Dialogue in silence: The false binary between Freirean concepts and practices in out-of-school education in Kerala

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Abstract

This article seeks to develop a critical perspective on silence, dialogue, and oppression in out-of-school education, in dialogue with Freire. It also shows how my classroom experiences or fieldwork incidents mediated this dialogue. Freire's concept of problem-posing education has been chosen as the central theoretical framework; that further informed me to develop a dialogical methodology for researching oppression and marginalisation with the Adivasi community in Southern Wayanad in Kerala. The article also explores the complexities of applying Freirean in forming dialogue with participants. My research led me to partially critique Freire, partially apply Freire and partially extend Freire into Kerala's context of out-of-school education. This article primarily explores the practices of silence and dialogue outside classrooms and shows how they form a dialogue with Freire or related scholars. Following that dialogue, it then revisits Freire to identify silence and dialogue as meeting practices and their oscillation in research and community work. The major outcomes of these dialogues and this article include: 'silence and dialogue as oscillating meeting practices'; 'research as silence and dialogue'; 'silencing and dialogic self-help group meetings'; 'silence as ongoing informal communication'; 'silencing events, identity, and resistance in silence'; 'people silence themselves, but, resist oppression in silence; 'silence as banking education and caste oppression'.

Keywords: *Freire, silence, dialogue, self-help group meetings, education, Adivasi.*

Introduction

Silence and dialogue exist in binary relationships in the Freirean scholarship (1978; 1985; 1992; 1998a; 1998b; 1994; 2000; 2005); whereas other scholars (Buber, 2004; Huey-Li Li, 2001; 2004) shift their focus into the complexity of both human practices in a continuum. Nonetheless, scholars (Rege, 2010; Krishnakumar,1999; Rampal, 2000) pay little attention to the practices of silence and dialogue, operating differently outside the formal education classrooms in Kerala or India. Self-help groups (SHGs) and community organisations are the most researched (John, 2009; Devika and Thampi, 2007) topics in Kerala regarding the empowerment of women or the oppressed in general; but they rarely examine how such organisations reproduce culture of silence or oppressive relationships in meetings. Besides, they are yet to explore the relation between culture of silence and education and meetings. In contrast to these, the primary aim of this article is to develop a critical perspective on silence, dialogue, and oppression in such out-of-school education meetings of the Adivasi community in Southern Wayanad [1] in Kerala in dialogue with Freire. These meetings include meetings of all the three tiers of Kudumbashree self-help groups (Neighbourhood Group, Area Development Society, and Community Development Society), Co-operative Society meetings, the Adivasi community's informal meetings, my fieldwork meetings, and public events run by both the state and local governing bodies [2] in Southern Wayanad.

Freirean pedagogy informed the theoretical framework and my own 'dialogical methodology' for researching with the Adivasi community in Southern Wayanad in Kerala. Freire (1985) suggests, critical educators should develop their own theory or methodology rather than passively implanting an existing

thought into a different context. This insight kept inspiring me to critique, revise or extend Freire. In Addition to these, there are many reasons to choose Freirean pedagogy as the central focus: While reading about Freire's educational thoughts and his impetus to writing books, I became aware of the common forms of oppression, education, and culture of silence in Brazil and in Kerala. Differently from Brazil, Kerala experienced culture of silence not only in traditional classrooms, but also in the public domains due to caste system. The commonalities between Brazil and Kerala enabled me to realise the scope of conducting a Freirean research in Kerala and thus extending his concepts into Kerala's empirical context. On the other hand, differences between both locations led me to think of forming a dialogue between Freirean concepts and the participants' experiences and mine. Freire suggests out-of-school education an alternative to banking education. Nonetheless, Freire overlooks the elements of oppression in out-of-school education including research and community work meetings. So, in contrast to Freire, I propose a unique parallel between education and research and community work differently from Freire; for example, the meetings and relationships in research and community work can be compared to banking/problem-posing education. This comparison caused me to think that both practices of silence and dialogue cannot simply be restricted to the participants' meetings alone. This article would be different to explore the Adivasi community leaders' and members' experiences and practices of 'silence and dialogue' in out-of-school education meetings including my own fieldwork meetings, and their contributions to banking and problem-posing education teachers and students while addressing the following questions.

- How do practices of silence and dialogue oscillate inmeetings?
- How does silence operate as banking education in relation to caste?
- To what extent did my fieldwork dialogues descend into silence despite the application of Freire's problem-posing model?

- How do the Adivasi community transform their silence into dialogue, to resist oppression, form relationships or educate one another in meetings and events?

Methodology 'in dialogue with' Freire and the participants

To explore the above questions, I developed my own dialogical methodology in critical dialogue with Freire's concept of problem-posing education: that further enabled the participants and me to share our common experiences, and knowledge gathered from different methods in dialogue with one another. Additionally, this methodology led me to consider my own fieldwork as an object of investigation reflectively. Consequently, interpersonal engagement was deepened, and fears/suspicions regarding my position and background were allayed. Nevertheless, I find my methodology dialogical not merely to collect or analyse data with the participants, but also to review literature and shape my writing. I reflected on my experiences or critical incidents [3], to make these processes dialogical for many reasons:

First, I consider my writing an 'unfinished' (Freire,1998 a) activity like problem-posing education as I read and experience new things. Second, it helps me to stop myself from silencing the readers with descriptive knowledge. For Freire, the oppressed should not use the dominant language of the oppressor to discuss their oppression. Complex vocabularies or theories without examples might silence the readers. So, I determined to avoid jargons and reflect on experiences to avoid silencing the readers. Third, it leads me to position myself as an insider. For example, while writing her PhD thesis, Carteret (2008) reflected on her memories to personalise the text, after her supervisor criticised for being authoritative. Drake (2010) also shifted her style of writing from 'third person singular' to 'first person singular'. Likewise, Clough and Nutbrown (2003) argue, the voice/identity of researchers acts as a blueprint for their

methodology. For instance, Freire's childhood experiences, life in exile and prison were his major impetuses to writings. Likewise, my experiences prompted me to position myself as an insider (Carteret, 2008; Drake, 2010; Clough and Nutbrown, 2000), although I acted as an outsider when discussing the Adivasi community's unique experiences. Fourth, it helps me to identify the gaps in the literature or evolve research questions in dialogue with Freire, and finally to mediate the dialogue between Freirean concepts and the participants' stories and meeting activities. Moreover, I learn from Freire (1985) that when two realms of thoughts are incompatible with one another, innovative knowledge is likely to emerge, the essence of dialogue. Consequently, I re-wound my memories of critical incidents (Best, 2012; Tripp, 2012) forward and backward with Freire beyond my simple anecdotes. Differently from Freire or related scholars, I consider my research as having parallels with education making my methodology dialogical in the following five phases of my fieldwork.

Table One: From problem-posing education to problem-posing research

Problem-posing education	Problem-posing research
The teacher as problem-poser	The researcher as a problem-poser
The students in problem-posing education	The participants in problem-posing research

I first introduced my fieldwork schedule, research questions, and major Freirean themes to the participants as a problem-posing researcher. The participants responded to the Freirean themes with their experiences and shared their preferences in fieldwork participation as problem-posing education students. Second, I constantly observed the meetings of the Adivasi community in

comparison with my own fieldwork meetings. Most meeting incidents were photographed to gather data which could not be generated by interviews (Best, 2012). Third, during one-to-one dialogues, the participants and I shared common experiences, and negotiated views about the data gathered. Fourth, I put together the data derived from observations, participant observations, critical incidents, photographs, interviews, and fieldwork meetings utilising the mixed method approach (Best, 2012; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2006), comparative method, and thematic approach (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) that contributed to similarities and differences between data enabling me to identify important themes. Mixed method has been used for three different reasons: first, for cross-validity checks between data; second, for development of research questions for further discussion; and third, to provide comprehensive data when one method generates insufficient, or potentially invalid data. For example, critical incidents of low attendance in the initial fieldwork meetings led me to add new research questions: why people marginalise meetings, and to what extent this incident is related to the way meetings are imposed. I thus explored two aspects of the same phenomenon differently from the original set of research questions: that reveal that when findings are in dialogue with one another, methods are also in dialogue especially between my intended and my actual methodology.

Fifth, I made use of Freirean concepts to frame my initial data analysis. I then presented this analysis to the participants for 'respondent validation' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) or photo-elicitation' (Collier; 1967; 1979) and this revealed its limitations in this context. For example, I initially noticed 'speech shame' for both leaders and members in formal meetings and my fieldwork meetings. I then compared these findings with my critical incidents of 'being silenced and being silencing' in meetings (see p11). Consequently, two different themes emerged: 'formal meetings cause speech shame' and 'informal meetings lead to communication'. These themes were presented to the

participants to discuss: Why do people talk more in informal meetings than formal? What stops us from initiating a conversation? The participants shared points of agreement and disagreement: most participants agreed that lack of experience or formal meetings triggers speech shame. In contrast to these, the participants brought up different perspectives too: People who are silent in meetings may bring discussions to other places, and that people may be silent as otherwise they would be compelled to do some tasks. I further stated to these participants that this is how the members form dialogue in silence differently from Freire. I thus formed a dialogue between the participants' themes of 'speech shame and communication in meetings at varying levels, and the Freirean themes of culture of silence. I was thus able to re-engage with the initial analysis and in addition Freirean themes to, once again, make it richer. However, these processes were not comprehensive or never end up in a smooth dialogue. So, I will further show such complexities and how dialogue descends into silence just like problem-posing research descends into banking mode unavoidably. Freire's problem-posing model provided me with richer insights to be a reflective educator, a reflective researcher, and a reflective writer.

The next three sections of this article together highlight the emerging issues for empirical investigation while forming a dialogue between Freire and related scholars or my experiences/critical incidents. Additionally, these coming sections together critically address the limitations of the Freirean literature for understanding the practices of silence and dialogue in Kerala and thus the significance of my research. These sections will also explore the extent to which Freire inspires me to minimise the silencing nature of my fieldwork meetings or my relationships with the participants.

Silence and communicative silence in classrooms: re-reading Freire

Freire (2000: 88) criticises the way in which culture of silence hinders people's struggle against dehumanisation and their ability to develop critical consciousness in banking education classrooms:

> Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it.

For Freire, culture of silence normally occurs with teacher's monologue or narrations that are detached from students' lived realities. Bartlett also (2005) criticises how a typical banking-education classroom makes students scared, anxious or silent. Drawing on Freire, Bartlett (2005:352) suggests communicative nature of teaching encouraging students to be proactive against silencing banking education classrooms. Bartlett (2005:353), writes of a critical incident of a teacher participant:

> In school, through high school, if I would say, 'Teacher, I didn't understand this,' she would get irritated, get hostile. And then your classmates would start making fun of you, because you didn't understand. And so the kid starts to think, 'Oh, I'm an idiot [literally, a donkey]. I'll never learn. I'm just going to stay quiet. I'm not going to question anymore.' That happened to me.

In contrast to this silencing pedagogy, Freire (2005:40) developed out-of-school education programme: "Instead of a teacher, we had a coordinator; instead of lectures, dialogue; instead of pupils, group participants; instead of alienating syllabi, compact programs that were 'broken down' and codified into learning units" (2005:40). Freire (2000:88-9) writes what an ideal nature of dialogue should look like in problem-posing education to replace the vertical communication between the teacher and students in banking education forming culture of silence:

> And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action
> of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and
> humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one persons
> 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to
> be 'consumed' by the discussants.

I found similarities mostly but also identified differences between those Freirean concepts, and my classroom memories. One of those memories was an incident that occurred before I presented a paper in a college classroom seminar in 2002.

> The teacher entered the classroom and asked us straight away, "Are you ready
> guys?" Silence for a couple of seconds. Eventually, my friend stood up. The
> teacher nodded and smiled at her. She simply read her paper. Later, another
> friend came up, but after reading a bit she tried to read her paper in Malayalam
> language. Suddenly, the teacher stared at her and the presenter eventually
> stopped. After a moment of silence, the teacher continued: "No Malayalam
> please, only English." We became silent again. The teacher said, "It is fine for
> today, but not next time.

Language was a barrier for me to express my thoughts as I too had prepared in *Manglish* (combining Malayalam with English), just like my friend. On the one hand, the teacher's initial authoritative tone or her facial expressions indeed silenced me. On the other hand, I was silent to express my fear, shame, or anger. The teacher and I communicated using gestures and facial expressions. Although I was verbally silent, I was still able to express my fear and anger. However, none of us verbally requested that the teacher use Manglish. From our silent expressions, the teacher may have realised our struggle to communicate. Somehow, she negotiated and let us communicate in Manglish for the time

being.This experience taught me that teachers might also use silence productively, which is hardly seen in the Freirean scholarship.

Huey- Li Li (2000) refines Freire's culture of silence differently: when banking education teachers deposit knowledge onto their students frequently there won't be any breaks of silence in the teachers' talk. However, there are breaks of silence during a classroom presentation allowing the teachers to think and thus bring innovative ideas. As Huey- Li Li (2001:157) further illustrates, 'the use of silence in educational settings may simply allow time for reflection, which further facilitates more meaningful interactions between teachers and students'. By culture of silence, Freire indeed does not refer to such breaks in delivering lectures. Freire rather discusses the students' silence due to classroom oppression. Scholars including Kohl (1994), Kincheloe (2005), Jaworski and Sachdev (1998), similarly offer enormous insights to criticise Freire's division between silence and dialogue. Kincheloe (2005) argues that teachers are generally expected to talk more than the students, and the students are more likely to be silent. Sometimes teachers use silence to discipline their students. The students' silence, on the other hand, might show their resistance to oppression, their ignorance about the questions being asked or their speech shame. For Jaworski and Sachdev (1998), silence cannot be restricted to an absence of noise or absolute quietness. Nevertheless, these scholars discuss such issues in formal education systems outside Kerala. On the other hand, there is little research on similar questions in the out-of-school education systems in Kerala. For instance, those who research (Devika and Thampi, 2007; John, 2009; Minimol and Makesh, 2012) Kudumbashree or community organisations rarely discuss the question of silence in meetings. Their findings are limited to routine communication of members and they largely focus on signs of women's empowerment within the dominant Kerala's power structure. So, this article explores how silence operates as dialogue regarding the engagement of Adivasi

community in their formal meetings as well as my own fieldwork meetings while addressing the following questions:

- How do the leader and the members communicate, use silence, or transform silence in meetings?
- How do they form consciousness, challenge, or resist their oppression in silence?
- What makes the researcher and the participants silent in fieldwork meetings?
- What a dialogical approach to meetings and relationships would look like in problem-posing research?

Silenced identities and dialogues: Freire and critical pedagogy

Freire predominantly discusses the oppressed as a single category rather than micro identities including race, gender, or ethnicity. However, his emphasis on patronisation and subjectivity to some extent are closer to the politics of identity. For instance, Freire (2000:45) writes of the extent to which the oppressed can realise the importance of liberation:

> Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?

Freire suggests problem-posing education for the oppressed to define their oppression on their own and then facilitate a united action and reflection with their oppressed peers, rather than passively receiving the liberation remedies created by the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed. So, revolutionary leaders should not impose their worldviews or projects in a way to patronise the

oppressed, which Frere considers a typical pattern of the banking model. Otherwise, such interventions would not make the oppressed transform their culture of silence. Like Freire, McLaren, and Giroux (1986), Ford suggests that classroom should incorporate the voices of traditionally excluded students to deal with systemic oppression. Huey- Li Li also discusses the importance of silenced voices and silencing silences. Ford (2014:390) suggests dialogue and critical pedagogy for the oppressed:

> Critical pedagogy can deploy the whatever-upholding respect for the ineffability of being-to make ourselves appear ineffable to ourselves; to excavate a non-predicative being-in-common in the present; to think the common outside of identity.

Ford addresses critical pedagogy for dealing with oppression that comes along with identity; dialogue allows the students to define their problems, develop critical consciousness and makes oppression visible. For Henry Giroux (2011: 6), 'critical pedagogy foregrounds a struggle over identities, modes of agency, and those maps of meaning that enable students to define who they are and how they relate to others'. Kincheloe (2005) argues that critical pedagogy explores how differences can address racial, ethnic, socio-economic class, gender, or religious identities. Although, identity is not my explicit focus, I will show how practices of silence and dialogue vary in meetings regarding the ascribed or achieved identities of people. Freire (2000) considers the teacher as silencer and students as silenced; but he overlooks the way teachers can be silenced or oppressed by their students, as I was silenced. For instance, Kohl (1994) identifies that the marginalised students might be shy during their engagement with elite friends. Neither Freire nor Bartlett explains whether people communicate or resist oppression in silence outside classrooms. These reflections triggered me to revise the initial set of questions:

- How do the Adivasi community are silenced in relation to caste or gender identities?
- How do leaders and members silence each other in meetings?

With these questions, this article identifies the practices of silence and dialogue in out-of-school education meetings of the Adivasi community. These dialogues with Freire educates me to minimise the disciplinary nature of silence when forming dialogue with my participants. Nonetheless, my dialogical attempts to reduce silence themselves descended into silence at times. So, this article will elaborate on those critical incidents to discuss: I how the participants and I was silenced in meetings; and how did we silence each other in fieldwork meetings regardless of our identities. These questions are further revised when I reviewed Hue-Li Li, hooks, and Lorde in dialogue with Freire: Huey- Li Li also discusses silence in relation to cultural practices of historically oppressed people including black women. hooks (1989;1996) and Lorde (1984) discuss the importance for the oppressed to emerge from their silence into speech. Gal discusses silence as a culturally imposed phenomenon making women passive in public domain; but she argues that such women may be able to speak out on other occasions. Gal calls this social silence. These scholars consider silence as a cultural or social phenomenon rather than pedagogical. Freire primarily focuses on the pedagogical aspects of students' silence not the teachers. Nor does he discuss historical inheritance of silence of the oppressed. Scholars (Gal, 1990; Devika *et al*, 2011) emphasize that women and the oppressed community were historically marginalised in the domestic or public spaces due to caste or cultural restrictions. However, they rarely address the relation between banking education and caste and culture of silence. So, in contrast to these scholars, this article explores:

- To what extent is Adivasi community's silence related to culturally imposed practices by caste?
- To what extent do they emerge from their historically and culturally inherited silence at varying levels?

Although, Ford (2014) raises the question of identity in the operation of power and oppression, he does not address dialogue explicitly unlike Buber (2002). These questions were further extended after I reviewed Buber (2002) and Huey-Li Li (2001;2004): they discuss the operation of silence as dialogue differently from Freire.

Non-verbal dialogues and relationships: Freire Vs Buber

Freire (2000) argues that dialogue occurs through the sharing of ideas that make students break their silence. However, Freire does not explore people's nonverbal communications; but, Buber (2002:4-5) does: "What does he now 'know' of the other? No more knowing is needed. For where unreserved has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally." Buber gives an imaginary example of how two strangers sitting next to each other on a journey form dialogue in silence without even knowing each other. Silence might form part of dialogue, albeit paradoxically. Freire was influenced by Buber (2004), Buber discusses dialogue enabling men to live in relationship with one another by two distinct ways of being in the world: "The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being." (2004:3).

Drawing on Buber, Freire argues that *I-it* relationships are more likely to occur in banking education, and they are transformed into *I-thou* relationships with problem-posing education. Again, Freire considers such relationships in binary, unlike Buber. Buber reminds us that the *I* of the combination *I-it* can transform

into an *I-thou*, which establishes dialogue and enables people to live in relation with others. Nevertheless, this *I* may slip back to his original realm of *I-it*. Buber believes in oscillation between *I-it* and *I-thou*, rather than in an either/or relationship between both parties, or in people developing both ways of being at the same time. First, people approach the world with their desire to own things or control things. Buber calls this way of facing the world the *I* of the primary word *I-it*. This *I* considers others as objects for observation. For example, a teacher who speaks from this *I* would say: my student is intelligent. This teacher uses his/her student's intelligence to validate his/her own existence rather than considering the separate identity of the student. Another way of facing the world is to speak from the *I* of the combination *I-thou*. This *I* confirms both itself and the reality it talks about. In other words, this *I* recognises the other as itself -This I reflects upon the other party to see him/herself from a distance. However, no such dialogue exists in the combination of *I-it*. Even though it is difficult to pin down an *I-thou* relationship, it is a lived reality rather than contractual. The principles discussed inspired me to constantly observe my own fieldwork meetings while forming dialogue with the participants. Additionally, this article will show how the leaders and members form relationships with one another; and how such relationships oscillated between 'I-thou' and 'I-it' in meetings including my own fieldwork meetings.

Learning from my dialogue with the Freirean literature can be summarised as follows. Freire ignores the complexity of silence and dialogue and their coexistence especially outside classrooms (Buber, 2002); nor does he discuss such practices beyond the false binary between teacher-silencer and students-silenced (Kohl, 1994; Kincheloe, 2005; Jaworski and Sachdev, 1998; Huey-Li Li,2001). All these dialogues together informed me the oscillation between silence and dialogue as education practices mainly at the theoretical level. Additionally, the gaps between these pieces of literature led me to further

investigate the nature of silence and dialogue as meeting practices and relationships rather than classroom at the theoretical level; and explore how both practices might oscillate from one another in my fieldwork meetings at the methodological level, and how such oscillations vary in participants' formal or informal meetings and public events at the empirical level, as elaborated on the remaining sections.

Research as silence and dialogue

As discussed in the beginning, I constantly revisited my methodology while reflecting on the ongoing critical incidents emerging from my fieldwork meetings to minimise the silencing nature of my research. Freire kept inspiring me to follow the principles of reflection to stop myself from being an oppressor when forming dialogues with the participants as a non-Adivasi male researcher. For Freire (2000:135), in revolutionary action, the leaders reflect on themselves from the perspectives of the oppressed while acting with the oppressed; in the oppressive action, the dominant elites act on themselves without involving the oppressed; and the mutual role no longer exists, and actors become mere objects of their own actions, which are mono-logical, silencing, and immobile:

THEORY OF
REVOLUTIONARY ACTION

THEORY OF
OPPRESSIVE ACTION

Intersubjectivity
Subjects-Actors   Actors-Subjects
(revolutionary leaders)   (the oppressed)

Actors-Subjects
(dominent elites)

These ideas have much in common with ethnography: Malinowski (1993) suggests that an ethnographer must realise his/her perspectives of their own world through a native's viewpoint in the world of inter-subjectivity. Tedlock (1991) elaborates on this dual role of the researcher as there has been a shift from participant observation to the observation of participation, one that

identifies the potential effects of his/her own behaviour upon others. Auto-ethnography (Tedlock, 1991; Murphy, 1987; Schwalbe, 1996a) emphasises the effects of researchers' behaviour on participants. As discussed previously, such attempts will lead to an I-thou relationship rather than I-It. Conversely, I consider how my actions impacted the participants, and vice-versa, addressing the relationship between me (the researcher) and the participants in terms of Freirean concepts. These reflections usually happened in the evening, or a few minutes after my interviews or meetings with participants, and were vital when, as a problem-posing researcher, I posed major Freirean themes to the participants and related struggles in the initial fieldwork meetings (see Table one).My fieldwork meetings still silenced the participants especially during the initial process of finding participants: 'I look forward to working with eight to ten participants. It is up to you, who else would like to become the participants,' (Syamprasad, Initial meeting, 23.09.13). When I asked this question, there was complete silence for a while. The Kudumbashree chairperson then asked the participants, "Can I nominate some of you?" Some members nodded, some just looked at her without expressing anything, and some said, "Okay and let us see." These communications between the chairperson and the members reflect Freire's (2000) culture of silence. When I posed this episode, the chairperson countered that people would not join by themselves unless they were coerced. Nevertheless, some members refused to become participants, saying that they were too busy to join my fieldwork. Other members did not say "no" to the chairperson, but they were not there when I visited their homes. One participant walked away when she saw me. In this way, the nominees seemed to *silently* withdraw and thus our relationships descended into I-it. The participants' silent withdrawal from meetings made me renegotiate my initial plans. I reduced the number of meetings to a minimum and replaced meetings by home visits to avoid imposing meetings in a banking away. I was thus in constant dialogue with the participants to minimise the silencing nature of my meetings.

There was a different episode of silence in the next meeting (24.09.13): Rajan arrived very late and looked very serious, with his face towards the floor. He took his seat without looking at anyone. He grabbed my draft thesis for my PhD upgrade and had a quick look through it, which made me nervous. He suddenly raised his face and said, "Can I ask you something if you don't mind?" "Don't feel bad," I replied, "no problem." I was once again silenced when he picked on some mistakes. In the glossary, I mentioned Pathiyar a scheduled tribe, but Rajan corrected me, pointing out that they are a scheduled caste [4]. I apologised for this error and thanked him for his feedback. I then read the rest of the glossary entries to find out more errors.

I was concerned about my first meeting (23.09.13) with potential participants: could I present my thesis from the beginning to the end? I kept reminding myself "try your best not to form narration sickness, monologue or silence them." We introduced each other: Who am I? With whom do I live? What am I doing now? During my turn, I introduced myself and explained my commitment with the Kudumbashree Mission. I then presented my project after introducing Freirean themes. I wanted to overcome banking education and become a reflective researcher (Freire,1978; 2000; 2005), while acknowledging that problem-posing education should not simply repeat what was taught previously. Dewey (1993) asserts that reflective thinking frees people from impulsive and routine actions. Dewey (1993), Spalding and Wilson (2002) claim that reflective thinking liberates people from prejudices and makes them consider the consequences of their own actions regarding many subject positions. Similarly, Buber inspires me to speak from the I of the combination of I-thou and see myself through the eyes of the participants. Bearing all these ideas together in mind, I decided to reflect on the participants' ongoing issues or their views; I tried my best to make the topics of discussion different every meeting rather

than repeating what I already discussed in previous meetings. These steps led me to minimise culture of silence and narration sickness in my meetings with the participants. For instance, I posed a theme of people's absence to the participants that emerged from that meeting itself:

Not many people arrived today. Some people may … interested but some people … not (sic). I remember a meeting that I organised during my career at a local NGO: I started my speech (it was about decentralisation), one guy walked away after crossing out his name from the attendance sheet. He said, 'I thought you came from the Panchayat,' (Field notes, 18.09.05). This is an example … how research deposits (sic). I wished to discuss decentralisation, but this participant did not. From the perspective of Freire, I realise that education and research are alike. My research is about how similar conditions marginalise people like you and me. Therefore, we explore why don't they come? What conditions cause them to do that? (Syamprasad, Initial meeting, 24.09.13).

My reflective journal made me realise that I became more confident when sharing such experiences, but I still struggled to communicate the concepts of banking education, dichotomy, praxis, and narration sickness. As Freire (1995; 1998a) illustrates, the researcher should be open to reflecting on the existential life of participants. So, I introduced Freire's concepts as they are related to what the participants shared. Again, my speech still silenced the participants and they made surprised faces and looked at each other and me. Later, they talked to each other; one of them yawned and blinked without saying anything. So, I stopped talking and asked, "Have you got something to say to me?" Three participants did not respond, but Shobha said:

> I understand a little bit because we listen to them for the first time. You carry
> on ... after a few days, it should be okay, I hope ... have things on my mind

> (sic). But, I do not know how to express them. I like to be a listener. (Initial meeting, 24.09.13)

My speech still seemed to silence the participants in subsequent meetings. Participants' silence made me speak more when I introduced other scholarly ideas in dialogue with Freire. As Jackson (1968) points out, teachers cannot always act and reflect simultaneously because they may be busy with other tasks in the classroom; in their moment-to-moment communications, they may not always be analytic with their students. There are, however, occasions when teachers can reflect on themselves in solitude, before or after the class. However, Jackson does not emphasise how the classroom can become unavoidably banking when reflection is absent. Considering these ideas in my evaluation meeting, my conversation with some participants was unavoidably mono-logical and less banking, making them silent, but it became dialogical and problem-posing the next day when they responded to me with different ideas or experiences. My attempts to form dialogue descended into silence, but the participants broke our silence and transformed into dialogue in an ongoing process. Therefore, research and education are alike forming silence and dialogues simultaneously. Both the researcher and the participants might silence each other during their dialogical actions and thus their relationships might oscillate between I-It and I-thou (Buber, 2002). Additionally, these critical incidents supplemented my initial set of questions or became a tool to analyse similar themes in the participants' meetings as discussed in the next section:

- How do formal meetings contribute to speech shame?
- How do the Adivasi community use silence to resist banking models?
- How do the Adivasi community marginalise meetings in return?

Silencing and dialogic self-help group meetings

Considering the relationship between education and meetings, my initial focus of enquiry was to explore the relationship between the leaders and members, their communications, and their contributions to banking or problem-posing education. Nonetheless, such issues were much more complex than I expected because both the leaders and members seemed to be silent in the formal SHG meetings, despite the absence of dichotomy or domination, but they were not silent before or after the meetings or during break times. Learning about these different themes of silence was complex, as there was no direct sequence of events.

Figure one
Informal meeting

Figure two
Formal meeting

NHG meetings usually take place at the front of Daivappura, where wedding ceremonies and funeral rites for this Adivasi community take place. As evident from Figure one, members share their issues just before the meeting. However, they did not bring these discussions to the formal NHG meeting, which is shown in Figure two (Observation of formal and informal meetings 29.09.13)

A formal discussion was very limited in the meetings of the Kudumbashree NHG, while the meeting of the Adivasi Co-operative Society was more formal. The leaders and members discussed domestic matters in the Kudumbashree ADS and CDS meetings. The Adivasi members were relatively more silent than the non-Adivasi members. The non-Adivasi members argued with the ADS

president, who belonged to an Adivasi community. In the ADS meeting, the Adivasi members simply whispered to each other, and seats were put out separately for the president, secretary and the chairperson, just like at the Adivasi Co-operative Society meeting. This seating arrangement was not found in the neighbourhood meetings, which have the most members to represent the Adivasi community. It was difficult to see a leader/member dichotomy apart from the formal discussion and separation of seating arrangements. The members became silent when the meeting started formally. However, the members had informal discussions before, after and during the meetings, but none of these informal discussions had a sequence:

> **Deepthi**: I attended a funeral yesterday; the body was buried in a different place.
>
> **Shobha**: Do not they belong to our community?
>
> **Deepthi**: Not sure, I think they have come from a different place.
>
> **Meenu** (interruption): My son had an examination last week. He told me that exam was very difficult.
>
> **Deepthi**: Hmm. I heard that questions were asked from outside the syllabus. The students are now supposed to answer things that they are not taught in the classroom.
>
> **Geetha**: How do we celebrate Gandhi Jayanthi (Gandhi's Birthday)? Who else should be invited?
>
> (Informal dialogues between members, observation of NHG meeting, 29.09.13)

First, Deepthi and Shobha discussed how funeral rites differ for the local immigrants. Second, they criticised their experience of dialogical education in schools because Deepthi repeated her assertions in the evaluation meeting (02.01.13). Other members whispered to each other so that I hardly heard them.

Again, Deepthi and Shobha had a discussion: they mentioned a television celebrity but did not continue their previous topics. These informal dialogues did not form part of the minutes of the meeting, but the members communicate informally differently from formal meetings. These episodes are much closer to Gal (1990), who discusses the historical silence of women. As Huey-Li Li (2001) argues, it is misleading to say that silence means absence of protest or resistance. For example, although these women were not verbal on formal occasions, they criticised Kerala's education system during informal conversations. Considering Gal's (1990) argument, the Kudumbashree women' silence in formal meetings cannot always be considered unproductive silence unlike Freire. Differently from Gal, these meeting episodes show the way women communicate differently in formal and informal meetings at the micro level. Moreover, these meeting observations led to a re-evaluation of Freire's (2000) silence and oppression beyond the false binaries. For Freire, silence is the result of the dichotomy and domination in the classroom. However, the neighbourhood group and the Adivasi Co-operative Society meetings still contribute to silence despite having a mutual relationship between leaders and members. Freire's ideas have been insufficient to explore this relationship between formal meetings and silence. Since there was no direct communication between the leaders or members it was hard to explore whether they speak from the I of the combination I-thou or I -It (Buber, 2002). Similarly, it was hard to say whether they were acting as banking or problem-posing education teachers or students in the formal meetings. The participants provided me with further reasons for their silence:

Kannan said, "Sometimes I cannot answer if you ask me a question even if I know the answer. However, when we sit like this I would talk," (Kannan, Evaluation meeting, 26.10.13). "When Padmini talks, I listen to her carefully," (Shobha, Evaluation meeting, 26.10.13). When I shared this concept of silence,

Deepthi responded: "I am concerned whether I can express my feelings in the ADS/CDS meetings in the same way as in the NHG meetings, where I am more comfortable. I am shy to talk when I stand up". (Evaluation meeting, 06.10.13) It is evident from Deepthi's response that the formal environment stops her from talking confidently in the ADS/CDS meetings. Again, such narratives show that silence occurs due to historical oppression of the disadvantaged women in general (Gal,1990; Huey-Li Li, 2001). Gal reiterates that the communicative and linguistic skills of both men and women are largely shaped by cultural and gender constraints. Alternatively, as Ford suggests, mobilisation of identity is crucial in dialogue and liberation. However, when considering the meeting practices of women members in Kudumbashree, such mobilisation should also be addressed regarding gender and caste differences, lack of experience and the nature of meetings. For an instance, Renjini said that, "talking to people who are more experienced than me made me silent in the meeting of the Adivasi Co-operative Society; it is however different when I speak to my own colleagues in the NHG (One-to-one dialogue, 26.10.13). In response to these narratives, I said:

> I find people forming silence and dialogue in both formal as well as informal meetings. However, these formal and informal are relational. For example, technically speaking the NHG meetings are more informal than the ADS/CDS. You might express more in your informal meetings outside your NHG. (Syamprasad, Evaluation meeting, 26.10.13)

Although the members talk more in informal meetings, their silence was not limited to within their formal meetings. The members were silent despite having mutual relationships in formal meetings, but they were also silent in informal meetings despite the absence of dichotomy. For example, two members talked in the informal meeting but the rest of them were listening to their conversation.

Therefore, the binary between formal and informal seems to disappear. However, as Sumesh said, the silent members may share what they hear from their colleagues to others in informal gatherings.

I shared this summary in evaluation meetings (29.10.13; 30.10.13; 02.11.13). Renjini responded, "I should speak up in CDS meetings, because I must execute my responsibilities as a chairperson. But, in the Adivasi Co-operative Society, this is not needed because I am just a member," (Renjini, Evaluation meeting, 02.11.13). I responded, "You defended well the arguments raised by the non-Adivasi members in the CDS meeting despite being an Adivasi," (Syamprasad, Evaluation meeting, 02.11.13).

As discussed previously, Renjini's silence is hard to explore from a Freirean perspective. Other factors facilitated her to form dialogue and silence in both meetings: on the one hand, she was not simply a silent recipient; on the other hand, she was silent in the Adivasi Co-operative Society's meeting due to lack of experience. It is hard to say whether she was silent because she was a woman, because the male members were also silent. However, being an Adivasi did not make her silent in her engagement with her non-Adivasi members in the CDS meeting. Lack of experience and leadership responsibilities made her silent in the Adivasi Co-operative Society's meeting.

In short, these common experiences of silence and oppression do not form an upper/lower caste dichotomy. Similarly, silence in NHG meetings does not form a teacher/student dichotomy because the leaders were more silent than the members in contrast to Freire's (2000) culture of silence. The president was more silent than the members in the NHG meetings (22.10.13; 29.10.13). Similarly, the NHG president seemed to be very shy in both meetings. She smiled at me and answered my questions, but nothing more. Similarly, the NHG

secretary was silent in the ADS meeting (01.10.13). The CDS chairperson was silent in the Adivasi Co-operative Society meeting, but was very chatty in the CDS meeting, responding to the questions raised by her members (05.10.13). Similarly, Deepthi was talkative in both the NHG and ADS meetings despite just being a member (29.09.13 and 06.10.13). Unlike Deepthi, the other members did not talk much in the NHG meetings, which is evident from the audio tapes of these meetings. Nonetheless, Deepthi took some time to initiate her talk. Moreover, in contrast to Freire, silence and dialogue are not separable, as shown by Huey-Li Li (2001:158)

> As mentioned before, speech and silence actually form a continuum of human communication. To a certain degree, the complementary relationship between speech and silence indicates that silence and speech are functionally equivalent.

However, Huey-Li Li claims that both practices of silence and speech have equal values in all situations. Huey-Li Li' arguments enable me to look at both practices in continuum beyond formal pedagogical platforms at micro level. Moreover, Huey-Li Li also sheds light into the productive silence of teachers in classroom unlike Freire. Ford (2014), Huey-Li Li (2001) and Freire together inspire me to propose that meetings should be problem-posing to constantly reflect on the historically silenced voices and enable them to speak up. Problem-posing approach will facilitate dialogue between the leaders and members in meetings. Freire (2000) considers the teacher as spoken and the students as silent representatives, but not the other way around. In contrast to Freire, I explored silence beyond the binary between leader-oppressor and member-oppressed in these meetings. The leaders were silent, just like members, in their execution of responsibilities in meetings as the teacher and the students respectively that can be productive or unproductive. Formal meetings silence

people but meetings can become communicative or dialogical for them during informal occasions.

Silence as ongoing informal communication

This section discusses how people transform their silence into communication from one meeting to another as an ongoing education practice. As discussed above, women members are more likely to speak informally during their NHG meetings. However, I observed people's silence in the informal meetings of the Adivasi men too, but two of them talked as evident from Figure three. Nevertheless, I learned a different meaning of silence from participants when I presented my findings.

Figure three
Informal meetings

In this shed, the village residents meet to read newspaper. On the left, there are paddy fields spreading across acres. In the middle of the road, a man is sitting on his heels with his grandson. He listens to the conversation of people who gather inside the shed. Meanwhile Rajan went past after having a brief chat with these people. (participant observation of informal meeting, 17.10.13). I found six people gathered in this shed, but only two people had a conversation while I was there. Many participants responded to this saying that elders would

listen when youngsters talk and vice-versa. When I posed the above photograph, Sumesh explained to me what their informal meetings generally look like:

> Someone initiates a topic of conversation, one or two might discuss with each other. Others listen to their discussions. They do not normally complete a topic if another person turns up and introduces a new topic; they would then carry on with that. People who remain silent or do not talk may bring what has been discussed to their friends or family. I can walk out if I don't like what is being discussed in informal meetings. People do not need to listen to the instructions of the president or the secretary. (Sumesh, Evaluation meeting, 26.10.13)

Sumesh discussed the advantages and disadvantages of informal meetings: the absence of dichotomy and domination enables people to communicate or form a dialogue. However, what is discussed in these meetings may not be factual. Sometimes, people may gossip, which they cannot do in formal meetings; this concern could be a reason for people's silence in formal meetings. Furthermore, in a formal context, they need to make sure that their arguments are valid. For Sumesh, those who are silent form dialogue too: their silence does not always display their passiveness unlike Freire, but they might share their experiences through another platform where they are more comfortable. The participants thus disclosed their reasons for being silent in meetings, agreeing with certain themes (for example, formal meetings as causing speech shame) that I posed, but disagreeing with other themes (for example, members as passive recipients in meetings)

Differently from Freire, these meeting practices and participants' responses together show that both 'silence and dialogue' need to be understood outside classrooms and outside formal meetings, and people's potential to transform silence into dialogue in an ongoing way. These findings are again in par with

what bel hooks (1989:9) said: 'Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. Linking my findings with hooks enable me to explore that it may take considerable time for the oppressed to emerge from their silence and communicate in productive or meaningful ways. In short, the above narrative shows the operation of critical pedagogy through a dialogical exchange (Ford, 2014), between members within and outside meetings in their ongoing education journey.

Silencing events, identity, and resistance in silence

Freire links silence to banking education and an absence of critical consciousness, yet he considers dialogue a means to develop critical consciousness in problem-posing education. He does not address silence as critical consciousness and as a means of dialogue. Freire's ideas are insufficient to explore silence as resistance to oppression. I had a similar experience of being silent in an awareness class for the SC/ST community.

Figur four
Mandatory participation

Two women are responding to each other about the stage announcement:
You are all requested to stay over after the meal. There is one awareness class to

be delivered by a former judge. It is mandatory for all Scheduled Tribe promoters (Participant observation of Social Solidarity Day, 16.10.13).

This announcement shows the compelling nature of people's participation and the silencing nature of events that are conducted in a banking away. This was repeated elsewhere regarding the planning and implementation of community work for the Adivasi community (Syamprasad, 2016). However, other than the Adivasi promoters, most people left soon after this speech. When I heard this announcement, I asked Renjini and Deepthi. "Aren't you both going to attend the seminar?" They just smiled and stretched their fingers (in Kerala, we use these gestures to mean "no"). As discussed before, members are tired of training programmes that replicate similar content. There was a follow-up of their refusal to attend the seminar in the evaluation meeting (29.10.13). "We have attended many classes like this," (Renjini, 29.10.13). These conditions of oppression caused a silent withdrawal of people from meetings. These women members use silence to communicate their potential absence or their strategic defence to silence (Basso,1979). Susan on the other hand argues that although women are socially silenced in certain cultures particularly in Indian public domain, women may have alternative communication skills including attentiveness and responsiveness. So, Huey-Li Li (2011) discusses the importance of reclaiming silenced voices and silencing silences in similar contexts and it is vital to recognise the subjectivity of the silenced voices in social action despite their challenges to resist various forms of public silencing. The seminar started around 1.30 pm and a former judge from a marginalised community delivered the seminar.

> He suddenly walks through the middle of the audience. He is in a suit and
> coat, very serious and never looks at the audience. Everybody stands up as a
> gesture of respect. He then waves his palm towards the audience to mean sit

down. He breaks his silence with, "How many of you are ST promoters?" The ST promoters stand up and raise their hands to confirm their presence. It looks like a traditional classroom in Kerala where the teacher takes attendance by counting the students' heads. During his talk, he kept asking, "Are you listening to me? Hey young man... You... (pointing finger towards the audience) here." "Listen to me." "Keep quiet." On another occasion, he raises his voice as he is angry. "Do not talk to each other!" "Do not fall asleep!" "Everyone should take their seats and come to the front. No one should stand up." (Participant observation of Social Solidarity Day, 16.10.13)

I could not sit in the front row because I was overwhelmed by the speaker's authoritative voice and facial expressions, just like I was in my college as discussed before. I moved to the back of the seminar hall and I felt offended and annoyed. He finished his talk without giving us a chance to respond. His class indeed reflected how the teacher uses silence to discipline his/her students and produces silence in banking-education classrooms. This class was more or less the same as what Freire (2000) defines as a culture of silence. There was no attempt from the speaker to facilitate dialogues and he was in total control of the audience including myself. He never considered the audience's views and imposed his own 'ideal' banking education classroom as he spoke only from the I of the combination I-It (Buber, 2002). The Kudumbashree members challenge this realm of silence by using silence. To some extent the above awareness class mirrored my previous classroom experience of silence. His official dress code and facial expressions made me fall silent. When I shared my experiences, the CDS chairperson responded: "Most of our awareness classes are like this. We rarely had a chance to discuss. Even if there are opportunities to talk, people do not talk" (Evaluation meeting, 02.11.13).

The trainer did not belong to the Adivasi community, but the audience did. The trainer and the audience, including myself, belonged to a marginalised

community. However, this commonality did not stop the trainer from silencing us, nor did it make him talk much to his own marginalised colleagues. In this meeting, the participants, including myself, were silenced in the same way that we are silenced in society. Freire (2000) over emphasises the teacher-oppressor/student-oppressed relationships in the larger context of silence, rather than the local. In contrast to Freire, I identified that, despite being a member of the oppressed, the trainer became a banking educator with his professional identity as a retired judge; he thus silenced his own marginalised peers. So, I went beyond Freire's dichotomy between teacher and student and between the oppressor and the oppressed to explore these forms of silence in meetings. As I stated in the evaluation meeting (02.11.13), both leaders and members hold many identities making them silent or not silent and making them defend the realm of silence. In addition, these identities do not occur constantly but may vary depending upon the nature of platforms and the identity of people forming dialogues. I stated: "I made mistakes and I was bit anxious when I presented my work in your CDS, ADS and Tribal Co-operative Society meetings. However, this was not the case when I came to your neighbourhood meetings," (Syamprasad, Evaluation meeting, 02.11.13). These reflections made me realise why some participants were silent in formal meetings. Members communicate more outside their formal meetings.

Freire (2000) argues that silence is the outcome of social, economic, and political domination. According to Freire, power relations are the crucial factor in producing silence. Similarly, different identities of leaders and members determine how people talk and how they remain silent in meetings. For instance, the NHG president was in her post for the first time. However, the NHG member Deepthi had held similar offices in the past. Moreover, she came from a relatively rich Kuruma family in that area. Her husband was the ward member and her father-in-law was the previous ward member. However, these

factors were more-or-less absent in the case of the president: she lived in a small house and her husband worked for a daily wage. Likewise, Shobha had been a part of different beneficiary groups formed by the local NGOs. In both NHG meetings, most members were silent except for Deepthi and Shobha. These meetings did not show any sort of dichotomy or domination even though there were many instances of silence. It is not only the formal environment that makes people silent, but also the different identities of the participants.

People silence themselves, but, resist oppression in silence

In contrast to Freire (2000), the reason for the silence of audience at these formal meetings and public events was not an immediate result of dichotomy or domination: it was more related to their long years of marginalisation from formal gatherings. Most members were silent despite forming mutual relationships with others. According to the participants, everyone gets the opportunity to speak at these meetings and they are not restricted from talking. The meetings themselves do not prevent people from talking or from contributing to silence. There are no explicit instances of domination or dichotomy in the NHG meetings, but still they create silence. Freire does not explore the different ways in which silence occurs in both banking and problem-posing classrooms. Although the NHG meetings themselves are banking, the members experience both models of education in meetings. Therefore, silence and dialogue co-exist because banking and problem-posing education or the 'I-It and I-thou'(Buber, 2002) relationships also co-exist in meetings. Buber mostly deals with inter-personal relationships between individuals at the philosophical levels. Nevertheless, I extended his ideas into the methodological and empirical levels while forming dialogue with Freire. For instance, such relationships oscillated in my dialogue with the participants. Furthermore, I found that culture of silence contributes to 'I-It' relationships, and dialogue leads to I-thou' relationships. However, dialogue might descend into silence

just like I-thou' turns back to 'I-It' in the relationship between leaders and members in meetings.

Many members marginalised the awareness class to stop themselves from becoming silenced. As discussed above, despite being only a member, Deepthi talked more than her leaders in the NHG and ADS. Deepthi explained that "in every meeting, both the president and the secretary ask me 'You please talk'. That is why I talk all the time." This narrative reminded me of the way in which the participants marginalised our initial meetings without explicitly opting out. However, Sumesh and Kannan brought a different argument:

> If I talk about crop failures and new methods of farming, my colleagues will ask me 'Why don't you take over as president? Why don't you take more responsibilities?' This makes people silent even though they have some ideas. If I say a few words in that realm of silence I would be in 'trouble', ha-ha (laughing). (Kannan, Evaluation meeting 29.10.13)

Kannan talks about why people do not talk and how people use silence to deal with the banking forms of meetings. Sometimes, silence might show the way people marginalise the responsibilities that are imposed onto them. While responding to these narratives Sumesh said:

> It is so funny when absentees are forced to take on the role of president or the secretary without their knowledge. When people find out about this they are angry. 'Why did you put my name down before letting me know?' There are many people who know a lot of things and can speak very well. But they cannot utter a single word because of this. (Evaluation meeting, 29.10.13)

Kannan further argued that there are occasions where people are silent due to stage fright:

> I can talk about these issues to you. But I am not confident to talk to someone from a government department. I don't know the reason why. It may be due to laziness, fear, etc. My body sometimes shakes or I lose confidence when try to discuss some issues. Even though I have many things to offer, my tongue and mouth will not let them out on such necessary occasions. (Kannan, Evaluation meeting, 29.10.13)

Kannan's stories revealed how members were silenced in different contexts. First, he talked about how meetings silenced members and how the leader and members marginalised each other using silence. Second, he talked about the circumstances that made him silent. When I posed similar questions, many participants said: "Once I started I was fine. Most of us had the same problem," (Deepthi, Evaluation meeting, 29.09.13); "I am concerned about making mistakes. Even those who are educated do not speak much," (Shobha, One-to-one dialogue, 19.09.13); "People are silent because our colleagues laugh at them if they make mistakes or if they use a Kuruma word or accent while delivering their speeches," (Rajan, Evaluation meeting, 29.10.13). Madhavan, an informal participant, also shared similar reason for his silence in the meeting of the Adivasi Co-operative Society (05.10.13). Many factors play a crucial role in forming silence. Silence sometimes shows people's speech shame or incapability to talk; silence can also be communicative for people to prevent themselves from being oppressed. For Freire (2000), having internalised the image of the oppressor, the teacher silences his/her own students in the banking-education classroom. In contrast to these ideas, it is neither the leader nor the members who explicitly silence each other, but the participants' stories reveal that it happens at an implicit level. In other words, it is the interaction between the leaders and members making them silent.

Silence as banking education and caste oppression

The participants raised many reasons for their silence and speech shame. They unequivocally admitted that their long experiences of marginalisation made them silent and caused them to marginalise themselves which are closer to Gal (1990), Huey-Li Li (2001) and hooks (1989) as discussed previously. However, the participants acknowledged that their experience of marginalisation was not the only reason for their silence. I raised my opinions in evaluation meetings:

> As I said before, you may not talk well when you face many people; you do not have the same experiences as mine. Historically, tenants should cover their mouth when replying to their masters or lords. Similarly, women were supposed to talk but should hide behind doors to listen to their male counterparts in family meetings. (Syamprasad, Evaluation meetings, 30.10.13 and 02.11.13)

Most participants admitted that they experienced speech shame and communication struggles in formal meetings mainly due to lack of experience; therefore, formal meetings made people silent. The participants and I reached a conclusion that our silence was due to lack of experience, the formal nature of meetings, and our social and historical inheritance of silence. However, we concluded that silence occurred in informal meetings too. The participants also shared some disagreements and brought up different perspectives. Two participants particularly said that people who are silent in meetings may bring the topics of discussion to other places, and that people may be silent as otherwise they would be compelled to do some tasks as discussed in the next section. I further stated to these participants that this is how the members form dialogue in silence differently from Freire. Differently from their colleagues, these two participants informally engaged in the process of criticising or refining Freire. Additionally, my analogy between education and meetings led me to explore the false binary between silence and dialogue. In contrast to Freire, I explored that formal meetings marginalise people and make people

silent, but that silence can operate as a dialogue; and people marginalise this culture of silence in the form of dialogue. Furthermore, historically, marginalised communities had limited opportunities in the field of education, employment, or participatory governance. Today, they have many opportunities, but they cannot take advantage of or utilise them, and thus they inherit silence historically or culturally. This condition, in turn, serves the interests of the oppressor-a new tactic of banking education. In contrast to Freire, my fieldwork dialogues with the participants and literature (Ambedkar, 2004) show that, the caste system excluded people, including the Adivasi community, from Kerala's formal education system, and therefore these communities were informally inserted into a culture of silence. Delivering a speech in a meeting will not be a problem for an upper-caste person, because s/he is trained to do this from childhood: s/he might be familiar with typical meetings through their own household because their parents or grandparents have been civil servants, bureaucrats, or royalty in the past. This experience will be enough to gain communication skills gradually for their future endeavours. So, lack of seniority or experience would not relatively affect their speech in contrast to members of the lower-caste community. On the other hand, a person belonging to an excluded community does not exercise such privileges, because his ancestors may have been servants to an upper-caste family, tenants in the feudal era, or slaves. These traditional occupations are imposed onto them by the caste system in a banking way and legitimised with banking education through beliefs or cultural practices. These conditions cause them to drop out, or prevent them from attending school or colleges regularly. Therefore, they are less likely to speak confidently in relevant spaces, as caste prevented them from gaining such skills. But they may be well trained or confident to talk about the lived realities of their traditional occupations.

Scholars (Arun*et al.*,2011; Kavitha *et al.,* 2011; John, 2009; Anand, 2004;

Mohindra, 2003; Minimol and Makesh, 2012) argue that the Kudumbashree movement enabled women to gain self-confidence and autonomy. These scholars predominantly celebrate the success story of Kudumbashree without addressing its limitations beyond the surface level. In contrast to these scholars, the themes of the participants in my research reveal that members still struggle to speak, although the Kudumbashree provided opportunities to liberate themselves from their historically contingent forms of oppression or marginalisation to some extent. This episode was repeated in other formal and informal meetings, and in my own fieldwork meetings. Again, Kudumbashree members were not used to communicating formally, due to the restrictions imposed onto them by caste and patriarchy historically. This experience made them withdraw from meetings or from talking in meetings, because people deposit knowledge by themselves from their own long experiences of being silenced by the caste system. In other words, this silence generated by the caste system also educated its victims to silence themselves paradoxically: a culture of silence itself contributes to banking education. Freire (1985; 2000), Ford (2014), Huey-Li Li(2001), Gal (1990) or hooks (1989)do not emphasise such a *natural* operation of oppression or silence causing banking education in new forms.

Concluding, but this writing-dialogue continues…

This is not a formal conclusion to what I discovered so far because my research is unfinished and ongoing like problem-posing education. Freire (1978; 1994; 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2005) predominantly discusses silence and dialogue as binary classroom practices. On the other hand, scholars including Buber (2004), Huey-Li Li, 2001; 2004 and Gal, (1990) discuss the oscillation between both practices. Ford (2014) explores dialogue in relation to the mobility of identity and critical pedagogy. In contrast to these scholars, my contributions can be generally classified at theoretical, methodological, and

empirical levels although each might overlap with one another. At the theoretical level, I explored silence and dialogue as oscillating meeting practices in out-of-school education. Silence can be a part of oppression or resistance to oppression, and it may occur without the teacher-student dichotomy. Silence can also be meaningful, productive, and communicative as ongoing dialogues; and similarly, dialogues can happen in silence despite the absence of mutuality in classrooms, fieldwork, or community work meetings. They oscillate at varying levels regarding the identity (for example, ascribed identities such as caste or gender; and achieved identities like profession) of and the field (examples include formal meetings, informal meetings, or classrooms) in which people speak. Therefore, such oscillations vary just like banking and problem-posing education oscillates. Culture of silence is not merely a result of knowledge-depository education unlike Freire. Likewise, Freire does not deal with silence as historically and culturally imposed practices. Although Ford (2014), hooks (1989) and Gal (1990) discuss historical forms of silence they do not explicitly discuss silence in relation to elements of self-oppression. Contrastingly, I discovered that people silence themselves, forming their own banking education, because they inherit silence due to culturally and historically imposed practices by caste. Caste itself is typically a form of banking education depositing knowledge to provide justifications for the silencing Brahminical social order. I intend to develop such themes in future writing.

At the methodological level, I found that research reproduces culture of silence when it becomes unavoidably banking, but it becomes dialogical with problem-posing models. My analogy between problem-posing education and problem-posing research informed me to develop a unique dialogical methodology that further inspired me to minimise culture of silence in research. Nevertheless, my fieldwork dialogues descended into silence and my

relationships with the participants oscillated between I-Thou and I -It (Buber, 2004) at times. These fieldwork meetings educated the participants and myself about our shared experiences of silence and dialogue. Therefore, research is educational when it is dialogical but oppressive when it is silencing, which I intend to develop in my future writing.

At the empirical level, I explored that out-of-school education/or community work meetings contribute to silence and dialogue simultaneously, and people marginalise such meetings in return. Freire de-emphasises the conditions leading to silence and oppression in out-of-school education platforms. As distinct from Freire, I explored that both formal and informal meetings could produce silence, and both the leaders and members communicate by being silent. The Adivasi members sometimes remain silent because otherwise they would be forced to hold leadership positions in the self-help groups. Both research and community work meetings are like education: they can be silencing and banking, simultaneously; they can be dialogical, problem-posing, or both; in the way such meetings are conducted, or the way people educate each other in meetings. Again, scholars (Buber, 2004; Huey-Li Li, 2001;2004; hooks, 1989; Gal, 1990; Bartlett, 2005, Ford, 2014) rarely explore the coexistence between silence and dialogue at the empirical levels particularly regarding the meeting engagements and practices. The notion of silence is complex and hard to define uniformly using Freire's opposition between silence and dialogue.

Finally, my research contributions can be generalised in the other parts of India or outside: At the theoretical level, the coexistence between the practices of silence and dialogue can be applied in both the school and out-of-school education systems. These findings further address the ambiguity of Freire's culture of silence, oppression, and education in India or elsewhere. Generally,

my dialogical methodology could be useful for critical education research or qualitative social science research. Empirically, my findings are applicable to any formal or informal meetings for all the silenced community. I propose that Indian policy makers should evolve their policies having problem-posing natures in dialogue with the target groups to minimise culture of silence although silence can sometimes be unavoidable. This co-construction of knowledge will continue to inspire and educate the participants and myself to recognise or challenge culture of silence, oppression, and marginalisation. I hope that these dialogues will continue, and that they reach non-participants in this research so that they too might be involved in this ongoing learning.

Notes

[1] The exact location of the study has been kept confidential due to ethical and anonymity considerations.

[2] As evident from the Kerala Panchayat raj Act (1994), the local governing bodies hold a three-tiered system: Grama (Village) Panchayat, Block Panchayat and District Panchayat. The Grama Panchayat consists of elected and administrative bodies. The elected bodies consist of a President, finance standing committee, welfare standing committee and development standing committee. The President and committee members are elected by the ward members, and ward members are elected every five-year period. The administrative staff members and secretary are appointed on a permanent basis by the Kerala Public Service Commission of the State Government. Kudumbashree self-help groups are formed in each Grama Panchayat in the state of Kerala in 1995, to strengthen this local self-government system. Kudumbashree Mission (2018) is formed as a joint initiative of Kerala's State Government and the National Bank for Rural Reconstruction and Development (NABARD). Kudumbashree is registered as per the Charitable Societies Act 1955, which aims to reduce poverty and empower women while offering community network activities, micro-enterprise and thrift- and credit facilities. Kudumbashree (2011) is monitored by the welfare standing committee of the Grama Panchayat for any funds allocated by the Government. It has three federated bodies: Neighbourhood Groups at local level; an Area Development Society (ADS) at ward level; and a Community Development Society (CDS) at the Panchayat level. The CDS consist of a Chairperson, vice-chairperson and executive members from the ADS. Similarly, the ADS consist of a Chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, and executive members from the NHG. As evident from Arun*et al.* (2011), the NHG consist of a president, a secretary, and members from 10-15 poorer families who are selected based on nine risk factors: earnings, land, shelter, drinking water supply, food, household headship, literacy, alcohol addiction and disadvantaged groups. The leaders of the CDS, ADS and NHGs are elected by the members every three year. The members of the NHG meet every week; members of the ADS and CDS meet every month. Representatives of the NHG bring the meeting minutes to the ADS, then the ADS meeting minutes are produced in the CDS. Similarly, discussions of CDS meetings are transferred back to next ADS and then to NHG meetings.

[3] The term critical incident (Tripp, 2012:24) comes from history, where it refers to an event or

situation that marked a significant turning-point, either in the life of a person or an institution (such as a political party), or in some social phenomenon (industrialisation, a war or some legal negotiations)'.
[4] According to Hindu mythology (Ambedkar, 2004), there are four castes, namely the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras. According to the principle of Karma, marginalised people are born to suffer as they committed sins in their past life. They are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy; they must serve the *Brahmins* who occupy the top position; and they cannot violate this because it is God who created this stratification. Ambedkar (2004) argues that caste is not a division of labour but a division of labourers because these divisions are not based on people's choices: on the contrary, choices are imposed onto people. For example, a scavenger is born as a scavenger and he will remain so for the rest of his life. For Ambedkar, this occupational immobility shows how slavery is enmeshed within the caste system.

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