

## INTRODUCTION



I sat waiting on a humid October morning in the entranceway to a house in which I had recently become a paying guest. The year was 1996 and the place was Varanasi, a city in northern India. The clatter of the gate latch meant that it was time to go to school—and to work. Mr. Sahni, my former Hindi teacher, had offered to introduce me to the principal of his daughter’s school, which was called Saraswati Balika Vidyalaya. Saraswati is the goddess of music, culture, and learning; Balika means young girl; and Vidyalaya means school. Children dressed in maroon and white ran past or smiled from the backs of passing rickshaws as Mr. Sahni, his daughter Puja, and I approached the school’s front gates. The cheerful noise grew deafening. Once we stepped through the entranceway of the school, drawing a stiff salute from the guard, Puja ran to join the line-up for the morning assembly. Mr. Sahni led me down a covered walkway and away from the action. On seeing us, another guard drew back the curtain from the doorway at the end of the walkway and entered the room. He reappeared after a few seconds to offer *praṇāṃ*, placing his hands together, and said in polite Hindi, “come” (*āie*).

The principal sat behind a massive desk. Mr. Sahni did not sit, but stood behind me, and mentioned that I would like to talk to her, students, and teachers during the year. She cracked a smile when I began to explain that I was interested in education in India and that I would like to visit her school. I knew that my nervous and halting Hindi prompted her expression. I had anticipated the need for proof of who I was, and offered to provide a copy of my affiliation with an Indian

university and my registration papers from the Superintendent of Police (SP).<sup>1</sup> The principal said that there would be no need—that I could do my work, and that she would see to it that I would not misbehave in her school. She then said something that would help to set the stage for my project. She explained that it was good that I was to spend time at the school to learn Hindi because this is India’s “national language” (*rāṣṭrabhāṣā*). “This is a Hindi-medium school” (*yaha skūl to hindī mīḍiam hai*), she said, adding in English, “This school, its medium is Hindi.” But, she added, I should spend time at an English-medium school so that I would be comfortable in my “mother tongue” (*mātrabhāṣā*). She concluded with a surprise. She explained that her school was for girls in the ninth- and tenth-grade levels, and the intercollege levels eleventh and twelfth. She suggested that I visit the school upstairs too.

As we walked back down the hallway toward the staircase, Mr. Sahni explained that he had no connection with the principal upstairs and that I should be fine alone. I knew that he had to get to work and would not say so. I wandered toward the curtained room with the sign *adhyāpikā* (female principal). I knocked on the doorframe and heard “who is it?” (*kaun hai*). I showed my face and the principal, sitting behind a desk identical to the one downstairs, motioned for me to sit. She pressed a buzzer on her desk that brought a young man, and ordered two cups of tea. I introduced myself and asked whether I might visit the school over the next year. The principal talked for nearly half an hour about the school’s mission to love children, to serve in this role in support of parents and goddess, and to instill discipline with love, not corporal punishment. In an abrupt shift, the principal then told me that I would need to bring a copy of my passport, visa, letter of permission from the Government of India, and registration with the SP. When I explained that I had already met with the principal downstairs, the principal concluded our meeting by explaining that it was good that I should come to her school too because the Hindi in lower grade levels would be better for me since Hindi is not my “mother tongue.”

The next day, I made my own way to the gate of a school whose principal was the sister of a friend of mine from previous visits to Varanasi. On my way, I noted that the school announced itself with a giant sign painted on the side of the four-story building, “Seacrest School.” Cars vied for space at the front gate in numbers rivaling rickshaws. The guard gave a salute and another man in uniform ran from the front of the school to greet me. He took me across the courtyard and sat me in a waiting area in front of the principal’s office. Another man

entered from an adjacent room, motioned for me to remain seated, and knocked on the principal's door. This time the principal began the conversation, in English, about her sister. Yet another man brought us two bottles of Pepsi and substantial snacks. The principal and I chatted about her sister for half an hour or so. Finally, she asked what she could do for me. I explained that I was interested in education in India and that I would like to visit her school. She responded with "no problem," and proceeded to anticipate my research practices, giving her consent to each in turn. She received several telephone calls and messages relayed by employees while we chatted, and I took yet another interruption as an excuse to go. As I prepared to say goodbye, she explained that I would be comfortable working in her school because English is my "mother tongue," but that in order to hear "the real Hindi," I should also visit a Hindi-medium school. "Hindi is our national language, *rāṣṭrabhāṣā* as we say."

Tea versus Pepsi, rickshaws versus cars, one assistant versus several, mother tongues versus national languages, Hindi- versus English-medium: I sensed that differences between the schools aligned across a set of domains even though I had little knowledge of the domains themselves. During the next year and shorter visits over the next ten, I would find that the issue of a school's language medium involves further distinctions. Whether a school teaches in Hindi or English resonated through conversations in Varanasi about what is native versus foreign, national versus international, government versus private, cheap versus expensive, mobile versus stationary, and rural versus urban. I came to learn that people's reflections on schools in India often entail reflections on languages, and reflections become meaningful and recognizable because, among types of schools, what is considered to be Hindi contrasts with what is considered to be English. Indeed, the contrast has become more significant for those who have grabbed so much media and scholarly attention in contemporary India: the new middle classes. This book considers the ways in which language-medium schooling in India has structured the emergence of social class distinctions amid political-economic shifts in the wake of India's New Economic Policy (NEP) of the early 1990s.

Many scholars have shown that nationalist activity often includes the engineering of a national language. Such activity often sets its sights on schools and other institutions as places where the national language will be used and through which it will be spread. A predicament in many nations is that the languages that have been engineered as these nations' own have not been the languages that figure in images of participation in economic relationships involving the largest capital trans-

actions or the most distant places. One cannot, however, use a nation's success or failure to inculcate a language of international salience to understand that nation's educational system. In order to understand better the educational practices of people in most of the world, one must consider that languages of participation in a world beyond the nation or the local emerge as meaningful in multiple ways. Often, the same language will be tied up with types of people, institutions, and nations in different ways in a single community. In this account, what English is and why it matters depends to a great degree on what Hindi is and why it matters. The same can be said for types of schools: English-medium schooling draws its significance from Hindi-medium schooling, and vice versa. The self and images of the nation figure centrally in the differences between language-medium schools. Hindi-medium schooling, for example, can evoke pride or prompt derision.

Schooling in India is not just a matter of projecting different images of the self and nation. The picture that emerges depends on the speaker and her own educational history. Sometimes what attendance at a Hindi-medium school can mean depends on whether someone is involved in talk or in another activity, such as reading advertisements for schools around town or in the newspaper. People engage in practices and pursuits that are always already entangled in meanings and uses of languages, institutions, and places. The ways in which practices and pursuits emerge as meaningful in the world often provide evidence that both languages and institutions are useful in different ways and often are unequal. Institutions, the practices they entail, and the places with which they are associated can resonate closer to or further from the center of what is understood to constitute the nation. Language-medium schooling in India can be used to reveal that places are not simply locations within the nation, but are rather loci in which different possibilities of national belonging exist. The book considers the ways in which language-medium schooling provides organization to middle-class life in the city of Varanasi, but also considers the ways in which schooling reveals its unequal and often contradictory qualities. The central conundrum is that the notion of a national language resonates with the city of Varanasi and, in so doing, can relegate the city to the periphery.

### **The Political-Economic Context of Education in Contemporary India**

This study emerges from a period of political-economic shift in India that has seen an increasingly complex relationship develop between

schooling and social class. The changing policy of the central government has fueled the rise of what many pundits, journalists, and laypeople call India's new middle classes. It is difficult to pin down who belongs to the new middle classes and how the groups have come to exist. William Mazzarella, for example, argues that it is more fruitful to approach the middle class in India as an emerging discursive space oriented to concerns such as "Hindu nationalism, consumerist liberalization, and the pluralization/fragmentation of national politics" rather than as a group to be defined by a single criterion and then counted (2005: 1). Mazzarella is following Partha Chatterjee (1997) in noting that the middle class in India has never attained majority status, much less hegemony. What is certain is that a sea change in discourses of class in India has occurred; what is less certain is how to describe the importance of such changes in people's lives.

A sure sign of the complexity of class transitions in India is the fact that different scholars as well as indigenous and international media have pointed to different policy measures of the Government of India as origins. Among these measures are Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's 1973 Pay Commission, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1986 efforts to loosen investment and licensing restrictions, and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's 1991 moves toward liberalizing the economy and privatizing some areas of the government sector. Rajiv Gandhi, some have argued, turned toward consumption as a theme that would resonate with changes in economic policy during the 1980s: "If the tenets of Nehruvian development could be captured by symbols of dams and mass-based factories, the markers of Rajiv Gandhi's shifted to the possibility of commodities that would tap into the tastes and consumption practices of the urban middle classes" (Fernandes 2001: 152). With the middle classes in mind, Rajiv Gandhi's policies sought to dismantle some of the barriers to consumerism from the earlier era: "Rajiv Gandhi's vision substantially rested on the role of the middle classes. His vision was encapsulated in concrete economic policies that began to loosen up import regulations in order to allow an expansion of consumer goods (such as automobiles and washing machines), that could cater to middle- and upper-middle-class tastes; even his vision for village development included the slogan 'A computer for every village'" (Fernandes 2000a: 613).

Such policies initiated a departure from Nehruvian concerns with development focused on the poor: "During the late 1980s the government's economic policies promoted the growth of the private sector, industrialization geared to urban middle-class consumers, and the reduction of transfer payments from rich to poor organized by the state" (McKean 1996: 11). The promotion of consumerism and the with-

drawal of the state from a redistributive role were general characteristics of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's government. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's government's acceptance of the International Monetary Fund loan in 1991 fixed such trajectories. A stipulation of the loan included the further dismantling of protectionist economic policies, internal licensing, and redistribution schemes.

The emerging middle classes were and are anything but homogeneous, and the label links multiple, disparate groups in its modes of membership and display (K. Kumar 1998: 1394). The disparate quality of middle-class membership is often lost when the focus is on a particular employment niche. For example, call centers are the focus of much of the international news about new economic opportunities in India.<sup>2</sup> While some reports focus on the importance of English among the middle classes for such work, others foreground the declining fortunes in the country from which jobs are—ostensibly—being taken: “Images of middle class Indians working at computers now routinely flash on American television as the symbol of white-collar and service-sector job losses in the United States” (Fernandes 2006: xxvii). When reports of economic change in India do not focus on such new employment niches, however, they are largely celebratory. The current frenetic pace of growth contrasts with the economic situation of the four decades or so following independence. The earlier period is often described as an isolated slumber and the present as an awakening.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the new middle classes include people in a wide range of occupations and types of positions such as “urban professionals and managerial groups, commercial and entrepreneurial classes, white- and blue-collar employees as well as substantial rural landowners and farmers” (Chakravarty and Gooptu 2000: 91).

Education has increasingly involved the child in the family's struggle for class mobility, raising the stakes for performance in school, especially on exams. Purnima Mankekar notes such tension in the precarious position of those whose desires and aspirations have been fueled by liberalization: “All it would take is a layoff, a bad debt, or a failed examination on the part of one of their children, and many of them would slide right back into poverty” (1999: 9). Mankekar pays special attention to the double bind in which middle-class girls find themselves wherein education is oriented to the satisfaction of spouse and family.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the education of girls is increasingly seen as important, many people told Mankekar that a girl should be educated to provide a suitably interesting companion for her husband. In those cases in which a girl's education made work outside of the home possible, Mankekar notes the gendered dual burden of domes-

tic and professional labor. I can confirm Mankekar's insights. While I did know a handful of girls whose families supported their pursuit of higher education, most girls were being educated to the tenth- or twelfth-grade level in order to be suitably married and to be able to run a well-ordered household via "home science" courses in which hygiene, food procurement and preparation, and the management of household funds are taught.

Though she does not focus on them, Fernandes argues that schools take their place among the profusion of consumerist practices characteristic of the new middle classes by virtue of being "diploma-granting institutions which provide skills and credentials" (2000b: 90). Nita Kumar underlines the importance of education to the discursive space of the new middle classes in Varanasi: "The community and class background of these children, as befits a 'mainstream' group, has not been discussed at any length. They are from a class that forms the 'backbone of the nation,' that wants liberal education and secure 'service' jobs for its sons, marriages into service families for its daughters and now maybe careers as well, if in proper establishments" (2001: 270). Kumar's invocation of "service" (*sarvis*) and its presumption of educational attainment provide an excellent illustration of the emergence of the discursive space of the new middle classes and the maneuverability it brings into focus. In the Nehruvian era, "service," more marked than the more encompassing "job" (*naukarī*), or the yet more encompassing "work" (*kām*), often denoted an employment niche in the government sector, the apex of which is a position in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).<sup>5</sup> It is this sense of service that D.P. Pattanayak addresses when he writes that "developing third world languages" are "passports to governmental positions which control the economy" (1981: xvii). Entrance to the IAS is controlled by an exam that is administered by the central government and presupposes higher educational achievements in a standardized language, and employees are sent to their posts at the district level. Such posts, as well as lesser ones, are extremely desirable for their prestige, but also for their well-known perks and pensions.

In the post-Nehruvian era, however, "service" denotes a broader set of desirable jobs and the term is no longer used primarily to refer to a government post. A vignette illustrates the change. Sharma Dry Cleaners sits next to the small convenience store owned by the man who was my landlord during the first year of my field research. Mr. Sharma has three sons, from eldest to youngest, Raju, Ramesh, and Guddu. Raju opened a branch in Sigra, a neighborhood five kilometers away from his father's store, and Ramesh uses a motorcycle

to run orders between the stores as well as from and to customers' homes. Guddu was already known as an especially gifted student at the fourth-grade level (in 1997).

During a visit in 2005, I asked Mr. Sharma whether Guddu would join his brothers in the family business. His reply was cryptic: "We are waiting" (*ham intazār kar rahe hāi*). Guddu approached and explained that he had been working extremely hard studying for his twelfth-level exams. I asked about what he planned to do after school. He replied that everything depended on his exam results. If he did well, he would apply for admission to Banaras Hindu University in order to study accounting. He had developed an interest in computers, he remarked, and gently teased that he had tried, without success, to convince his father to generate receipts and keep records electronically. His father used the word "service" in order to explain, "accounting is good work" (*akaunṭing kī sarvis acchā kām hai*), but, waving his receipt book overhead, said that he would never entrust his business to computers because the electrical power in Varanasi comes and goes. When I expressed confusion, asking, "service is a government matter, no?" (*sarvis sarkār kī bāt hai, na*), Mr. Sharma replied vehemently that he lacked the connections necessary to acquire such a job for his sons, and that reservations for disadvantaged groups had made the prospects for getting such a job that much more difficult. Guddu reassured me that were he not able to gain entrance to the university, he could always join his brothers in the family business. With a sweep of his hand over the shop's linoleum counter, he concluded, "this is good service too" (*yaha bhī achhī sarvis hai*). This vignette shows the ways in which education has become linked to new careers such as digital accounting, but also the ways in which such educational possibilities themselves rest on the class status of those people supporting the student.

### **Schooling, Language, and the Reproduction of Class**

In social reproduction, "Up for grabs are what constitutes being skilled, what kinds of knowledge are permissible and useful, what work attitudes are acceptable, and by whose authority these are determined" (Katz 2004: x). The school is such an interesting site for the study of social reproduction because "School produces categories, assigns students to these categories, and directs their actions accordingly" (Doerr 2009: 1). The categories produced by school, in turn, exhibit "specific forms of difference and inequality" (Pollock and



Levinson 2011: 6). Some scholars have investigated individual educational institutions as sites for social and cultural reproduction because the school provides an arena in which differences in dress, talk, and other behaviors emerge in patterns to produce types of students. The behaviors of types of students, in turn, articulate with school policy in different and unequal ways. In classic cases, working-class Lads at Hammertown Boys enjoy “having a laff,” rejecting what they see as the conformity of the middle-class Ear’oles (Willis 1977); Burnouts at Belten High School eschew the corporate logic of class rank and individual success of the Jocks (Eckert 1989); and working-class Vatos at North Town High attract white youth marginalized from the “most popular, attractive standard-bearers for the school” (Foley 2010: 84). In all of these cases, the school works to reproduce large-scale social class membership with symbolic elements not easily related to class formation.

In order to explain the relationship between symbolic structures and the formation of groups, scholars of education have often utilized Pierre Bourdieu’s extension of the notion of capital from the economic to the social and symbolic. Bourdieu famously argued that education, like all human practice, involves the investment of time and body that requires and anticipates the transfer of the economic, in the form of wages and investments; the social, in the form of occupations, memberships, and contacts; and the symbolic, in the form of behaviors and dispositions betraying prestige and cultivation (1986).<sup>6</sup> Schools foreground intergenerational concerns in such investments and transfers: “Person, family, and class are mutually constituted through multiple capital conversions and the practices associated with them” (Rutz and Balkan 2009: 16). School entails an investment beyond the student, and the enormous resources expended on schools provide evidence that schools participate in the ways individuals, families, and governments anticipate the future and their place in it.

Bourdieu also points out that schools participate in the production of a special type of capital, educational capital. Educational capital is so valuable because it is underpinned by state sanction “with the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy which has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given moment in time” (1986: 248). In contemporary India, the production of educational capital is made especially complex by the selective participation of the state in schooling as well as by the ways in which educational bureaucracies become meaningful to peo-

ple in moments of reflection. This study focuses on multiple schools because among the schools themselves there is the production of different forms of educational capital depending on whether a school is Hindi- or English-medium. The language in which classroom activity predominantly occurs, among other differences, produces different images of students, different dispositions toward further schooling, and different notions of the difficulties faced by students. Whereas many studies focus on students' dispositions in a single school, this one draws attention to multiple schools because they help to constitute one another as recognizable institutions.

Bourdieu's notion of educational capital focuses attention on the fact that the school system in India entails a distinction between those institutions able and unable to provide the "legally guaranteed value" of educational credentials. On the one hand, there are highly selective schools far from Varanasi, some nationally and even internationally known, that have, since the colonial period, fostered the cosmopolitanism of elites. Sanjay Srivastava writes that the Doon School located in Dehradun, several hundred kilometers from Varanasi, has cultivated its own sense of being modern through the notion that "'uncivilized' existence is *elsewhere*" (1998: 198). He describes the practices of the civilized at the school: "the 'secular' morning assembly, student interaction which emulates life in the contractual space of the metropolis which does not inquire after the caste of its citizens, and the constant effort to establish the 'scientific temper' as the defining ethic of the post-colonized nation state" (1998: 198). Founded in 1935, the Doon School has produced many members of India's "post-colonial intelligentsia—journalists, editors, novelists, social scientists, [and] cultural functionaries of the state" (S. Srivastava 2003: 1016). No school of national (much less international) stature exists in Varanasi. Furthermore, many residents of the city told me that a student who had attended schools in Varanasi for any length of time would have little chance of ever being admitted to the Doon School. While such claims might have been apocryphal, they give the correct impression that Varanasi's own residents do not feel like they have access to a local institution that could confer a cosmopolitan and elite status.

On the other hand, there are many schools in Varanasi that do not play a part in fantasies of class mobility. Nita Kumar (2001), for example, reflects on her conversations with students from the Muslim weaver community in Varanasi attending Jamia Hamidia Rizvia, a school organized around sectarian divisions in Islam.<sup>7</sup> Students there hold dear the craft of weaving, an ideology of freedom, and an identification with local neighborhoods. Left out of their pedagogy

is the officially sanctioned history of the nation, a subject of school board-administered exams. Indeed, few schools with overt religious ties have managed to have their syllabus approved by a school board. A glaring exception is the “convent” school in Varanasi that holds a prominent role in the group of schools that can offer the “legally guaranteed value” of an education sanctioned by the state, and thus can provide a vehicle for fantasies of class advancement or reproduction.

Also excluded from pedagogy that enables students to compete for educational credentials are schools that belong to what was called for a time the non-formal education (NFE) sector.<sup>8</sup> The NFE sector was established in 1979–1980 by a mandate of the Education Commission of 1964–1966 to accommodate non-enrolled children in ten educationally backward states (including Uttar Pradesh, the state in which Varanasi is located). The National Policy on Education of 1986 revised the NFE sector to accommodate volunteer agencies (VAs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to address the sector’s limited successes (Ghosh 2004).<sup>9</sup> As part of the World Bank loan taken by Prime Minister Rao’s government in 1991, the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) was launched in 1994 to address perceived failures of the NFE schemes, including a greater focus on the education of girls and members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCTs) in rural areas deemed educationally backward. The nomenclature of the educational sector thus grew in complexity with the addition of alternative schools (ASs) and education guarantee schemes (EGSs) to address the needs of groups not well served by the NFE sector (Ramachandran 2004).

Article 21A, amended to the Constitution of India in 2002, declared that the state will provide free and compulsory education to those between six and fourteen years of age.<sup>10</sup> The Indian parliament passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009 and it took effect in 2010.<sup>11</sup> Appropriate governments will have to be in compliance by 2013 (De et al.: 2011). This should not imply that schooling in India is heading toward some sort of equality, however. Surabhi Chopra argues that “lower-tier private schools” will be negatively affected by new norms and penalties for violations (2011: 18). If a private school is not already affiliated with a board, the regulations of the act will present a new burden. During fieldwork in 2010, none of the three principals of the schools introduced at the beginning of the book expressed any concern about the act. They saw the act as affecting schools “at a lower standard” with students with poorer families or in rural places where private schools might be the only ones available.

Regardless of particular organizational affiliation, NGO and volunteer schools can be considered to comprise a group because they generally aim to reach the population excluded from board-certified educational institutions. Strategies include charging extremely low or no fees, allowing students to forego uniforms or wear relatively simple ones, providing materials, and accommodating students, sometimes adults, with flexible hours. During an interview conducted in August 2004, Krishna Kumar, longtime scholar of education and newly appointed director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), one of the Government of India's highest posts in secondary education, told me: "It's very difficult today to clearly distinguish philanthropic private activity in education from NGO activity. And purely commercial activity in education is also widely rampant. The situation is far more complex than one could have seen in the early eighties when the state was definitely the main player in education, certainly in school education, and even in higher education" (Ladousa 2007: 139–140). Today, the sponsorship of a school by an NGO can expose the school to the charge that entrepreneurial activity—and not education—is the primary reason for the school's existence.<sup>12</sup>

One NGO school in Varanasi in which I conducted some fieldwork considered itself a laudable alternative to board-certified schools as well as other schools run by NGOs for its incorporation of student creativity in the curriculum, flexible approaches to discipline, and involvement of parents in learning and communication with teachers. The principal told me that board certification would lend the school legitimacy and assuage fears of corruption. She explained that such a move would also resolve the school's enrollment problems connected to the fact that some parents remove their children from the school and place them in a board-certified institution in the years just preceding their board examinations. But, the principal explained, the prospect of the school becoming a "diploma factory" helped staff members to reconcile the school's administrative disadvantages. Accordingly, the school will remain under the purview of an NGO and will not seek board affiliation.

The remaining schools in Varanasi and across Hindi-speaking North India are affiliated with school boards. School boards provide curricular guidelines and administer examinations in which hundreds of thousands of students participate annually. Exams at the end of the tenth and twelfth levels partly determine one's future academic possibilities. Thus, boards play a key role in bestowing the academic qualifications that Bourdieu notes are key in the production of educational capital (1986).

School boards in India are massive organizations with thousands of affiliated schools (Guichard 2010: 43–44). In Varanasi, two boards were on people’s lips: the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Uttar Pradesh Board (UP Board). People took the boards to be contrasting, not simply different. They understood the CBSE to be private and took for granted that a school affiliated with the CBSE charges fees. Most people with whom I worked knew that the CBSE was administered in Delhi, the national capital. There are school boards that are more prominent than the CBSE in other regions of India, and some schools in Varanasi are affiliated with them. One of the most prominent examples is the convent school that was founded by Christian missionaries. Whereas the school once represented one of the only avenues to an English-medium education in the city, now hundreds of schools offer it. Furthermore, several other English-medium schools have surpassed the size and cost of the convent school. People in Varanasi consider the CBSE to be the most prominent school board most likely because the largest private school in town has long been affiliated with it.

The UP Board is administered by officials of the state in which Varanasi and its district are located, Uttar Pradesh. A school’s affiliation with the UP Board brings subsidies such that people describe such schools as relatively cheap or even free. People call UP Board-affiliated schools “government schools” (*gavaṛnment skūls* or *sarkārī skūls*) and understand them to be different from “private schools” (*prāyvaṭ skūls* or *fīs lenewāle skūls*).

**Table 1. School types, class distinctions, language medium, and board affiliation.**

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Prestigious schools outside of Varanasi (English-medium)

- Doon School (Dehradun)
  - Modern School (Delhi)
  - Woodstock School (Mussoorie)
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Schools in Varanasi whose board certification serves as a vehicle for class maintenance or mobility (Hindi- versus English-medium schools affiliated with the Uttar Pradesh Board, the Central Board of Secondary Education, and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education)

- Saraswati School (Hindi-medium)
  - Seacrest School (English-medium)
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Schools in Varanasi unaffiliated with boards

- most Madrassas
- volunteer schools
- Non-formal Education (NFE) schools

Language plays a dual role in school distinctions. First, people assume that an expensive private school (often affiliated with the CBSE) is English-medium and assume that a government school (often affiliated with the UP Board) is Hindi-medium. “Medium” is a commonly used word in both Hindi (*mīḍiam*) and English that refers to a school’s primary language of pedagogy. It is not always the case that private schools are English-medium or that government schools are Hindi-medium, but through a complexly arranged set of contrasts presented later in the book, people often refer to schools based on their language medium and understand the reference to be tied to a number of differences among students, their families, and teachers. In sum, by mentioning the medium of a school, Hindi or English, one is necessarily talking about a kind of school that produces educational value underpinned by the state’s recognition of certain school boards and bureaucracies. That value, however, is highly unstable as it emerges in the particular reflections of particular people with particular histories of schooling.

Language also plays a part in school distinctions because it is only among board-certified schools that language-medium distinctions matter. Nationally and internationally known schools such as the Doon School—far from Varanasi—are assumed by all to be English medium. Local schools lacking board affiliation are not discussed as Hindi-medium or English-medium because any claim to be English-medium would ring false. A board affiliation allows a school to offer a seat at tenth- and twelfth-level examinations, and it is among such schools that language-medium distinctions matter. Thus, language plays a major role in schooling that does feature in practices underpinned by class differentiation and fueled by fantasies of class mobility. Indeed, the question of a school’s language medium is tied up with the question of its board affiliation, and many other attributes too.

The notion of educational capital helps to explain how it is that people invest in the school system in a manner not predicted by their current attainment of economic or cultural capital. In other words, expensive schools do not preclude the attendance of those with class aspirations. Schools thus participate in the “inevitable incompleteness of the project of being middle-class” (Baviskar and Ray 2011: 19). Indeed, most of the people who can be considered to be in the new middle classes lack the luxury enjoyed by Guddu Sharma in the vignette above, a guaranteed job opening in the event of academic failure. I met many students whose families struggled to put their child or children through schools without the possibility of security in the face of failure. Indeed, they were aspiring to become part of the new middle classes.

## The Multidimensional Significance of English in Indian Education

A number of ethnographic accounts share the awareness that education has become crucial for the understanding of class in liberalizing India, but focus largely on English. English resonates with many ideas about change in Indian society: “A combination of various forces—economic, political, intellectual and social—has propelled the craze for English, successfully marketed as the language of development, modernity, and scientific and technological advancement” (Rubdy 2008: 136). Leela Fernandes chronicles the rise of the new middle class in the city of Mumbai and the importance of the class in nationally distributed advertising images. An education in English has emerged as a defining feature of a new Indian middle class: “this group largely encompasses English-speaking urban white-collar segments of the middle class who are benefitting from new employment opportunities” (2006: xviii).

Fernandes is very careful to differentiate those people who were already fluent in English at the onset of liberalization from those people whose economic aspirations have led them to seek fluency in English since the onset of liberalization. Fluency was required for jobs in finance and in the upper echelons of the corporate world, and cities like Mumbai have become associated with the availability of such jobs to the exclusion of the hinterland. Others lump these gradations together and talk about the middle classes as a group emergent in the wake of liberalization. People who seek fluency, Fernandes explains, are served by a massive proliferation of English-medium schools and coaching centers, but good training is uneven. People often show evidence of lower-class origins by the ways in which they speak English and are denied access to the employment opportunities they seek. Schooling, particularly relatively expensive English-medium schooling, has become an increasingly attractive activity of consumption for people who aspire to join the new middle class, but there is no guarantee of success in the massive proliferation of schools.<sup>13</sup>

In their work on the consequences of neoliberal reform among Kolkata’s middle class, Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Timothy Scrase point out that: “English has ... increased dramatically in popularity in India from the early 1980s. Apart from the class position of the speakers (largely upper and middle classes) and their consequent social and political influence, there was the continued proliferation of the teaching of English in various schools and colleges, and the mushrooming of spoken-English institutes and private English-medium schools (many

of dubious quality) continued at a rapid pace, particularly in urban areas” (2009: 136–137). They concur with Fernandes that “English proficiency is a virtual prerequisite for those wishing to work in new ‘smart’ industries like call centre work and in the business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors” (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009: 149).

Working in Bijnor district, in the western part of Uttar Pradesh, the state in which Varanasi is located, Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffery, and Roger Jeffery found that “The prominence of English-medium institutions reflects an increased desire for English proficiency among large sections of the urban and rural population” (2008: 46). While none of the people with whom the anthropologists worked had ready access to the employment possibilities typical of the new middle class in Mumbai or Kolkata, one caste group in particular, Jats, had begun to invest in secondary education, primarily for sons, to “diversify economic risk” from a sole reliance on agriculture (2008: 53). Jats living in rural areas were often able to draw on urban kin networks to have their sons educated in better or higher-level schools. The best education is English-medium, costly, and outside of Bijnor district: “in the early 1990s parents in the three richest Jat households had sent their sons to the regional educational center of Dehradun for prestigious English-medium education within private boarding schools” (2008: 55).

An important exception to the focus on English in work on education in India and its association with class mobility is Viniti Vaish’s study of the Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya (RSKV) or State Sarvodaya Girls’ School of East Vinod Nagar in Delhi, the capital, run by the Delhi Administration. The students who attend the school are from families of modest means: “At best they [the parents] have jobs in government offices where they could be peons, clerks or security personnel” (2008: 4). Indeed, the Sarvodaya School scheme was initiated to “service some of the poorest in urban India and give them access to the linguistic capital of English, which, before the 1990s, was the fiefdom of the upper middle classes” (2008: 93). Vaish explains that “until 1999 the whole school was English medium, but the principal felt the children could not cope up with the English medium so she made one section Hindi medium for the weaker students” (2008: 3).

Vaish finds resonance between the English that students learn at school and the English that call center workers must use on the job, and describes the identity of call center workers as “a hybrid pastiche” (2008: 100). While the school does not provide the ability to use English in such a way that one could work in a call center, Vaish stresses the positive aspects of the employment possibilities that are initiated by the “‘emergent competencies’ provided by such schools”



(2008: 90). This book presents an argument that does not share Vaish's optimism about the intersection of languages, schools, and social class in India. Vaish's study focuses on a Sarvodaya School committed to bringing English to the disadvantaged. This book focuses on the way that Hindi and English provide a way of differentiating many types of schools in a city where call center work is not locally available. Vaish's optimism is aimed partly at countering an overly pessimistic view of globalization. That the mention of globalization indexes a concern with English should not come as a surprise. I found that people in Varanasi use the connection between English and the global to describe one kind of school and to contrast it with another associated with Hindi.

The focus on English in studies of schooling in contemporary India is understandable and even expected for two reasons. First, colonial education policies set English in a superior position to Hindi and other indigenous languages, and second, globalization has further enhanced English-medium schooling's part in strategies of class mobility. Many scholars have traced the unequal avenues to social and economic power that colonial dispositions toward languages helped to construct in India. Washbrook (1991) argues that the colonial encounter involved not only disparate languages, but also disparate ways of reckoning languages' relationships to the social world. British ideas about standards (whose artifacts are grammars and dictionaries) and language populations (whose artifact is the language census) were simply not amenable to indigenous notions about language, based as they were in ideas about substance, contextual variability, and relative plurilingualism. Plurilingualism, Washbrook argues, established South Asia in the eyes of the British as a "land of Babel brought to perpetual chaos by the sheer perversity of its natives" (1991: 187).

Trautmann (1997), however, charts a shift in British attitudes toward South Asian languages. The first period that Trautmann calls "Indomania" was characterized by keen British interest, if only in South Asian languages' ability to provide grist for hypotheses rooted in Biblical scholarship or the reinvigoration of British aesthetics. This period lasted from the conquest of Bengal after 1760 to the early years of the nineteenth century. "Indophobia" followed. The period was characterized by British denigration of indigenous languages and ideas, a consequence of a larger project to uplift the morality of natives by distancing them from their own lack of reason.

During the period Trautmann calls Indophobia, debates raged and shifted within the colonial regime about the place of English and indigenous languages in government institutions, including schools, as well

as the appropriateness and potential effects of natives engaging with English literature.<sup>14</sup> Pitted against one another were the rationales of Christian moralists and utilitarians. Moralists claimed that “the study of English literature had merely succeeded in creating a class of Babus ... who were intellectually hollow and insufficiently equipped with the desirable amount of knowledge and culture” (Viswanathan 1989: 159). Utilitarians “found that the humanizing motive [of the moralists] was in fact an evasion of responsibility toward equipping the Indian with the knowledge required for making him useful to society” (Viswanathan 1989: 158). Viswanathan points out that moralists and utilitarians engaged in the critique of policy only insofar as the Indian was deemed insufficient in the mirror of the competing colonizing project. Out of these tangled debates emerged a new force in Indian society, an elite whose identity was partly constructed by the English language and whose access to the language was mediated by education.

There were many who advocated for and worked toward the provision of education in indigenous languages during the colonial period. Writing about colonial Bengal, Sengupta illustrates the great interest *bhadralok* or upper-caste people had in vernacular education: “The education of students in Bengali, in addition to English, would ensure that education would not merely be a form of ‘Westernization’ but rather a form of ‘modernization.’ The cultural anxiety over retaining one’s own culture, however reconfigured, in the face of colonial culture was one that marked all colonial societies, and the Anglo-vernacular school provided the *bhadra* classes with one solution” (2011: 35). The crafting of school textbooks played a major part in the standardization of modern Hindi (Orsini 2002). These schools, however, did not generally attain the prestige of English-medium institutions, because English-medium institutions provided the gateway to higher education and employment. Writing about colonial Bengal, Sanjay Seth explains: “A middle school certificate usually meant education to a certain standard in the vernacular. However, it was reported, such learning was not valued, and it became progressively devalued once the acquisition of a government job of even lowly rank began to require more advanced qualifications, and hence education in English” (Seth 2007: 19). With higher-level education and with government employment came the necessity of schooling in English.

The two-tiered relationship between English- and Hindi-medium schools has been largely preserved in independent India: “The standard arguments in favour of English as the medium of instruction are: equality of education, poverty of the regional language and their

inability to meet the demands of the role of a medium of instruction, paucity of books in the regional languages, the near-impossible task of large-scale translation, and the contact and mobility of scholars” (Verma 1994: 119). A direct link between competence in English and a middle-class disposition thus continued beyond India’s independence. The link is embodied in the form of the private school (K. Kumar 1996: 61). In a state-of-the-art volume on the sociolinguistics of English in India, scholars include such comments as “English still continues to be the only sure key to good jobs and careers in the country today” (Nadkarni 1994: 131), and “In short, it [English] is regarded as an essential part of the ‘middle class’ baggage” (Khubchandani 1994: 78). Needless to say, by “baggage,” Khubchandani means something like “luggage” and not something like the popular psychology-infused “issues.” And, as Fernandes and Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery rightly report, English-medium schooling has taken an increasingly prominent place in people’s class aspirations. It has enabled the already knowledgeable to make good use of the new possibilities of liberalization, and others to attempt to engage with English, largely through schooling. The prominence of English in discourse about social class in India is reflected in the 2005 National Curriculum Framework developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training: “it is necessary to address the question of developing effective competence in a language [English] that is now an essential part of aspirations and access to opportunities of livelihood, knowledge and power” (NCERT 2005: 37, quoted in Advani 2009: 50).

Many of the same words were used in both Hindi-medium and English-medium schools as well as in official discourse emanating from the many bureaucratic organizations that oversee the curricula of Hindi-medium and English-medium schools. One of the most obvious ways in which contemporary education in India bears colonial traces emerges from the words used for common objects, practices, and ideas. Indeed, words such as “complex” (*kāṃpleks*), “fees” (*fīs*), “tuition” (*tūīśan*), and “board” (*borḍ*) take their place in both English and Hindi and are thus “bivalent” in the parlance of Woolard (1999).<sup>15</sup> I heard and used such words in conversations that were conducted almost entirely in Hindi. Indeed, some people in Varanasi claimed that some of the terms are Hindi. Such words question “the naturalness of rigid boundaries between languages” (Woolard 1999: 23). Yet, in the relatively elite context of the most expensive English-medium schools, no word that would likely be identified as Hindi was used to refer to objects, practices, or ideas. While such terms as *kāgaj* (paper) and *kalam* (pen) were used in Hindi-medium schools, no such term

was used in the more expensive English-medium schools. Terms that might be identified as English—but are often thought to be Hindi—are pervasive in reflections on schools of either medium in northern India, while terms that might be identified as Hindi—and are not thought to be English—are used in Hindi-medium schools and not in the most expensive English-medium schools. There is little doubt that this selective phenomenon points to the colonial origins of the institutional differentiation of language medium maintained in contemporary schooling (K. Kumar 1991b).

Globalization has enhanced the salience of English for its seeming omnipresence and the connection to distant others it might provide. This has taken on particular significance in India. Sometimes, English's association with the global has served certain politicians in India in their nationalist rhetoric of defense. Sometimes, specific groups such as Muslims or Christians are targeted as alien transgressors through an association with language: Muslims with Urdu and Christians with English. Most often it is Hindi that is invoked in opposition as a language that is national. Sanskrit often emerges as an ancient language of an essentially Hindu collective with Hindi as its contemporary manifestation.

Globalization, of course, is an idea that circulates beyond the borders of India. Yet, there are aspects of the concept that generally resemble its specific uses by right-wing Hindu-fundamentalist politicians. Globalization often entails bifurcation. On the one hand are those who argue with a “euphoric, utopian thrust” for the “complex connectivity and circulation of all global processes” (Jacquemet 2005: 258–259). On the other hand are those who engage in a “dystopic, neo- or post-Marxist, political economic critique” and tend to see global relations as “antagonistic and asymmetrical” (Jacquemet 2005: 259). While this book can be placed in the latter camp, it does not join the linguists who have seen in the processes of globalization “linguistic imperialism, endangered languages, language loss, and language death” (Jacquemet 2005: 260). There are several reasons for this. Hindi participates (even if often in a subordinate position) in the schooling system, and what gives English meaning in Varanasi depends on Hindi. In conversations with people about schooling, I found that talking about English medium always prompted talk about Hindi medium and vice versa. Hindi and English are relational and mutually constructive. This is true of the languages as well as the institutions that are identified by them.

Furthermore, while people's reflections on the division between Hindi and English mirrors euphoric and pessimistic visions of the ef-

fects of globalization in some respects, there are multiple realms of value through which Hindi- and English-medium schooling can emerge as meaningful. A move from one realm of value to another—from the local to the national, for example—can transform the relationship between the language mediums. Finally, the mode of communication matters a great deal in what relationships between Hindi and English emerge in different situations. When people are talking about Hindi- and English-medium schools, for example, the possibility exists that Hindi- and English-medium schools in Varanasi might be seen as valuable. Such is not true of advertising for schools in locally distributed newspapers.

In short, “people manage or fail to make sense across contexts; their linguistic and communicative resources are mobile or lack such semiotic mobility, and this is a problem not just of difference, but of inequality” (Blommaert 2010: 3). At times, manifestations of Hindi- and English-medium schooling do seem to divide the world or seem to rest on totalizing visions of it. I strive to show that such manifestations and visions are never actually total, but rather are partial, and beg for placement.

### **Language Ideology, Educational Institutions, and Language-Medium Schooling**

A theoretical notion that has enabled me to appreciate the interplay of Hindi and English in concerns about schooling in North India is that of language ideology: “ideas with which participants [in discourse] frame their understandings of linguistic varieties and the differences among them, and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities” (Gal and Irvine 1995: 970).<sup>16</sup> When speakers are talking about languages, they often focus on people, events, and activities—and, I would add, institutions. Educational institutions are key sites for the production of language ideology: “A society’s beliefs about language—as a symbol of nationalism, a marker of difference, or a tool of assimilation—are often reproduced and challenged through educational institutions” (Wortham 2003b: 2).

An aspect of discourse that is productive of language ideology is what Michael Silverstein (1992) has called “overt metapragmatic discourse.” This refers to the practice of overtly describing the relationship between language phenomena and their contexts of use. Discourse that explicitly names or describes a language is important and deserves special attention because it so often includes commentary

about its linguistic form, appropriate or inappropriate uses, characteristic or uncharacteristic users, and relationships to other languages (Mertz 1998). This book will represent such discourse because it provides clues as to what possibilities exist for tying institutions to each other and to social groups, often in complex relationships to different time periods brought into view in a conversation or interview. Indeed, people in Varanasi had much to say about Hindi- and English-medium schooling, and tracing the different versions can reveal much about how different people use schooling to comment on their worlds differently.

Institutions of whatever type, however, have largely been overlooked in studies of language ideology. One reason, Patrick Eisenlohr (2004) argues, is that scholars have tended to focus on overt discourse and ignore other sorts of semiotic relationships between participants, their linguistic production, and the non-referential aspects of what is happening. Eisenlohr argues that a sole focus on overt discourse within and about institutions risks the erasure of “less overt institutional and linguistic practices”: “The conceptual tools and mechanisms of linguistic ideologies have become increasingly well understood, but an understanding of how such politically charged interpretive schemata are mapped onto people, events, and situations also needs to be grounded in an analysis of how institutional and everyday practices form a constitutive part of such ideologies” (2004: 63). Eisenlohr’s insights are salient to the ethnographic account presented herein because I have derived some aspects of Hindi- and English-medium schools from overt descriptions that people offered in conversations and interviews (such as “It is good that one goes to a Hindi-medium school because Hindi is our national language”).

Yet, such descriptions do not exhaust the ways in which the distinction between Hindi- and English-medium schools shape the ways in which people can reflect on it or use it to make social commentary. Some possibilities in discourse—through which institutions become meaningful—are more ready-made than others. The ways in which cost and board affiliation, for example, do not actually predict the language-medium status of a school, but rather lead one to assume it, demonstrates the need to consider statements made by interlocutors in ethnographic fieldwork, but always alongside a consideration of institutional practices that underpin such statements. Some speakers will meet such ready-made discursive constructions of institutions differently. Not everyone in Varanasi, for example, finds the distinction between Hindi- and English-medium schooling relevant, and this is true for different reasons. By tracing language ideology through institutional practices and their circulation in discourse, this book seeks

to appreciate “the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language” (Errington 1999: 115).

A conversation that provided the title for the book serves as a good example. In 2007, I sat talking to two professors at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), the largest university in Varanasi. While BHU is a central university, and thus officially on par with India’s elite institutions of higher education, its prestige has waned in the last few decades. One of the ways in which many people reflected on its status was to explain that many courses offered there that should be taught in English are taught predominantly in Hindi. One of the professors, Professor Mishra, had been teaching in Varanasi for approximately ten years. The other, Professor Tiwari, had come from another smaller university, but had been teaching for thirty years and was the senior professor present. I had been explaining the research I had done on previous visits when the following ensued:

Professor Mishra: You can really go in deep to understand the emotion behind this language [Hindi]. You will find something common here, nationalism being attached to Hindi. You can go deep in that. Sometimes you can find that it is not sincere nationalism because there are people who do not know Hindi, but they will be more nationalistic than me, from Hindi. Sometimes you can find a national crisis, a cultural crisis, in those people. Because, of course, they need English too.

Professor Tiwari: But then the fact is there, English is a language of convenience for us. Because through Hindi you’ll become national, not international. We Indians can be disconnected from the world, but like any other country we have this English. But despite this, as far as Hindi is concerned, I must say that as Professor Mishra was saying, the language for India, it can never be English. This nation wants to see itself in Hindi, feel itself in Hindi. So, the children, they know the power of English because they want to excel in the market, want to excel in the business, but they feel in Hindi. English has come to stay. Education will need English, benefits of English. So our ground . . . maybe . . . we are standing on firm ground, but English is our sky. So, Hindi is our ground, English is our sky.<sup>17</sup>

I was so taken with the metaphor offered by Professor Tiwari because, when considered in the shadow of the conversation in which it emerged—much less in the shadow of the larger context of schooling in the region—the metaphor exhibits so many features of language ideology. The poetic metaphor uses fundamental and universal aspects of the world to describe the relationship between two languages. Profes-

sor Tiwari utilizes Professor Mishra's linking of Hindi with emotion, but transforms the possibility of political manipulation into a stable connection to the world. She also transforms Professor Mishra's notion of political manipulation into a marker of national rather than international boundaries.

Struck by Professor Tiwari's image, I listened to the recording. Professor Mishra never returns to the political uses of Hindi, and Professor Tiwari excuses herself just after the offer of her metaphor. After she leaves, however, Professor Tiwari explains that he had been schooled in Hindi-medium schools until reaching the university level, while Professor Tiwari had been schooled in both Hindi- and English-medium schools. I noticed that neither Professor Mishra's nor Professor Tiwari's initial commentary was about schools, and yet I found that talk about language had invoked talk about schooling after Professor Tiwari's departure. I am unable to offer an explanation of why Professor Mishra began to talk about schools after Professor Tiwari left because he never offers an explanation. But from the short interchange, I can attest to the intertwined nature of Hindi and English, the multiplicity of ways in which the division can resonate in the lives of conversations and people, and the relevance of schooling in reflections on the world, the nation, and the self.

### **Fieldwork Contexts**

I carried out the research on which this book is based over several trips of varying length to different locations in northern India. Long-term and multi-sited research has allowed me to claim that discourse about language medium explored herein is lasting, particular to certain types of schools and their students and families, and of widespread salience. From October 1996 until October 1997 I conducted my first field research on schools in Varanasi, a city of approximately two million. The city is famous within and outside of India for its Hindu holy sites, including the Viswanathan Temple, cremation grounds, and ghats, or steps, leading from the Ganges River up to the city. Lawrence Cohen describes a much-stereotyped view of the city from the point of view of a boat in the Ganges: "The scene—river, ghats, lanes, boats, and bathers—is clichéd. It has come to stand in for the city as a whole in a variety of registers: religious, touristic, sanitary, scholarly" (1998: 9). Unless they are scholars, less familiar to outsiders is the geography of pleasure that many of the city's residents describe as unique to Varanasi. Nita Kumar (1988) recounts residents' descriptions of the



Ganges as a space of recreation, the bank across the river from the city as a space of relative freedom, and the lanes of the city as spaces of carefree movement.

The leisure and pleasure associated with the city as well as the region in which Varanasi is located, eastern Uttar Pradesh, have been largely left behind in the growth in India's IT sector, including the call service industry, that depends on a large supply of English speakers. Nevertheless, the city affords an array of occupations that—while not typical of that portion of the new middle class singled out by Leela Fernandes (2006) for its already-established abilities in English—does offer the ability to pay school fees, sometimes of considerable amounts. Millions of people on pilgrimage and other tourists visit Varanasi annually, drawn by its sacred practices and sites. Research in schools largely kept me out of the orbit of pilgrims, tourists, and the vast array of people whose living depends on them. Few parents of students attending the schools in which I worked were involved in Varanasi's religious world, whether riverside or elsewhere. Some were petty shopkeepers, such as my landlord, who explained that pilgrimage was good for business for the city, but that he saw little of it in his shop's residential location. A few owned restaurants or were involved in Varanasi's main markets of Godowlia and Chowk where silk, toys, and other items associated with the city are available for purchase. Certainly, none of the children found near the river conversing with tourists during the day were those of parents with whom I usually visited (Huberman 2005, 2012). Indeed, such children, themselves engaged in business, were those targeted by a number of volunteer schools unaffiliated with school boards.

Parents' occupations varied considerably, whether they were sending children to Hindi- or English-medium schools. Some were professors, some were secretarial and janitorial staff, and some were groundskeepers at Banaras Hindu University. Some were engineers and some were secretarial and janitorial staff at Varanasi's massive Diesel and Locomotive Works. A handful of parents were physicians, and a handful of parents were rickshawallas. The difference in income between different sets of parents of students in the same school could be much greater than the income difference between some parents with low-paying jobs and the parents of students at volunteer schools. Thus, middle-class status does not exclude attendance at Hindi-medium schools, just as English-medium schooling has become a salient part of preparations for class mobility.

Caste, of course, is as complex a social reality as class. The two do tend to work in tandem, but this is not always true, and the relation-

ship between class and caste has shifted in the period of liberalization. Well known is that many high-caste rural Brahmins and urban Brahmin priests can be found at the lower end of the class spectrum. Varanasi is famous for the fact that Dalit—or untouchable—Doms have risen to some of the highest class levels of the city for their participation in the city's rituals and industry surrounding death (Parry 1994). New reservations mandated by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 require private schools to reserve 25 percent of their seats for the needy (Chopra 2011: 18). Such children usually come from Dalit and lower-caste backgrounds, but there are exceptions. Rumors have run rampant that such schools will not care to have such children as students and will encourage only those with high marks to stay. Residential segregation of Dalits often leads to the formation of a volunteer or NGO school for neighborhood children because the children's families cannot afford the tuition and other costs of board-certified schools, even those subsidized by the state. At the university level, students of lower castes have begun to want English literature that resonates with them, but this seems to be emergent within graduate programs (Mukherjee 2009: 37).

From the vantage point of precollege schooling, Varanasi resembles the cities around it, including Allahabad, Gorakhpur, and Patna. Although rural areas surrounding these cities are agriculturally less efficient, more densely populated, and generally more impoverished than rural areas to the west—toward the cities of Agra and Delhi, and further west toward the states of Haryana and Punjab (A. Gupta 1998; Wadley 1994)—the cities themselves offer a wide array of school options. In Varanasi, and in other cities in northern India, people place individual schools into many categories: central (administered by the national government from Delhi), convent (administered either currently or previously by Christian organizations), government (administered by the government of the particular state in which the school is located), private (administered by an individual, family, or organization that owns the school), madrasa (in which students learn the Koran and tenets of Islam), Montessori, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

Initially, I focused my research activities on the Saraswati and Seacrest Schools. A combination of my personal relationships and the schools' administrative affiliations made the three suitable choices. My landlady's two daughters, one in the ninth-grade level and the other at the eleventh-, attended what I have called the Saraswati School with Mr. Sahni's daughter. In a pattern observed in many families across North India, Mr. Sahni's son (younger than his sister) attended the more expensive Seacrest School (De et al. 2011). The girls' grade levels

meant that they were attending the school on the ground floor of the building because the school upstairs served grades one through eight. I would later find out that the schools were distinct even though people called both Saraswati School. The downstairs school enrolled a student body of girls who comprised roughly half of both schools' enrollment of approximately 1,600 students. The upstairs school was coeducational. The principal of the primary and middle school upstairs had explained that hers is a private school that charges students' families fees and whose school board affiliation differentiates it from the one downstairs. The downstairs school maintains affiliation with the Uttar Pradesh Board, making it a government school. The upstairs school is affiliated with one of the many private, multistate boards in northern India, but not the CBSE, to which Varanasi's most prestigious schools are affiliated. In the coming argument, fee structures and board affiliations will play a major role in differentiating schools in terms of language medium.

Most of the students attending the two schools that made up what people called the Saraswati School lived in New Colony, the neighborhood in which the schools were located and in which I resided. New Colony had been planned decades before as a government scheme to offer decent two-story housing at subsidized cost to government employees. In the 1950s and 1960s, many people living in the neighborhood sold their houses and plots to move elsewhere in the city. The new owners built spacious mansions along the main boulevard of New Colony such that only a handful of the scores of original houses are left. For a time, it seemed that New Colony would become one of Varanasi's posh neighborhoods. Several circumstances thwarted its realization as such, including an influx of lower-middle-class residents—among them the family with whom I lived—who built more modest houses in the lanes behind the colony's boulevard, the growth of a large slum area on the very edge of the neighborhood, and flooding in the boulevard with the onset of each monsoon. The student body of the schools reflected the lower-middle-class status of most of the neighborhood. Most of the students came from families wherein the breadwinner, usually the father, was employed as a merchant, a secretarial worker, or a low-level civil servant.

The third school in which I started fieldwork, early on, I call the Seacrest School. During our initial interviews, the principal stressed that Seacrest maintains strict standards by virtue of its affiliation with the Central Board of Secondary Education and that this affiliation with the CBSE justifies the school's extremely high fees. The school, located approximately two kilometers (about 1.2 miles) west

of sleepy New Colony, lies just off one of southern Varanasi's most heavily trafficked intersections. Indeed, most of the students take rickshaws or are driven to school from locations all over southern Varanasi. Seacrest students' transportation habits generally reflect their superior social class positions as well as their more widely dispersed residential origins vis-à-vis students attending either section of the Saraswati School. But it is important to remember that there are exceptions. Some Seacrest students came from modest backgrounds, and tuition and other costs stretched family budgets to the breaking point. A handful of children of doctors, professors, and engineers attended Saraswati's private and government schools.

The Seacrest School has grown to become the largest private school in eastern Uttar Pradesh. When I was conducting initial fieldwork in 1996, the school had a total of nearly 10,000 students with approximately 2,000 enrolled at the branch near New Colony. By 2010, my most recent field research in Varanasi, the school had six new branches, two in nearby cities, with a total enrollment of over 20,000 students. Whereas Seacrest had become a Varanasi-wide institution by 1996, it was branching out to become an institution associated with the larger region of eastern Uttar Pradesh by 2010.

I began my first fieldwork at the beginning of October. Thus, from roughly October to March, and, again, from June to October, I was able to visit schools when they were in session. During the first two months of fieldwork, I spent each day from Monday through Friday in one of the three schools. I attended classes, audiotaped classroom interaction after my presence had become less awkward, talked to the principals and teachers after their breaks, and talked to students between classes and during recess. After school, I accompanied students on their daily treks to buy cheap snacks at a local stall or store where we could linger and talk about school, life circumstances, and ambitions. Weekends and the summer break provided me with opportunities to visit principals, teachers, and students' families outside of school. These breaks also provided opportunities for me to travel to Delhi to visit schools and talk to officials employed by or retired from educational boards, usually the CBSE.

After a couple of months, I spent two days a week visiting other schools in Varanasi, trips sometimes requiring a rickshaw ride to distant parts of the city. Thus, from this point until the end of my first year of fieldwork, I spent one day a week in each of the three original schools. These visits gave me further exposure to the wide array of pedagogical goals, bureaucratic affiliations, and socioeconomic backgrounds of students represented in Varanasi's schools. Among the

schools I visited was St. Joseph's School, located on the western outskirts of the city. St. Joseph's is a coeducational private convent school affiliated, like Seacrest, with the CBSE. I also visited several schools affiliated, like the downstairs level of the Saraswati School, with the UP Board. These schools vary in grade levels as well as in gender inclusion. Some are for girls, some are for boys, and some are coeducational. I visited many schools without board affiliations. These included two madrassas, differentiated by Islamic sectarian distinctions, as well as a school run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an organization with complex ties to political groups that have called for the realization of an essentially Hindu India (Basu 1996). These schools, not affiliated with a board, also included several voluntary schools, most of them located in or near slum areas, that try to accommodate extremely poor students by offering flexible hours, school supplies, and pedagogical techniques in keeping with the needs of those who attend, such as the provision of basic math and literacy instruction.

I spent ten weeks in 2004 at the University of Delhi talking to graduate students in linguistics and English about their ideas about Hindi and English and language-medium schooling. At night, I used insomnia as an excuse to play cards and chat with a *chaukidar*, or guard, of the guesthouse in which I was staying. He was from Bhabua, a town in Bihar quite close to Varanasi. He spoke from a lower class position than those people with whom I had worked in Varanasi, at the Saraswati and Seacrest Schools, and his notions about Hindi and English were significantly different from those of people engaged with board certified schools. Sending two children to a Hindi-medium government school was a barely affordable option given his income of approximately 1,000 rupees (Rs) a month (approximately \$25.00 (U.S.)) in one of India's most expensive cities. He stated that English is important for contemporary life and that Hindi is the mother tongue and should be respected and cherished. The examples he offered of ways in which English is valuable, however, differed significantly from the explanations of the people with whom I had worked in Varanasi. The value attributed to English by the guard will be a theme of chapter 6 because it throws into relief the notion of English emergent from discourse on language-medium schools.

I was able to spend a total of twenty-two weeks in North India, predominantly Varanasi, during the two trips I took in 2007 and 2010. On both occasions, I was a guest of NIRMAL, a school founded by Som Majumdar in 1988 to offer people with a wide variety of class backgrounds an education that the school sees as missing from other schools in Varanasi. In short, the school seeks to include families in

the space of the school's activities, to provide small classes, and to teach in a way in which the student is supposed to come to discipline her- or himself.<sup>19</sup> I spent most of my time outside of this atypical school visiting the schools in which I had worked previously. I was able to interview students, teachers, and, of course, the principals, two of whom were new since 1997.

I encountered much of the same reflections on language that I had found in my initial fieldwork. People argued that English is an international language and allows people to plan to travel beyond Varanasi to attain jobs not available locally, usually in the information technology sector. People still defined English alongside Hindi, emphasizing the latter's status of mother tongue, and argued that to be an Indian one must have Hindi. A new development, however, was striking. Many individuals' commentary on the importance of English began to focus on coaching institutes offering lessons in conversational English, interviewing practice, and advice about comportment to those who have finished school, intercollege, or university. Nita Kumar quotes an administrator of a coaching institute in Varanasi: "See, in metros if students do professional degrees, they can get jobs. In [backward areas like] Purvanchal [eastern Uttar Pradesh] there are no career opportunities, except as labourers and in government service. By joining coaching centers, students try to qualify for national exams such as the JEE [Joint Entrance Examination]" (2011: 240). Kumar reports that many students of such institutes find the personalized instruction they receive superior to their experiences in school, where discipline, textbooks, and exams were paramount. I cannot comment other than to affirm that many teachers and students in board-certified schools recognize in coaching centers the ways in which English-medium education is oriented outward beyond Varanasi, in contrast to Hindi, the language of home. Although this book finds that such ideas "mask what are typically multiple and contradictory notions about the nature and basis of social order," the ideas have remained remarkably consistent during the period called liberalization (Ka. Hall 2002: 122).

### **Plan of the Book**

Chapter 1 considers education in India through a particular ideological lens, the mother tongue (*mātrabhāṣā*). The chapter proposes that one reason that schools are largely absent in the large body of work on the sociolinguistics of India can be traced to notions of mother

tongue. Scholars investigating social aspects of language difference in India considered schools to be modern institutions wherein standardized language varieties made people's engagement with their mother tongues impossible. In contrast, chapter 1 demonstrates that the notion of the mother tongue is a primary means through which many middle-class people in Varanasi recognize a language used in school, Hindi, and recognize a type of school, the Hindi-medium school. People in Varanasi imagine Hindi to be the language accessible to all because it is their mother tongue. Though many people in education understand that Hindi puts one in an increasingly inferior position as one advances in the educational system—a position, they claim, that can produce a “complex”—even they maintain that one should have pride in her mother tongue. In turn, people who have developed fluency in English explain that an exclusive claim to English rings pretentious and suspect. Indeed, what constitutes Hindi—even as a primordial identity understood to be essential to the self—depends to a large extent on English. The notion of mother tongue is so conflicted in the world of schooling because it is something in which one should have pride at the same time that it is something that is subordinate in schooling and problematic to embrace. Thus, chapter 1 argues that processes of economic liberalization and globalization hardly entail a uniform embrace of English, but rather entangle people in tacit and contradictory claims.

Whereas chapter 1 explores the ways in which the language-medium divide implicates the self through notions of mother tongue, chapter 2 moves to the arena of the national language (*rāṣṭrabhāṣā*) to show that Hindi- and English-medium schools offer different types of capital, in the parlance of Pierre Bourdieu. What is valuable about Hindi-medium schools and English-medium schools can shift radically depending on how they are understood to relate to local, regional, national, and international arenas. Furthermore, the relevance of Hindi- and English-medium education can disappear when people feel that no educational institution in the city is up to the task of educating their children. The realm of value creation that depends on a certain kind of English shows Varanasi (or India) to be a peripheral place. In India there are multiple arenas of linguistic value that depend on different symbolic manifestations of different languages, and schools in Varanasi cannot participate in all of them. Thus, just as ideas about the mother tongue can be sustained as valuable up to the point of comparison with English-medium schools and their ability to further one's educational goals, ideas about the variable values emanating from Hindi- and English-medium schools can be maintained up

to the point of comparing Varanasi's schools in the national sphere of education. Processes of economic liberalization and globalization have interjected an unsettled quality to language-medium distinctions just as they have continued to relegate Varanasi to the periphery.

If some language markets show that Varanasi is a peripheral place in the nation via the ways in which its educational institutions fail to participate in the national realm of the production of value, advertising for schools is a practice that relegates Varanasi to the periphery in a particularly robust way. Chapter 3 explores the relationship between language and the script used in school advertising in terms of what kind of school is being advertised. An especially clear distinction between Hindi-medium and English-medium schools emerges. Advertising for tutorial services, ubiquitous in Varanasi and across North India, supports the maintenance of the distinction between Hindi- and English-medium schools. Chapter 3 compares advertising for schools found around town in Varanasi with advertising for schools found in national newspapers that are distributed locally. Out of the differences emerges further evidence that Varanasi is a peripheral place unable to offer the kind of schooling found in more cosmopolitan locales. The English-medium school is the only kind of school in the newspaper. Any indication of Hindi-medium schools as valuable in the national sphere disappears just as does evidence of the existence of prestigious or cosmopolitan English-medium education in Varanasi. Indeed, in school advertising in the newspaper, unlike in spoken interaction, there seems to be little possibility of maintaining that schools in Varanasi offer much value.

The differentiation between Hindi- and English-medium schools is an easily accomplished and seemingly inevitable aspect of schooling for those who describe schools or sit for their exams. Chapter 4 introduces someone who was an exception. A teacher at a Hindi-medium government school was able to reflect on her past and compare it to the present in a way that threw into question the inevitability of the stark division between Hindi- and English-medium schools. I came to cherish the teacher's words—however singular for me they may have been—because they were so disruptive of the commentary I was hearing constantly. The chapter invokes Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of voice to explore what made the teacher able to disrupt the inevitability of the divide between Hindi- and English-medium schools. While it is true that the teacher's perspective on schooling was unusual and, therefore, indicative of the pervasiveness of the language-medium discourse explored in the rest of the book, her narrative reminds us that seemingly inevitable divisions are never total or beyond the re-



constructive touch of the narration of experience. She calls into question—albeit in an implicit way—the notions that make the “complex,” introduced in chapter 1, so important, yet ultimately confounding.

Chapter 5 asks questions about the use of English by people whose desire for English is often ridiculed by reflections on language-medium schooling, including Hindi-medium students and people who are working-class with little or no experience of schooling. The chapter considers interaction in school classrooms and finds that in some there exists a routine typical of interaction in classrooms in many postcolonial societies wherein the former colonial language is beyond the capacity of teachers and students. Specifically, the ways in which Hindi-medium teachers and students interact when discussing texts written in English exhibit many of the features that Chick (1996) calls “safetalk.” The notion refers to interactional routines engaged in by teachers and students to manage their lack of knowledge of and practice in the language in which they are mandated to engage, thus saving face. In English class in one of Varanasi’s most prestigious (English-medium) schools, teachers and students frame talk about the English text in English, whereas in a Hindi-medium school, the English teacher frames talk about the text in English and Hindi, and uses Hindi to provide exegesis on the text. The interaction between teacher and student in both cases is minimal, and the students speak to the teacher largely in English. This is possible because the teacher of the English class in the Hindi-medium school uses Hindi as well as English, and what English she does use is primarily derived from the text. Chapter 5 of this book will use Chick’s insights to question whether the notion of “safetalk” exhausts the uses of English for the kinds of students who attend Hindi-medium schools, or even the kinds of people who have not attended a board-certified school.

## Notes

In sections, especially “The Political-Economic Context of Education in Contemporary India,” the introduction incorporates material from the publications listed in the acknowledgments.

1. Increasingly, people in the city in which I conducted fieldwork are using the officially recognized name, Varanasi. In my initial fieldwork in 1996–1997, almost everyone used Banaras if talking about the city generally, and sometimes Kashi if talking about the city for its importance in a Hindu religious vein.
2. In her study of call centers, Reena Patel shows that they are quite discriminatory with regard to the English abilities of potential employees. Discrimination

is often based on distinctions between places judged more or less cosmopolitan. She reports, "Linda, the executive of TYJ Corporation in Mumbai ... stated during an interview, 'If an applicant is from Ahmedabad, we don't touch them. Their accents are untrainable. We tried before, but it just didn't work'" (2010: 46). The executive has come to understand Ahmedabad as a place of untrainable workers because of the way they speak English.

3. Some have sought to point out the rising inequalities during the period of growth (Deshpande 2003; D. Gupta 2010; Khilnani 1999).
4. For descriptions of gendered antagonism between education and marriage, especially as girls approach higher grade levels, see Gold (2002), Mukhopadyay and Seymour (1994), Seymour (1999, 2002), and Wadley (1994). See N. Kumar (1994) for a fascinating discussion of the role of women in the creation of several schools in Varanasi.
5. See Upamanyu Chatterjee (1988, 2000) for irreverent, hilarious depictions of a fictional civil servant's experiences. Chatterjee's lampoons brilliantly capture the hierarchical nature of relations among different posts.
6. Symbolic capital, Bourdieu explains, is particularly subject to a process he calls "misrecognition," the understanding of some practice in a particular domain of capital formation such that the larger social position of the person or group in question becomes hidden. Taking the examples of the Lads, Burnouts, and Vatos, Bourdieu might explain the ways in which teachers understand such students to be unintelligent based on their poor performance in school to be a kind of misrecognition of the larger process of their production as a kind of student in the school (and wider world).
7. These schools use literate materials written in Nastaliq script that marks them as schools in which Urdu is used. Thus, they are not part of a much larger category of schools called "Hindi-medium," in which Devanagari is used.
8. Rebecca Klenk (2003) describes women's memories of participation in Lakshmi Ashram, a Gandhian pedagogical institution in the Northern state of Uttaranchal, that has facilitated the realization of non-normative gendered subjectivities. In retrospect, some of the women regret not having received a board-certified diploma, believing that the lack of such credentials had barred them from opportunities.
9. Part of the 1986 National Educational Policy mandated that a Navadoya school would be built in each district of the nation. The rationale was that this would make competitive English-language institutions available at no cost to rural areas (K. Kumar 1991a). Both Krishna Kumar (1991a) and Gauri Viswanathan (1992) express skepticism about the schools' democratic goals by pointing out the Navadoya system's neoliberal emphasis on skill and merit at the expense of social equality.
10. This coincides with the definition of elementary education as levels one through eight.
11. The act defines the locus in which a school must exist as a "neighborhood," but S. Chopra (2011: 18) notes that a definition is not provided.
12. Aradhana Sharma (2006) notes that workers in Mahila Samakhya, a women's empowerment program launched in 1988 as part of the Government of India's New Education Policy of 1986, strategically project the professional dispositions of a government or NGO employee depending on perceived contextual advantages. Such maneuverability seems to be erased in discursive reflection on school boards.

13. The ideological reverberation of English in India is the subject of an immense body of scholarship. Selected examples include Aggarwal (1988), Annamalai (1991, 2001, 2004, 2005), Brass (1990), J. Das Gupta (1970), P. Dasgupta (1993), Dua (1994a), Faust and Nagar (2001), Joshi (1994), Krishnaswamy and Burde (1998), Kurzon (2004), Pattanayak (1981), Ramanathan (1999, 2005b), Rubdy (2008), and Sonntag (2000).
14. These debates were spun around a central tension in the colonial project: the promotion of an (inequality-producing) bureaucratic regime required for capitalist expansion versus the moral reform of a degenerate, hapless society with the dissemination of (equality-producing) Western knowledge.
15. Terms such as “complex” (*kāmpleks*) highlight the ways that representing language with the written word poses ethical dilemmas to any scholar of linguistic interaction, ranging from concerns about distinctions between standardized and non-standardized forms (Jaffe 2000) to often-related options for the transliteration of phonological features (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998).
16. See also Blommaert (2006), Friedrich (1989), Kroskrity (2004), Philips (1998), Rumsey (1990), and Silverstein (1979).
17. Krishna Kumar noted that “ground” resonates with *zamīn*, which can be translated as “earth.” Thus, “ground and sky” might be rendered “earth and sky.”
18. See N. Kumar (1998) for a longer list of school types in Varanasi, and N. Kumar (2000) for a history of education in Varanasi.
19. Unpublished transcript of interview with Nita Kumar by Chaise LaDousa, 2007.