3: Parent consent form

Parent consent form

for

A PhD research project, Open University, England

Home and school literacy practices of children in rural India

Name of participant:

Name of researcher:

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.

2. I understand that my participation will involve the researcher spending time in my house, observing home activities, talking to me, spending time with my child, observing and talking to him/her.

3. I have been informed that:
   
   (a) I am free to withdraw from the project till the end of January 2016, without explanation or prejudice.

   (b) My participation in the research will be both audio and video recorded and photographs will be taken, as per need.

   (c) The project is for research. This might involve subsequent publication and my identity will be kept confidential in this process. The photographs used for publication will not reveal the identity of my children.

   (d) The summarized research report (in Hindi) will be provided to me.

Participant signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Appendix 4: Teacher consent form

Teacher Consent Form

For

A PhD research project, Open University, England

Home and school literacy practices of children in rural India

Name of participant:

Name of researcher:

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.

2. I understand that my participation will involve the researcher spending time in my class and/or talking to me.

3. I have been informed that:

   (a) I am free to withdraw from the project till the end of January 2016, without explanation or prejudice.

   (b) The project is for research. This might involve subsequent publication and my identity and the identity of my school will be kept confidential in this process.

   (c) My participation in the research will be both audio and video recorded, as per need.

   (d) The summarized research report (in Hindi) will be provided to me.

Participant signature:  
Date:
Appendix 5: Head-teacher consent form

Head-Teacher consent form

for

A PhD research project, Open University, England

Home and school literacy practices of children in rural India

Name of participant:

Name of researcher:

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.

2. I understand that my participation will involve the researcher spending time in my school and talking to me.

3. I have been informed that:

   (a) I am free to withdraw from the project till the end of January 2016, without explanation or prejudice.

   (b) The project is for research. This might involve subsequent publication and my identity and the identity of my school will be kept confidential in this process.

   (c) My participation in the research will be audio recorded.

   (d) The summarized research report (in Hindi) will be provided to me.

Participant signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
Appendix 6: Child consent form

Dear (name of student)

I am studying in college in a country called England. Just like you study, Language, Mathematics and Environmental Sciences in school, I am studying a subject called research at my college. As a part of my studies, I have taken on a project. As a part of this project, I will try to understand what you do at school and at home. This can be related to your studies, play etc. I will spend time with you throughout the day and talk to you in the process. I will be like your shadow; I will go wherever you go.

I will need to video record what you are doing at various points both inside and out-of-school. I will also need to audio record what you are saying at various points. I will also take photographs of you and your activities. This is because I do not want to forget what you are saying and doing. At the end of this process, I will write a story about you, which I will also give to you to read. I will give you a fictitious name in the story so that no one knows that I have written about you. At any point during this period, if you do not wish for me to be around or do not want me to audio or video record you, do let me know. I will comply with your wishes.

If for some reason, you do not wish to be a part of my research project, I would understand. There is no compulsion on you to do so but I hope that you do.

I look forward to spending time with you.

Yours,

Namrita
Appendix 7: Information leaflet

A PhD Research project at the Open University, England

Home and School Literacy Practices of Children in Rural India

Who is the researcher?

Namrita Batra is a student at the Open University, England. She is pursuing her PhD at the university. As a part of her research degree, she is required to undertake this research study. The study is being supervised by Dr Steven Hutchinson, Prof Teresa Cremin, and Dr Prithvi Shrestha from Open University.

What is the research project?

The research study focuses on the home and school literacy practices of children. It aims to explore the experiences and views of children, parents, language teachers and the head-teacher in the process.

How will the data be collected?

Data will be collected from children, their parents, their language teachers and the head-teacher of the school. It will be collected using the following methods: participant observation and fieldnotes; oral accounts; and documentary evidence and material artefacts. Data will be audio recorded, video-recorded, and photographs will be taken as per the requirement of the research process, both within the school and the classroom and within children’s homes and surrounding areas.

How will the data collected be protected and stored?

All the audio and video data collected will be stored on the Open University Server for 5 years from the period of data collection. After this period, the researcher will decide whether she wants to hold on to the data.

Is your consent voluntary?

Your consent is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw consent till the end of January 2016. If you withdraw, none of your data (written, audio/video recorded/photographs) will be used by the researcher for the study.

Will your identity be revealed?

The project is for research. This might involve subsequent publication and the identity of the school, the teachers or the individual pupils and their families will be kept confidential in this process. The data of this study will also be shared with supervisors and peers during the analysis and writing.

Will the research reports be shared with you?
A written summary of the report will be provided to you in due course. This summary will be in Hindi.

If you have any more questions, please do ask. After the period of data collection, I am contactable at:

Mrs Namrita Batra

(Email and phone number provided)

And my principal supervisor is contactable at:

Dr Steven Hutchinson

(Email provided)
Appendix 8: The codes and themes for adult Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers' beliefs</th>
<th>Descriptive codes</th>
<th>Sub-codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Authority</td>
<td>The teacher as akin to a parent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Authority Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher as the guru</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher as the morally superior to the children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher’s superior urban status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher as a speaker of Hindi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher as the responsible citizen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers have a right to hit children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interest</td>
<td>Children disinterested in studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student interest in learning Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children only interested in play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s parents disinterested in their schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill-based literacy instruction</td>
<td>Emphasis on the alphabet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skill-based literacy instruction Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of emphasis on the library when children are learning to read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of basal texts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on handwriting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on the correct answer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ beliefs</td>
<td>Descriptive codes</td>
<td>Sub-codes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Authority</strong></td>
<td>Children must listen to the teacher</td>
<td>Teacher authority Discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers have a right to hit children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers need to pay attention to the children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student interest in learning</strong></td>
<td>Children need to be responsible about studying at home</td>
<td>Student interest in learning Discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children need to be responsible about going to school regularly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill-based literacy instruction</strong></td>
<td>Children need to learn the alphabet to read</td>
<td>Skill-based literacy instruction Discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children need to do as teachers say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 9: Examples of transcription

Example 1

We will let them study till they want to study. We will see good times and bad times, but we will continue to send them to school. If they decide not to study then we can do little about it, but we will send them to school till they want to. We will not tell them to leave school if they want to study.

Example 2

I believe that if a child has studied and got a degree but does not have moral values, then his education is completely useless. Children must not only study but also inculcate moral values. Children learn moral values within their family, first. The first teacher is the mother and the other adults in the family. The child comes to his teachers when he is six years old. Children are not taught moral values in their homes over here. Even then I try my best to inculcate moral values...
in the children. I tell them to be honest. I explain again and again. Our Indian tradition also tells us that the gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh, reside in our hands. I tell the children to get up in the morning to cover their face with their hands and remember God. They don’t need to light a lamp for this, just feel the presence of God mentally. They should get up in the morning and touch their elder’s feet.

(Chapter 4, pages 95-96)

Example 3

Jagdish: Madam is this your job?

[...]
Researcher: This is not my job. I am studying.

Jagdish (in an exasperated tone): How much more does one have to study?
Researcher: You might have to. You can have long periods of study.

Gayatri and Vijay asked together:
Gayatri: You leave your child and come here?
Vijay: Don’t you get a salary?
Researcher: I get a stipend through the period of my study.

Shankar: What does that mean?
Researcher: A stipend is an amount of money you get while you are studying for household expenditures and the expenditure I incur when I come here.

Gayatri (asks again): You leave your child and come here?
Researcher: Yes, my daughter lives very far away.

Jagdish: Delhi?
Researcher: Further away, she is in another country. There is a country called England. The English, do you remember studying about the English ruling our country?
Gayatri: Yes madam.
Researcher: Yes, that country.

[...]

Gayatri and Shankar asked together:
Gayatri: Madam, don’t you cry?
Shankar: You must miss her?
Researcher: Yes, I do.

[...]
Gayatri: Madam, doesn’t your daughter cry?
Researcher: Her father is taking care of her. She is older now; she does not cry. She is five years old.
Gayatri: Madam, I would be scared if I was in her situation.

The red colour portion of the transcripts marks the deletions represented as […] in the above transcript.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jagdish</th>
<th>Madam आपकी नाकरी है, कि अभी आते हो यहां पे गांव में, नाकरी है?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>क्या?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagdish</td>
<td>Madam आपकी नाकरी है कई madam, नौकरी है क्या?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>नौकरी नहीं है, पढाई है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagdish</td>
<td>पढाई और क्या madam ।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>पढाई होती है, लम्बी-लम्बी पढाई होती है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>छोटी बच्ची मेल कर आते हो</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>थो पया नहीं देते?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>पढाई के समय एक छात्रवृत्ति देते हैं। ऐसा होता है न छात्रवृत्ति मिलती है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shankar</td>
<td>क्या होता है?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>छात्रवृत्ति होती है, मतलब के आपको जैसे अंग्रेजों कॉलेज में पढने के लिए अंग्रेज आपको खाना-पीना का पैसा देते हैं। और जैसे मैं इधर आती हं, तो उसका पैसा देते हैं, यूं।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>आप madam छोटी बच्ची मेल कर आते हो?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>मेरी बेटी तो बहुत दूर है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagdish</td>
<td>दिल्ली?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>दिल्ली से भी दूर है। एक अलग देश में है। इंगलैंड कर के एक देश है। अंग्रेज। तुम्हें याद, तुम्हें पता है न अंग्रेजों ने हमारे देश की, देश पर राज किया था।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>हां madam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>वो वाला देश है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ganesh tries to take my cell and I say no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>थो कटू रो madam ? थो कटू रो madam ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>हां?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>थो अटे कटू रो?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>उदयपुर</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>थोर सोरी?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>मारे सोरी रहे इंगलैंड।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagdish</td>
<td>किसके घर पर?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>तू हिन्दी क्यों नहीं बोल रहा है प्रकाश?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>Madam आप रोते नहीं हो?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shankar</td>
<td>याद आती तो होगी।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>आती है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagdish</td>
<td>madam आप एक दिन Shankar के घर पे रहने, वहां नवरात नहीं होगा, नवरात?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>हां</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagdish</td>
<td>अच्छा धूम-धाम करेगे madam उस दिन, हां madam, हां।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>Madam छोरी कटे है?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>छोरी इंगलैंड है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>आपकी लड़की?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>Madam, आपके, आपकी</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>आप कभी नहीं जाते उधर?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>जाऊंगी जनवरी में।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>Madam आपकी बच्ची रोती नहीं दे।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>रोटीई। उसके पापा उसका ख्याल रख रहे हैं अभी। अब वो बड़ी है तो अब नहीं रोती। पांच साल की है।</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>Madam हमको तो ले जाए, तो हम डरप जाते।</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Chapter 4, pages 76-77)