

**SKILL DEVELOPMENT**  
**AND**  
**YOUTH ASPIRATIONS IN INDIA**

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

*By*

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# SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH ASPIRATIONS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis features two kinds of skill-training programmes implemented in Tamil Nadu (India) drawing on 18 months of fieldwork. The first explores how Nokia recruits and trains semi-skilled youth to work as Operators, in the Nokia SEZ, in Sriperumbudur. I contrast this with the case of Project SEAM: a state-funded skill-training programme, implemented by a private firm through a public-private partnership (PPP). SEAM trains rural, below-poverty-line youth, to work as sewing machine operators in India's burgeoning garment clusters. I argue that contemporary India's development trajectory is characterised by the confluence between an increasingly pluralised network state and rapidly proliferating network enterprises, which work together to establish new workplaces and design and implement skill-training programmes for India's rural poor. Skill-training is used as a lens to examine the complex, symbiotic relationship between these two actors, who drive these new initiatives.

Skill development programmes are predicated on the idea that aspiration is a positive, transformative force – a view that is echoed by social scientists like Appadurai (2004; 2013). I demonstrate how the network state and network enterprise, shape and mould youth aspirations, across the skill-training cycle: transforming (within mere weeks) unemployed, unskilled rural youth – into semi skilled workers, ready to work in the manufacturing sector. Youth aspirations are consciously heightened as a marketing strategy, to maximize enrollments into skill-training programmes. Aspiration is also actively taught as a valuable soft-skill, that young people must possess, to become a part of India's new workplaces. Through an exploration of how young people encounter such initiatives, I question the idea that aspirations are positively transformational. I highlight the tension in youth experience - between aspirations elevated by the training program, and factory work's harder realities - to illustrate the dark side of aspiration: characterized by disillusionment, disappointment and personal failure.

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The responsibility for any errors or inconsistencies in this thesis remains mine.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIADMK	- All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
BPL	- Below Poverty Line
BPO	- Business Process Outsourcing
CEO	- Chief Executive Officer
DMK	- Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
CBSDI	- Cluster Based Skill Development Initiative
CII	- Confederation of Indian Industry
EPZ	- Export Processing Zone
EXIM	- Export-Import
FERA	-Foreign Exchange Regulation Act
FICCI	- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FTZ	- Free Trade Zone
GLSDI	- Grassroots Level Skill Development Initiative
GPN	- Global Production Network
HHH	- Hand in Hand
HR	- Human Resources
ICT	-Information and Communication Technology
IL&FS	- Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services
IRDP	- Integrated Rural Development Programme
IT	- Information Technology
ITI	- Industrial Training Institute
ITES	- Information Technology Enabled Services
MNC	- Multinational Corporation
MoRD	- Ministry of Rural Development
NGO	- Non-Government Organisation
NITS	-Nokia India Thozhilalar Sangham

NREGS	- National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NREP	- National Rural Employment Programme
NRLM	- National Rural Livelihoods Mission
NSDC	- National Skill Development Corporation
NSDM	- National Skill Development Mission
NSDP	- National Skill Development Policy
PDE	- Personality Development and Enhancement
PIA	- Project Implementation Agency
PPP	- Public Private Partnership
PwC	-PricewaterhouseCoopers
TIDCO	- Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation
TNALPA	- Tamil Nadu Acquisition of Land for Industrial Purposes Act
TRYSEM	- Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment
RLEGP	- Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme
RRC	- R Radhakrishnan Committee
RTI	- Right to Information
SC	- Scheduled Caste
SEAM	- Skills for Employment in Apparel Manufacturing
SEZ	- Special Economic Zone
SGSY	- Swarnajayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana
SGSY-SP	- Special Projects for Skill Development of Rural Youths under SGSY
SIPCOT	- State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu
SMO	-Sewing Machine Operator
ST	-Scheduled Tribe
UPA	-United Progressive Alliance
XI FYP	- Eleventh Five-Year Plan

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## NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this thesis, I follow Sinha (2004) and Sud (2012) and use the term ‘state’ (with a small ‘s’) to refer to the “institutional apparatus of government” (Sud: 2012:1); while ‘State’ (with a capital ‘S’) signifies India’s sub-national regions or federal units.

I use the terms skill-training and skill development interchangeably.

Pseudonyms have been used for all the rural youth who have participated in this study and for some of IL&FS’ staff who requested anonymity. Pseudonyms have also been used for the specific villages where fieldwork was conducted and for the garment manufacturing firms featured in this thesis. The original names of IL&FS and Nokia have been retained, as I have obtained permission to do so.

The term ‘IL&FS’ is used as shorthand to refer IL&FS Clusters. ‘IL&FS Corporation’ refers to the main parent entity of IL&FS.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **I. Why Skill Development?**

The rise of new kinds of workplaces in global spaces such as call centres, shopping malls, special economic zones (SEZs) and industrial parks is a key feature of India's development trajectory. Scholarship on the new workplace has focused primarily on employment and labour relations within these worksites<sup>1</sup>. However, the processes by which a new workforce is trained and prepared for work in new workplaces in the manufacturing sector, has received limited academic attention. Who are the main actors and agents who transform India's unskilled/semi-skilled youth into trained workers for its new workplaces? How do India's youth respond to these large-scale "skilling" efforts? This doctoral thesis explores these questions by focusing specifically on skill-training programmes – government and private – aimed at equipping rural Indian youth with skills, to make them employable in India's burgeoning new workplaces.

The theme of skill-training is particularly significant. Not only does it explore a central aspect of the new workplace, and outline how steady new supply of skilled workers are created for India's new work sites: it has also recently emerged as a central component of the Indian state's economic and social development policy. This new emphasis on "skilling<sup>2</sup>" was first articulated in India's Eleventh Five Year Plan (XI FYP) document, in

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<sup>1</sup> On the garment manufacturing sector, see Chari (2004) and De Neve (2005 a, b). On the IT sector, see Fuller and Narasimhan (2007, 2008); Upadhyay and Vasavi (2008); Mukherjee (2008); Ilavarasan (2008); Sathaye (2008). On the organised retail sector see Gooptu (2009) and on SEZs see (Cross 2009)

<sup>2</sup> Skill-training efforts are popularly referred to as "skilling" initiatives.

2007. Since then, a number of skill-training programmes have been launched in India – by government departments, private corporations, industry associations and non-government organizations (NGOs). Policy documents (such as the XI FYP) portray skill-training as a panacea to ensure “inclusive growth” - a central objective of XI FYP, and, more importantly, the driving political agenda of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government, which first came to power in 2004 and won its second mandate in the 2009 general election. Skill-training programmes are described by policy makers as initiatives, which could simultaneously promote rural development, empower youth, and reduce poverty and unemployment (Planning Commission, 2008; MoRD, 2007).

While the Indian state’s skill development efforts have received much media attention<sup>3</sup>, such initiatives have only recently been subjects of significant academic enquiry<sup>4</sup>. This doctoral research project began, consequently, at a time when there was no academic research on the Government of India’s newly launched skill development programmes; and accordingly, sought to fill this gap by examining how such programmes are envisioned and implemented on the ground. I was specifically interested in exploring the impact of such initiatives on shaping the aspirations and personalities of India’s youth (most of whom come from economically vulnerable and socially disadvantaged sections of Indian society). These aspects of skill development have not yet been researched. Indeed, skill-training (both as general activity, and as formal policy intervention) provides an interesting lens to explore what skills are valuable in India’s new workplaces; how youth are mobilized and trained under these programmes; and the impact of these initiatives on shaping their future aspirations. As skill development has also emerged as

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<sup>3</sup>For examples: see Punj (2012) and Khan (2009)

<sup>4</sup> Gooptu (2013a) has written about skill-training for private security guards and in this context discusses Government of India’s new policy focus on skill development; Mehrotra, Gandhi and Sahoo (2013) question India’s ambitious skill development targets; my chapter (Nambiar 2013) in Gooptu (2013b) highlights the role of skill development programmes in creating enterprising subjects for India’s new workplaces.

an important state-driven programme to train India's youth to make them employable, a study of such initiatives also provides insight into the Indian state's new role, as pluralised agent, which collaborates with a range of other actors to achieve development goals.

I explore all these themes by situating them within the context of two kinds of skilling initiatives in two different institutions. The first is an exploration into how Nokia (a leading Finland-headquartered multinational telecommunications firm, known for manufacturing mobile phone handsets) recruits and trains semi-skilled rural youth to work as Operators, in its largest worldwide manufacturing facility in Sriperumbudur town, in Tamil Nadu's Kancheepuram district. The Nokia Telecom SEZ was established in Sriperumbudur in 2006, and it was one of the first multinational firms, which recruited and trained thousands of semi-skilled youth from surrounding villages in Kancheepuram to work in its factory. Jobs in the Nokia SEZ were advertised widely in villages around Sriperumbudur. Young semi-skilled men and women in Tamil Nadu have been urged by state representatives and NGO workers to acquire new skills in order to obtain "company jobs"<sup>5</sup> in firms like Nokia. These openings were perceived as prestigious new job opportunities in a rapidly industrialising region. Nokia's training programme, known as the "Smart Operator Bootcamp", provides a good example of how workers are trained by the private sector to assemble mobile phones in the Nokia SEZ.

Material on this training programme was first collected in 2008 – a few months before the global financial crisis, when the demand for new workers was high. This was also a time when skill-training in the private sector had little state support. In 2008, the Government of India was in the process of drafting the National Skill Development

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<sup>5</sup> The English term "company job" is a generic term widely used in Tamil Nadu to describe jobs in MNCs.

Policy and had just outlined its skill development targets in its Eleventh Five Year Plan (XI FYP) document. Thus, the Nokia case provides a good example of how skill-training took place in the private sector, before it became a development priority for the Government of India.

I contrast the case of skill-training within the Nokia Telecom SEZ with one of the first government-funded skill-training programmes, implemented by a private company through a public-private partnership. This initiative, known as Project SEAM (Skills for Employment in Apparel Manufacturing) was financed by the Government of India's Ministry of Rural Development (henceforth known as, MoRD) and implemented by a prominent Indian private corporation (IL&FS Clusters). SEAM provides free training to rural, below poverty line youth, to work in India's garment clusters. It is funded through one of the Indian Government's largest livelihoods programmes, which was initially called Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) and subsequently renamed the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in 2011. Skill-training programmes are now being implemented under the umbrella of the NRLM<sup>6</sup>. The case of SEAM illustrates a new trend in India's development trajectory: one where the Indian state and the private sector collaborate through public private partnerships (PPPs) to recruit and create a new workforce for India's manufacturing sector, in order to boost industrial growth and generate employment.

The decision to focus on two programmes in the Chennai and Kancheepuram districts of Tamil Nadu was deliberate. Tamil Nadu is considered one of India's proactive, business-friendly States. Crucially, it was one of the first States to introduce skill-training initiatives as a key component of its industrial policy, in 2007 (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2007b),

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<sup>6</sup> These programmes come under a special component of the SGSY Skills programme called 'Aajeevika'.

when it was emerging as development priority for the Union government. Kancheepuram itself has emerged as an important manufacturing hub over the past decade, and employs thousands of young semi-skilled workers in manufacturing units, making diverse products (from automobiles and mobile phones to garments and leather shoes) in industrial clusters, scattered across SEZs and industrial parks (Government of Tamil Nadu 2007). Thus, the story of how Nokia came to Sriperumbudur and the processes by which young men and women from villages in the region obtained jobs within the SEZ provides a good starting point within which skill development programmes more generally, can be located and analysed.

The shortage of skilled labour in India is repeatedly highlighted in government policy reports (See Planning Commission 2008; 2011). The Nokia SEZ and other export-oriented firms in the Chennai-Kancheepuram region employ thousands of young workers typically between the ages of 18-25. Training costs and attrition rates are high. State funded skill development programmes were conceptualised as a solution to this challenge, by bridging the gap between demand (for trained workers) and supply (the availability of large numbers of unskilled youth). In both case studies, I explore the diverse actors involved in delivering skill-training and highlight the processes by which young people are “motivated” to participate in these initiatives. I also examine the training methods and the kinds of skills that such programmes impart to young workers. Thus, an exploration into skill-training not only explains how a new workforce is created for India’s new workplaces; but tells a deeper story, about the role of the contemporary Indian state, its relationship with the private sector and the ways in which aspirations and subjectivities of young workers are shaped in specific ways as a result of such training processes.

## II. The Study's Core Themes

This thesis uses skill-training programmes as a prism through which three central themes, which lie at the core of this work, are explored.

The first core theme, is the nature of the *Indian state, within the context of its relationship with the private sector*. I expand on Manuel Castells' (1998; 2006) characterization of the modern nation state as the *network state*, adapt this concept to contemporary India and use it as an analytical tool to understand how the Indian state works in practice, as a pluralized, actor, which increasingly collaborates with the private sector to achieve development goals. I argue that India's development trajectory is characterized by the increasing confluence between the network state and the Castellan network enterprise. I examine the relationship between these two major institutions by situating it within the frame of skill-training programmes, in India.

The second theme is the *broadening of the meaning of 'skill', against the backdrop of the emergence of new workplaces in India*. Skill-training programmes have emerged as a response to the needs of new kinds workplaces in India. These new work sites take a number of different forms – from large manufacturing units in SEZs, embedded in global production networks, industrial parks and call centres, to shopping malls and organised retail outlets. This thesis focuses specifically on the Castellan “network enterprise” (Castells 1996) as a new workplace and it explores the context within which such firms have spread across the state of Tamil Nadu, in southern India. In investigating the new workplace, I highlight the factors that make them distinct and explain how the rise of new kinds of workplaces has led to a broadening of the meaning of skills. I argue that workers today are expected to possess both technical expertise and soft skills, not just for service sector

jobs, but also for jobs in the manufacturing sector. This points to how the concept of ‘skill’ has been fetishized in contemporary India and has evolved into a specific kind of product that is actively marketed to India’s youth. These trends merit a deeper investigation into the processes of skill-training itself. Through the detailed case studies of (privately funded) skill-training processes in the Nokia factory and (publicly funded) skill-training initiatives for the garment industry, this thesis answers two key questions. What does it mean to be “skilled”? What kinds of skills are valued in contemporary India’s new workplaces?

The third core theme that this thesis focuses on is: *Youth and Youth Aspirations*. Young workers between the ages of 18 and 25 are in high demand in new workplaces and form the bulk of the workforce in these new worksites (See Gooptu 2009). Over half of India’s population is under 25 years of age (Planning Commission 2008), making India’s youth an important demographic group that the state needs to cater to. India’s skill-training programmes are specifically targeted at training its young population. Crucially, therefore, in engaging a policy area that is so profoundly connected with Indian youth and their socio-economic destinies, this thesis highlights how the concept of ‘aspiration’ and what Appadurai (2004; 2013) calls the “politics of hope”, lies at the heart of skill-training programmes. I argue that skill-training initiatives aim to instil “the capacity to aspire” in the minds of young Trainees. The empirical chapters of the thesis demonstrate how young people’s aspirations are shaped at every stage of programme implementation: from the recruitment stage to the placement stage.

The social science and public policy literature views aspiration as a positive, potentially transformative force (See Ray 2003; Appadurai 2004; 2013). This thesis questions this idea and asks three important questions. Is aspiration an important skill that young

people need to acquire to find jobs in new workplaces? Is there a darker side to aspiration, characterised by disillusionment instead of hope? And, if so, is there a personal cost to aspiring high? The theme of aspiration is not only applied to the theme of youth, but also constitutes a central component of this thesis' analytical framework. Through the case studies of Nokia and SEAM, the thesis highlights the diverse ways in which key actors delivering skill-training programmes (the state, private corporation and citizen) use the aspirations of youth, to fulfil their own objectives. Do the interests and aspirations of these actors converge? If not, what are the consequences of divergent aspirations of the different actors designing and implementing the skill development programmes?

Chapter 2 of the thesis situates each of the core themes discussed above, analytically, within the social science literature. It engages with the literature and raises important questions, which have been instrumental in shaping this study's research design. These themes are also explored empirically drawing from qualitative data collected through field research in New Delhi and Chennai and Kancheepuram districts (Tamil Nadu) – since 2008. Together these perspectives create a snapshot of the dynamics between the pluralised Indian state, the private corporation and the citizen – in the process of conceptualising, promoting and implementing skill-training programmes in contemporary India.

### **III. An Overview of the Data Collection Process**

This thesis is guided by two underlying motivations. First, it attempts to understand the everyday workings of institutions such as the state, the private corporation and the workplace in contemporary India through an exploration of how skill-training

programmes are conceptualised and implemented in practice. Second, it aims to simultaneously capture how citizens (particularly rural youth) engage with these institutions, as participants in development programmes. This motivation to examine a skill development programme – both from the perspective of the institutions that shape it and the users for which it is intended – was instrumental in shaping the research design of this study, which was based on the use of qualitative research methods (see Denzin and Lincoln 2008). The material presented in the thesis, its analytical framework and driving argument are products of an iterative research process, which involved fieldwork data collected over multiple phases, from 2008 to 2013. While some key informant interviews were conducted in New Delhi, a bulk of the fieldwork was conducted in the city of Chennai and in Kancheepuram District, Tamil Nadu. Figure 1 (below) on the following page presents a map of Chennai and Kancheepuram districts. The main sites, where fieldwork for this study was conducted are encircled in red.

**Figure 1: Map of Kancheepuram District**



(Source: <http://www.aboutkanchipuram.com/Map.html>)

The next section presents an overview of the research design of the study. I explain the key issues examined and tools of data collection used, in each phase of research. I also highlight my own role in the research process and how this influenced the kind of data gathered during the research process. All these factors undergird this study and create the foundation for the empirical evidence that I present in the forthcoming chapters.

**a) The First Stage of Research: Studying the Nokia Telecom SEZ and the Changing Aspirations of Youth in Kancheepuram District**

This study has its roots in my MPhil dissertation entitled ‘Working in a Global Village: New Opportunities and Changing Aspirations among Tamil Nadu’s Youth’, which explored the processes by which new workplaces emerged in SEZs in Tamil Nadu and how young, semi-skilled youth are recruited and trained to assemble mobile phones on the shop floor of Nokia’s factory in the town of Sriperumbudur, Kancheepuram district. The study also sought to examine the aspirations of youth in villages in Kancheepuram, in the context of the emergence of new job opportunities in the region. Fieldwork was initially conducted from July to September 2008, after which follow up interviews were conducted in Chennai in December 2008. Most of the fieldwork was conducted at the Nokia Telecom SEZ, Sriperumbudur and in villages in Kancheepuram district. I examined the recruitment and training processes in the Nokia SEZ through non participant observation of a job fair, observed Nokia’s in house training programme and shop floor work and also conducted interviews with human resource (HR) staff, factory supervisors, line managers and Nokia’s operators on the shop floor. During fieldwork I often ate meals with workers and Nokia’s staff in their cafeteria and had informal conversations with Nokia’s employees.

A majority of workers on the shop floor were women. As a female researcher, it was much easier for me to speak to Nokia's female operators and discuss their experience of training, work and their future aspirations. Hence, this thesis presents the view of female Operators at Nokia.

While it was useful to observe the training and production process in the Nokia SEZ, it was difficult to conduct interviews within the factory. Workers were often pressed for time and were reluctant to speak openly within the factory premises. During initial attempts to interview workers, human resource staff insisted on selecting specific workers and remained present during the interview. I was keen to interview the workers outside the SEZ, in order to get a more realistic account of their work experience and future aspirations. I obtained access to Nokia's workers outside the factory floor through an NGO called Hand-in Hand (HIH), which had a strong presence in Kancheepuram and was running a number of soft skills training programmes for youth in the region. HIH also helped organised job fairs and recruitment camps on behalf of some of the large manufacturing firms in the region, and hence were well connected with Nokia's staff and senior management. I obtained access to Nokia's workers through HIH, who had a roster with the names of young people in the region who had participated in an HIH training programme and were working for Nokia. This gave me an opportunity to interview young women working in Nokia, outside the factory environment. Group discussions were also held with Nokia's employees. These interviews and group discussions were held at public places in the village, such as schools or bus stops near workers' homes, and were typically conducted when workers were returning home after a full day's work or on days when they had a day off. These interactions with Nokia's Operators provided useful insights into the lives of these young men and women, their

family background, education and their views of the future. Life stories of nine workers were also collected through such interviews.

Group discussions and interviews were also held with a mixed group of youth (which included employees of Nokia and other manufacturing firms, unemployed youth and young people aspiring for jobs in these new work sites) in four villages around Kancheepuram district. The villages were selected according to their proximity to the Nokia SEZ. Two villages were within 60 kilometres from Sriperumbudur and had a significant number of young people working in Nokia; while two other villages were remote (about 100 kilometres away from Sriperumbudur) and a majority of youth were engaged primarily in agriculture, fishing and poultry farming. Men and women participated in these group discussions. I prepared the key questions in advance and I also obtained the help of a research assistant to facilitate the discussion. This gave me an opportunity to observe the discussions closely and take detailed notes. These discussions were aimed at examining the broader theme of youth aspirations and examining whether location of the village influences the future aspirations of young people.

Interviews were also conducted with government officials in the departments of Industry and Labour and Employment, in Chennai – to understand the role of the Tamil Nadu government in creating new worksites, the nature of their engagement with private corporations, and the opportunities they provide to young people. This initial phase of research set the foundation for my doctoral research project.

## **b) The Relationship between the MPhil and DPhil Thesis**

The MPhil thesis aimed to explore the new workplace and employment within it. It specifically focuses on how young people encounter this new workplace for the first time, through an examination of the Nokia SEZ. My MPhil thesis highlighted the centrality of skill-training initiatives in creating a new kind of workforce, with specific qualities, which match the norms and values of the workplace. The MPhil data also demonstrated the deep partnerships between officials in Tamil Nadu and Nokia's human resource managers, in facilitating recruitments to Nokia by publicising new opportunities and organising job fairs. These insights from the MPhil research led me to use skill-training programmes as the empirical lens through which the contemporary Indian state and its relationship with private corporations can be understood.

Through an examination of how skill-training took place within private corporations, before the Government of India stepped in to become a key funder and driver of national level skill-training programmes – the MPhil field material helps set the background against which state-funded skill development programmes are explored. Combined, the material collected through both the MPhil and DPhil research phases (from 2008-2013), brings out the different kinds of interactions between the state and the private sector. Second, both the MPhil and DPhil theses focus on examining new workplaces in the manufacturing sector. By shifting focus from the hardware-manufacturing sector (in the case of Nokia) to the garment-manufacturing sector (examined through the case of AB Apparels), I examine some of the similarities and differences in how these work sites are organised and how young people experience work within them. Lastly, the theme of aspiration is common in both the MPhil and doctoral research work. While the MPhil thesis begins to identify what young people in

rural Kancheepuram aspire to, my doctoral research work takes this idea much further by situating youth aspirations within the frame of skill-training programmes in India. In doing so, it goes beyond identifying what young people's aspirations are to how their aspirations are shaped by the implementers of skill-training programmes and thus highlights how youth respond to these processes. In doing so, the thesis attempts to make a broader theoretical contribution to how aspirations are conceptualised in the social science literature and emphasises the central role of aspiration in the framing and implementation of public policy.

**c) The Second Stage of Research: A View of Skill Development Programmes from Within**

In 2009, I returned to New Delhi to find that skill development had begun to dominate national policy discussions. The National Skill Development Policy (NSDP) was being drafted in New Delhi and a wide range of organizations (in the public and private sectors) began offering skill-training programmes to semi-skilled youth. Many of these new initiatives were either fully or partly funded by the state and were supported by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank. A dominant theme in the discussion on skill development at this time was the idea that the private sector needs to be an active agent in delivering skill-training. The term "private sector" was used not only to refer to private manufacturing firms or MNCs (like Nokia) who train their own workforce through such initiatives; but also to private corporations which offer skill-training modules, catered to specific industries in the manufacturing and service sectors. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a public sector company incorporated by the Government of India, was explicitly created to encourage private organisations to support skill-training initiatives. PPPs were proposed as a means to implement skill-

training programmes and such initiatives were tested through pilot projects supported by the MoRD. The year 2009 thus saw the emergence of an institutional infrastructure created by the Indian state to support its ambitious target of providing skills training to 500 million young people by 2022. These new developments combined with some of the insights from my previous MPhil research, motivated me to shift focus entirely to the process of skill-training for the doctoral research project. The fact that the MPhil research project was initiated before the launch of India's National Skill Development Policy in 2009, was an advantage, as I could compare how state led skill-training programmes (like SEAM) differ from more traditional private sector led models.

In August 2009, I met Dr Rita Sharma, a civil servant who served as Union Secretary in the MoRD to learn more about PPPs in the field of skill development. I spoke to her about my research and she connected me to IL&FS Clusters, who were process of testing out one of India's first skill-training projects supported by the MoRD, by running a pilot project called Skills for Employment in Apparel Manufacturing (SEAM). In September 2009, I met Mr R.C.M Reddy, the CEO of IL&FS Clusters in Mumbai. He was putting together a Skills Team, for IL&FS Clusters' new Skill Development vertical. IL&FS Clusters was recruiting consultants who could write project proposals and document the progress of the pilot project. I discussed my work with Mr Reddy and expressed my interest in studying the SEAM programme. I was then offered a job to work with the Skills Team, as an "Outreach Specialist". I was also granted permission to conduct my own research while working for the organisation. As an employee of IL&FS Clusters, I was tasked with staff and field functions. I was responsible for both desk-based documentation work, which involved compiling case studies of specific Trainees in the programme, writing project proposals and preparing presentations for the Vice President and CEO of the Skills Team for IL&FS Clusters' head office in Delhi. In

addition, I was also placed with the field team of Mobilisers in Chennai, where I was to study the mobilisation process in detail and identify some of the reasons behind the low enrolments and high dropout rates in the programme in the region. My work for IL&FS Clusters thus initiated a second phase of ethnographic research into skill development, where I studied skill-training processes from an insider's perspective in order to identify the underlying values and motivations behind this new policy. I spent 11 months working at IL&FS, out of which 8 months were spent working with field teams in Chennai and Kancheepuram and 3 months were spent in the Delhi head office – liaising with the MoRD, writing project proposals and documenting the progress of the SEAM programme in different States in India. This study draws on this process of participant observation to draw out how skill-training programmes are conceptualised and implemented by the private sector, which now partners with the state in delivering skill-training to India's rural poor.

I had a dual identity during this phase of research. Though I was formally a member of the SEAM project team, I was often introduced to outsiders as a social scientist and a researcher with an MPhil from Oxford University. These two identities worked to my advantage as it meant that I could distance myself from day to day office politics and yet could build close relationships particularly with field staff, who confided in me and discussed future career goals or work-related concerns that they normally would not share with colleagues. This period of participant observation was also important in providing insights into how PPPs are conceptualised and implemented in practice. By participating in Project Approval Committee (PAC) meetings<sup>7</sup>, corporate strategy meetings, job fairs and training sessions, I studied the diverse motivations and incentives

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<sup>7</sup> These are meetings chaired by the Union Secretary of Rural Development, where companies bid for funding from the MoRD to support skill-training based on a proposal and the Ministry selects successful proposals for funding grants.

of the different actors who were implementing and shaping the skill development policy. A significant part of my work involved working with Mobilisers, who are the IL&FS staff responsible for recruiting young people into the programme. I helped organise job fairs and had the chance to interact with young people who aspired to be a part of SEAM. I also accompanied the Mobilisers in a series of meetings with district level officials to secure permissions to hold such fairs and get their support and endorsement for IL&FS' skill-training projects. Over the 8 months I spent at the Chennai office, I had a chance to build relationships with a few SEAM Trainees who were employed in the Chennai region and I watched them transition from Trainees into garment factory workers. This combined with the fact that I was tasked by IL&FS to conduct a post placement tracking exercise of Trainees, gave me a chance to strengthen my relationships with a few Trainees and study their experience of the workplace. Building relationships with Trainees and tracing their progress through the programme from Trainees to workers was particularly important in bringing out how their expectations of the programme met the reality of work on the factory floor. The fact that my first interactions with the Trainees were mediated through IL&FS field staff and mobilisers who were seen as 'mentors' and were respected by most Trainees played an important role in granting me access to Trainees. However, trust was built over several conversations and multiple interactions with Trainees, who went on to share some of their hopes, aspirations and life stories with me. Material on Trainees' aspirations and their experience of work in the garment factory that is presented in this thesis emerged out of these interactions. From being referred to as 'Madam' during initial interactions with Trainees, I was called 'Akka' (Tamil word for older sister) – this also modified our relationship and the nature of our discussions. During many group discussions, I found that it was not only me who asked questions but I was also quizzed on my own aspirations and my career choices, which I too shared with them.

As a member of the SEAM project team, I frequently interacted with SEAM Trainees who were placed in three garment firms (pseudonymously referred to as AB Apparels, PS Apparels and MR Apparels (two of these firms, AB Apparels and PS Apparels, were part of the same export house and had factories in Guduvanchery in Kancheepuram district and in a major Export Processing Zone in Chennai; MR Apparels' factory was located on the outskirts of Chennai). These interactions exposed me to the workplace and helped me understand how young people experience it. Most of my informants were female Trainees/employees, as they make up a significant proportion of the shop floor workforce in the garment factory. As a female researcher it was much easier for me to approach them and build long-term relationships with a few of them. I maintained a diary during the course of my work at IL&FS, where I noted down my observations or reflections. During job fairs and training programmes, I was often tasked with taking photographs of the training programme (which I was allowed to retain for research purposes). This provided me an opportunity to closely record some of my observations in detail. My field diary, detailed notes on specific meetings I attended, photographs and interview transcripts were some of the key sources of data that I obtained during this phase of work.

During this phase of fieldwork, I held 4 focus group discussions (with groups of SEAM Trainees on the theme of aspirations). I also collected 25 life histories of young women, who have been trained under project SEAM. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 9 of these young Trainees in May 2011. This gave me a chance to observe how Trainees respond to skilling initiatives (post placement), how their aspirations are shaped (or have changed over time) and the ways in which their aspirations meet the reality of factory work.

#### **d) The Third Stage of Research: Conducting Fieldwork in New Delhi and Tamil Nadu as an Independent Researcher**

I commenced a third phase of fieldwork in the periods: November 2010-June 2011; November 2011-January 2012 and July-August 2013. This involved a shift in my role from a participant observer to an independent doctoral researcher, where I studied skill-training initiatives as an outsider. This phase of research was initiated after analysing the social science literature on the themes of the youth, the new workplace and the Indian state. These interviews deliberately focused on answering questions that came up after a deep engagement with the secondary literature on youth, skills and new workplaces in India. I used this chance to reconnect with the IL&FS staff, get an update on the progress of SEAM and conduct more detailed follow up interviews with some of the Trainees that I met earlier when I worked with the SEAM team.

During this period, I interviewed key informants who were shaping India's skill development agenda. These interviews focussed on understanding the roles of diverse actors – in the Planning Commission, industry associations (such as CII), private corporations like IL&FS, representatives of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), The World Bank, The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the newly appointed Adviser to the Prime Minister on Skill Development – all of whom were contributing to India's skill development efforts at the national level, in different ways.

Similar interviews were also conducted in Tamil Nadu (in Chennai and Kancheepuram). This helped me understand how the national vision for skill development relates to the Tamil Nadu government's response. My identity as a doctoral student facilitated access to key actors within these institutions in New Delhi and in Chennai. I also conducted

detailed semi-structured interviews with human resource managers, production managers, and supervisors in the three garment factories that I had previously interacted with, during my tenure at IL&FS Clusters. One out of these three garment factories (AB Apparels) was particularly responsive and was quite generous with their time, especially after I had left IL&FS. They allowed me to observe the production process and interact with some of their workers. The fact that this factory is also located in Kancheepuram district was another reason why this firm features in this thesis, as it provides a useful case of comparison to the Nokia SEZ, which is also in the same district. Interviews with factory management and workers in AB Apparels also helped cross-check information collected earlier and helped me clarify gaps from previous rounds of fieldwork. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with the SEAM-trained workers I had previously interviewed, to examine how their careers had progressed. Unfortunately, only 8 young women that I had interviewed previously remained employed in AB Apparels, when I went back in 2010 and 2011. However, interactions with this small group of young women were important in understanding their experience of work and their future plans.

Understanding the perspectives of the main architects of India's skill development policy was also an important objective of this study. This was obtained through interviews with senior bureaucrats and technocrats. In addition, I also attended conferences, which brought together Union cabinet ministers, bureaucrats, representatives from industry associations and private corporations to discuss the challenges of skill development and employment generation. For example, I attended a conference organised by a New Delhi based think-tank called the 'Skoch Foundation', which helped me understand some of the political imperatives behind skill-training programmes. This gave me a chance to listen to India's politicians (whom I would not have access to otherwise) and understand their vision of skill development. Importantly such conferences enabled me to observe

how government representatives (politicians and bureaucrats) interact with representatives from private sector and observe the relationship between these two actors closely. Material from conference speeches and seminars were also used to triangulate information gathered from key informant interviews and to identify unanswered questions for further exploration. Lastly, fieldwork also involved collecting a variety of written material and grey literature on the theme of skill development. This included policy presentations by Planning Commission staff, policy briefs and statistics, which I use to supplement the primary data collected during fieldwork.

#### **e) Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations that have Guided this Study**

Data collected from each of the stages was first transcribed and then thematically organised into four broad themes, namely: the multifaceted state (focusing mainly on the relationship between the Indian state and private corporations); work and employment in the new workplace; skill-training, and youth aspirations. Material from interviews, group discussions and field observations were organised under each of these themes and were analysed in detail. Following this, the connections between the four broad themes were explored, after a detailed analysis of field material. The key findings presented here have emerged out this iterative process of qualitative research.

This study examines a new policy, which was being debated and shaped through the course of fieldwork. This comes with both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, this means that programme objectives, modes of operation and the actors and institutions involved are fluid and ever changing. On the other, the complex dynamics of policy formulation and implementation and the underlying values and aspirations that shape such programmes at its inception can be examined in detail, precisely because it is

a new initiative. Even after completing fieldwork in India, I have tried to keep abreast of recent policy changes and had telephone conversations and email exchanges with some of my key informants to ensure that I am up-to-date with recent events in India,<sup>8</sup>. Multiple rounds of fieldwork, the use of diverse data collection tools, combined with the fact that I played different roles as a researcher (from a participant observer to a non-participant researcher) have helped foreground the internal dynamics of institutions such as the state and the private sector as they collaborate to formulate and implement skill-training programmes in India.

This thesis seeks to link this with the aspirations and expectations of young Indian citizens, who are the targets of such new policy initiatives.

Lastly, ethical considerations have driven the research design, data analysis and writing phases of this doctoral research project. IL&FS Clusters was fully aware that I was conducting research while I worked with them. The CEO of IL&FS Clusters (R.C.M Reddy) granted me permission to use the name of the firm in my DPhil thesis, as a result of which I have not used a pseudonym in this case. I also shared some of my research findings with them in a meeting in August 2013. Similarly Nokia's CEO in 2008 (D. Shivakumar) granted me permission to use the name 'Nokia' in my research; hence I have done so. However, the garment-manufacturing firm that features in this thesis requested that they remain anonymous. I call this firm AB Apparels in this thesis. Similarly, the names of key informants have been anonymised when they have requested that I do so, and permission has been obtained from every interviewee whose original names have been cited in this thesis. Lastly, a number of young people (Trainees,

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<sup>8</sup> The most recent telephone interview was conducted on 04.05.2014 with the former member of Nokia's top management.

Trainers and IL&FS field staff) spoke to me and shared some of their aspirations, fears and opinions openly with me on the grounds that they remain anonymous. I have used pseudonyms for all these informants in order to protect their identities. Similarly, the names of the villages in which I did fieldwork have also been changed in order to ensure that some of my key informants remain anonymous, as per their request.

Having outlined some of the objectives of the thesis and presented an overview of the methodology that has shaped this study; the next section explains how the entire thesis has been structured, based on the material collected through the three phases of fieldwork described above.

#### **IV. Thesis Structure and Chapter Plan**

This thesis comprises of nine chapters, which are organized around three main themes, *the relationship between the Indian state and private sector; the new workplace (and the broadening of skills within it)* and *youth aspirations*. These three themes are interconnected and each chapter brings out the different ways in which they intersect, within the context of skill-training programmes in contemporary India.

Chapter 2 presents this thesis' analytical framework. It situates the three key themes of the thesis in the social science literature. Through a detailed engagement with the literature, it presents an overarching framework, which connects the Indian state, the private corporation, new workplaces and the young citizen in contemporary India. The chapter argues that the partnership between an increasingly networked, pluralised, Indian state (which I refer to as the "network state", drawing from the work of Castells, 1996) and the Castellan network enterprise (Ibid.) is a defining characteristic of contemporary

India's development trajectory. The chapter explores the nature of the partnership between these two actors – by examining the changes in the role of the Indian state in the post-liberalisation era and the growing confluence of these two key actors, as they come closer together to create new kinds of workplaces or collaborate to deliver skill-training to India's rural poor. Chapter 2 also focuses on the theme of 'aspiration', particularly the aspirations of India's youth. It builds on existing social science literature on this theme and makes a case for the need to understand how young people's aspirations and subjectivities are shaped not only through processes of employment and work, but also through the recruitment and training processes within new work sites. Aspiration, thus acts as an important component of this study's analytical framework as it connects the network state and the network enterprise to the young Indian citizen.

*Chapter 3* goes a step further by applying the framework presented in the previous chapter to examine Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy and sets the context for this study. The decision to begin the first empirical chapter of this thesis with the story of the evolution of Tamil Nadu's industrial policy; how skill development programmes became a key focus area within it and the emergence of new workplaces such as the Nokia Telecom SEZ - is driven by two key factors. First, India's sub-national regions (or States) are the key drivers of economic development. Thus the story of Tamil Nadu is an apt starting point for the thesis, as it helps bring to life the conceptual themes that have been explored in Chapter 2 and sets the context for the overall thesis. Second, Tamil Nadu was one of the first States in India to prioritise skill development initiatives, before it became a national policy priority. Thus, it makes sense chronologically to begin the thesis by examining how skill development slowly rose to prominence in Tamil Nadu (as illustrated in the State's industrial policy), explain how skill-training initiatives took place within the private sector, before became a core national development goal.

Chapter 3 explains the processes by which new workplaces have emerged in Tamil Nadu, and draws out the different kinds of alliances between Tamil Nadu government officials and private corporations (like Nokia) in establishing these new work sites and the different roles played by these actors in doing so. Through an analysis of Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policies in 2003 and 2007 the chapter explores three key themes. The first theme pertains to how the role of the Indian state as a 'facilitator' became institutionalised as a strategy to attract foreign investment into the state. The chapter then examines how this new incarnation of the Indian state works in practice in Tamil Nadu, through the story of how Nokia set up its largest worldwide manufacturing facility, in the town of Sriperumbudur. In doing so, the chapter highlights how an alliance with state representatives and foreign capital was instrumental in giving Nokia a range of tax breaks and concessions to establish its plant in the Nokia Telecom SEZ in Sriperumbudur. The chapter therefore draws out how the "pro-business" state characterised by Kohli (2006) works in practice, by highlighting how *state representatives actively court private corporations* to attract foreign investment into Tamil Nadu. The second core theme of the chapter focuses on how skill-training rose to prominence in the State – not only was it an important component of Tamil Nadu's industrial policy but increasingly bureaucrats, politicians, NGO workers and representatives of the private sector were calling on young people to acquire new skills so that they can obtain jobs in glittering new workplaces such as the celebrated Nokia plant in Sriperumbudur. Finally the chapter concludes with the third theme, of how young people in villages around Sriperumbudur perceive jobs in MNCs like Nokia and draws out their aspirations and expectations from the new opportunities that have emerged in the region, since 2008.

*Chapter 4* shifts focus to the new workplace: the Nokia Telecom SEZ in Sriperumbudur. It describes Nokia's on-the-job training called - "The Smart Operator Bootcamp", which

trains young, semi-skilled workers to work as Operators, assembling mobile phones on Nokia's shop floor. By describing the kinds of workers that companies like Nokia seek to recruit and the process by which they are trained, the chapter highlights the underlying norms and values of the new workplace and explains the practices through which these norms are inculcated to a new workforce within the SEZ. Such private sector led training programmes were used as models for scaling up skill development initiatives at the national level (as observed in the following chapters). Thus the description of Nokia's in-house training programmes provides a backdrop against which the Indian state's policy response to the challenge of skill development at the national level (explored in detail in the following chapter) can be situated and explored.

*Chapter 5* retains the focus on skill development, but shifts focus to the national level, and focuses on Government of India's response to the skilling challenge. It applies the analytical framework provided in Chapter 2 to examine how and why skill development rose to prominence and became a priority for the Government of India. This chapter combines material collected from key informant interviews with some of the main national level actors (primarily bureaucrats, politicians and representatives from international organisations such as the World Bank and ILO) who have been the architects of India's skill development agenda. This data is then supplemented with material collected through non participant observation of a conference on the theme of 'Generating Employment', which brought together major actors from the public and private sector (politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats, CEOs of private corporations and representatives from industry associations) who were driving the design and implementation of skill development programmes in India and captures the interactions between these multiple actors. The material collected from these two key sources, brings out the multiple motivations and interests of the diverse actors who work (or aspire to

work) in the field of skill development and sets the context for understanding the origins of Project SEAM. The chapter highlights another facet of the relationship between the network state and network enterprise – *where the private sector actively courts the state* in order to become its partner in implementing skill development programmes in India.

*Chapter 6* presents how Project SEAM is implemented. It argues that shaping young people's aspirations is a key component of SEAM's programme design and implementation strategy. The chapter begins by introducing the key actors who implement SEAM at the village level and illustrates the role of the partnership between the network state and network enterprise in shaping young people's aspirations and expectations of work in the garment industry through SEAM. By examining the 'mobilisation' phase of SEAM (where rural youth are recruited into the programme) the chapter explains how aspiration is used as a powerful marketing strategy to maximise enrolment into the SEAM programme. The chapter concludes by questioning the idea that aspirations are positive and transformational, as Appadurai (2004; 2013) argues, and poses important questions on the implications of falsely raising aspirations – especially when heightened aspirations are met with disappointment. This theme continues to be explored in the following chapter.

*Chapter 7* digs deeper into the theme of raising aspirations through processes of skill-training, by shifting focus to the SEAM training centre. The chapter explains the methods of skill-training, the kinds of skills that are imparted during the training processes and highlights how Trainees experience such initiatives. Importantly the chapter demonstrates *how aspiration becomes fashioned into a valuable skill* through SEAM's training process. The chapter also highlights how these programmes project specific

ideas of “success” and “failure” and explores the ways in which trainees accept and challenge these ideas through their everyday interactions at the training centre.

*Chapter 8* moves on from the SEAM training centre to the workplace. It explains the ways in which workers experience work in two manufacturing firms – Nokia and a garment manufacturing firm (pseudonymously referred to, for the purposes of this thesis, as ‘AB Apparels’), which employs SEAM-trained workers. The chapter compares the ways in which workers experience their everyday work on the shop floor in both firms and the extent to which the reality of work meets their initial expectations of it. Portraits of SEAM Trainees are used to illustrate young people’s complex engagements with the workplace – particularly the ways in which they strive for success or encounter failure. Themes of “success” and “failure” which feature in the previous chapter are re-examined in the context of the workplace as the chapter highlights the gap between the high expectations that young people had of factory work (at the time of recruitment) and the disappointments and (in some cases) disillusionment that they experience during employment. The conclusion of the chapter draws out the dark side of aspiration – characterised by failure, disillusionment and frustration, which I argue are invisible, but equally important components of aspiration. The chapter ends with an Afterword, which highlights some of the recent events that have taken place in the Nokia SEZ, and highlights some of the key challenges faced by the Nokia SEZ today. The Afterword also raises new questions for further research.

*Chapter 9* concludes the thesis, by reflecting on the core themes that drive the study and highlights how the empirical material presented in this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Indian state, the new workplace, skill development and youth aspirations in contemporary India.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE NETWORK STATE, THE NETWORK ENTERPRISE AND YOUTH ASPIRATIONS IN INDIA**

#### **I. Introduction**

The conceptual framework of this thesis rests on three important themes: an increasing convergence between the Indian network state and the network enterprise; the spread of new workplaces and the broadening of the meaning of “skills” within them, and youth aspirations. Each theme is defined, situated within the broader social science literature and key questions or gaps in the literature are highlighted. In doing so, the chapter explains how this thesis seeks to build on this literature and contribute to these debates. This chapter thus serves as a scaffold on which the driving arguments of the thesis are constructed.

#### **II. The Rise of the Network State and the Spread of Network Enterprises in India**

##### **a) What is the ‘state’?**

Defining the state has been at the core of scholarship in politics and sociology. Scholars have defined the state in different ways, focusing on different facets. Weber (1946) defines the state broadly, as a political organisation within a distinct geographical region, which has the monopoly over the use of physical force.

While there is no consensus on a single definition of the state, a common theme in this literature is that the state is not a singular object but is a multi-faceted entity. Abrams (1988) emphasises this point. He writes,

“The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask, which prevents our seeing political practice as it is. There is a state-system: a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centred in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society. There is, too, a state-idea, projected, purveyed and variously believed in different societies at different times.”

(Abrams 1988: 58).

Thus Abrams (1988) identifies two key facets of the state: the state idea, which focuses on what the state is (or what it is not) and the state system, which comprises of the key institutions (the bureaucracy, legislature, judiciary, police) within the state. Abrams (1988) emphasises the need for greater scholarship, which seeks to understand how these actors within the state-system, relate to each other (Abrams 1988). Drawing inspiration from Abrams’ ideas, this thesis focuses on examining the ‘state system’ in India and seeks to understand how the contemporary Indian state works in practice – as a development actor. In doing so, I deliberately focus on what the state does, through an examination of two cases. The first case is an exploration of the functioning of the Indian state at the State (provincial) level - by first examining its role in creating new workplaces in Tamil Nadu and analysing its relationship with private corporations, through the example of the Nokia telecom SEZ in India. The second case, examines the role of the Indian state (at the national level), in designing and implementing skill development programmes for India’s rural poor, through public-private partnerships. In both cases, I seek to look within the state and explain how it works in practice.

Having clarified how the ‘state’ is defined in this thesis, the next section examines how the Indian state has evolved as a development actor, since the 1980’s, and thus sets the context for the empirical chapters of the thesis.

## **b) Economic Liberalisation, Globalisation and a New Role for the Indian State**

The decade of the 1980’s signalled a new phase in India’s development trajectory. It was marked by a shift in the role of the Indian state – from a pro poor, socialist state to one that increasingly became “pro-business” (Kohli 2006a). This shift is explained in detail by Kohli (2006a), who argues that the 1980s under the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi witnessed the subtle abandonment of left leaning, anti-capitalist, redistributive policy orientation and gave way to what Kohli terms “a slow and steady embrace of Indian capital as the main ruling ally” (Kohli 2006a: 1252). This new focus on economic growth and new alliances with the business classes set the context for a new kind of relationship between the Indian state and the private sector – one that I argue has strengthened over the past three decades. Kohli argues that this pro-growth strategy was inspired by the success of growth oriented developmental states such as Taiwan and South Korea, which managed to boost economic growth, “turning their countries into state-guided corporations of sorts” (Kohli 2006a: 1253). In this new incarnation, these countries undertook a number of steps to ease some of the constraints faced by the private sector. This included creating specific policy interventions to boost domestic demand and promote exports. On the supply side, these countries also invested heavily in education and research and development, to facilitate the availability of labour and capital (Ibid.). India attempted to emulate these countries, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi in the 1980’s. However the compulsions of democratic politics and the desire to please Indian

businesses also meant that such reforms were slow and short lived. The decade of the 1980's thus saw the emergence of a new kind of state, which actively engaged with the private sector, cut subsidies to the public distribution system and the food for work programme but continued to spend on the creation of public infrastructure. The private sector also had considerable influence over state policy during this period. Kohli illustrates this point with an example of how attempts to open up the economy to foreign trade and investment in 1981 were aborted in 1983-84, due to opposition from the Indian business classes who felt threatened by the prospect of cheaper imports and demanded protection. This example highlights the fact that the business community had considerable influence over policy making in the 1980's and explains how this "pro-business" stance of the Indian state worked in practice. It is important to note that the fact that the state was "pro-business" did not mean that public expenditure was cut back. Rather, public expenditure on infrastructure and government programmes continued to increase during this period. At the same time, taxes could not be increased due to political/ electoral considerations. Thus, while the 1980s saw an increase in the overall growth rate, at the same time, public debts mounted – as the state relied heavily on borrowing continue to keep up the pace of public spending (Kohli 2006a). This trend continued well into the Rajiv Gandhi period, when revenues from direct taxes further declined as a result of tax concessions for big businesses and an increase in public expenditure for infrastructure and defence. These factors added to the growing fiscal deficit in India, culminating in a balance of payments crisis in 1991, which plunged the country into near bankruptcy (Kohli 2006a,b; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Corbridge, Harriss and Jeffrey 2012).

The year 1991 marked another turning point for India. The debt crisis led India to pledge its gold reserves and take loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as a short-

term solution to overcome this problem. As a long-term solution to tide over the crisis, India succumbed to pressures from the IMF and adopted a series of economic policy reforms – opening up its economy to foreign trade and investment, as a means to nurse the Indian economy back to health (Khilnani 1999). These reforms included: the deregulation of investment and production, financial sector reform, and taxation reform - all of which were implemented to overcome the economic crisis. It is important to note that there were attempts in the past (notable in the 1970s and 1980s) to open up the economy, which were often stalled or aborted as a result of pressure from various interest groups. However, the financial crisis of 1991 speeded up this process and created a new foundation for India's development trajectory over the next few decades (See Basu 2004; Bardhan 2004; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Khilnani 1999).

The opening up of India's economy coincided with a period, which saw new developments in information and communication technology, which were unparalleled in history (Held et al 1999). The information and communication revolution, which arose as a result of the spread of the Internet, created a new phase in the globalisation process, worldwide. Gupta and Sharma (2006:278) use the term 'neoliberal globalisation' to characterise the post 1991 period in India. They emphasise the fact that the reforms took place in a rapidly changing global context. I too draw from their work and use this term in this thesis to refer to the confluence of globalisation and the economic liberalisation in post-reform period.

David Held (1999) defines Globalisation as,

‘...A process or a set of processes which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity,

intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or inter regional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power.’ (Held 1999; cited in Steger 2003:10)

Held et al (1999) argue that this new phase of globalisation was radically different from past periods of global interconnection and is characterised by the *intensification of networks*, which connect people, institutions and organisations in different ways. Castells (1996) offers a detailed treatment of this idea and characterises the age of contemporary globalisation as the ‘information age’, and argues that information and communication technologies have revolutionised the way in which people communicate and interact and thus had a profound impact on the economy and society worldwide. New kinds of organisations, workplaces, and jobs emerged. As India opened up its economy to global competition – it also opened its doors to the forces of globalisation and experienced its effects. A major consequence of these two forces was the fact that they transformed key institutions in India. How have institutions changed?

Manuel Castells’ *Information Age* explicitly answers the above question (with a global focus) and argues that a defining feature of the information age is the organisation of institutions along the lines of *networks*. Defined as ‘a set of interconnected nodes’, *networks*, according to Castells, constitute ‘the new social morphology of our societies’ (Castells 1996:10). The *nodes* within a network transmit information within and across networks (Ibid.). For Castells, networks are dynamic, open structures, which generate complex and enduring connections that stretch across time and space, between people and things (Urry 2003). The effectiveness of a network depends on its *connectedness* or “the ability to facilitate noise free communication between its components”, and *consistency* which refers to “the extent to which there is sharing of interests between the network’s goals and the

goals of its components” (Castells 1996:171). Networks, according to Castells (1996) are characterised by their ability to innovate, adapt (almost spontaneously) and respond to changing contexts around it.

I argue that concept of a *network* is a useful analytical tool to examine how institutions have been transformed in India, as a result of the processes of globalisation and economic liberalisation. Drawing inspiration from the work of Manuel Castells (1996; 1998), I specifically examine how two major institutions – the state and the private corporation – have evolved into new forms and are increasingly organised along the lines of networks, as a result of these twin processes in India. I use the Castellan term *network state* to characterise the pluralised, decentred, multifaceted, Indian state. The private corporation too has transformed into the Castellan *network enterprises*, within which a range of new workplaces have emerged. One of the driving arguments in this thesis is that contemporary India’s development trajectory is characterised by the confluence of these two institutions – the network state and the network enterprise – which increasingly collaborate and partner for mutual gain across a wide range of sectors from infrastructure development to poverty alleviation. The empirical material in this thesis explains how the partnership between these two actors actually works in practice.

I will elaborate on the above argument over the next two subsections, by first drawing on the social science literature to explore the changes in the role Indian state as a result of the processes of globalisation and economic liberalisation and explain how describing the contemporary Indian state as the *network state* adds value to this body of work. I then go on to explore the transformation of the private corporation as a result of neoliberal globalisation in India and examine the spread of network enterprises across India. I conclude this section by highlighting how the partnership between the network state and

network enterprise is a defining feature of policy formulation and implementation in India, and make a case for examining this partnership through an anthropological lens.

### **c) The Rise of the Network State in India**

The adoption of neoliberal economic reforms in 1991 led to a further change in the role of the state<sup>9</sup>. The “pro-business” state of the 1980’s, catered actively to the needs of private enterprise but it still retained its role as the key institution responsible for policy formulation and implementation (Kohli 2006). The 1990s saw the emergence of a new incarnation of the state, one that was increasingly pluralised and multifaceted. From the major actor in the process of industrial development, the Indian state became a facilitator of industrial growth (See World Bank 1997; Jayal 2001; Kohli 2006a,b; Chandhoke 2003; Chibber 2003; Kochanek 1995). Unlike the past where the state promoted industrial growth by responding to the needs of specific industrial groups, in its new role as a ‘facilitator’, the Indian state’s key role was to mobilise collective action and bring diverse actors (such as NGOs, private corporations and more recently consultancy firms) together, to collaborate with it in the process of governance. Thus, contrary to predictions that economic liberalisation would result in the “retreat” of the state, the Indian state has continued to remain a prominent actor, as a *manager* of the process of governance.

The need for the state to perform this new role was articulated in the World Bank’s (1997) Report entitled ‘The State in a Changing World’. It states:

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of the context in which the Indian economy was liberalised and the key components and impact of this process, see Basu 2004; Bardhan 2000, 2004, Corbridge and Harriss, 2000, Jayal 2001; Kohli 2006).

“...Development requires an effective state, one that plays a catalytic, facilitating role, encouraging and complementing the activities of private businesses and individuals” (World Bank, 1997:4).

Thus the effectiveness of a state was now measured in terms of its ability to bring multiple actors together and work with them collectively to achieve development goals. Scholars like Jayal and Pai (2001) argue that this shift in the role of the state not only emerged as a result of the new policy context in India, which arose as a result of liberalisation; it also took place as result of a global shift in policy focus away from *government*, to *governance*. Jayal and Pai (2001) explore the distinction between these two terms in the Indian context. They explain that that while the term *government* is restricted to the state and its various institutions; *governance* is much broader and includes a whole range of public and private institutions, multilateral and international civil society organisations – all of whom are key actors in the process of ‘development management’ (Jayal and Pai 2001:13-15). This new emphasis on governance, which dominated the international development discourse in the 1990s, was instrumental in nudging the Indian state to take on this new facilitative role. *Good Governance* is defined by the World Bank as,

“The manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.” (World Bank 1992:3).

The language of ‘governance’ is dominated by terms such as ‘public-private partnerships’, ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’, ‘participation’, all of which are part of the “new public management” development paradigm, which became increasingly popular since the 1990s. (Ibid; Jayal 2001; Aucoin 1999; Barzelay 2000). The dominance of these ideas, globally, was also instrumental altering how the Indian state functioned in the post-

liberalisation era. Chandhoke (2003:2959) argues that the concept of governance “pluralises and decentres the state”. She uses the term *pluralisation* to describe the process by which the state increasingly collaborates with non-state actors to achieve development objectives. She writes that in the era of governance,

“The state is now represented as just one of the many agencies, organisations, or associations that dot the landscape” (Chandhoke 2003:2958)

Thus, for Chandhoke the emergence of a network of diverse actors who collaborate with the state, defining feature of governance in contemporary India. This broader notion of governance in the context of the pluralised ‘networking state’ found expression in the infrastructure development projects of the 1990s. These projects were initiated by the Indian government and were funded by loans from the World Bank. Along with the loans, the government also embraced the PPP models advocated by the World Bank (See Vyas 2007). NGOs and grassroots organisations were invited to partner with the state – to help shape policy and implement it on the ground. They were allotted the task of conducting social impact assessments or drawing up plans for resettlement and rehabilitation of people who were displaced by these road projects (Ibid). These partnerships emphasised horizontal ties rather than vertical ones, focused on mutual cooperation rather than on conflict, and played reconfigured the relationship between the state and non-state actors (Chandhoke 2003). The empirical chapters of this thesis demonstrate how these ideas have not only been applied to areas such as infrastructure development but also dominate the state’s economic and social development agenda, at the national and sub-national levels. Increasingly, the design of national rural development and livelihoods programmes are predicated on ideas such as “PPPs”. The Indian state now openly invites diverse actors (NGOs, and private corporations) to

become its “partners” to deliver development to India’s citizens through a host of new partnerships (See Planning Commission 2008).

This strong emphasis on governance in the post-liberalisation era was also followed by another important policy shift, which led to what Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan (2011) term the Indian state’s “internal transformation”. This was the process of decentralisation, which gave federal states and local governments’ greater autonomy. Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan (2011) argue that the process of globalisation combined with the decentralisation process reconfigured the relationship between the state and citizen. Decentralisation led to the establishment of a range of new programmes (in areas such as joint forest management, watershed management, the spread of private education and the launch of a range of community development programmes by NGOs, charitable trusts and other organisations), which actively encouraged citizens to participate in the state’s development efforts (Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011). These new initiatives were led and managed by communities and local governments. These changes at the level of local governments have also contributed to the Indian state’s new role as a facilitator.

Federalism is another key factor, which is central to understanding the internal dynamics of the Indian state and its role as a facilitator in the post reform period. The federal structure of the post-colonial Indian state has meant that while overall goals and strategies for growth and development are set by the Central Government in New Delhi, the implementation of these strategies falls within the ambit of the State governments. Funds for development projects in the form of grants-in-aid also flow from the Centre to the State Levels. Manor (2001) in his chapter on centre-state relations in India, highlights the fact that the practice of federalism in India involves bringing together a range of different actors – politicians, bureaucrats, members of trade unions, corporations and

caste associations who simultaneously balance different incentives and interests in a rapidly changing economic context.

The relationship between the centre and state became more complex in the 1990s – not only due to the pressures of economic liberalisation, but also because of a changing political environment, which was increasingly characterised by the rise of numerous caste and regional based political parties and the emergence of coalition politics (Sinha 2004; 2005). This was further complicated by a move in the mid 1990's to give individual States the right to directly attract private foreign investment, leading to the emergence of what Jenkins (2007) calls “competition states”, where rapidly industrialising States like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra compete with each other for foreign investment, in order to boost growth within their own regions. Scholars like Sáez (2002) characterise this form of federalism in India as “federalism without a centre”, as state governments increasingly have greater autonomy in the means that they choose to pursue growth.

Sinha (2004;2005) elaborates on this idea and argues that while States in India have always been competing with each other, the process of economic liberalisation has changed the nature of competition between states. She argues that regional competition in the pre-liberalisation era was *vertical* and took place between the centre and the States (for example - States sought to match central government subsidies, or ensure that prominent public sector units are located within their regions). In the post liberalisation era, Sinha (2004) explains, competition became increasingly *horizontal* and took place between different States (as individual States started competing with each other for foreign investment). Sinha meticulously explores how the nature of centre-state relations evolved as a result of this shift and she draws on policy evidence from States such as

Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra to highlight how India's sub-national regions played a more dominant role in the post-liberalisation era. Corbridge et al (2012) highlight how the prominence of States as key development actors also led to the emergence of new forms of leadership at the State level, where the role of the Chief Minister was reinvented into that of the dynamic Chief Executive Officer (CEO)<sup>10</sup>. At this time new government agencies (such as Tamil Nadu's Guidance Bureau which was created in 1992<sup>11</sup>) were established at the State level to specifically attract foreign investment into States. The rise of competition between States has had multiple consequences. While Jenkins (2007) argues that this has helped boost overall growth rates in India; other scholars like Corbridge (2011) argue that these processes have created new sources of rent for bureaucrats and politicians at the State level and widened regional inequalities at the national level.

There is broad consensus, however, that decentralisation combined with federalism were instrumental in creating the foundation for a new kind of state in contemporary India. Sub-national regions within the country emerged as key sites where the multidimensional, multi-layered, complex Indian state manifests itself through its everyday implementation of policies. Sud's (2014) highlights this point and makes a case for more scholarship at the level of India's sub-national regions – to understand the multiple ways in which the Indian state actually works in practice. These ideas have guided the analytical framework of the thesis and have also influenced the thesis' structure, which begins by first presenting material from the State of Tamil Nadu and examines its industrial policy before moving on to exploring how skill development was conceptualised as a national policy. The decision to present the empirical chapters of the thesis in this manner was

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<sup>10</sup> Corbridge et al (2012) uses the example of Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh and Narendra Modi in Gujarat, as examples of Chief Ministers who project themselves as CEOs.

<sup>11</sup> See Sinha (2004; 2005) and is also discussed in further detail in Chapter 3

deliberate as it helps highlight the central role of India's sub national regions in policy formulation and implementation and brings out the dynamics between the Centre and the State – in creating new policies and implementing them as 'facilitators' of growth and development.

What makes the new incarnation of the Indian state, which emerged in the post reform period, distinct? It could be argued that the Indian state has always been deeply connected with other actors and institutions – particularly big businesses, which have had considerable influence over economic policy since independence. For example, as far back as 1944-45, a group of Indian industrialists put forth a set of proposals for industrial development in post-independent India. This document known as 'The Bombay Plan', argued in favour of an interventionist state, a large public sector and the protection of Indian industries from foreign competition. While Nehru did not formally accept the Plan, these recommendations formed the core principles in India's first Five-year Plan (and indeed its first industrial policy in 1956). This illustrates an early nexus between the state and the industrial classes in India (See Chibber's 2003). Similarly, Bardhan's (2004) paper on how India's "dominant proprietary classes" (industrial capitalists, rural landowners and the professional class) have managed to use their privileged positions to make demands of the state, and how the state in return has acquiesced to these demands – also illustrates the close connections between the Indian state and the elite.

The process of economic liberalisation has brought the state and big businesses even closer together. The closeness between these two actors is particularly evident in the work of Kochanek (1995), Kohli (2006a,b) and Evans (1995) – all of whom emphasise the different kinds of connections that the Indian state shares with big businesses. Kochanek (1995) examines how interest politics has transformed as a result of the

process of economic liberalisation. In doing so, he highlights the evolution of business associations in India and how their interests converge, over time. For example he argues that the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) rose to prominence because of its unique lobbying style, where it explicitly aligned itself with the goals and objectives of the government<sup>12</sup>. The CII describes itself as the “junior partner of the government” (Kochanek 1995: 547) and the close relationship that it shares with government officials enabled it to lobby successfully for the reform of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA). Famously the 1993-1994 was termed the “Tarun Das<sup>13</sup> budget” by India’s Revenue Secretary – a term which reflects CII’s strong influence over government policy in the post reform period (Ibid.). Another example of the Indian state’s close relationship with the private sector is evident in Kohli’s (2006) work on the “pro-business” (as opposed to “pro-market”) stance of the Indian state, which he argues has privileged the interests of large corporations over the interests of the poor and other vulnerable groups (See Kohli 2006 a,b;2012). Evans (1995) documents the beginnings of the process by which the Indian state began to act as a facilitator of growth by examining the process of industrial transformation. He focuses on the growth of the IT industry in India and explains how the specific departments of the state took on “midwifery” and “husbandry” roles to boost industrial growth in new sectors such as IT, while simultaneously playing a “predatory” role in other sectors. In some Indian States like Tamil Nadu, institutions to promote industrial development, within the state apparatus (such as the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation [TIDCO] or the Small Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu [SIPCOT]), were created as early as the 1960s and 1970s to promote industrial development in the State. These organisations attempted to play the “midwifery” and “husbandry” roles that Evans (1995) describes even before 1991,

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<sup>12</sup> See also, Yadav 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Tarun Das was the President of CII at that time.

though this role was rather limited at that time<sup>14</sup>. In the post-reform period, these institutions were reinvigorated and newer institutions were established to specifically promote industrial growth within these States. Thus some Indian States emerged as star performers in the field of industrial development, while others lagged behind.

Evans' (1995) work seeks to answer an important question: why have some countries fostered sustained industrial development while others have not? Evans explores the role of the state in facilitating the growth of the IT sector in three countries: South Korea, Brazil and India. Evans finds that countries, which are most effective in facilitating industrial transformation, are those that balance “autonomy” (through a professionalised meritocratic civil service, which is free from manipulation from rent seeking groups) with “embeddedness” (which refers to state representatives being in touch with dominant social groups and civil society actors and thus remain connected to these wider social networks). He uses the term “embedded autonomy” to characterise this balancing act that states perform to boost industrial growth. Evans (1995) cites South Korea as an example of a country where this balance between “embeddedness and autonomy” has worked well, while Zaire is cited as an example of a weak, “predatory state” – which does not exhibit these characteristics.

A common feature in the work of all scholarship discussed so far is that they all emphasise the shift in the role of the Indian state – to that of a *facilitator* – which now openly engages with lobby groups, industry associations or indeed with private corporations. A distinguishing feature of the Indian state since the decade of the 1990s was that its role as a facilitator of development became institutionalised. Rather than an

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<sup>14</sup> Post liberalisation, Tamil Nadu has seen the rise of a number of organisations that are state-owned, partly state-owned joint ventures (through public-private partnerships) and private industry associations all of which work together to promote industrial development. I will illustrate this point in further detail in Chapter 3.

improvised attempt to please various interest groups the neoliberal Indian state now deliberately brings multiple actors together to collaborate with it not just to promote growth but also to achieve development goals. This was initially seen in the area of infrastructure development - building roads, airports, schools, and hospitals, through partnerships with the private sector. More recently, such partnerships with the private sector and NGOs have extended into the field of socio-economic development. For example, the preparation of midday meals in schools and its delivery are increasingly outsourced to NGOs and private catering firms; initiatives under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission are implemented by both state actors and most recently by private corporations (see Deodhar et al 2010; MoRD 2007). In addition to implementation of government programmes through institutionalised partnerships, non-state actors now also provide policy advisory services to government departments. While, in the past the business classes have influenced policy, their contributions were not acknowledged and their recommendations were implemented through “stealth” – in order to create an illusion of an impartial state, committed to redistribution (Kohli 2006a; Panagariya 2008). Today, the role of non-state actors in policy making is actively encouraged as members from Consultancy firms like PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) are increasingly seconded to government departments (such as the Department of Urban Development and IT) to draft policy notes and advise on public policy<sup>15</sup>. Significantly, a range of new hybrid organisations, combining the interests of individuals and organisations with multiple affiliations are now working together with the Indian state to deliver development to India’s citizens (Chandhoke 2003).

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<sup>15</sup> PwC had a representative seconded to the Ministry of IT. PwC’s ‘Government Reforms and Infrastructure Development’ practice, has been working on sectoral reforms for the Indian Government for the past 15 years – see <http://www.pwc.in/government-reforms-and-infrastructure-development/index.jhtml> (accessed 08.11.13).

The contemporary Indian state has often been described by social scientists as “pluralised” “embedded”, “multi-faceted”, or “multi-layered” – all these definitions emphasise multidimensionality, as one of the defining features of the contemporary Indian state (See Chandhoke 2003; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011; Evans 1995; Sud 2012). The emergence of new hybrid organisations that are in-between the public and private sectors, add further dimensions to the state. I argue that this blurring of boundaries between the public and private sectors combined with the fact that a multiplicity of actors now work with the state and perform state functions on its behalf, distinguish the contemporary Indian state from its previous incarnations.

While all the above studies point to a close nexus between the state and private sector, very little is known about the nature of the relationship between these two actors. There is limited ethnographic research on private corporations in India, particularly on their relationship with the Indian state and on their role as development actors. There are media accounts of the powerful role of private corporations such as ‘Reliance’ who are viewed as important lobby groups with the ability to influence policy<sup>16</sup>, there is little anthropological research on how lobbying works in practice and how state actors respond to it. This thesis attempts to clarify how this relationship between the Indian state and private corporations works in practice, through the examples of the Nokia SEZ and Project SEAM.

The anthropological literature on the contemporary Indian state provides rich evidence on the everyday working of the Indian state (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Gupta 1995). This scholarship builds on structural-functional and Marxian approaches to studying the state

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<sup>16</sup>For examples, see media articles by Singh (2014); Dalal (2014)

(which dominate the discipline of political science and sociology) by asserting that the state is also a “cultural artefact”, creating a more nuanced framework to understand the everyday workings of the state system. Gupta and Sharma (2006) provide a useful starting point to understand how an anthropological study of the state and its everyday practices provides insights into how the state as an institution has been transformed by the processes of neoliberal globalisation.

Gupta and Sharma (2006) undertake a detailed comparison of two government programmes. The first programme the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme - a welfare scheme focused on reducing maternal and infant mortality and malnutrition through a range of preventative and supplementary interventions. This intervention was entirely funded and implemented by the state, and was initiated in 1975, well before the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms. The second initiative featured in the paper was a women’s empowerment programme known as Mahila Samakhya (MS), which was jointly funded by the Government of India and the Dutch government and was implemented by state functionaries and representatives from NGOs. The MS programme was studied in the post-liberalisation era. By comparing two development programmes, which were designed in two different policy contexts – years apart – the paper argues that though the two programmes differed in their philosophy and objectives, there were striking similarities in their everyday practices, particularly in the way representatives of the two initiatives exercised power over project beneficiaries.

Gupta and Sharma (2006) go on to make an important point, that the adoption of neoliberal economic policies by post-colonial states has not meant a total retreat of the state, where welfare programmes are being replaced by workfare programmes, but rather has led to a simultaneous expansion of both kinds of programmes. This is largely due to

the compulsions of democratic politics, where governments seek to balance populist policies (to win elections) with growth promotion. Skill-training programmes that are the subject of study of this thesis lie at the cusp of welfare and workfare programmes and thus represent another example of the Indian state's attempts to balance growth priorities with redistribution, by seeking to connect several hundred thousand unskilled rural youth with free training and jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Gupta and Sharma's (2006) work begins to answer two important questions, which are also central to this study. What is the role of culture in state formation? What are the mechanisms through which state power is exercised in neoliberal India? In answering these questions, Gupta and Sharma also make a case for how an anthropological approach to studying the state can provide useful insights into the role of the state in the era of neoliberal globalisation. Anthropologists studying the state use 'culture' as the lens through which they examine the state. Thus such studies accord primacy to the study of the everyday state and examine how citizens perceive and encounter the state through their everyday interactions. Gupta and Sharma (2006) emphasise the importance of norms, bureaucratic procedures and "proceduralism" in legitimising state-sponsored programmes. In addition, they focus on the powerful role of objects and symbols (such as vehicles with official license plates, official forms with a government seal, written records, modes of speech of programme implementers) in acting as "markers" of authority which play an important role in giving these programmes legitimacy in the eyes of programme beneficiaries. Thus this perspective adds another dimension to the question of what constitutes the state. If the state is a complex system of ideas and practices which legitimise rule or domination, as Abrams (1988) suggests, it also a set of objects and cultural symbols that legitimise authority.

Gupta and Sharma's (2006) work also provides a useful framework to understand how power is wielded by the contemporary Indian state. Drawing from the work of Mitchell (2006) who argues that *power* mediates between the realm of the state and that of civil society, Sharma and Gupta (2006) draw attention to the work of Rose (1996; 1999) who argues that state power also manifests itself through disciplinary practices implemented by "experts". Does the way in which power is exercised change when multiple actors work together in development programmes or when "experts" are drawn from outside government? Sharma and Gupta (2006) answer this question in the introductory chapter of their book with an example of the MS initiative, which was structured as Government Organised Non Government Organisation (GONGO) – a partnership between a government department and an NGO. The authors highlight how this hybrid organisation used its ambiguous position (between government and NGO) to its advantage when implementing the programme. MS was introduced to potential clients as an NGO to emphasise the fact that it had limited funds and that it was pro poor, at the same time it used symbols of state power (such as jeeps which displayed both the MS symbol and the government of India emblem) in order to establish authority and exercise power. Thus, while new hybrid organisations are being created within the frame of the state, the ways in which power continues to be exercised within these hybrid organisations remains unchanged.

The idea of development programmes being implemented through hybrid institutions like GONGOs provides further evidence of the pluralised nature of the state, in a liberalised and globalised context. While the role of NGOs as implementers of state policies has been identified by scholars such as Kumar (2011) and examined in detail by Gupta and Sharma (2006), the everyday workings of PPPs – particularly the role of the private sector in implementing state-funded development programmes has received little

academic attention. How are such partnerships conceptualised? How do such partnerships work in practice? How do citizens who are the intended beneficiaries of these initiatives experience such partnerships? The empirical chapters in this thesis attempt to answer the above questions.

While there is broad consensus in the social science literature that the Indian state is a pluralised, multidimensional entity, it is unclear how to make sense of this multifaceted state. How does it work in practice? Crucially, how do the different facets of the state relate to each other? How are these facets interconnected?

One way of conceptualising this multifaceted state – analytically – is by thinking of it as a *network* of diverse actors who come together to achieve particular goals and then disperse into nodes and go on to become part of other networks. Chandhoke (2003) hints at this idea when she refers to the contemporary Indian state as the ‘networking state’ (Chandhoke 2003:2959). She uses the term ‘networking’ to illustrate the state’s numerous partnerships with a range of other actors (notably civil society groups, NGOs and private sector) in performing the task of governance. This idea also features in an earlier work by Castells (1996, 2006) who first used the term “network state” in the last chapter of his book entitled “End of Millenium” (Castells, 1998), to describe how globalisation and the spread of information and communication technologies would transform the nation state. This chapter was written in the late 1990s, at a time when the combination of globalisation and the spread of information technologies had altered various institutions in society. Indeed capturing this transformation of institutions in its entirety was the main objective of Castells’ “Information Age” trilogy. As a result, the concept of the network state is not fully developed. The final chapter of the trilogy predicts how institutions – notably the state, would be affected by these technological changes. It is in

this context that Castells predicts that the technological and geopolitical changes (caused by globalisation) would result in “a crisis of the nation state” – where the nation state would become less sovereign as it increasingly becomes part of an interdependent global system. He argues that nation states will no longer be able to control their own currency as economic policies will become increasingly determined by supra-national organisations, which begin to have a greater influence on the governing of nation states. Castells argues that these factors would lead the state to play the role of a power broker, balancing its own interests with that of other supranational organisations, while collaborating with a range of different actors to conduct the task of governance. These ideas provide a useful framework to understand the Indian state and its encounters with the twin processes of globalisation and economic liberalisation.

Castells’ writing on the “network state” in the Information Age trilogy ends rather abruptly, leaving key questions on the role of citizenship, the future of democracy and functioning of the network state in practice – unanswered. Castells picks up on the idea of the ‘network state’ again, ten years later, in a 2006 article entitled “Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy”. Here he defines what he means by the network state more clearly, describing it as a “network of political institutions” which actively collaborates with a range of different actors at the global and local levels to carry out the task of governance. On reading Castells’ revised definition of the network state, one gets the sense that the contemporary nation state is not in a state of crisis as he had predicted earlier, but rather has found the means to effectively manage the complexities of being linked to a complex global system by operating in a networked manner. He explains,

“To connect the global and the local, nation-states have asserted or fostered a process of decentralization that reaches out to regional or local governments, and even to NGOs

(non-government organisations), often associated to political management ... Governance is operated in a network of political institutions that shares sovereignty in various degrees and reconfigurates itself in a variable geopolitical geometry. This is what I have conceptualized as the network state.” (Castells 2006:15)

While Castells has provided a definition of the network state, he has not developed this concept, leaving it open to multiple interpretations. I argue that Castells’ definition of the network state can be interpreted in two ways. First, the term could be used to understand the role of the nation state, in a changed global geopolitical landscape and how its policies and mode of functioning emerge as a result of its engagements with a range of international actors – governments, international organisations or NGOs. Second, this term could also be applied to look within the nation state and could explain how the nation state itself operates as a network of diverse actors in carrying out the task of governance. As Chandhoke (2003) persuasively argues, the contemporary Indian state today is a pluralised entity, which works with multiple actors (notably NGOs, quasi-government agencies, civil society groups and think tanks) to deliver development to its citizens. By characterising this pluralised state as a ‘network state’, the interconnections between the state and its diverse partners who carry out the task of governance are brought into prominence. I particularly focus on this second interpretation of the idea of the ‘network state,’ in this thesis, and use it as an analytical framework through which the everyday workings of the contemporary Indian state can be understood. By building on Castells’ concept of the network state, the empirical chapters of this thesis specifically focus on answering the following questions: how does the “pro-business” Indian state (Kohli 2006a,b) work in practice? What connects state institutions to private corporations and how does this reconfigure the relationship between these two actors?

The concept of the network state also helps overcome a major challenge that many anthropologists encounter, when studying the state. According to Gupta and Sharma anthropologists struggle to balance a nuanced understanding of the everyday workings of the state in practice (collected through ethnographic fieldwork) with the challenge of placing these observations within a transnational frame. The concept of the network state thus helps provide an overarching contextual framework within which ethnographic research on how the various nodes of this network state interact and evolve can be situated and analysed.

#### **d) The Proliferation of the Network Enterprise in India**

Globalization - combined with the spread of information and communication technologies has created what Castells (1996) calls the 'network society' – which is structured around flows of capital, information, technology and labour. These developments have not only altered the nature of the state, as explained in the previous section; they have also changed the nature of organizations and private enterprise. Castells' (1996) argues that the network society has led to the emergence of a new kind of organization, the 'network enterprise', which he defines as:

“[An] organizational form built around business projects resulting from cooperation of different components of different firms, networking amongst themselves for a given project and reconfiguring their networks for the implementation of each project.” (Castells 1996: 218)

Like the network state, the network enterprise is also a pluralized entity, characterized by mutual co-operation across different nodes of the firm, which collaborate for specific

business projects. For Castells, 'the network is the enterprise' (Castells 1996: 218). Thus, while the firm remains the unit of accumulation of capital, management, and property rights; 'networks', which are flexible and adaptable, perform the actual business in practice. Castells (1996) explains that the network enterprise emerged as a distinct organisational form as a result of the culmination of numerous changes in the capitalist production system, which was accelerated by globalisation and the spread of information and communication technologies. Some of the key factors that were instrumental in creating the network enterprise included: the shift from Fordist models of industrial production (centred on assembly lines), to more "flexible" Post-Fordist production models; the emergence of small businesses as centres of innovation and job creation; and the "crisis" of large co-operations (Castells 1996). In addition, the rise of Toyotism (characterised by management-worker co-operation and a range of human resource management strategies which emphasise team work, a flat management structure, ideas of total quality management etc.) also marked a transformation in the structure of the corporation itself which shifted away from vertical bureaucracies, giving rise to the "horizontal corporation", which was increasingly organised along the lines of networks. These factors have led to the emergence and spread of the Castellan network enterprise, across the world.

Why are "networks" a defining feature of the modern corporation? Castells answers this question by explaining that the process of globalisation has led to a "crisis of the vertical corporation model" (Castells, 1996; 1998). In order to remain competitive and innovative, organisations have had to link up with other firms often across borders. These networks take a number of different forms – between firms, within firms, personal networks between individuals and networks of technology and information flows. The formation of these networks of partnerships enables firms to share risks, keep costs low and adapt

quickly to rapidly changing demands. The proliferation of subcontracting networks, where large corporations increasingly subcontract work to smaller units – often overseas – is an excellent example of how organisations have adapted to the changing global context and transformed themselves into network enterprises (Ibid). For Castells, network enterprises represent a new stage in the evolution of the traditional multinational corporation (MNC), which as a result of globalization becomes, as Ghoshal and Bartlett (1993) explain – “an interorganisational network...which is embedded within an external network” (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1993, cited in Castells, 1996). Castells explains that the spread of network enterprises across the world as a result of the globalization process has led to the emergence of new kinds of industries (such as the ITeS industries), flexible patterns of employment and the entry of a diverse workforce (comprising of women, migrants and youth) – all of which characterize the new workplaces which are the subject of this research study.

Importantly, globalisation has also led many of these firms to move to emerging economies, where costs (particularly) labour costs are cheaper (Williams et al, 2013). These changes have particularly been visible in countries like India, which saw a rapid proliferation of network enterprises, in the aftermath of neoliberal globalisation. Network enterprises in India take a number of different forms: from large multinational firms (which establish its back offices, call centres and manufacturing plants in India, to take advantage of the low labour costs in the country)<sup>17</sup>; small and medium size enterprises which work as subcontractors to global corporations, and large and small private Indian companies which forge partnerships with international organisations, the Indian state and other institutions – to innovate and remain profitable.

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<sup>17</sup> This literature on GPNs see Coe et al, 2008; Williams et al. 2013; Carswell and De Neve, 2013; De Neve 2013.

In this thesis, I examine two kinds of network enterprises. First, I view the network enterprise as a new kind of workplace that is rapidly spreading across India; second, I argue that it is also an active partner/collaborator of the Indian state, working with the state on implementing development programmes for India's citizens. There is limited social science research on the latter point. Therefore an important objective of this study is to introduce the network enterprise as a development actor and explain the nature of its relationship with the network state. The examples of the Nokia SEZ and Project SEAM, illustrate both these facets of the network enterprise. Together both cases are used to argue that contemporary India's development trajectory is increasingly characterised by the confluence of the network state and the network enterprise. The partnership between these two institutions has established new work sites (within new kinds of network enterprises in global spaces such as SEZs and industrial parks), created demand for new skills, and established new kinds of partnerships between state agencies and private corporations to meet India's diverse development challenges - from infrastructure development to skill-training. Unpacking what this partnership means – both as an idea and how it works in practice is an important objective of this thesis. These insights would add to the social science literature on the ways in which the processes of neoliberal globalisation have brought the state and the private corporation closer together, as they collaborate in numerous ways to deliver development to India's citizens.

While there has been considerable research on the transformation of the state as a result of the processes of globalisation and economic liberalisation, the evolution of the private corporation has received little academic attention. Since 2011, there has been an emerging body of literature in social anthropology, which has begun to focus on the corporation as a dominant social institution and anthropologists have made a case for

more research in the area of ‘Corporate Anthropology’ to examine this theme further (See Welker et al 2011). Emerging research in this new field has been compiled in a special issue of the journal, ‘Current Anthropology’ which explicitly focuses on the theme: ‘Social Life of the Corporate Form’, bringing together perspectives from anthropologists, social activists, NGO managers, corporate executives, financial planners and entrepreneurs (Welker et al 2011:S3). The editors of this special issue emphasise the fact that by focusing on ‘corporate forms’ rather than the ‘corporation’ they aim to shift away from conceptualisation of the corporation as a, “solid, unified, self-knowing and self-present actor that relentlessly maximise profits and externalise harm” (Welker et al 2011:S5) to a broader conception of how the logics of capitalism, business and profits have influenced how institutions function (Ibid.). This work particularly explores everyday corporate practices and situates these within the context of wider economic, political and social changes to explain the diverse forms that corporations take. Some of the important themes that emerge in this body of work pertain to how corporations interact with and influence, the state, media, NGOs, educational institutions, the workplace and the subjectivities of individual citizens (See Welker et al 2011). Crucially, this body of work emphasises the powerful role that corporations play in shaping social institutions and actors in society. By examining the complex relationship between the network state and the network enterprise and how they work together to implement skill development programmes, this thesis focuses on the evolution of the network enterprise into new a corporate form – which is now a ‘partner’ of the state to deliver development to India’s citizens. The empirical material presented in this thesis explains how corporations like IL&FS Clusters and Nokia undergird the state’s development agenda. In addition, corporations also emerge as new sites of training and work, and are also important institutions through which future aspirations and subjectivities of Trainees/workers are shaped.

I specifically situate this study within the existing literature in this field, which examines the links between the corporation and governance. One strand of this literature focuses on how new corporate forms have emerged as a response to the “double movement of capitalism” where corporations attempt to straddle goals of profit maximisation with demands for social protection (Polanyi 2001). Movements for ethical consumption, fair trade and corporate social responsibility have emerged within large corporations as one response to this challenge (Browne and Milgram, 2009; De Neve et al, 2008; De Neve 2009; Partridge 2011) and can be viewed as a set of attempts to reformulate capitalism itself. These studies have examined how the corporation has been reconfigured and its impact on other institutions and actors – particularly labour (See De Neve 2009; Partridge 2011; Carswell and De Neve, 2013; Williams et al 2013). The new focus on “corporate ethics” has also led to the emergence of new forms of corporate governance, setting new terms for corporate citizenship, inclusion and exclusion (See Merry, 2011; Partridge 2011). This literature therefore points to a new nexus between corporations, NGOs, and the state, creating what Partridge (2011) calls a new form of “activist capitalism” predicated on partnerships between corporations and NGOs who are increasingly subcontracted by corporations to conduct audits and assess the extent to which corporations conform to environmental or labour laws. Schwittay (2011) highlights another important aspect of this idea in her study of Hewlett-Packard’s CSR initiatives, which seek to create new products for consumers at the “bottom of pyramid” (Prahalad 2004). Schwittay’s (2011) study provides evidence of how corporate attempts to bridge the digital divide through information technology, in fact exacerbate these differences, as a result of arbitrary decisions taken by corporations to relocate or terminate the project without taking into account the impact of these decisions on the local community. Schwittay’s (2011) work poses an important question which is especially relevant to this study: is it possible for the multiple actors in such collaborative

projects to leave aside their diverse vested interests and act wholeheartedly for the benefit of the community alone? This question is also at the heart of an earlier paper by Schwittay (2008) who characterises these attempts at what Prahalad (2004) calls “inclusive capitalism” (which views the poor as an important market for transnational corporations) as the “marketization of poverty” (Schwittay 2008). This concept highlights a new trend in social policy where market-led solutions to poverty reduction are increasingly proposed to provide the poor with the tools needed to unleash their initiative and escape poverty. Schwittay’s (2008; 2011) critique of such an approach comes from the idea that such solutions do not address the structural reasons why the poor remain poor and rather than dealing with the roots of poverty and inequality, act as a band-aid, which ignores the deeper underlying factors which trap people in poverty. Schwittay’s (2008) idea of the “marketization of poverty” also provides a useful backdrop against which skill-training programmes, such as SEAM can be analysed. The SEAM programme is a particularly relevant example, as it features a further evolution of the corporate form into a public-private partnership. This is a useful case study through which the transformation of the state and the private corporation in India can be examined.

### **III. New Workplaces in India and the Changing Meanings of “Skill”**

This thesis specifically examines the impact of new worksites – in creating new dimensions to the concept of ‘skill’, generating new forms of work and employment and constructing new aspirations for young Indians who dream of working in these new worksites. I use the term ‘workplace’ in this thesis, to refer to a site of production and employment, where individuals produce goods and/or services in return for remuneration or wages. By focusing on both the transformation of the ‘workplace’ and

the transformation of 'work' within these sites, I emphasise the shift that has taken place in both the spatial dimension of work and in the nature of work itself, as a result of the twin processes of globalisation and economic liberalisation. I argue that an exploration of the geography of the workplace and the site within which it is located provides an insight into how the nature of work within these spaces is distinct from some of the older/traditional workplaces.

**a) The Evolution of the Workplace: From the Fordist Workplace to the Global Factory**

The workplace has often been viewed as a microcosm of society and the transformation of the workplace has frequently been used as a lens through which social change is examined. The centrality of the workplace as a marker of social change is evident in the writings of the three founding fathers of the discipline of sociology – Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx. The shift in the site of work (from the farm to the factory), the emergence of new forms of work, changes in labour relations and the evolution of organizations, were central to their writings (Giddens 1971).

More recently, Castells (1996) examines in detail the evolution of the workplace in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the developed world, and he specifically focuses on the role of technological change and new management paradigms in creating new sites of work. He identifies three phases in evolution of the workplace. Notably, each phase is characterised by a change in the definition of "skill", as new kinds of skills emerge in accordance with the requirements of these new work sites.

The first phase is the period from 1920-1970, which witnessed a shift to what Castells calls the 'post agricultural workplace'. The Fordist manufacturing factory (See Castells 1996, 1998; McDowell 2003, 2009) epitomised the new workplace of this period. Here

production was organised along assembly lines in order to maximise efficiency of workers and achieve high production targets. There was little room for error on the assembly line – as complex tasks were divided into smaller parts and workers were tasked with completing specific, minute tasks to precision. The reorganisation of the production process in the Fordist factory, also led to a new definition of what it means to be skilled. Bezanson (1922) argues that while the term ‘skill’ was used to mean the possession of in-depth knowledge of the production process, acquired through long term experience; in the Fordist factory, to be ‘skilled’ meant being able to operate a specific kind of machine, to possess specific technical competencies, which can be acquired over a relatively short period of time. The high division of labour on the factory floor meant that work was divided into smaller tasks. Thus, workers had to learn a very small, specific set of skills to be able to work on the shop floor. This narrowing of the definition of ‘skill’ made it possible for unskilled workers to be trained to work in the assembly line quickly, which according to Bezanson (1922) was particularly important in the post-war period, when access to skilled workers was scarce and workers needed to be trained quickly to meet the needs of industry (Ibid.). Thus the emergence of the Fordist workplace was marked by two key trends which continued, as the workplace evolved: first, it saw the emergence of structured skill-training initiatives within the factory, where workers were trained to perform specific tasks within a short period of time, and second, it led to the division of the production process into smaller tasks as a result of which the individual worker made a very small contribution to the production of the final product.

The period 1970-1990 saw a further evolution in the workplace, with the emergence of what Castells (1996) calls “the post-industrial workplace”. This was characterised by two key features. In the manufacturing sector, it led to a shift from Fordism to Post Fordism, which saw the rise of ‘flexible specialisation’ – a new paradigm around which work was

organised. This strategy aimed to create greater variation in the products produced on the shop floor, as product innovation became increasingly important in order to rapidly meet the changing demand of the market. This was particularly evident in labour intensive sectors such as the garment industry, which saw a shift in the layout of the factory, the organisation of work and in production processes, as a result of this new production paradigm. From a factory floor characterised by long assembly lines with workers performing specific tasks, flexible production cells dedicated to performing sets of processes emerged. To meet high production demands and quality standards, firms started developing networks with other firms and began to sub-contract specific tasks (such as embroidery or cutting in the garment industry, for example) to them. This reorientation of the production process also led to a premium placed on new kinds of skills (Unni and Rani, 2009). For example, workers who could multitask, innovate or learn new skills quickly were increasingly valued at the workplace. Those who were unable to do so were left behind. In this system, a worker not only has to possess the skills needed to perform particular tasks, but they are also tasked with the responsibility of continuously upgrading their skills to remain competitive (Sennett 1998). Thus, this move towards flexible specialisation also made work more precarious in this new era (Ibid).

This period also saw the emergence of the service sector as a dominant sector of the economy in the developing world. This was marked by the rise of new occupational profiles and an increase in white-collar occupations. Here too, employment was precarious and flexible, as the onus was on the individual worker – to acquire new skills and remain competitive. Service sector employment also placed premium on new kinds of skills, particularly soft skills, such as interpersonal skills and communication skills (Upadhy 2013). The physical appearance of the worker, body language, personal

grooming and other “embodied” characteristics of the worker became increasingly important in service sector jobs. McDowell (2009) illustrates how workers in the service industry are gauged by their “embodied performance” at the workplace – a feature that became even more prominent in the 1990’s which saw a further evolution in service sector employment, due to the spread of information and communication technologies (ICT).

The 1990s was marked by the Castellan Information Age and signified yet another watershed in the evolution of the workplace. New sectors such as the IT Enabled Services (ITeS) industry emerged – creating new opportunities for work. New skill sets centred on an individual’s knowledge of new technologies emerged. Here too workers were tasked with the responsibility to learning both the technical and soft skills needed to work in these new sectors. Countries like India, because of their low labour costs and high proportion of tech-savvy, middle class youth with the skills to work in this sector – became a favoured location for business process outsourcing. Jobs in new worksites such as IT parks and call centres, were increasingly sought after, especially among India’s youth (Upadhyia and Vasavi 2008; Nisbett 2013.) McDowell argues that the proliferation of such workplaces in the developing countries saw new groups of people (such as women and migrant workers) taking up these new jobs, creating new kinds of workplace interactions, working conditions and worker identities (Castells 1996, 1998; McDowell 2009).

A majority of the literature on new workplaces in India focuses on the emergence of new sites of work in the service sector. The nature of work, labour relations and employment practices in these new workplaces have been studied by a number of scholars (see Fuller and Narasimhan 2006; James and Vira 2009; Larner 2002; Das et al 2008; Upadhyia and Vasavi 2008). This body of work focuses on skilled workers who are typically well

educated in English and belong to the middle/upper-middle classes. For example, Gooptu (2009) studies workers in the organised retail sector, who work in shopping malls – a new site of work that is rapidly proliferating across India. Gooptu describes how new workers are trained to work in this sector and goes on to illustrate the kind of work they do in Kolkata’s shopping malls. Through this description, Gooptu explains how the workplace plays a central role in creating new kinds of worker-citizens who are dynamic, enterprising subjects who develop individualised coping strategies to cope with the precarious nature of work in this sector. She describes the worker in the new workplace as a ‘neoliberal subject’, who is,

“Individualised and responsible for his/her own self-presentation, self-government, self-management and self-advancement” (Gooptu 2009: 46).

While there is some research on new workplaces in the service sector, there is limited research on how workers experience work in new workplaces in India’s manufacturing sector. This thesis explores this idea through the lens of skill-training programmes to illustrate the role of the state and the private sector in constructing an entire class of young, dynamic enterprising worker-subjects for new workplaces in India’s manufacturing sector.

Notions of ‘change’ and ‘transformation’ are central to the literature on the evolution of the workplace; but, as McDowell (2009) points out, the rise of these new workplaces did not mean a complete break from older forms of work. This is particularly relevant when exploring the proliferation of new workplaces in countries like India, which has taken place in a relatively short span of time. It is important to note that the evolution of the workplace in India does not follow a linear path, but rather follows a complex trajectory as a result of the globalization process. The three kinds of workplaces that Castells writes

about – the Fordist workplace, the Post Fordist and the network enterprises of the information age – co-exist, making it a very rich and complex site for fieldwork. This point is emphasised in recent ethnographic studies on new workplaces in new global factories in India’s manufacturing sector, which have emerged in India as a result of the process of globalisation and economic liberalisation. This literature focuses primarily on the ‘global factory’ as a new kind of workplace in India. These firms produce largely for exports and operate as vast network enterprises, which exhibit features of the Fordist and Post Fordist workplace. For example, the shop floor of large export oriented garment firms seem to be organised as assembly lines, but deeper investigation into the nature of production reveals the complex sub-contracting networks which involve small firms, individual artisans and home-based workers who contribute to the production process (See De Neve, 2005; Chari 2004; Mezzadri 2008, 2010). Temporary workers coexist with permanent staff on the rolls of the firm and like the new workplaces in the service sector – employment in these new worksites is precarious and characterised by flexible patterns of employment and low levels of job security. Crucially, like other new workplaces that have emerged in the era of neoliberal globalisation, the individual worker is responsible for managing risk and developing coping strategies to deal with the challenges of employment in this new workplace. A number of recent ethnographic studies on different kinds of new workplaces in the manufacturing sector emphasise these points (see Chari 2004; De Neve 2005; Cross 2009; Bannerjee-Guha 2008). For example, anthropological studies on India’s export-oriented garment industry have analysed these new worksites in terms of global production networks (GPNs), and have brought out the networked nature of these worksites (See De Neve 2013; Carswell and De Neve 2013) while explaining how these complex supply chains work in practice. Importantly this literature not only explores how workers experience work within these organisations, but also emphasises the central role of the nation state within GPNs (See

Coe et al 2008). Scholars like De Neve (2005) and Chari (2004) also highlight the fact that these workplaces are deeply embedded in the social structures of the region. Both these monographs bring out the central role of caste networks, political affiliations and gender – in shaping work practices and labour relations within the workplace and outside it.

In a globalised world where capital is mobile, Asian countries like China, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have emerged as important manufacturing centres (specifically in sectors such as textiles, leather processing and hardware manufacturing for the telecommunications industry) due to the low cost of labour in these countries (Gregory et al, 2009). This new system of international division of labour was further enhanced as developing countries opened up their economies and saw the emergence of global factories and manufacturing units in distinct spaces, such as SEZs or industrial estates. The next section focuses precisely on the above point by examining the rise of global factories, particularly within SEZs in India.

### **b) Global Factories within SEZs as New Workplaces in India**

The global factory in the manufacturing sector is the new workplace featured in this thesis. I examine two kinds of global factories in two distinct worksites. The first is the Nokia manufacturing plant, located within an SEZ; the second is a large export-oriented global garment-manufacturing factory (AB Apparels), which is not classified as an SEZ, but functions quite similarly to firms within SEZs. I first examine how SEZs emerged and proliferated across India and outline some of their key characteristics. In doing so, I also explain some of common features between global factories within and outside SEZs.

Jenkins (2007) defines an SEZ as,

“ A geographic region within a nation-state in which a distinct legal framework provides for more liberal economic policies and governance arrangements than those that prevail in the country at large, the intent being to stimulate investment, trade, and employment”.  
(Jenkins, 2007:3)

Jenkins' (2007) definition of the SEZ (above) emphasises that it is a distinct space, which is separated (geographically, legally and institutionally) from other firms outside the zone. Firms within these zones obtain a number of tax concessions and other incentives, in order to boost overall rates of industrial growth. The concept of promoting industrial growth through the creation of industrial enclaves is not new. India has had Export Processing Zones (EPZ) since 1965 in states like Gujarat. The current SEZ policy (which was announced in April 2000) derives inspiration from the earlier EPZ model and calls for a proliferation of such zones in order to boost foreign investments, exports and overall growth rates. India's SEZ Act 2005 governs the functioning of SEZs and individual States within India have also created their own SEZ Acts. SEZs have proliferated across India over the past decade. As of July 2013, a total of 576 SEZs were approved in India<sup>18</sup>.

Government of India's SEZ website describes these zones as an “engine for economic growth”<sup>19</sup> SEZs have been a subject of intense debate in India, with vociferous supporters and critics. Supporters of the SEZ policy argue that they bring positive spillovers, which include – increased employment generation, enhanced skills for workers,

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<sup>18</sup> Source: <http://www.sezindia.nic.in/writereaddata/pdf/ListofFormalapprovals.pdf> (last accessed on 22.05.2013)

<sup>19</sup> See: <http://www.sezindia.nic.in/about-introduction.asp> (last accessed on 22.05.2013)

foster innovation and technology transfer, make industry more competitive, improve infrastructure and reduce rural-urban migration – all which they argue, would benefit the economy as a whole (Aggarwal 2007; Bannerjee-Guha 2008).

Critics of India's SEZ policy take issue with the exclusiveness of SEZs and make three key points against the spread of SEZs in India. First, they argue that SEZs primarily serve the interests of capital over labour (Gopalakrishnan, 2008; Jenkins, 2007). They criticise the fact that these zones are administered by a government official known as the "Development Commissioner" and have no representation from labour departments, labour unions or local municipal councils in monitoring its functioning. In addition, critics argue that private sector actors get far too many concessions at the cost of labour and they predict that this policy will increase inequality in India and further isolate the poorer sections of Indian society from the development process (Ibid). The Nokia Telecom SEZ, which features in this thesis has been criticised for precisely these reasons by Dutta (2009) who filed a 'Right to Information' (RTI) petition with the government of Tamil Nadu to ascertain the extent of concessions that have been granted to Nokia. Dutta argues that the Nokia SEZ has come to Sriperumbudur at a high public cost, which according to her calculations amounts to Rs. 1020.4 crore or 216 million USD (Dutta 2009). Critics of SEZs also focus on the poor working conditions within these zones, which form a second important criticism of the SEZ policy – one that is repeatedly featured in academic studies on SEZs (See Majumdar 2001; Hossain 2001; PRIA 2000; Ong 2006). Scholars like Suchitra (2008) and Ghosh (2002) argue that a majority of workers in these zones tend to be young (between the ages of 18-29); female (women are considered by employers to be more hardworking and work at low wages) and are unattached to any labour union, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Ghosh 2002; Suchitra 2008; Wilde and de Haan 2006). Thirdly, land

acquisition for SEZs has been a particularly contentious issue in India. For example, the establishment of SEZs in the states of West Bengal and Goa were characterised by violent protests by farmers in response to the massive land acquisition processes that lie at the heart of these zones. Low compensation rates (well below the market value of land) and farmers' forcible displacement from their land made the creation of SEZs particularly unpopular in a few Indian States. Different States in India have followed different approaches to land acquisition for development projects. While States such as West Bengal have witnessed violent protests due to land acquisition issues, this was strikingly absent in States like Tamil Nadu (Vijayabaskar 2010). The latter point is further detailed in the next chapter, in the context of exploring the process of industrial development in the state of Tamil Nadu.

For Jenkins the SEZ policy exemplifies the practice of “reforms by stealth” and acts as a window into examining the politics of economic liberalisation. He argues that these new spaces have emerged due to the inability of the state of to “broker political accommodations that advance policy objectives” (Jenkins 2011:49). Thus Jenkins writes,

“....If ever a single policy initiative were capable of serving as a microcosm for the politics of reform it would be India's SEZ Act, which draws within its ambit such diverse issues such as foreign investment, taxation, industrial relations, land, and environmental sustainability. There are implications for federal relations and the functioning of India's system of local government as well.” (Jenkins 2010:48)

The above idea has inspired the research focus of this thesis where I use the case of the Nokia SEZ as a lens to examine the Indian state.

The notion that the SEZ is a unique, distinct space that is carved out of a nation state and yet remains separated from it, is a theme that features frequently in the literature on SEZs in India, which characterise SEZs as “spaces of difference” (Bannerjee-Guha 2008); “islands of excellence” (Brahmbhatt 2008) or “a country within a country” (Ong 2006:19). Ong (2006) goes a step further, to argue that SEZs embody the “neoliberal exception” which privilege the interests of capital over labour. She goes to highlight the disciplinary practices of work within these zones, specifically the exploitative and dehumanising nature of work within these spaces – which she explains is a distinct feature of these new work sites. The fact that firms within SEZs are exempted from specific labour laws (with fewer restrictions on overtime, working on weekends etc.) further legitimises the exploitation of workers within these zones.

Cross (2010) questions Ong’s notion of the SEZ as an “exceptional” neoliberal space. He uses empirical evidence collected through ethnographic fieldwork in a diamond cutting SEZ in the town of Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, to argue that the spaces such as SEZs are not exceptional sites of experimentation with new kinds of labour regimes or business practice. Rather, Cross argues that employment and work practices mirror the precarious work practices and labour norms that exist in firms outside the SEZ, and merely formalises them, within these zones. Cross (2010) brings to focus the continuities between work practices within these zones and outside it and presents an alternative view of the SEZ as a space, which is not completely amputated, from the social, cultural context in which it is embedded; but one which is “unexceptional” from other industrial work sites. By examining how workers experience their work in two kinds of global factories: the Nokia SEZ and AB Apparels, I seek to build on Cross’ (2010) argument and highlight the fact that SEZ’s are not isolated spaces, but rather are deeply embedded

in the local political economy. Employment and labour practices within SEZs are quite similar to those in other global manufacturing firms in the region.

As the SEZ is a relatively new kind of workplace in India, there are few ethnographic accounts of work within these work sites. Cross' (2009) pioneering ethnographic study of an SEZ in Visakhapatnam (known as Worldwide Diamonds) draws on his experience as a factory worker, cutting and polishing diamonds on the shop floor. Through detailed interactions with workers, Cross (2009) highlights how the workplace shapes the subjectivities of young male workers and their future aspirations. The global factory too – like firms within SEZs, are complex network enterprises. These firms typically produce goods for export. Some of the themes echoed in Cross' work on SEZs – such as precariousness of work; the coexistence of temporary workers or contract workers along with permanent staff (on the rolls of the firm); flexible labour practices etc. – also feature frequently in studies on global factories in India (see for example, De Neve 2005; Chari 2004). These ideas are explored in further detail in the next section, when I highlight some of the new features that make global factories (both those within and outside SEZs) a new, distinct site of work.

### **c) What Makes the New Workplace Distinctive?**

An analysis of the social science literature discussed above reveals four underlying characteristics of the new workplace, which make it a new, distinct entity. This includes: flexibility of work, a broadening of the meaning of skills (which now includes both technical and soft skills), a strong preference for young workers and gender issues in the workplace. Each of these characteristics will be explained in this section. Together they

explain the distinctiveness of these new work sites and set the context for the empirical chapters of this thesis.

*'Flexibility of work'* as illustrated through the process of flexible specialisation was a key characteristic of the post Fordist workplace. It emerged as a means to ensure that high quality outputs could be produced, efficiently, at low cost. Thus firms engaged in a range of 'flexible' work practices, which included sub-contracting work to other firms and individuals, leading to an increase in casualization and informalisation of work. For example, two separate studies on garment clusters in Tamil Nadu by Geert de Neve (2005) and Sharad Chari (2004) document in detail the complex sub-contracting networks that characterise the new workplace. They examine how during periods of high demand, large export-oriented garment manufacturing units subcontract work to individuals and small subcontracting firms which employ 3-4 workers who are paid at a piece rate for their work. Thus, while 'flexibility' can be interpreted as increased efficiency from the firm's perspective, from the point of view of the worker "flexibility" also means the absence of fixed hours of work, lack of social security, low wages, and greater insecurity, vulnerability and precariousness of work (see Gooptu 2009; 2013b; Unni and Rani 2008). These conditions are exacerbated with the absence of (or active discouragement of) unions within these worksites, as workers' human resource management strategies are increasingly used to manage labour relations and labour unrest. The use of terms such as "flexploitation" (Bourdieu 1998, cited in Gooptu 2013a) to characterise the new flexible workplace, highlights the exploitative nature of work practices in the new workplace. Work in the flexible new workplaces of the manufacturing and service sectors, is increasingly precarious. How do workers respond to the precarious working conditions of the flexible workplace? The high attrition rates, which characterise employment in these new work sites, are one response – where

workers work in such firms for a few years to obtain experience and then move on to other jobs. Scholars argue that this uncertainty of work also leads workers to work hard, acquire new skills to remain competitive and hold on to their jobs. (Amoore 2004, cited in Gooptu 2009).

A bulk of the literature on the flexible workplace in India is focused on the high-end service sector (such as IT and BPO) industries; however as Gooptu (2013) points out, precarity is also a defining feature of work in low end service sector jobs. Gooptu's study of the booming private security industry in urban India, examines the processes by which the urban poor (particularly young men) are recruited and trained to work as security guards in private firms which provide trained security guards to a host of organisations – from private residential complexes to factories. Gooptu (2013) contrasts the highly formalised, regimented training programme that young Trainee security guards endure, with the informal terms of employment and insecure labour relations. She specifically examines the ways in which they experience this work and cope with insecurity. The theme of coping strategies of labour in the context of the flexible, insecure workplace is also highlighted by scholars like Sennett (1998) who give examples of workers working overtime to improve performance, taking up multiple jobs, and continuously acquiring new skills as some of the main strategies to minimise risk and remain employed. Risk is a fundamental element of the new workplace and flexible work practices have exacerbated risk, particularly for workers, who often respond to the uncertainties of work with more risk taking, making them particularly vulnerable (Baumann 1998). Baumann (1998) argues that switching jobs frequently and taking time off work to acquire new skills or obtain additional training are some of the long-term strategies workers employ to minimize risk. Baumann argues that some of these strategies could exacerbate uncertainty in the short term, but the precarious nature of work is what leads workers to take up multiple

strategies in order to protect themselves from the high degree of vulnerability that they face in an increasingly risky and uncertain work environment.

An important consequence of the rise of the 'flexible' workplace was a *broadening of the meaning of 'skill'*. Unni and Rani (2008) explain that in the early 1950s and 1960s "skill" was defined on the basis of the activities undertaken in the manufacturing sector. Thus, it was measured in terms of manual dexterity or technical knowledge of the shop floor worker. However, with the rise of new kinds of workplaces and the growth of the services and retail sectors in India, "skill" has acquired a broader meaning to include "soft skills" (Unni and Rani 2008: 188). Thus as the workplace becomes more flexible, the concept of 'skill' becomes more personalised – as the worker's personality traits and attitudes becomes as important as his/her technical competencies. In this process, the very meaning of "soft skills" deepened to include a range of interpersonal, behavioural and attitudinal skills, which were essential in order to obtain jobs in these new worksites.

McGuire's (2013) study of Personality Development and Enhancement (PDE) training programmes in New Delhi clearly supports the above point. She demonstrates that young people aspiring for jobs in the service sector not only needed to learn English, communication skills and interpersonal skills, but they also had to acquire new cultural identities, accents, and mannerisms (which conform to the countries that they service) in order to perform their jobs effectively. She explains how PDE programmes help young people "overcome Indianism" (McGuire 2013:17), by training young people to acquire new accents and new forms of speech in order to create "world class", "professional" workers. She argues that PDE programmes seek to,

"Invoke the body as the site of a standardising process, which will produce universally recognisable "professional" characteristics like confidence and assertiveness" (Mc Guire 2013: 117).

Mc Guire's work thus demonstrates how the "successful performance of professionalism" involves removing an individual's specific personality traits characteristics (such as "Indianisms", which are viewed as undesirable constraints) and replacing them with (valuable) "world class" traits – to create a new class of professional workers. Upadhy's (2013) paper on soft skills training in Bangalore's IT sector, goes a step further to argue, that such programmes not only aim to create new personalities for its workforce, through specific kinds of psychological and spiritual training (drawing on ideas pertaining to self-help; stress management etc.), but they also seek to "re-engineer" workers' souls (Upadhy 2013: 107). Thus both McGuire (2013) and Upadhy (2013) highlight the importance of "emotional labour" (McDowell 2009) in service sector employment through an examination of PDE and soft skills training programmes. Gooptu (2013a) also argues that "emotional labour" or "affective labour" is not only important for white collar service sector jobs, but is also an important component of skill-training programmes which seek to train private security guards in urban India.

Skill-training programmes in India typically provide both technical skills training (which is industry focussed or job specific) and soft skills training (which include an entire package of skills from personal grooming to communication and presentation skills). They seek to mould the personality of the worker to fit into the new workplace by emphasizing personal grooming, hard work, discipline, and effective time management among other themes.

This study examines the pervasiveness of this trend, as it emphasises the point that soft skills training is not only limited to workers who work in the service sector, but form an important component of skill-training in the manufacturing sector. This broadening of the meaning of skills is implied in the social science literature as a part of the analysis of the workplace. For example, Cross (2009;2012) discusses the processes of on the job

training for workers learning to cut and polish diamonds in an SEZ in Vishakhapatnam. Fuller and Narasimhan's (2007) work on training new workers for the IT in southern India and James and Vira's (2010) paper on the creation of a new workforce for the BPO sectors north India, also illustrates how training is increasingly sub-contracted to experts who conduct these programmes outside the workplace, in an that closely resembles the workplace.

Private sector led skill-training programmes have been the focus on academic work on the new workplace, particularly over the past year. Upadhy's (2013) account of a soft skills training programme in Bangalore's IT sector, explains how the soft skills training programmes are not only used to produce "enterprising global professionals"(Upadhy 2013: 93) but are also employed as tools for individuals to rework their own identities and personalities to fit into the culture of the workplace. McGuire's (2013) work on PDE programmes, discussed earlier and Gooptu's (2013a) paper on how urban youth are trained to work as private security guards also highlight how skill-training programmes seek to align the personality and values of the worker with the values of the workplace. Importantly, these studies demonstrate the importance of skill-training programmes in communicating and reinforcing the values of the new workplace and how workers' subjectivities, aspirations and behaviour are shaped through such processes.

Who are the key actors providing skill-training in India? What skills are taught in these training programmes? How do Trainees respond to the training process? The answers to these questions are still unclear. More specifically, the role of the state and the multinational corporation as active participants in the skill-training process is strikingly absent in the existing literature. These gaps have led to the adoption of skill development as the dominant theme through which the employment in the new workplace and young experience of work are examined.

Lastly, the discussion on skill-training links closely with two other interrelated themes, which are central to the new workplace: youth and gender. Youth is a dominant theme in the literature on the new workplace, which is often portrayed as a “site of youth empowerment” (Gooptu 2008:48). Youth is typically defined (by private firms and the state) in terms of age and a young person is typically between the ages of 18-35. Young workers within this age group are often preferred in new workplaces. Gooptu argues that an important reason for this could be that young workers are perceived as,

“Malleable, more easily trainable and expected to have fewer fixed or strong ideas”.

(Gooptu 2008:48)

These qualities enable them to adapt easily into the work culture of the new workplace. Skill-training programmes have a particular salience in this context, as they represent the processes by which young people’s personalities and aspirations are shaped, or possibly manipulated, to conform to the values of the new workplace. How do young men and women engage with the new workplace? How do they experience work in these new worksites? These questions have been the subject of recent ethnographic studies on new workplaces and this study builds on this scholarship.

For example, Cross’ (2009; 2010) study of young men working in a diamond cutting SEZ in Andhra Pradesh, makes an important contribution to the literature on gender, youth and new workplaces in India. Cross (2009) examines what it means to be an educated young man working inside a prominent SEZ in Vishakhapatnam. Through powerful ethnographic portraits of young men working in the SEZ, Cross (2009) highlights how educated young men who enter the SEZ with expectations of prestigious, respectable jobs, are faced with low wages, precarious working conditions and a devaluation of their skills on the shop floor, leading to low self-esteem and disillusionment with work. Cross

(2009) finds that a majority of workers on the factory floor had diplomas from industrial training institutes (ITIs), even though the work they did only required high school diplomas. The young men Cross interviewed felt that their investments in higher education and technical training were not valued; yet they continued to work in the SEZ because of the prestige that was associated with working in a foreign firm. This prevented them from taking up menial jobs that paid more. Cross uses the term “fractured masculinities” to describe the frustration experienced by young men who are unable to perform masculine social roles as providers. This adversely impacts their marriage prospects. Cross (2012) builds on these ideas in another paper based on fieldwork within the same SEZ. Here he examines how young men “performed their masculinity” (Cross 2012:120) by acquiring a certain kind of “technological intimacy” with the tools that they use to cut and polish diamonds on the shop floor of the SEZ. Through his observations of how young men use technology at the workplace, Cross (2012) draws out how workers construct notions of ‘skill’ and ‘efficiency’ and explains how the use of these tools help shape workers identities and subjectivities.

Another body of work focuses on female workers in global factories and highlights the ‘feminisation of labour’ and the gendered division of work in the factory floor of these worksites. Studies of global factories within SEZs and Free Trade Zones (FTZs) across the world highlight the fact that women often form the lowest rung of workers on the shop floor. Scholars argue that this is largely based on based on certain assumptions about women workers as hardworking, dextrous, patient and loyal (Ong 2006; Nash and Kelly 1983; Wolf 1994). These ideas also feature in Hewamanne’s (2010) rich ethnographic study of women working in a FTZ in Sri Lanka, where she discusses the complex processes by which women’s subjectivities are shaped through gendered work on the factory floor. This theme is also featured in another ethnographic study of women

in an export oriented garment industry in Sri Lanka which studies a national programme called the 200 Garment Factories Programme, which encourages rural women to work in the garment industry (Lynch 2007). This initiative was promoted as a means to prevent youth unrest in the country, by providing young people (largely young women) jobs in garment factories across the country. Lynch's study focuses on how stereotypes of working women in the garment industry are formed and how young women who are a part of this new initiative, seek to contest these stereotypes by participating in this state-sponsored programme. Young women's participation in such initiatives shifted how they were socially perceived in Sri Lankan society. From being labelled "Juki girls" (a term with negative connotations), these young women were increasingly viewed as "good girls", who contributed to nation-building. Lynch's work is therefore important as it explains how the workplace can also be a site when new kinds of worker identities are forged.

Ethnographic studies on the electronics industry (another industry that is also featured in this thesis), also examines how women relate to their work in this sector. Scholars like Lim (1983) argue that the emergence of multinational electronics manufacturing firms opens up new opportunities for poor women in developing and thus contributes to the emancipation of women (Lim 1983). However other scholars like Ong (1987a; 1987b), who has conducted ethnographic research in electronics factories in Malaysia's export zones, contest Lim's view and argue that the picture is more complex. Ong argues that on the one hand, women working in these sectors are presented with new opportunities to earn a living for themselves in these new worksites; on the other, the nature of work on the shop floor also subjects young women to new forms of control and surveillance, thereby reproducing local patriarchal norms and limiting their freedom. Ong (1987b)

specifically highlights how gender has been “disassembled” in the electronics industry.

She writes,

“Microchip production as intrinsically “feminine”, women’s fingers and eyes coded as extensions of electronic instrumentality and women’s capabilities and subjectivities reduced to pure sexuality. As their relations with technology, men and institutions became eroticised workers struggled to articulate self-identities in opposition to the images imposed on them.” (Ong 1987b: 623-624)

Ong uses technology as a lens through which she examines how women’s subjectivities are reconstituted in the workplace. She argues that while technology exerts power over women workers, it can also be a tool of resistance. Ong provides examples of how women workers resisted the disciplinary processes that they were subject to on the shop floor through everyday acts – such as deliberately jamming machines or by claiming to be possessed by spirits. Thus she suggests that women working in these industries are not merely docile subjects, but also exercise agency through the above acts.

These themes are also featured in the work of Pun Ngai (2005) who studies workers in the electronics industry in Shenzhen’s (China) special economic zones. Drawing from her ethnographic fieldwork within the factory floor of firms within China’s export zones, Ngai explains how shop floor work practices seek to discipline the body of the female migrant worker (*Dagonmei*) who is tasked with following instructions and performing a series of repetitive tasks to precision. Ngai investigates China’s dormitory labour regime (which she explains, houses more than one hundred million migrant workers in China) and highlights the precarious nature of work where young female migrant workers work twelve hour days and earn low wages while manufacturing garments, toys and electronic goods in Shenzhen’s economic zones. However Ngai too argues that workers are not docile subjects, but exercise agency through subtle ways, such as staging bouts of illness

or deliberately slowing down production processes. A recent paper by Chan, Pun and Selden (2013) focuses on large corporations like Foxconn (with a global monopoly in the field of electronics manufacturing) and illustrate its close relationship with the Chinese state and examine the power dynamics within these supply chains. In examining these macro processes, they emphasise the negative consequences borne by migrant workers as a result of global production processes.

Another paper by Ngai and Chan (2012) examines an even darker side of this story. They investigate the 18 cases of worker suicides, which occurred in the Foxconn factory in Shenzhen in 2010. They shed light on some of the exploitative work practices within the factory, which take place under the banner of “productivity” and “efficiency” and explain how loneliness, desperation, anger and frustration, characterise their lives - driving them to suicide (Ngai and Chen 2012). Ngai and Chan conclude their paper with Foxconn’s chilling response to this tragedy – installing 3,000,000 square metres of safety nets along the dormitory staircases and windows, to prevent workers from taking their lives – transforming workers’ homes into cages.

The tragic case of workers’ suicides in Foxconn illustrates how some of the key features of the new workplace: flexibility of work, precarity, broadening of the meaning of ‘skill’ (and the immense pressures on individual workers to continuously upgrade their skills) can lead to frustration and hopelessness among the young workers that these workplaces employ. Indeed India’s new workplaces in towns like Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu, were inspired by the “success” of Shenzhen’s manufacturing zones, which transformed China into the world’s manufacturing hub. However, while celebrating China’s “success” in manufacturing, the plight of Chinese migrant workers within these zones and the personal costs that they bear for China’s “success”, are often ignored. The work of Ngai (2005) and Ngai and Chen (2012) are important, as it takes a closer look within these

worksites and explains the sense of hopelessness, frustration and disillusionment that workers experience as a part of their everyday course of work in the factories of large manufacturing firms.

The themes of disillusionment and hopelessness also feature in recent scholarship on India's new workplaces. One kind of disillusionment comes from the mismatch between young people's expectations of work and the reality of work. For example, Cross characterises SEZs as zones of "blighted hope" to illustrate the stark difference between how young men imagine work in the SEZ and how they experience it (Cross 2009:375). This theme also comes up in Gooptu's (2013a) work on private security guards in Kolkata, where she explains how young people working as private security guards aspire to these jobs in search of financial security, respect and improved social standing and feel disillusioned and disappointed by the work they encounter. Their disillusionment from these jobs come not only from the precarious and insecure nature of their jobs, but from the routine humiliation and "lack of respect" that they encounter during their everyday course of work (Gooptu 2013a:22).

A second form of disillusionment faced by young people comes from the anxiety of unemployment – which is another major theme in the global literature on youth. Despite possessing educational qualifications (such as diplomas from vocational training institutes or university degrees), a large number of young people remain excluded from the workplace, as they lack the skills, resources or social capital needed to access jobs in these new work sites. This theme is the focus of Jeffrey's (2008; 2010) work on lower-middle class, educated unemployed youth, in Meerut, Western Uttar Pradesh, India. The young men who are the focus of Jeffrey's study are the sons of dominant caste (Jat) landowners in Meerut, who invested heavily in the education of their sons – in the hope that education would improve their life chances and secure their future. Unfortunately,

for many young men in Meerut, education has not been as transformative as they hoped. The poor quality of education and training, a reduction in public sector jobs, high competition for jobs and the lack of social capital to access jobs in the private sector – were key factors that prevented young men in Meerut from ensuring that their educational qualifications were translated into employment. Jeffrey argues that the inability of young men in Meerut to obtain jobs placed them in a state of ‘limbo’ (where they felt trapped in an interstitial stage between adolescence and adulthood) and they devised a number of strategies to cope with unemployment. Jeffrey uses the term “timepass” to describe how men cope with these challenges. This term encompasses a range of activities – from remaining enrolled in universities for indefinite periods of time and collecting a range of new degrees in the hope of finding a job or getting involved in university politics; to loitering around public places such as tea stalls in groups (often leering or harassing women in the process) – waiting for time to pass and things to change. As time went by, these young men found it harder to obtain jobs, leaving them in a state of perpetual “waiting” or “limbo” – trapped between a state of adolescence and adulthood. The men Jeffrey describes were in their mid-thirties and their failure to have secured a job (as a result of their investment in education), prevented them from fulfilling other personal goals such as getting married or supporting their families, which further trapped them in a state of limbo. Thus, through an exploration into the phenomenon of “timepass” Jeffrey makes an important point that ‘youth’ as a category cannot be merely defined by age, but is socially defined. Thus the men in Jeffrey’s study, in their late thirties are still considered as “youth” as they have been unable to secure permanent jobs or get married, which are considered markers of adulthood.

The idea that the state of unemployment produces in young men a new conception of time – which has to be “passed” through “waiting”, is also echoed in a study of educated

unemployed men in Ethiopia by Daniel Mains (2007; 2012), which is centred on examining what happens when “Hope is Cut”: when young men are unable to realise the promise of education and remain unemployed. Like the unemployed men in Meerut, their counterparts in Ethiopia too experienced time as an “overabundant and potentially dangerous quantity” (Mains 2007: 666) and described it as “something to be ‘passed’ or ‘killed’ ” (Ibid.). In Mains’ study, male unemployment was exacerbated by the Ethiopian idea of *yiluñnta* (an intense sense of shame that comes from what others would think and say about one’s family based on one’s actions), as a result of which men preferred to remain unemployed rather than take up menial jobs (such as working as a porter or a shoeshine), despite an increased income, for fear of what people may think.

The above discussion thus makes two important points, which are central to this thesis. First, it highlights the precariousness of work within new workplaces. Second, disillusionment emerges as a key theme in the literature on youth and new workplaces. One cause for disillusionment arises from the gap that exists between how youth imagine work within these work sites and the reality of work they actually experience. Another cause of disillusionment arises from the failure of formal education to open up new economic opportunities for young people. The devaluation of skills that workers in Cross’ study experience or the unemployed status of the young men in Jeffrey’s study, despite their family’s high investments in their education – point to deeper economic, social and educational factors which inhibit young men from getting jobs.

In December 2013, a ‘National Employability Report’ by ‘Aspiring Minds’ - an Indian employability solutions firm found that 47% of India’s graduates were “unemployable”, and listed lack of English skills and computer literacy, as key factors that prevent young graduates in India, from getting jobs. The findings from this study received a great deal of media coverage and these findings were used to emphasise the urgent need for skill-

training for India's youth. Skill-training programmes are currently being promoted as a means to make India's youth "employable". Demographers predict that India's population in the 15-34 age group will peak by the year 2024, when most countries in the west will be grappling with an ageing population (Jha, 2008 cited in Unni and Rani, 2008). Skill development, thus emerged as a policy priority for the Indian government – as a solution to tap the potential of India's large population of youth and harness India's demographic dividend and simultaneously, supply a well-trained workforce for India's new workplaces. While celebrating the potential of skill development as a magic bullet to deal with the above challenges, little is known about the perspective of young Indians and how they imagine and experience skill-training programmes and the jobs that they offer. 'Aspiration' – (particularly youth aspirations) forms an important component of this study's analytical framework, for specifically this reason.

#### **IV. Conceptualising Aspiration**

Aspiration is a motivating force, which drives individuals to strive towards a better future. The term 'aspiration' implies setting goals and targets and working towards achieving them. The theme of aspiration first drew the attention of Sociologists and Social Psychologists, who were interested in understanding individual and group behaviour. For example, Robert Merton's (1968) theories on reference group behaviour, role models and the idea of anticipatory socialisation, suggest that people model their behaviour according to the norms and values of the groups that they aspire to be a part of. This forms some of the early sociological work on aspiration. The idea that aspirations evolve in a social context and that the socio-cultural environment in which an individual lives conditions one's aspirations and choices was highlighted by social psychologists like Bandura (1977). These ideas laid the foundation for the work of Economists, like Ray (2003) who uses

the term “aspiration window” to explain how individual aspirations are constrained and conditioned by one’s social environment.

The propulsive force of aspiration and its diverse consequences are recurring themes in the literature on new workplaces, youth and enterprise culture in contemporary India (See Gooptu 2013b; Mankekar 2013). While this literature examines how aspiration manifests itself in specific instances, the concept of ‘aspiration’, its multiple facets and the diverse consequences it can have on individual lives, is not adequately explored. This point is also emphasised by Appadurai (2013) who explains that the discipline of Anthropology has largely been preoccupied with the past and present and says little about the future. Appadurai emphasises the need to create an “anthropology of the future”, which studies the “future as cultural fact” and examines future-oriented concepts such as aspiration and hope, using an anthropological lens. In an attempt to carve out a space for the future in the discipline of anthropology, (Appadurai 2004; 2013) explores what he calls “the politics of hope” within which he situates ‘aspiration’. Appadurai views aspiration, as a largely positive, transformative force with both intrinsic and instrumental value. The instrumentality of aspiration is particularly evident in the work of Ray (2003) and Appadurai (2004; 2013), who emphasise the role of aspiration in facilitating poverty escapes. Ray (2003) defines poverty itself as “a state of failed aspirations” and asserts that it “stifles dreams” and prevents young people from attaining them (Ray 2003:1). For Appadurai (2004:2013) “the capacity to aspire” acts a navigational aid, which can lead the poor out of poverty. He writes,

“The capacity to aspire is thus a navigational capacity. The more privileged in any society simply have used the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically, and to share this knowledge with one another more routinely than their poorer and weaker neighbors. The poorer members, precisely because of their lack of

opportunities to practice the use of this navigational capacity (in turn because their situations permit fewer experiments and less easy archiving of alternative futures), have a more brittle horizon of aspirations.” (Appadurai 2004: 69)

For Appadurai (2004) this “capacity to aspire” is unevenly distributed in society and is more common among the rich than the poor. He argues that a combination of social, economic and cultural factors limit the poor’s ability to aspire high, thus trapping them in a state of poverty. Appadurai argues development programmes must focus on increasing the poor’s aspirational ability, as aspiration acts as a map and creates a pathway out of poverty for the poor.

Can an individual’s “capacity to aspire” be altered through external interventions? Appadurai (2004; 2013) not only argues that it is possible to do so, but seems to advocate such interventions as important components of poverty reduction strategies. A recent study by Bernard et al (2014) finds that it is indeed possible to shape people’s aspirations and future goals in specific ways. Bernard et al (2014) report on the results of randomised control trial experiments in Ethiopia, which demonstrate how watching a documentary in which people from similar backgrounds had succeeded in agriculture or setting up business, independently without help from the government, induced a significant change in the behaviour of viewers in a six-month period. Thus, such interventions gave viewers role models (from within their peer group) and motivated them to take initiative in specific ways – and influenced their aspirations in this manner. Like Appadurai (2004; 2013), Bernard et al’s work (2014) too assumes that aspiration is a transformational force and that can mould people’s behaviour in specific ways, which lead to positive development outcomes.

This link between aspirations, development and poverty reduction provides a useful starting point to examine how shaping aspirations form a core component of social

development programmes in India. The skill development initiatives featured in this study aim to shape young people's aspirations in specific ways. By examining how these programmes work in practice, I question some of the underlying premises in the existing literature on aspiration. Are aspirations always transformative? Do the poor entirely lack the capacity to aspire? What happens to rural BPL youth when aspirations are raised falsely? The empirical field material presented in this thesis wrestles with these questions, offers a critique of Appadurai's notion of the transformative potential of aspiration and sheds light on the multiple facets of aspiration – its positive aspects and its darker side. In doing so this thesis explains how notions of success and failure, hope and disillusionment, all form important facets of aspiration.

## **V. Conclusion**

Public policy is future-oriented. An ethnographic study of a policy, not only needs to be grounded in its history; it is equally vital to understand its future-oriented vision and examine how this vision shapes the aspirations and subjectivities of citizens. This study places emphasis on how the future is imagined by the network state and its partners and explains how this vision is implemented, through the specific example of skill-training programmes. The aspirations of young Indian citizens form a core component of this study's analytical framework, as it explains how they experience skill development initiatives in their everyday lives. Aspiration therefore forms the connecting thread that brings together the network state, the network enterprise and the young Indian citizen – who are all key actors in pursuit of skilling India.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **NEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN TAMIL NADU'S 'VELIYOOR' COMPANIES**

#### **I. Introduction**

This chapter situates the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2, within the context of Tamil Nadu. It presents the story behind the proliferation of new workplaces in the State over the past decade, and explains how young people in Tamil Nadu's Kancheepuram district view these new opportunities in 'veliyoor' (foreign) companies.

The decision to begin the first empirical chapter of this thesis with an exploration into Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy, rather than Government of India's Industrial Policy, was inspired by recent scholarship on the Indian state, which places emphasis on India's sub-national regions (States), which scholars argue are the main sites within which the politics of economic reform are implemented in practice (Evans 1995; Sinha 2004; Sud 2012; 2014). Sinha (2005) draws on empirical evidence on the development trajectories of the States of West Bengal, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, to argue that,

“National economic policy is the aggregate product of regional political strategies and institutions given a certain set of centrally imposed constraints.” (Sinha 2005: 115)

As discussed earlier, the process of economic liberalisation has given States within India, greater autonomy to determine policy priorities. Tamil Nadu was one of the first Indian

states to devise a new industrial policy as early as 1992, in response to the liberalisation process and is thus an excellent example to illustrate how the sub-national state has responded to the process of economic liberalisation. This policy aimed to transform Tamil Nadu into a manufacturing hub and sought to promote specific industries, particularly in the electronics, information technology and automobile sectors. During the 1990's the Government of Tamil Nadu set up purpose-built industrial parks to locate new industrial units, entered into collaborations with a host of foreign firms and offered tailor-made financial incentive packages to domestic and foreign firms choosing to set up operations in the State. These initiatives were targeted at creating a new image of Tamil Nadu, as an “industry friendly” and “proactive” State (Government of Tamil Nadu 2003; 2007). These terms were repeatedly used by bureaucrats in the industries department during interviews, to describe the state. Tamil Nadu is now ranked by India's Planning Commission as one of the most industrialised states in India. It has the largest number of factories in India and has the largest number of workers employed in the manufacturing sector (Vijayabaskar 2010).

This chapter explores how Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy has evolved since 1992, its future vision and how this vision is shaped and implemented by numerous actors such as bureaucrats, politicians and representatives from private corporations, in order to illustrate the role of the sub-national state as a ‘facilitator’ of industrial development. The chapter presents material collected through a series of interviews and conversations with key informants in Tamil Nadu (including bureaucrats, CEOs of private corporations, representatives of industry associations, and rural youth aspiring to work in Tamil Nadu's new worksites). Group discussions with youth in four villages were also conducted to understand their future goals and aspirations and how they seek to achieve them. The chapter supplements primary data obtained through interviews and group discussions

with an analysis of industrial policy documents prepared by the Government of Tamil Nadu, from 2003 to 2014. By presenting field material collected over multiple phases of fieldwork, through multiple methods, I seek to convey how industrial policy in the state has evolved over time and how new policy priorities have emerged.

Two key trends are emphasised in this context. The first is a clear reinvention of the role of the state to that of a facilitator of industrial growth. The roles of the key institutions within Tamil Nadu, which are explicitly tasked with facilitating industrial growth, are explained. The chapter then explains the emergence of the network state in Tamil Nadu and how this reconfigures the relationship between the state and the multinational corporation, through a detailed examination of how Nokia established its largest worldwide manufacturing plant in the town of Sriperumbudur. The second trend that emerges from an analysis of industrial policy documents is the growing emphasis on human resource development, as skill-training and human resource management become important components of Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy (2007) for the first time: a year before it became a national policy priority for the Union Government.

Lastly, this chapter connects policies and visions of industrial development, as they exist on paper, with how citizens experience them in practice. It draws on interviews and group discussions with youth in four villages in Kancheepuram district, which explore their future aspirations. This material was collected in July and August 2008, just a few months before the global financial crisis. Manufacturing firms in the region were conducting mass recruitment drives during this period. Have the emergence of new worksites like Nokia truly opened up new opportunities for youth in the region? Do young people aspire to work in these new work sites? What steps do they take to prepare

for jobs there? This chapter sets the context for this overall thesis, by engaging with these questions.

## II. The Emergence of the Network State in Tamil Nadu

The website of the Government of Tamil Nadu's Industries Department describes the State's industrial development trajectory over the past two decades in the following words:

During the post liberalisation period since 1991, [the] private sector began to take over the lead in the industrial development of the country....States started taking the initiative in the new and competitive environment and Tamil Nadu was one of the earliest to seize the opportunity and announced its Industrial Policy in 1992 itself. This policy became the cornerstone and laid the foundation for the rapid growth of new industries in the State. (Government of Tamil Nadu, Industries Department website <sup>20</sup>).

Tamil Nadu's prominence as one of India's industrialised states in India cannot only be attributed its business-friendly industrial policies. Political factors, particularly, the close proximity of ruling parties in Tamil Nadu to the central government, played an important role in ensuring that Tamil Nadu remains the preferred investment destination for foreign investors. Two regional parties, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) have dominated politics in Tamil Nadu. These parties have supported coalition governments at the Centre, since 1991. For example, between 1991 and 1996, the AIADMK party supported the

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.tn.gov.in/department/16> (last accessed on 23.06.2014)

Congress-led coalition government, which kick-started the economic liberalization process. Sinha (2005) argues that the AIADMK used this connection to its advantage by launching Tamil Nadu's new industrial policy as early as 1992. From 1996-1998 and 1999-2002, the DMK's representative Murasoli Maran was appointed Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, who according to Sinha (2005) sought to ensure that foreign investors head to Tamil Nadu by providing information on potential investors to the State government, even before the Cabinet could consider these investment proposals (Ibid.). Following the death of Murasoli Maran in 2003, his son, Dayanidhi Maran represented the DMK in the UPA coalition governments elected in 2004 and 2009, where he was appointed Union Minister in the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications. Murasoli Maran was credited with bringing in a range of IT firms (such as Nokia, Dell, Samsung and Motorola) to invest in Tamil Nadu<sup>21</sup>.

The fact that Tamil Nadu's interests were well represented in New Delhi, combined with its pro-business industrial policies adopted since 1992, were instrumental in Tamil Nadu's "success" in attracting foreign investment. Every Industrial Policy document of Tamil Nadu, since 1992, contains terms such as "partnerships", "collaboration" and prescribes a close relationship between the state and private sector. The next section explores the latter point further, through an analysis of Tamil Nadu's policy documents over the past decade. This includes Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policies of 2003, 2007, 2014; the Industrial Policy Note of 2011 (a precursor to the 2014 Industrial Policy) and Tamil Nadu's Vision 2023 document. All these documents provide evidence of the emergence of the network state in Tamil Nadu and illustrate how the sub-national state envisions its own role as a facilitator of industrial growth.

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<sup>21</sup>Interview with former Secretary IT, Government of Tamil Nadu 05.08.08.

### a) The Emergence of the state as a ‘Facilitator’ in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy 2003 marked another significant milestone in Tamil Nadu’s industrial development trajectory. In the process of outlining a new vision for growth and industrial development, it prescribed a new facilitative role for the state. It explains:

‘The role of the State has to necessarily transform into one that facilitates industry to increase its skills, optimize its resources and raise its competitive power in a balanced, deregulated environment’ (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2003:1).

This shift in policy was notably underscored by attempts to disinvest in loss-making public sector companies, limiting the scope of public sector enterprises to areas where they would do “promotional work”<sup>22</sup> (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2003:6). Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy of 2007 (formulated by a DMK-led State government) continued this trend to boost investment, by promoting PPPs in the area of infrastructure development and providing a range of incentives to manufacturing firms, to enable them to grow faster. Another vision document (released 11 months after the election of the new AIADMK-led government in the state elections) entitled ‘Vision Tamil Nadu 2023: Strategic Plan for Infrastructure Development’ also echoes this vision of the state, as a facilitator of private investment. This is evident in the excerpt below:

“The Government will play the central role of a procurer of infrastructure services on behalf of the people of Tamil Nadu and will facilitate private investment and service delivery in infrastructure sector. Under the PPP mode, the Government will play the role

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<sup>22</sup> This implies that the role of state owned enterprises would be limited to promoting/facilitating industry by the state rather than manufacturing products.

of a change agent and will originate infrastructure projects in line with Vision 2023, and will also focus on the important functions of regulation and overall governance.” (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2012:25)

The excerpt above clearly illustrates how the state views itself as an agent that facilitates industry. The strong emphasis on PPPs for infrastructure development, the call for increased interface between the government and industry, substantiated, as it was, by the establishment of a number of working committees where prominent industry leaders (from industry associations like the CII) sit alongside senior government officials, offer striking and specific examples of the emergence of the network state, at the sub-national level in India. The role of the state as a networked actor in facilitating industrial growth was specifically evident in how it went about attracting foreign investment into Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Government’s websites (particularly those of the industries departments) describes Tamil Nadu as an ‘investor friendly’ State, with a “skilled labour force”, and “good infrastructure”<sup>23</sup>. The task of attracting foreign investment into Tamil Nadu lies within the portfolio of the state Ministry of Industries, headed by a Cabinet Minister<sup>24</sup>. The Industries Secretary (a ranking civil servant from the elite Indian Administrative Service) is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the department.

Two main agencies within the Industries Ministry: the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) and the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIPCOT) are specifically tasked with the goal of promoting industrial development in Tamil Nadu. These agencies were established well before economic

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.sipcot.com/>; <http://www.tidco.com/> <http://www.tn.gov.in/department/industries.htm>, <http://www.tidco.com/guidance.html>

<sup>24</sup> At the time of fieldwork in 2008, the Chief Minister was holding the Industries portfolio – which reflects the importance given to the industries ministry in the state. (Accessed 27.06.14)

liberalisation, however their roles were reinvented in the post-liberalisation era, and epitomised the ‘facilitative’ role of the state, in attracting foreign investment.

For example, TIDCO was established in 1965 and sought to promote industrial development in Tamil Nadu, by acting as an equity investor. It established joint ventures with private Indian firms such as the Tata Group and set up manufacturing companies like Titan Company Limited, (well known in India for manufacturing watches). Since 1991, TIDCO has been the face of industrial development in Tamil Nadu and has successively convinced a number of MNCs to invest in the State. Similarly, SIPCOT was created in 1971 largely to create infrastructure for small and medium industries in India. SIPCOT started establishing land banks on which new industrial parks could be located, as far back as the 1970s and 1980s. Post liberalisation SIPCOT played a key role in developing and managing industrial parks and industrial estates, which it describes in its website as “one stop supermarkets”<sup>25</sup>, aiming to provide private companies “state of the art infrastructure”<sup>26</sup> and an investor friendly environment. In 2014, institutions like SIPCOT and TIDCO actively court MNCs and private corporations by offering them a bespoke package of concessions and incentives, in order to persuade them to invest in the state. In order to support this process of attracting foreign investment, a third agency – the Tamil Nadu Industrial Guidance and Export Promotion Bureau (popularly known as the ‘Guidance Bureau’) was created in 1992 and was envisaged as the first point of contact for foreign investors and functions as “a documentation and clearance centre”<sup>27</sup>, to expedite regulatory clearances for new industrial projects, without the delays caused by bureaucratic red tape. The choice of the term ‘guidance’ for this department reflects this agency’s view of itself as a facilitator (helping ‘guide’ foreign firms in making investment

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.tidco.com/guidance.html> (accessed on 27.06.2014)

decisions.) The Guidance Bureau also maintains an economic database on foreign investment in the state and supports investors by helping facilitate industrial clearances (through a single window system) or obtains permits on their behalf, clearly epitomising a evolution of the role of the Indian state, into that of a facilitator of industrial development.

The formulation of Tamil Nadu's SEZ Act 2005 marked another important moment in Tamil Nadu's journey towards industrial development. This new Act brought TIDCO, SIPCOT and the Guidance Bureau (all under the State's Industries Ministry) together, as they began to collaborate to create new SEZs and industrial parks in Tamil Nadu. These institutions partnered with MNCs and private corporations and aggressively marketed Tamil Nadu to potential foreign investors. The rapid proliferation of industrial parks, SEZs and the strong presence of MNCs in the late 1990's and the early 2000s, depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3, attest to the success of these institutions in mobilising foreign investment into the State. An industrial park is a purpose built enclave within which private firms in specific sectors (such as information technology, biotechnology, textiles, electronics or floriculture) can be located. SIPCOT's role is to provide high quality infrastructure that caters to the needs of specific industries. From Figure 2, it is clear that most industrial parks are located on the north-eastern regions of the state, clustered around the city of Chennai and Kancheepuram district. Proximity to cities of Chennai and Bangalore, access to the airport and to the Chennai port are key factors that have led to a concentration of industrial units in these areas.

**Figure 2: Industrial Parks Promoted by SIPCOT in Tamil Nadu**



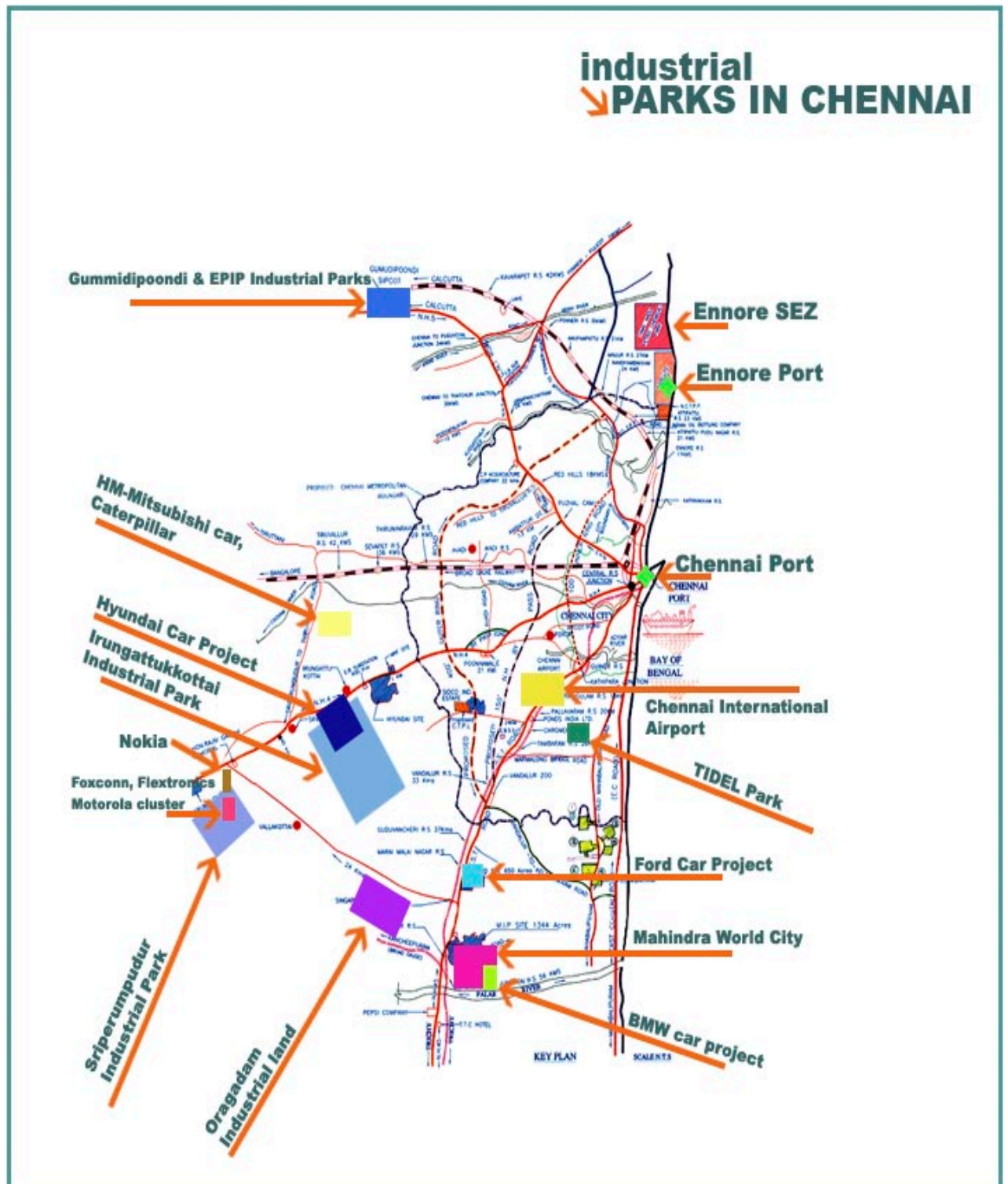
Source: SIPCOT, 2012

Many industrial parks are also notified as SEZs, giving firms within these enclaves a further set of incentives and concessions, in return for choosing to invest in Tamil Nadu.

Figure 3 (on the following page) zooms into the Chennai region and depicts the proliferation of industrial parks and SEZs in this area, as of 2008. This diagram also identifies different kinds of multinational firms that have invested in Tamil Nadu. A majority of these firms are in the automobile, electronics and telecommunications sectors, transforming Chennai and surrounding regions into a manufacturing hub, centred largely on the hardware and automobile industries. Apart from these “high-tech” industries, Kancheepuram also hosts a number of manufacturing units in other industries such as textiles, ready-made garments, leather footwear etc., which are located within SIPCOT’s industrial estates or SEZs.

Lastly, it is important to note that the state in Tamil Nadu was successful not only in facilitating industrial development, by creating industrial parks and SEZs; equally, it has ensured that industrial development takes place with little or no resistance from citizens in the region. For example, thousands of acres of land of farmland have been acquired by SIPCOT to establish these industrial zones, yet in contrast with other Indian states, there was little resistance from local citizens in Tamil Nadu. What made Tamil Nadu unique? The next section examines this issue, and in doing so illustrates how local political economy shapes both policy processes and policy responses.

Figure 3: Industrial Parks in Chennai



Source: SIPCOT 2008

## **b) SEZs and the “Politics of Silence” in Tamil Nadu**

Land acquisition for SEZs has been a particularly contentious issue in India and is a key factor that provokes resistance to SEZs. Vijayabaskar (2010) seeks to explain why the spread of SEZs in Tamil Nadu was uncontested and characterised by a “politics of silence”, in contrast to other states in India. According to Vijayabaskar (2010) a combination of social and policy factors led to the absence of protest and resistance to the establishment of SEZs in Tamil Nadu. He explains that Tamil Nadu’s history of anti-caste movements, which often projected the “rural” as “backward” led many farmers to willingly sell their land, as they hoped to move out of agricultural jobs, into jobs in newly emerging industries in the region. Tamil Nadu’s land acquisition policy offers farmers a more generous compensation package, compared to other states (Vijayabaskar 2010) and this has incentivised farmers to sell their land. Vijayabaskar (2010) points out that the DMK-led Tamil Nadu government deliberately altered the conditions under which land can be acquired for industrial development projects under the Tamil Nadu Acquisition of Land for Industrial Purposes Act (TNALPA), in the late 1990s, when the government was acquiring large tracts for land for future industrial projects. Vijayabaskar (2010) argues that this Act (which came into force in 2001) appears more flexible in terms of the compensation that it offers farmers, yet room for legal negotiations are limited, giving the dispossessed limited opportunities to further negotiate land prices (Vijayabaskar 2010). This combined with the fact that Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy 2007 and 2014, mandates that SEZ developers provide a job to at least one person from a family from whom land is acquired, motivated people in the region to willingly sell their land. This point came up repeatedly during interviews with officials in the Industries Department, and also features in Vijayabaskar’s (2010) paper.

Thus, the above discussion shows how Tamil Nadu has attempted to create an impression that it is seeking to straddle the interests of MNCs and rural citizens, at least on paper, in pursuit of its industrial development goals. The next section highlights another example of how Tamil Nadu, sought to balance its industrial development priorities and human development objectives, by exploring Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy of 2007 which focused on theme of "skill development" of its youth, for the very first time.

### **c) Skill Development – At the Cusp of Industrial and Social Policy?**

Industrial policy in Tamil Nadu had, prior to 2007, focussed on two broad areas – creating physical infrastructure to facilitate industrial growth (in the form of roads, highways, airports, industrial parks, SEZs etc); and developing specific sectors such as IT. The 2007 Industrial Policy however had a broader objective. It attempted to:

“Accelerate human development in Tamil Nadu by maximising investment, output, growth, employment and manufacturing competitiveness through human resources development and services sectors”. (Government of Tamil Nadu 2008:4)

It justifies its focus on developing the manufacturing sector, in the following words:

“[The] manufacturing sector is important also because of the potential it offers in providing jobs not only to highly qualified and skilled workers but also to semi-skilled and unskilled workers. We recognize that the youth from different parts of the State particularly semi urban and rural areas are yearning for an improved standard of living by getting employment in [the] organized sector”. (Ibid: 3)

The above excerpt underscores the importance of human resources (HR) and skill development (especially focused on youth) which became an important component of the implementation strategy of Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy 2007, which sought to provide industry-specific vocational training to young people in Tamil Nadu, so that they can be employed in Tamil Nadu's new industrial enclaves. This forms the basis of a larger strategy to ensure "inclusive growth" - a key objective of India's Eleventh Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 2008). The ideas above are explicitly stated as first two objectives of the "Vision 2011" section in the Tamil Nadu's Industrial Policy (2007), which aims to "to create an additional 2 million jobs by 2011" and "to raise [the] contribution to [the] GSDP [Gross State Domestic Product] from [the] manufacturing sector from 21% to 27% by 2011" (Government of Tamil Nadu 2007). The choice of the year 2011 was particularly significant as it was the election year. These goals needed to be met before the elections.

The section on HR and skill development in the 2007 Industrial Policy proposed three initiatives, to enhance the skills of workers (particularly of youth) in order to ensure that they are employed by the local manufacturing industries that have been set up in the region. First, it proposed to upgrade educational institutions in the state and equip youth with Soft Skills such as:

"Interpersonal skills, team building and working skills, right attitude to work and analytical abilities"(Government of Tamil Nadu 2007:9).

Second, Industry-Institute Collaborations, in the form of partnerships between engineering colleges and training institutions were proposed to ensure that youth who graduate from engineering colleges are employable. The policy also proposed to set up

technology parks within the premises of universities (Ibid.). Notably, PPPs in the field of skill development, were proposed, for the very first time in this industrial policy, While, the frameworks and objectives of such PPPs are not explained in detailed here, this focus on PPPs in skill development also became the core of the National Skill Development Policy, launched in July 2009.

Third, the Industrial Policy 2007, proposed to formulate Skill Development Initiatives in the State at two levels. It envisaged the creation of a Grassroots Level Skill Development Initiative (GLSDI), which aims to equip 100,000 workers (during the period 2007-2010) with an accredited industry specific course, which is relevant to local industries in a region. It also proposed a Cluster Based Skill Development Initiative (CBSDI), which would link specific industrial clusters (such as textiles or electronic hardware) with engineering colleges and training institutions (specifically ITIs), to ensure that the course curriculum in these institutions match the requirements of industrial clusters in the region (Ibid). Notably, both these initiatives had been proposed by the CII, in a study outlining Tamil Nadu's skill gaps and proposing what the Tamil Nadu government's policy response to skill development should be. These points that feature in the Industrial Policy 2007 seem to have emerged directly from CII's recommendations<sup>28</sup>.

CII was a key actor shaping Tamil Nadu's skill development strategy and was often described as an "Adviser" to the Tamil Nadu government on skill development, by both CII staff and government officials in the Industries Ministry. This points to another connection between the network state and network enterprise, at the State level – as

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<sup>28</sup> See [business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/tamil-nadu-should-create-rs-700cr-annual-skill-development-fund-cii-study-106032301019\\_1.html](http://business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/tamil-nadu-should-create-rs-700cr-annual-skill-development-fund-cii-study-106032301019_1.html) (last accessed on 20.12.2013)

industry associations emerged as important “advisors” and “partners” of the state, at the early stages of conceptualising Tamil Nadu’s vision for skill development.

The financial crisis of 2008 was cited by a number of respondents (in the Tamil Nadu government and CII) as having slowed down growth rates, as manufacturing firms in Tamil Nadu were particularly vulnerable to the crisis. Key informants in Tamil Nadu cited this an important reason why the targets in the 2007 Industrial Policy were not met. In 2011, the DMK government headed by M. Karunanidhi as Chief Minister was voted out of power and the AIADMK party with J. Jayalalitha as Chief Minister took over. Despite a change in political leadership in the state, skill-training still retained prominence as an important policy initiative. The importance of skill-training was reiterated in Tamil Nadu’s Industries Policy Note 2011-2012 (Government of Tamil Nadu 2012:29-30<sup>29</sup>), which proposed the creation of skill development centres to train young people with industry-specific skills to enable them to find jobs in new industrial clusters. This strong emphasis on skill development is also echoed in the Tamil Nadu government’s ‘Vision 2023’ document, which outlines the state government vision for infrastructure development over the next decade. Skill development is one of the key policy thrusts of this report, which has been prepared by the Government of Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and a private consulting firm (iMacs). An excerpt from the report is highlighted below:

“The single most important resource for the success of Vision 2023 is the availability of trained, knowledgeable and skilled manpower in Tamil Nadu. Without a body of sufficiently skilled and balanced workforce, no economy can hope to develop to its

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<sup>29</sup> Government of Tamil Nadu (2011) <http://www.investinginTamilNadu.com/TamilNadu/doc/policy/2011-12/industries.pdf> (accessed on 20.12.2013)

potential. Vision 2023 envisages training and skilling 20 million persons over the next 11 years.” (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2012<sup>30</sup>).

Tamil Nadu’s recently launched Industrial Policy 2014, continues to have an entire section devoted to skill development and also seeks to encourage PPPs in this sector, promote institute-industry collaboration and initiate cluster-based skill development initiatives. From the above discussion, it is clear that the state in Tamil Nadu views skill development in instrumental terms and it is used to balance its industrial development objectives with its social development goals. This discussion provides a background for the next section, which explains the story of how Sriperumbudur transformed into a hardware manufacturing hub over the past decade.

#### **d) An Introduction to Sriperumbudur and the Story of its Transformation**

The town of Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu’s Kancheepuram district has seen a massive influx of foreign investment in recent years. The transformation of this town into an industrial cluster has attracted media attention, with some journalists describing the town as “India’s Answer to [China’s] Shenzhen”<sup>31</sup>. The town is also mentioned in the World Bank’s World Development Report 2009, which predicts that Sriperumbudur “may be on its way to become a national or even a regional hub” for electronic manufacturing (World Bank, 2009:13).

The story of how Sriperumbudur’s transformation took place is one of collaboration between the network state – which actively facilitates industrial growth – and the network enterprise, which began flourishing in this town as a result of Tamil Nadu’s

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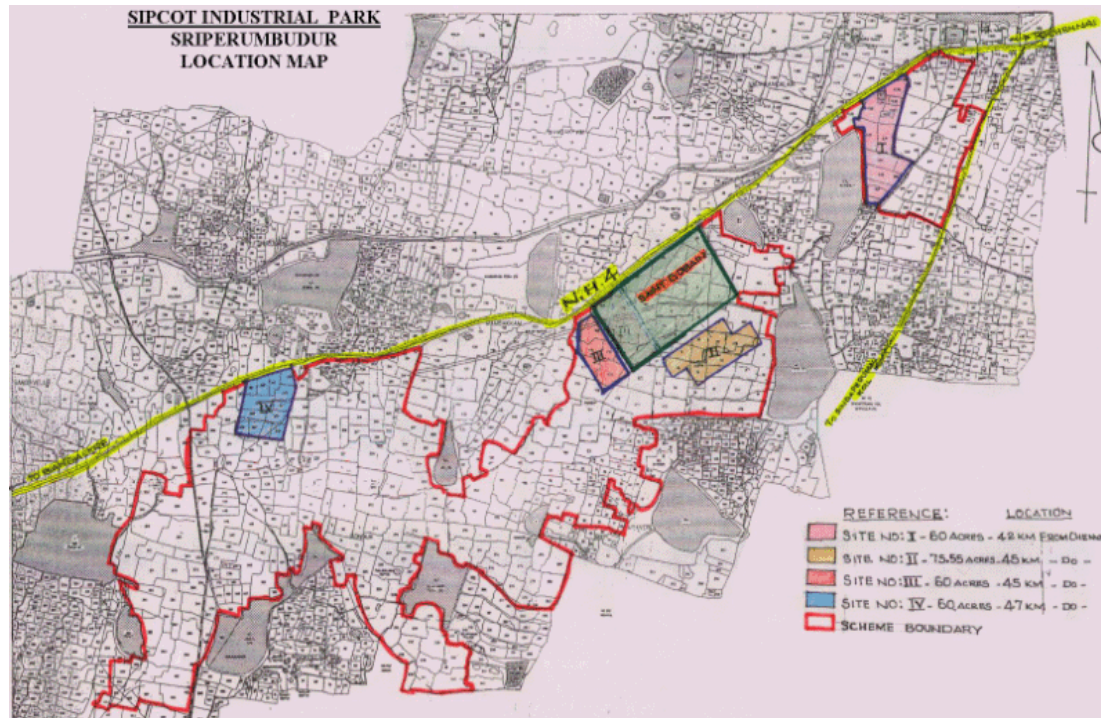
<sup>30</sup> Source: [http://www.spc.tn.gov.in//pdfs/TN\\_Vision\\_2023.pdf](http://www.spc.tn.gov.in//pdfs/TN_Vision_2023.pdf) (last accessed 20.12.13)

<sup>31</sup> See Mukherjee A. (2007); Jayaram, (2006); Ravi Kumar and Kamath (2006).

industrial policy. By 2008, over 16 MNCs had set up their manufacturing units in Sriperumbudur employing over 100,000 people by 2010<sup>32</sup>.

Large tracts of fields, open marshland, ponds and village settlements were interspersed with shining steel and glass factories, announcing their presence with huge billboards, as I approached Sriperumbudur for my first phase of fieldwork in July 2008. Names of prominent MNCs - Hyundai, Dell, Nokia, Samsung, Motorola and Saint Gobain, popped out of billboards along National Highway 4 (NH4), which connects the city of Chennai to Bangalore (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Many of these MNCs are located in an area designated as the SIPCOT Industrial Park, (See Figure 4 below) just off the highway.

**Figure 4: Map of SIPCOT Industrial Park**



Source: SIPCOT (2008)

<sup>32</sup> Interview, Industry Department Official, 29.07.10

Figure 4 (above) presents the layout of the SIPCOT Industrial Park and the location of some of the key firms within it. The red lines depict the boundary of the industrial estate. The industrial estate has broad paved roads and there are a large number of vacant plots within the estate.

The industrial estate hosts hardware, engineering, automobile manufacturing firms (such as Ford and Hyundai); and telecommunications firms (for example, Nokia, Motorola, Samsung and Flextronics). Sriperumbudur has also emerged in recent years as an education centre. This is particularly striking on the drive towards the SIPCOT industrial park on NH-4; where a large international school, a few English medium schools, a number of small technical training institutes, a prominent medical college, and some of well-known private engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu, appear one after the other, along the highway. Most higher education institutions on this belt focus on engineering and technical training, and cater to the needs of the large companies that have set up their manufacturing plants in the SIPCOT industrial estate.

MNCs in Sriperumbudur often hold campus recruitment drives in engineering colleges in the region and these firms also tie up with local training institutes, in order to train its new workforce. The 'Institute-Industry Partnership' that was envisioned in the state's industrial policy takes place between these educational institutions and the manufacturing firms in Sriperumbudur. In addition, firms within the region also have outreach programmes in villages around Sriperumbudur, as a part of their ongoing corporate social responsibility programmes. Such outreach programmes also help facilitate recruitment of semi-skilled workers into these manufacturing units. For example, one of Nokia's community initiatives (as part of its corporate social responsibility programme) is known as the Chennai Factory Fence Line School Improvement Plan, where Nokia

works with students in schools in and around Sriperumbudur to impart IT education programs and “life skills training”. This programme fits in with Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy’s objective of providing vocational and skill development training at the high school level. Thus the MNCs located in the SIPCOT Industrial Estate are not isolated enclaves, but are deeply enmeshed in the political economy of the region.

What makes Sriperumbudur so attractive to investors? Sriperumbudur’s strategic location marked by its proximity to Chennai, Tamil Nadu’s capital city and its prime location on the national highway connecting Chennai and Bangalore are two key factors that have transformed this region into an industrial belt. The presence of the engineering colleges and industrial training institutions in this area, give firms in the region an abundant supply of highly skilled and semi-skilled workers, who work at low rates and can be directly recruited from these institutions. These factors combined with the Tamil Nadu government reputation of being “industry friendly” and “easily approachable” (points that come up repeatedly in discussions with senior management of Nokia) is another reason why investors chose Sriperumbudur.

How did Nokia set up its largest worldwide manufacturing facility in Sriperumbudur? I answer this question in the next section, drawing on empirical material gathered through interviews with Tamil Nadu government officials in the industrial development department (who were negotiating with Nokia in 2005), Nokia’s CEO and its top management (who were also a part of these negotiations). By presenting this story, I illustrate how the network state courts the network enterprise, to boost foreign investment in Tamil Nadu.

### III. The Network State in Action: How Nokia Came to Sriperumbudur<sup>33</sup>

#### a) Introducing Nokia

Nokia Corporation is the world's largest producer of mobile handsets. This Finnish MNC epitomises the Castellan "network enterprise", with employees spread across 120 countries, selling mobile phones in 150 countries across the world. The company employed a total of 120,309 workers worldwide, as of June 2012 (Nokia, 2012)<sup>34</sup>.

Nokia's office in India was set up in 1995 (shortly after the liberalisation of the economy). Nokia is headquartered in Gurgaon, near Delhi and the company has offices in the cities of Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmadabad. In 2006, Nokia's tenth manufacturing plant was set up in the town of Sriperumbudur. During my first interview with Nokia's CEO in his Gurgaon office, he proudly mentioned that the very first mobile phone call in India was made on a Nokia mobile phone, in 1995.

Two factors make the case study of Nokia's manufacturing plant in Sriperumbudur particularly important, from the perspective of this thesis. First, Nokia's presence in Sriperumbudur is the result of two coincident factors. Its is partly attributable to a state industrial policy focused on developing a hardware manufacturing base for the telecom industry in India and, as a consequence, generating immense employment potential. For Nokia, the establishment of the Sriperumbudur plant – its largest globally (in terms of

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<sup>33</sup> This section based on interviews conducted with government officials and Nokia's managers who negotiated the "Nokia deal" (July-August, 2008)

<sup>34</sup> <http://company.nokia.com/en/news/press-releases/2012/07/19/nokia-corporation-q2-2012-interim-report>

volume) – reflects the enormous business opportunity represented by the Indian market. India's growing middle class has created an unprecedented increase in demand for mobile phones; 105 new mobile phone connections were established every *minute* in India at the time of fieldwork in 2008<sup>35</sup>. Nokia aimed to make the most of the growing Indian market – by taking advantage of the low cost Indian manufacturing base. Fifty percent of the phones produced in the Sriperumbudur plant are made to cater to domestic demand. The other fifty percent is exported to parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, New Zealand and Australia. The fact, therefore, that Nokia's presence in Sriperumbudur is both market driven and state driven, makes it an excellent case example of how state policy, politics and market forces converge in the process of attracting foreign investment and stimulating industry. Second, Nokia was the first telecom company to set up its operations in Sriperumbudur. It was instrumental in transforming Sriperumbudur into a high-tech manufacturing hub. Nokia not only brought its suppliers and component manufacturers to Sriperumbudur, but by 2007 other telecommunications firms like Samsung, Motorola, Foxconn, and Flextronics, set up their manufacturing units in Sriperumbudur, encouraged by Nokia's presence in the region. Thus, within just two years of setting up Nokia's plant in Sriperumbudur, the region transformed into a telecom cluster.

Firms along this cluster are classified as SEZs and employ thousands of young workers. Companies like Nokia have become examples of a new kind of industrial workplace that is proliferating in India – a workplace driven by networks of local and multinational firms, partnerships, and a vast, young workforce. How did the Tamil Nadu Government successfully attract Nokia to invest in Sriperumbudur? The following section examines this question.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview, Nokia-India CEO, Gurgaon, 28.07.08.

## b) “Competition States” in Action: Attracting Nokia to Sriperumbudur

The idea that industrial development (particularly the setting up of hardware industries) is closely linked with employment generation – is one that comes up repeatedly both in interviews with government officials (at different levels) and in those with private sector representatives. This idea is best summarised in the words of the Director of the Guidance Bureau, who explained,

“A large number of youth in Tamil Nadu are educated they have not only completed school education but many of them also have diplomas from technical training institutes. However, many of them are unemployed and are unable to find jobs – as a result...they sit idly at home. By attracting or rather kidnapping foreign investment into Tamil Nadu, we not only achieve industrial growth in the state but we also provide employment to thousands of educated, unemployed youth”. (Interview, Director Guidance, 29.07.08)

The Director’s comment is striking: not just in its articulation of the government’s vision and its priorities for development, but also in the aggressiveness of approach it suggests in state government efforts to attract foreign capital. He emphasised the fact that Tamil Nadu has to compete for investment, not just with other Indian states (such as, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra), but also at the global level, with cities like Shenzhen in China. He explained that this makes the role of the government particularly difficult; as the state government must go beyond just making a case for why Tamil Nadu is an attractive investment destination. It now has to provide the best set of incentives and the “best package possible” (Ibid) for these companies to make Tamil Nadu the perfect investment destination. Otherwise foreign investment will be “kidnapped” by other Indian states, or by China.

The Director's description of the Tamil Nadu government's response to attracting Nokia into Tamil Nadu echoes Corbridge's (2011) view of how the federal system in India has spurred the emergence of "competition states" in India, as States actively compete with each other for foreign investment. Corbridge writes,

"For all its centralising tendencies and imperfections, Indian federalism has helped promote a set of competition states that are working hard to outdo one another in their courtship of inward investment. Having set the table, the Centre has been able to sit back and allow various experiments to take place in the states that advance its reform agenda." (Corbridge 2011: 69)

Corbridge's (2011) view is illustrated through the story of how Nokia was convinced (or "kidnapped") by the Tamil Nadu government to establish its manufacturing facility in Sriperumbudur.

Officials in TIDCO and the Guidance Bureau, describe the decision to court Nokia as a "targeted project". The Union Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunications in 2004, Dayanidhi Maran, represented Tamil Nadu's DMK party and was very keen to develop Sriperumbudur into a telecom hub; the political party he belonged to was in power at the state, as well as being part of the ruling coalition at the centre. He was instrumental in mobilising the state government's machinery to negotiate with Nokia and convince them to set up the factory in Sriperumbudur. Three main officials in the Tamil Nadu government – the Chief Secretary (the State's senior-most civil servant), the Director Guidance, and the Chairman and Managing Director of TIDCO and SIPCOT were "put on the job" by the state government to "get Nokia".

The reason behind targeting Nokia was simple. Government of Tamil Nadu officials saw Nokia as an “anchor client” and they believed that if Nokia invested in Tamil Nadu, other telecommunications MNCs would also follow Nokia into Sriperumbudur, transforming the town into an electronics and telecommunications manufacturing hub – the only such hub in India. In 2004, Nokia had not even considered Sriperumbudur as an option. They had almost decided on setting up this plant in Shenzhen, China and the only options that they explored in India were the cities of Mumbai (Maharashtra), Pune (Maharashtra), Manesar (Haryana), and Bangalore (Karnataka).

On 3 December 2004, Tamil Nadu government officials made a presentation to the Nokia’s management, at the firm’s corporate headquarters in Gurgaon, near Delhi. They made a strong case for Sriperumbudur, citing the town’s strategic location, good infrastructure facilities, and availability of skilled labour. A subsequent series of discussions, presentations and meetings were held over the next few months between Nokia’s India office and the team of Tamil Nadu government officials.

These initial discussions led to an exploration, on Nokia’s part, of the possibility of establishing its manufacturing plant in Sriperumbudur. Nokia officials estimated the potential costs of such a venture, comparing it with those of establishing the operation in Shenzhen. They also began negotiating the terms of investment with the state government. Nokia’s aim was to create a plant, which would manufacture low cost mobile phones – to cater for export but largely to India’s fast-growing domestic market. The Tamil Nadu government addressed these concerns by creating a tailor-made package for Nokia. The package included tax incentives, tax exemptions, and the promise of being allotted SEZ status – all of which would reduce costs dramatically. Sriperumbudur, as a consequence, proved to be a winner – scoring over Shenzhen not only in terms of overall cost of

establishment, but also in terms of the cost, availability, and quality of skilled and semi-skilled workers. The strategic location of the town (marked by its proximity to the airport) allowed Nokia to source their raw materials easily, as well as tapping Tamil Nadu's rich pool of skilled and semi-skilled talent - a key element of its manufacturing workforce. These factors combined with their impression of the Tamil Nadu government as one that is "highly supportive" and "proactive"<sup>36</sup> were the main factors that clinched the "Nokia deal"<sup>37</sup>.

SIPCOT allocated 210 acres of land for Nokia manufacturing plant in mid-2005 in an area designated for the Nokia Telecom SEZ. The facility became operational in 23 weeks, by January 2006. By March 2006, the plant had produced one million handsets. Most of the components at this were imported, until 2007, when Nokia managed to convince seven of its component manufacturers (who manufacture chargers, batteries, and LCD screens) to establish manufacturing units within the Nokia SEZ. By July 2008 (when fieldwork was first conducted), Nokia as well as its seven suppliers (Foxconn, Laird, Perlos, Salcomp, Jabil, Aspocomp and Wintek) were all located within the Nokia SEZ. At this time, plans were underway to expand capacity in the plant to meet the growing domestic demand for handsets<sup>38</sup>.

The state government's plan to establish Nokia as an "anchor client" had, it seemed, worked. Alongside Nokia's seven suppliers, in 2007, other mobile phone manufacturers such as Motorola and Samsung also set up their manufacturing plants in Sriperumbudur; making Sriperumbudur India's first high-tech telecom manufacturing hub.

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<sup>36</sup> These terms came up repeatedly in interviews with senior officials at Nokia (August-September, 2008)

<sup>37</sup> Term used by the Director Guidance, during the interview.

<sup>38</sup> Interview Nokia's CEO, Gurgaon 28.07.08.

The story presented by government officials and Nokia staff about how Nokia came to Sriperumbudur and its benefit to other industries and the region as a whole, was presented as a largely positive story – frequently described as a “win-win situation” by both parties during interviews conducted in 2008, and 2011. Both parties also highlighted the tremendous social impact that this project could have, the huge employment and training potential of this initiative – especially for young, semi-skilled youth in the region and the fact that Nokia has taken up a range of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives – which including adopting two villages around Sriperumbudur, funding education and health care initiatives (for the poor, elderly and disabled) etc. – made Nokia’s staff and government officials label Nokia’s Sriperumbudur factory as a case where the ideal of inclusive growth and “empowerment” of young workers has been realised. This idea is clearly articulated in the CSR section of Nokia’s website in 2008:

“By empowering women factory workers and creating community improvement initiatives, it is engineering economic transformation in Sriperumbudur....Along with driving the engine of the investment train in Chennai’s investment corridor, Nokia has been a direct catalyst for economic growth and has transformed lives for the better in the neighbourhood.<sup>39</sup>

However, everyone did not share this perception of Nokia’s positive, almost benevolent presence in the region. An alternative view of Nokia’s Sriperumbudur plant is evident in a compelling paper by Madhumita Dutta, published in October 2009, entitled “The Public Price for Success: Nokia SEZ”, where she examines in detail some of the tax concessions given to Nokia to establish itself in Sriperumbudur. The paper brings out the exponential financial losses that the Tamil Nadu government has borne in getting Nokia

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<sup>39</sup> <http://srnokia.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/social-responsibility-in-chennai.html> (last accessed 20.12.13)

to invest in the state. According to Dutta's (2009) estimates the total losses to the State government at Rs. 645.4 crores (roughly £63.7 million GBP). This figure includes the costs incurred by the state as a result of subsidized land allocations, exemptions from value added tax (which are reimbursed to Nokia), and other financial concessions levied to Nokia. Dutta (2009) argues that in spite of this high cost, Nokia's workers continue to work at very low wages, long working hours – and a large number of its workforce continue to work as contract labour. Dutta's (2009) paper also discusses the process by which Nokia came to Sriperumbudur and some of her research findings also confirm what I had observed during fieldwork which was conducted a year before her paper was published.

Yet in spite of these alarming figures raised by Dutta (2009) in her paper - ideas that were repeatedly echoed by NGO staff that I interacted closely with during fieldwork – it was clear that the Tamil Nadu government, and private firms like Nokia had worked hard to create a positive image of firms like Nokia. Tamil Nadu's government officials in Kancheepuram echoed this view and urged young people in region (during job fairs) to work hard and aspire for jobs in companies like Nokia. The fact that Nokia was one of the first companies to establish itself in Sriperumbudur and that it was also one of the first companies to conduct large scale recruitment drives (recruiting thousands of workers in the period 2006-2008) through job fairs involving NGOs and local government officials (who were also actively endorsing jobs in the Nokia SEZ), made working in Nokia seem very prestigious to youth and their families living near Sriperumbudur. In fact young people I spoke to often expressed the desire to work in “Nokia company” – a term which I later learnt did not mean that they specifically wanted to work in Nokia – but was used as a generic term to refer to any job in an electronics manufacturing SEZ or factory in the region. Other terms, that was used for these new

jobs was “Company Job” or a job in a “*veliyoor* (foreign) company”. The next section shifts focus to this idea and moves away from the story of how Nokia came to Sriperumbudur, to how young people in the region perceive job opportunities in the region, and how their aspirations are influenced by the presence of firms like Nokia. By highlighting the aspirations of young citizens and how they perceive jobs in SEZs I demonstrate the deep connections that SEZs have with local political economy.

#### **IV. New Opportunities and Changing Youth Aspirations**

##### **a) What kinds of workers do companies like Nokia employ?**

The growth of Sriperumbudur as an industrial cluster has led to the creation of new employment opportunities for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers<sup>40</sup>. Skilled workers are employed as Supervisors and Managers within manufacturing firms in the Sriperumbudur region. These workers have typically completed their schooling and also possess additional higher degrees (such as a Bachelor’s degree or a professional diploma from ITIs). The term “semi-skilled” is applied to those who have completed high school, but typically do not have additional qualifications. This category is rather fluid (as workers who have dropped out of school but have additional qualifications or degrees from ITIs are also labelled “semi-skilled” workers). Typically, young people who have completed high school and have obtained a minimum mark of 60% in their first attempt of their high school leaving examination, have the best chance of being recruited as direct employees of Nokia. Youth who have not met these criteria also work in the SEZ, but they enter through another route: working as flexi workers or contract workers in the

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<sup>40</sup> I use these terms as they are defined and understood by respondents – government officials and human resource staff in firms like Nokia. For an academic discussion on these terms and their meaning see Unni and Rani 2008.

Nokia factory for short periods of time (especially during peak seasons). These workers are trained like Nokia's staff but are not on the company's payroll. This means that Nokia does not incur any additional costs on providing them benefits or social security, which they are compelled to pay their staff on payroll. Flexi-workers are recruited through specific contractors (who are liable to provide them with social security and other benefits), however, in practice the lives of these workers are particularly precarious as they lack a steady income and struggle to make ends meet. Often flexi workers also come in from other units within the SEZ (such as from Foxconn or Salcomp) and many of them work in Nokia, for a short period of time in the hope of getting a more permanent position within the factory. Some of the young, contract workers I spoke to aspired to full-time jobs in the Nokia factory (not only because of greater job security and a steady income, but because of the high degree of prestige that came with working for Nokia). Youth viewed working as flexi-workers as a stepping-stone to achieving a "permanent" (full-time) position in the factory. Human resource (HR) staff in Nokia also concurred with this view and explained that flexi workers are often "tested" and then made "permanent" if vacancies arise.

Scholars like Castells (1996) argue that the employment of flexi-labour is a key characteristic of the network enterprise, in a globalised context. This category of workers is important from the point of view of the firm as they represent a "reserve army" which steps into the factory floor to help these companies achieve high production targets (De Haan 1999). There seem to be parallels between flexi workers and the badli system of labour studied by De Haan (1999). Unskilled workers also work in the Nokia SEZ. However these workers are employed by private firms specialising in providing specific services, such as catering, transportation, security, house-keeping and are not on Nokia's payroll. Nokia merely sub-contracts these services to smaller private firms, which

specialise in the above tasks. Workers in all categories are typically between the ages of 18 and 35, and Nokia prefers to recruit people between the ages of 18 and 25 to work on its shop floor. Thus, the emergence of these new worksites in Sriperumbudur has led to a growing demand for young workers.

Nokia's HR staff and senior management describe young workers as "hard-working", and "willing to learn". This is why they are in high demand in firms such as Nokia. Young women are particularly preferred and they constitute a majority of the workforce on the shop floor in Nokia and other manufacturing firms in Kancheepuram. Female workers are described as "disciplined", "hard-working", and "committed", by Nokia's HR staff, who add that unmarried women are particularly preferred of Nokia, as this makes them more willing to work long hours on multiple shifts<sup>41</sup>.

How are young people recruited into these new worksites? The following section seeks to answer this question.

### **b) Preparing Tamil Nadu's Youth for New Opportunities: The Role of the State, NGOs and the Private Sector**

The state, NGOs and the private sector have played a key role in disseminating information about the new employment opportunities for youth and training them to make them "employable" in industries in the region. There are mainly two channels through which these actors reach out to youth in villages. The first is through "job fairs" (which are large-scale recruitment camps held usually in the district headquarters) and the second is through village-level "employability training programmes" run by NGOs

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<sup>41</sup> Interview Nokia's HR Team (25.08.08)

(typically jointly funded by the state government and the private firms seeking to recruit new workers in the region).

Job fairs are advertised primarily through the employment exchange in each district and advertisements are posted in village panchayat office. The job fair illustrates the role of the network state, which works in close partnership with other non-state actors in creating awareness about the new job opportunities that have emerged in the region. These fairs were organised primarily by the Tamil Nadu Government's Labour Department and sought to facilitate recruitment into private firms in the region<sup>42</sup>. Today, job fairs have become large-scale events, which are often jointly organised (or sponsored, in some cases) by the government and the private sector, illustrating the closeness between the network state and network enterprise. This is in contrast to job fairs organised for the SEAM programme (which are described in detail in a subsequent chapter) where despite the fact that SEAM is organised as a PPP, the job fair is entirely organised by the private sector (with limited government support).

For example, in a job fair that was held in the Kancheepuram district headquarters in April 2008, the District Collector of Kancheepuram (the top administrative official in the district) approached the seven MNCs within the Nokia Telecom SEZ and solicited their participation in the job fairs. These companies also sponsored a part of the cost for these fairs (for example they may provide refreshments or contribute to the costs of posters). However the Tamil Nadu government was the main host of these job fairs, a point that exemplifies the role of the state as a facilitator. Not only does it facilitate

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with a senior Tamil Nadu government official in the rural development ministry, Chennai (04.08.08)

MNCs to invest Tamil Nadu, it also facilitates recruitment into MNCs by organising job fairs.

Job fairs were the main channels through which Nokia recruited its workforce, especially during its first few years of operation in Sriperumbudur. These events were instrumental in making jobs within the SEZ visible and appear prestigious. Hundreds of young people attend job fairs to work “Nokia Company” or to obtain a “company job”. These events provide youth with an opportunity to interact with human resource officials from private firms (who set up small stalls with material on the application process, entry criteria etc.). Attendees move from stall to stall, making job applications or discussing their applications with HR staff. Often speeches by government functionaries or HR staff are made in these job fairs.

NGOs in the region have also played an important role in publicising jobs in firms like Nokia and adding to this “glamorous” image of working in an SEZ. For example, “Hand in Hand” (HIH), an international NGO, which works on issues relating to livelihoods in villages across Tamil Nadu, was working on an “Employability Training Programme” in a few villages in Kancheepuram in 2008. This two-week training programme sought to make youth more employable in MNCs by providing “soft skills” training. This programme is a part of Tamil Nadu government’s *Grassroots Skill Development Initiative* (described earlier) and is jointly funded by the State government and CII. This training programme is another good example of the nexus between the state and private sector, which collaborate to make youth “employable”, by providing them a set of soft skills, to enhance their ability to obtain “company jobs”.

At the time of fieldwork, HIIH was also working closely with some of Nokia's HR staff (informally) and helped them recruit eligible workers to work as Operators on the Shop Floor. While Nokia's HR managers were reluctant to discuss the precise nature of the relationship between Nokia and HIIH, interviews with HIIH staff revealed that they had recruited a large number of Operators for Nokia, and was also paid a fixed fee per candidate<sup>43</sup>. HIIH's experience of working with the local government and its networks young people in the region, who had participated in its soft skills training programmes, made it an ideal actor to mobilise young people in the region and facilitate their entry into Nokia.

Thus the state, private sector (Nokia, in this case) and the NGO (such as HIIH) emerge as important actors that work together to create an impression of the transformative potential of "company jobs" in MNCs like Nokia. How do young people in Kancheepuram perceive these new job opportunities? What are their aspirations?

### **c) Exploring Youth Aspirations in Kancheepuram: Perspectives from Four Villages**

"I used to see Nokia's buses every day on the streets, just outside my village. I used to look at the buses and see young women like me, coming home after a day of work. I hoped that I too will have a chance to travel in those buses and work in Nokia." Jency, Pichi Village (Operator at Nokia)

The new opportunities in Kancheepuram district were widely publicised by state representatives, NGO staff and MNCs in the region. However, little was known about

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<sup>43</sup> However, the exact payment that HIIH per candidate received was not disclosed.

how young people in the region view these job opportunities. In August 2008, I conducted group discussions with young men and women in four villages, in Kancheepuram district, which focused on the theme of aspirations. The group discussion sought to discuss, how youth perceived the new job opportunities in the region and also focused on understanding what how young people in the region view the future and explore some of their future aspirations. HHH worked in these four villages and were in the process of implementing (or about to implement) soft skills training programmes in each of these villages. I obtained access into these villages, through HHH. In Kottai and Vakkam, HHH's training programme was complete. While in Pichi and Kuppam, the HHH training had not yet begun.

The four villages were also selected on the basis of their proximity to Sriperumbudur. The villages Pichi and Kottai, were located near the SIPCOT Industrial Estate in Sriperumbudur Taluk of Kancheepuram District. A number of young people from these villages worked in MNCs in the region. Vakkam and Kuppam were remote villages, located in Kancheepuram's Cheyyur Taluk. As these villages were located over 60 kilometres away from the Sriperumbudur industrial clusters, youth in this region had limited exposure to working in MNCs. Table 1 (on the next page) provides an overview of the respondents who participated in the group discussions in the four villages.

**Table 1: Overview of Youth Participants in Focus Group Discussions in Four Villages**

Name of Village	Group Characteristics	Age Group of Participants
Pichi	Untrained, unemployed youth looking for jobs	18-26
Kottai	Trained youth employed in private firms in the region	20-25
Vakkam	Trained, unemployed youth who are looking for company jobs	20-26
Kuppam	Untrained youth employed in traditional occupations – agriculture and fishing	21-30

Source: Field notes, August 2008

The Map in Figure 1 (in Chapter 1, page 20), shows the location of Sriperumbudur and Cheyyur, and gives a sense of the geographical location of the villages in which the group discussions were conducted.

The focus group discussion took place at a public place in the village – usually a school or in an outdoor space near the Panchayat headquarters. The discussion was facilitated by a research assistant (based on questions and themes that I had prepared). I often followed up with additional questions and also observed and recorded the discussions. Follow-up interviews were conducted with selected individuals who could stay on after the group discussion. In cases where it was possible, brief interviews of the parents of the FGD participants were also conducted, to examine their aspirations for their children. All the FGD participants were in the age group of 18-30.

Two striking findings emerged across all four group discussions.

First, across all four villages young people were very keen to move out of agricultural work and wanted to work in the private sector. “Company jobs” were particularly valued by youth in all four villages. This idea was clearly articulated by a Sashi, a 22 year old woman from Pichi village who explained,

“Though my parents are uneducated, they encouraged me to study hard because they did not want me to do back breaking work like them. They wanted me to work in an office. I would also like to do a company job.” – Interview, Sashi, Pichi Village 22.08.08

Respondents repeatedly echoed Sashi’s words during group discussions across all four villages. Young people explained that agriculture yields low incomes and they believed that jobs in private firms, were not only more lucrative, but also more prestigious<sup>44</sup>. For example, in villages near Sriperumbudur (such as Pichi and Kottai), a company job signified financial independence, the ability to save money for marriage or higher education, prestige, and the ability to contribute to the family income. Job fairs and training programs (such as the ones conducted by HHH) helped increase their aspirations further and give youth hope that training (in some form) can give them a chance to earn more money; and also work for a respectable company (Ibid).

The desire to move out of traditional occupations was also expressed in the two remote villages -Vakkam and Kuppam. In Vakkam (where almost all respondents were semi-skilled), the absence of employment opportunities in MNCs or private firms meant that young men and women had to migrate to towns in Kancheepuram, Chennai and Vellore district, in search of employment opportunities. Young men in Vakkam, saw migration as the best option to secure a better future for themselves and their families. However

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<sup>44</sup> Group discussion, Pichi, 22.08.08

young women in Vakkam, who had migrated to other districts in Tamil Nadu and worked with private companies (such as garment manufacturing and leather processing units in SEZs in Sriperumbudur) explained that moving to another location was difficult, both emotionally and financially. Safety was a main concern for these young women. The inability to find a safe place to stay (in working women's hostels or with trusted relatives) was a key factor, which determined whether unmarried women would migrate in search for work. This combined with the fact that wages were quite low and they spent almost everything they earned on living expenses, led them to give up their jobs and to return home in a few months. For example, I encountered three such young women from Vakkam, who have returned from manufacturing jobs in the garment and electronics industries in are now pursuing distance learning programs - in the hope of getting better, safer and higher paying jobs in the future. These young women dreamed of getting married and settling down near Chennai and working as salesgirls in local shops.

In Kuppam, a fishing village on the Tamil Nadu coast, in Kancheepuram's Cheyyur Taluk respondents explained that the fishing yield had decreased, since after the Tsunami in 2004. This was a key factor that has led young men to leave fishing and aspire for jobs in the private sector. Young men in the village wished to take up jobs as welders, plumbers, drivers or caterers. A major concern of these young men was that they lacked education and skills needed to obtain "company jobs", hence they felt jobs in the service sector were the next best option. In addition, men in Kuppam complained that companies prefer to recruit women, and that this limited their employment options within Tamil Nadu. These men dreamed of migrating abroad to places like Dubai, and cited examples of successful people within the village who had done so. One young man (Anand) proudly stated that he had returned to the village after working in Dubai for two years as an electrician and is now building a large house in Kuppam with his savings.

Anand has become a mentor for other young people in Kuppam. He mentioned that he is associated with an agency, which facilitates the migration process and was helping some young men acquire jobs overseas, through this agency. Discussions with young men in the village revealed that there was a network of brokers, who recruited them for jobs overseas, for a fee. Only two out of the fourteen participants in the group discussion in Kuppam, were female and these young women had dropped out of school. They aspired to do courses on catering and housekeeping, but had not yet enrolled in these courses.

The second core theme that emerged from the group discussion with youth – across all four villages was the desire to acquire new skills.

There was broad consensus (among employers, government officials and NGO Trainers) that the school education system in the Tami Nadu places great emphasis on rote learning and does not teach young people life-skills. This sense of disillusionment with the system of education in the State, and the inability of educational qualifications to translate into lucrative employment opportunities was a major source of frustration, among youth who participated in the group discussion. They explained that this was a key reason why they had enrolled in HIIH's training programme, as they believed that it would open up future employment opportunities in the private sector. English terms like "skills" and "soft skills" were frequently used by youth in the group discussion, and young people across all the villages believed that acquiring a skill would help them "settle" and get "permanent company jobs".

HIIH's life skills programme was a precursor, to state-sponsored skill development programmes like SEAM, and a key factor which made them popular in 2008 was the fact

that these initiatives coach small groups of young people, to prepare for private sector jobs by teaching them how to perform in interviews or giving mock entrance tests. Representatives of NGOs like HIIH describe themselves as agents, who help enhance the human and social capital of rural youth, by facilitating access to the new economic opportunities that have emerged in Kancheepuram. HIIH staff acted as mentors to youth in the four villages, who discussed future career plans or even family problems with them. A twenty-one year old girl who has just applied for a “company job” in a garment manufacturing firm in Kancheepuram after attending the HIIH training programme explained this point to me and said,

“My parents are farmers and they have never been to school, so they tell me that education is important as it will help me get a better job. My parents or school teachers were not able to tell me what kind of jobs are available and how I could get these jobs. After attending the training by Muruguraj Sir (HIIH staff), we learnt about the new jobs that are available and also how to apply for these company jobs. After the training programme, I started going for computer classes, as Sir told us that companies look for people who have IT skills. Muruguraj Sir also helped me fill in the application form for a company job – which is something I had never done before.<sup>45</sup>”

“Things have changed a lot in the villages over the past three to four years”, said Murugaraj<sup>46</sup>, the HIIH Trainer, who believed that young people today have a number of new employment opportunities open to them. However, he believed that “lack of skills” constrained them. HIIH’s skill training programmes, sought to fill this gap. Ratnavel, a young man with a Bachelor’s degree (BA) in History works for a small local NGO in the village of Pichi, also agreed with Murugaraj’s view. Ratnavel was an unemployed young

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, Arasi, 21.08.08.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, Murugaraj, 21.08.08

man in Pichi, who was affiliated with the DMK Party. He aspired to become a politician in the future. Ratnavel said,

“Opportunities were limited a few years back. Even if there were opportunities, companies would prefer to recruit people from Chennai, who have gone to college and know computers; they would never recruit people from villages like ours...now you don’t see young men loitering around the villages. Instead, they are learning English and going for computer classes – as they know that studying hard will get them a good job.”<sup>47</sup>

Youth across all the villages were taking the initiative to acquire new skills. This process of skill acquisition took a number of forms and varied across villages – depending on the gender, educational qualifications and location of the village. For example, in Vakkam and Kottai, HIIH’s soft skills training programme was an important channel through which youth were exposed to new employment opportunities. The two-week training programme (spread over twelve days with twelve modules) focuses on expanding the skills of youth to promote self-employment (through modules on entrepreneurship, initiative, leadership and team work). In addition, it also focuses on “work ethics” (discipline, time management, punctuality, presentation and interview skills etc.), which help acquaint young people with the values of the workplace.

Young people who had completed high school, were enrolled in distance learning programmes (to obtain a Bachelors or in a few rare cases a Master’s degree) or enrolled in short courses (computer classes or spoken English classes) to learn valuable skills to make them employable. Among unskilled youth, women tended to attend training

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, Ratnavel, 22.08.08

programmes in catering and housekeeping; while men did short courses on carpentry, plumbing, welding and mechanics. In Kuppam (where almost all respondents were unskilled), young men explained that they plan to continue fishing part time, but also aimed to have another more lucrative job which would be their primary source of income. Many young people in this group also aspired to migrate to the Gulf countries and work for a short time. They explained that in the absence of other employment opportunities near the village – migration emerged as the best strategy for economic mobility.

The young people who participated in the group discussions, across all four villages had high aspirations and dreamed of a better future. Young people spoke of their commitment to work hard and their desire to live a different kind of life, which involved a job in a private company, a scooter – and in the longer term a home of one's own and a surplus income – so that they can take care of their families. Does working in an SEZ like Nokia or an export oriented garment manufacturing firms guarantee young people the future that they dream of? Subsequent chapters of this thesis explore this question – by first examining processes of skills training and the kinds of skills that these young, aspiring youth are taught and then shifting to the workplace where these newly acquired skills are put to use, as workers in these new workplaces.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This chapter brings together the complex policy processes involved in the process of attracting foreign investment and creating new worksites in the state and links this with the expectations and aspirations of young citizens - who dream of working in these new work sites, as a result of a largely successful marketing campaign by the private sector,

the state and NGOs – who have projected these new worksites as golden opportunities that must be seized by young people. Three key points, central to this thesis’ driving argument emerge from this chapter.

The first is the fact of the emergence of the network state in Tamil Nadu. The previous chapter, outlining as it does the conceptual framework of this study, examines this point analytically, using the Castellan concept of the “network state”. This chapter aims to push this further, by considering the role of the state empirically in the context of Tamil Nadu, by examining the evolution of its industrial policy and explaining how Nokia set up its manufacturing facility in the town of Sripeumbudur. The Nokia case study demonstrates how the state and the private sector negotiate and partner for mutual gain.

The second key theme that runs through this chapter is that of the state’s renewed attempts to boost the manufacturing sector. The basis of this policy lies not only in the sector’s potential in generating economic growth, but also on the idea that the development of a strong manufacturing sector will have a multiplier effect on employment. This link between foreign investment in the manufacturing sector and employment generation has led to a shift in policy thinking and imperatives – leading, for the first time, to the incorporation of “skill development” and “human resources development” as key features of the state’s industrial policy.

Third, the chapter highlights a clear trend (in the four villages studied) where youth are attempting to move out of traditional occupations into jobs in the private sector or in multinational companies. The attempt by youth to acquire new skills (through distance learning programs or short training programme) is an important strategy through which they achieve this goal. This strategy is also actively encouraged by NGOs like HHH.

HIHs (informal) role as head-hunters/ recruiters for Nokia and their own life skills/soft skills training programmes have led them to motivate young people to acquire new skills and aspire for jobs in the private sector.

This discussion sets a backdrop against which Nokia's training programme for semi-skilled youth is examined – the driving theme of the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SKILL-TRAINING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

#### **NOKIA'S SMART OPERATOR BOOTCAMP**

##### **I. Introduction**

The term “Skill development” was a new buzzword in Tamil Nadu in 2008 and was repeatedly echoed by key informants in the Tamil Nadu government and the private sector. Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy 2007 had highlighted its importance and at that time NGOs like HIH were conducting soft skills training programmes on a small scale to enable young people in Kancheepuram district to acquire jobs in new workplaces. In 2008, skill-training for large private corporations, like Nokia were conducted through “on-the-job” training programmes, within private firms. Nokia developed the training curriculum to conform to its global standards (across its different manufacturing facilities worldwide) and the training process was subcontracted to a private agency, based in Chennai.

This chapter builds on the discussion in Chapter 3, by shifting focus to how a new workforce of Operators (who assemble mobile phones on Nokia’s shop-floor) is recruited and trained to work in the Nokia SEZ, drawing on fieldwork conducted in July-August 2008. What kinds of skills are valuable in these worksites? How is this training imparted? This brief chapter thus gives a flavour of the nature of skill development programmes led by the private sector and helps provide a backdrop against which the

Government of India's escalation of skill development, as a policy priority at the national level can be examined.

## **II. Recruiting Operators to Manufacture Nokia Handsets**

Operators form over 75% of the workforce in the Nokia SEZ. These Operators perform a crucial role – they assemble mobile phones, test, check, package and ship them to locations in India and abroad. Nokia invests a great deal of resources and time in training its Operators – semi-skilled workers who work on the shop floor of the Nokia's manufacturing plant in Sriperumbudur.

In July 2008, Nokia was expanding its manufacturing plant and was on a massive recruitment drive. At that time mobile phone penetration in India was still relatively low (at about 35% in 2008, according to Nokia) and domestic demand for low cost mobile phones was growing at an unprecedented rate. Nokia was in the process of designing and manufacturing low-cost mobile phones, for the domestic market. It was also expecting a surge in demand for its phones, during the upcoming the Diwali festival season in October-November 2008, and was recruiting hundreds of new workers to cater to this demand. This was clear on one of my first visits to the Nokia SEZ, where I saw long queue of newly recruited Trainees, waiting at the SEZ gate, to obtain security clearance for their first day of training.

Nokia sub-contracts its recruitment process to a recruitment consultancy firm, in order to manage the sheer volume of applicants. Workers are recruited through two main channels. The first (more common) channel is through job fairs, which are usually held in villages in the region or the district headquarters and were primarily organised by the

Tamil Nadu government in 2008. The second channel of recruitment is through employee referrals, where employees in Nokia recommend their friends or family members to apply for jobs in Nokia<sup>48</sup>. This latter is often preferred as it ensures that new candidates enter the factory with some knowledge of what working in the factory is like and it was believed by HR staff that the fact that a new entrant has friends or relatives working in the factory would prevent new recruits from leaving the factory after training. Nokia's Operators are also provided financial incentives and bonuses when they recommend workers. As a result, employee referrals have emerged as a popular channel through which new Operators are recruited to Nokia.

Once an applicant submits his or her job application, the recruitment consultancy firm screens the forms and candidates are shortlisted for testing. In order to be considered for the post of an Operator in Nokia, an individual must have completed their school leaving examination at their first attempt, with a minimum mark of 60%. Proof of exam certificates and mark sheets need to be attached to every application form. This cut-off mark eliminates a large number of semi-skilled candidates, who do not meet the above criteria. Nokia's HR team explains that this minimum criterion eliminates a large number of initial applicants. This is because young people who complete high school with a 60% average usually enrol for higher education in universities or in technical training institutes. Those who do not enrol are a group of young men and women who either did not get into university or more commonly (as interviews with Nokia's workers reflect) were unable to afford the costs of higher education and thus chose to work and contribute to the family income. This group of workers has two important qualities according to Nokia's HR staff – “intelligence” and the ability to “learn quickly” and “commitment to hard work”, which make them ideal Operators for the Nokia SEZ.

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<sup>48</sup> Interview, Nokia HR team 25.08.08

Age is another key factor that is considered when short-listing applicants. Nokia primarily recruits young workers (who are between the ages of 18-25) to work as operators. HR officials in Nokia explain that workers in this group learn on the job quickly and adapt easily to Nokia's work culture. According to Nokia's HR team, 90% of workers who are recruited in Nokia are "freshers", who have never worked in a private company before. Older workers are perceived by recruiters as "rigid"<sup>49</sup> in their thinking and unwilling to learn new methods. The Operations manager of the Nokia plant in Sriperumbudur summed up this point as follows,

"Young people who are from this age group [18-25] learn very fast on the job; and unlike workers who have worked elsewhere, they do not have to unlearn anything when they come to us".<sup>50</sup>

This idea was echoed not only by the Managers in Nokia's HR department; but also by employees of HHH and representatives from the technical training institute, which conducts Nokia's training programme.

Age and the initial educational qualifications thus emerged as the two most important factors that help shortlist candidates. Shortlisted candidates are then tested through aptitude tests, psycho-diagnostic tests, alertness tests, and finger dexterity tests. Applicants who have passed these tests, then appear for an interview, which is conducted in Tamil. These interviews test the applicant's ability to understand and follow instructions and also to assess their potential to "fit" into Nokia's work environment. Applicants who pass the tests and the interview are then appointed as 'Trainee Operators' in Nokia. They remain Trainees on probation for a six-month period, following which

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<sup>49</sup> Interview, Nokia HR Manager, 11.08.08

<sup>50</sup> Interview, Operations Manager, 11.08.08

they get confirmed as full time Operators – assembling mobile phones on Nokia’s vast factory floor.

Over 75% of Nokia’s Operators were female, in 2008. Nokia’s HR team explain that this gender bias that favours women is not intentional, but is a result of the fact that women tend to score higher than men on the finger dexterity test and psycho-diagnostic tests, resulting in more women being recruited. HR staff also explained that female workers had “a good attitude”, “had good attention to detail”, were “polite” and “disciplined”. Thus it was clear that young, female workers were generally preferred to work as Operators. This strong preference for female workers, is not only specific to Nokia, but is highlighted in other studies on the electronics industry (see for example, Ong 1987a; Pun 2005).

Why do young women apply for jobs in Nokia? What made working in Nokia so attractive to them? Informal interactions with Nokia’s Trainees over a lunch at Nokia’s cafeteria revealed that the availability of free, safe transportation was an important factor that led women to seek jobs in MNCs, as they saw employment in firms like Nokia as “safe” and “respectable”. Female workers explained that safety was a key concern and that the high security within the Nokia factory, combined with the fact that they all now own mobile phones (which ensures that their families can easily contact them), made it possible for women in the region to aspire to work in MNCs around Sriperumbudur.

The process by which Nokia’s Trainees are trained to work in the SEZ highlights the kinds of skills that are valued in new workplaces in Sriperumbudur. The nature of the training process provides useful clues to some of the underlying values and norms that define what Nokia’s HR staff call the “work culture” of factory and highlights the overt

and subtle ways in which the values of the workplace are imparted to Nokia's new workforce.

### **III. Attending the “Smart Operator Bootcamp”**

A new recruit in Nokia needs to possess two sets of skills in order to work on the factory floor and manufacture mobile phones. The first set of skills is technical, and enables workers to actually assemble a mobile phone on the factory floor. Soft skills, form a second, equally important set of skills that is essential for working in the Nokia. Values such as teamwork, discipline, attention to detail and commitment are important “soft skills” that workers acquire through the soft skills training programme. The fact that workers work in teams on an assembly line (as discussed in detail in Chapter 8) makes these skills especially desirable in ensuring efficiency of work, high productivity and high quality of output with low margins of error.

Nokia's new recruits are taught both sets of skills through an “on the job” training programme called the “Smart Operator Bootcamp”. The very name of this skill development programme gives away the rigorous, intensive and highly structured nature of Nokia's training programme. The “bootcamp” (as it is popularly known) has three objectives. The first objective is to “create knowledge” about the manufacturing process in general and the mobile phone manufacturing process in particular. The second is to “develop skills” – this includes both “technical skills” and “soft skills”. The third is to “develop a positive attitude towards work” (inculcating in the workers the values such as discipline, hard work, and commitment).

On completing the technical and soft skills training modules, the Trainees are assessed on their performance through a series of tests – which assess their theoretical knowledge (on basic electronics) and practical skills (on device assembly, manufacturing processes). Those pass these tests are awarded “Qualified for Quality” certificates, after which they are sent on to the factory floor to work as Helpers – where they begin work by assisting Operators. Depending on how quickly these new Helpers learn on the job, they become Trainee Operators working on an assembly line. Trainees who do not pass the tests are sent for “re training” and are given retests. On passing these tests these Trainees are permitted to work as Helpers and join thousands of workers on the factory floor.

The next two sub sections examine the process of technical and soft skills training to highlight the training methodology and content to give a sense of how a new workforce is created for the Nokia SEZ.

### **a) Introducing the Smart Operator Bootcamp**

Nokia’s Smart Operator Bootcamp is rigorous and intensive. It is described as an “on the job” training programme as Trainees are considered employees of Nokia from the very first day of training. It aims to teach Nokia’s new recruits everything they need to know in order to assemble a mobile phone, in three just weeks – following which they start work on the shop floor. This training programme involves classroom teaching, practical exercises, homework and daily tests to ensure that Trainees are learning quickly and efficiently.

The technical training process takes place in the main building of the Nokia SEZ, just above the shop floor. Experts from an ITI (trained and certified by Nokia) deliver

training content. The classroom teaching occurs in a large room equipped with an overhead projector and a white board; while some of the practical sessions take place in “labs” which simulate the factory environment and give Trainees a chance to practice the processes of assembling different models of mobile phones.

The Smart Operator Bootcamp has two components. The first consists of theoretical training where Trainees are taught basic concepts in physics and electronics (which helps build a foundation for the technical training process). The process by which handsets are assembled explained in detail, after covering these basic principles. The second component includes a practical training component, where new recruits work in labs in groups, which simulate the assembly line in Nokia’s shop floor.

The next section describes one session of the technical training programme based on direct observation of the training in progress. Its aims to capture the pedagogy used in the training process and classroom dynamics, which were observed during the training session. I argue that an understanding of the methods used in the training process and the nature of interaction between the Trainer and the Trainee reveal important insights into the work culture of the Nokia SEZ.

### **b) Learning to Assemble Mobile Phones: An Example of Technical Skills Training in Progress**

It was a Monday morning at the end of July 2008. 43 new recruits (13 men and 30 women) sat in long rows in the training room, facing the Trainer who was making a PowerPoint presentation to the class. Each row was separated by a space in the middle that broke the row in half. It was the fourth day of technical training and Trainees were

listening attentively to the Trainer who was explaining the process of device assembly. The key topics covered included: how different models of Nokia's phones produced in the Sriperumbudur plant are assembled, the names of the different components of each model and the nature of the equipment that was used to assemble specific kinds of phones. The presentation was rich in visuals and graphics. The slides were in English and the Trainer explained each slide in Tamil. The training was interactive. Theoretical concepts were first explained through the presentation, following which individual Trainees were called upon to demonstrate a specific assembly process, using a sample mobile phone, in front of the class. The Trainer (who was slightly older than the Trainees and very enthusiastic) constantly encouraged the new recruits to ask questions while the session was in progress. Trainees rarely asked questions while the presentation was in progress. The few questions raised during the session came from the young men in the room. The women in the room were attentive, but silent, and took detailed notes.

This initial round of theoretical training and exploration of key concepts was followed by a "rapid fire quiz". The quiz transformed the serious atmosphere in the room to one that was livelier. The Trainer divided the class into two teams and the Trainer asked each team a question, in quick succession. In cases where the question was answered wrongly, the question was passed to the next team. Each team was given one point per correct answer. Soon a spirit of competitiveness took over the classroom – as answers were shouted out, quickly. Trainees raised their hands and shouted out "Ma'am!" – to signal to the Trainer that they had the answer to a question. The Trainer then pointed to a particular Trainee (usually someone who had not spoken up before) who was asked to respond to the question. The Trainees almost always stood up (a practice that is encouraged in schools in India) when answering the questions, in spite of the Trainer telling them to remain seated while answering questions. By the end of the quiz, answers

were shouted out even before the Trainer articulated the question (as Trainees began guessing what the question was); hands stopped being raised as members of each team were determined to win the quiz.

Gender differences were particularly striking during the technical training programme. Men and women sat in two separate groups on either side of the classroom and the interaction between the two groups was minimal. Female students formed a majority of the class and they seemed much more attentive than the group of men. Almost all young women appeared to be taking notes and rarely got distracted while the session was taking place. They often shouted out answers as a group during pop quiz. When they were asked to demonstrate/explain a procedure individually in front of the class however, they appeared to be shy and lacked confidence, even though they had the correct answers. In contrast, young men seemed to have a more casual approach towards the training programme. Not all male Trainees took notes and a few men seemed distracted and were reprimanded by the Trainer for day dreaming or talking while the training session was in progress. Like the female Trainees, the male Trainees also shouted out answers in groups during the question and answer session, however, unlike the women they were more confident when demonstrating/explaining a process in front of the class (even when their responses were incorrect). The Trainer seemed to understand some of these gender differences, as she was quite curt with the men in the classroom, while she encouraged the women in the classroom to speak up.

The training pedagogy, particularly the use of PowerPoint, visuals and graphics to explain a process, is particularly striking. An interview with the Trainer reveals that the combination of using slides in English (with graphics and images) and explaining them in Tamil, was a conscious strategy to familiarise Trainees with written English. The Trainer

explained that the instructions to assemble phones on the factory floor are in English, thus it was important that Trainees read and understand these instructions. Thus a combination of English slides with Tamil explanations ensured that Trainees understand key concepts, and yet can follow written instructions in English<sup>51</sup>.

The highly participatory nature of the training programme, where Trainees are encouraged to ask questions and explain processes in front of the class are used not only as teaching tools but also aims to teach workers, communications skills, which are an important component of Nokia's soft skills training programme. The fact that Trainees are asked to remain seated while answering questions or how they are assessed through the pop quiz (which not only tests their technical knowledge but also teaches them to be competitive and work in teams) helps familiarise new workers with the values of the new workplace.

During an interview, the Trainer mentioned she introduced herself by her first name (Savitha) and asked Trainees to address her as Savitha. However she said, that all Trainees insisted on referring to her as "Savitha Ma'am" (as they address their school teachers), and continue to stand up when talking to the Trainer in spite of her insistence that they remain seated. Savitha explained that there was a clear difference between the behavioural norms in this new workplace and the social and cultural norms that these Trainees have grown up with, and felt that the training programmes primarily sought to bridge this gap. Trainees I spoke to also concurred with this view and explained how they found it difficult to adapt to the norms of the new workplace. This tension between their own values and the values of the workplace is heightened, when they encounter

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Trainer, 30.08.2008.

work in the factory floor for the first time – a point that is examined in detail in Chapter 8, when describing how workers experience work in the manufacturing sector.

### **c) Learning Time Management and Team Work: Soft Skills Training in Progress**

The process of soft skills training aims to orient young workers with the values of the new workplace. These include: time management, punctuality, discipline, hard work, drive and determination, communication and interpersonal skills, and leadership. Through each of these topics workers are taught about Nokia's work culture, the nature of their interaction with managers and other staff. The soft skills training programme also has additional modules, which cover miscellaneous topics on "health and hygiene" and "personal grooming" (which were not observed during fieldwork).

This section describes a soft skill-training module on time management and team-work, based on non-participant observation of a soft skills training programme. A description of this module aims to highlight some of the important values and norms of the new workplace. Importantly, the way in which these values are imparted to Trainees – provide useful insights to the subtle processes by which Trainees' personalities and values are shaped through such soft skills training processes.

30 young women participated in the soft skills training programme observed in August 2008. "Time management" and "team work" were the two main topics that were covered during the session. PowerPoint presentations were an important teaching tool and the Trainees took the initiative to participate in discussions. The soft skills training session was held after the technical training sessions were complete. Thus, by this point Trainees in the classroom knew each other for about three weeks. They seemed enthusiastic and

eager to participate. The atmosphere in this classroom was very relaxed (compared to the more formal technical training programme). The Trainees shared a close rapport with the Trainer (a young woman, in her mid-twenties) and they joked with each other during the session.

Group discussions and interactive games were important components of this training programme. For example, during the session on time management, the class was divided into two groups to discuss the ways in which time is wasted and how time can be managed effectively. One representative in each group made presentations in front of the class. The presentations were rich and detailed and provided insights into the lives of the Trainees. A key point that emerged out of these presentations is that many Trainees were enrolled in part-time courses or were pursuing undergraduate degrees (through distance learning programmes). They explained how in a single day, they managed to do household chores, travel long distances by bus and work in Nokia and also make time to study for their higher degrees.

The participatory nature of the soft skills training session is best captured through a game on teamwork. Trainees were divided into two equal groups and each group was assigned a group leader. A thin row of newspapers were spread on the floor of the classroom and the group leader's task was to take every member of the team across the room, by walking over the newspaper as quickly as possible, without tearing it. Trainees worked together to carefully fold the paper and stick as close together as possible as they worked to perform the task as carefully as possible. The Trainees seemed to really enjoy the game – they laughed, squealed and cheered the winning team. For twenty minutes the training room transformed into a recreation space – a stark contrast to the silent, organised and efficient factory floor, outside the training room.

Competition is an important value that came up in the technical training module (discussed earlier) and was also reinforced in the soft skills training module described above. In both cases, it was not individual competition that is highlighted but competition as a team, which was particularly emphasised. Trainers believed that competition is an important motivating factor, which enables Trainees to give off their best at the workplace. This value continues to be emphasised on the factory floor, where each assembly line is equipped with a large white board with its production targets and achievements listed on it. Workers in the assembly line needed to work together (as they did in the game described above) to meet collectively production targets.

#### **IV. An Analysis of the Training Process**

The “Smart Operator Bootcamp” is one of the main mechanisms through which a new workforce is created for this new industrial workplace. Nokia’s recruitment and training process selects a specific kind of worker who is most likely to “fit in” to Nokia’s work culture. A typical Trainee in Nokia, is young (between the 18-25 years of age), female, intelligent, willing to learn and ambitious. This kind of worker is not only the most likely to “absorb” the skills and values taught during the training programme, but also they are also least likely to challenge authority (because of their age, gender and inexperience). Trainees who join Nokia, explained to me that they were there not only to work, but to learn new skills, as they felt that working in Nokia, would set them up for a long-term career in the electronics manufacturing industry.

The training process also ensures that Nokia’s Trainees are sensitised to the norms and values of the workplace. Importantly, while it teaches the importance of efficiency and competition and team-work it creates a certain images of Nokia, as a single unified family.

The training of workers through highly interactive and participatory techniques, which emphasises horizontal ties – is an important characteristic of the Post Fordist network enterprise. The idea that workers and the management have to work together in a mutually beneficial partnership is a key message that emerges out of the soft skills training programme. This idea is also emphasised repeatedly when workers interact with managers. This resonates with the parallel that Chandhoke (2003) draws between the idea of governance in the pluralised, network state and Post-Fordist management strategies, which highlight horizontal ties, partnerships and teamwork. This strategy is important as it discourages the formation of labour unions, which were absent in the Nokia's SEZ in 2008). Training young inexperienced workers in the values of “discipline”, the “ability to follow instructions”, “commitment”, “hard work” etc. play an important role in averting the possibility of a labour strike; or the formation of a labour union, which will be detrimental not only to the functioning of Nokia's plant, but also in attracting other private companies to invest in Tamil Nadu.

Informal interactions and interviews with the female Trainees reveal another side to this story. All the young women I spoke to were working for the first time. They came from predominantly agricultural families and had high expectations from the new “company jobs” that they had acquired. They hoped to gain new skills (through the training process), acquire work experience and save money. Many young women I spoke to, were from poor families and gave their salaries to their parents. They spoke of this with great pride and they also dreamed building a home, buying gold jewellery or saving money for their weddings. To them, Nokia represented an opportunity to realise these dreams. Trainees, I interacted with often described the training process as a continuation

of their formal education. One Trainee said that it was like “going to a college<sup>52</sup>”. They believed that the prestige of working as Nokia employees, combined with the training and work experience at the SEZ, would help them find better paying, permanent jobs in the future.

## **V. Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced how a new workforce is trained to work in the Nokia SEZ, and in doing so has highlighted some of important skills that are valued in the new workplace. The description of the technical and soft skills training processes in this chapter was used to illustrate the importance skill development to the new workplace and explains how skill training takes place within the private sector. Some of the core ideas on technical and soft skills training are revisited in Chapter 7, which describes the training processes for the SEAM programme. This chapter also emphasises that the new workplace is an aspirational site, where young people hope to realise their dreams.

Together, Chapter 3 and 4 have provided a snapshot how Tamil Nadu’s industrial policy has brought the network state and network enterprise closer together, in the process of establishing new workplaces. Chapter 3 has explained how skill-training rose to prominence, as a driving objective of Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy and how young people in the region, who dreamed of new jobs in the private sector sought to acquire new skills (by participating in HIHs training programmes). Chapter 4 has identified the kinds of skills are valued in firms like Nokia, through an examination of Nokia’s Smart Operator Bootcamp. The material presented in Chapter 3 and 4, provides the

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<sup>52</sup> Informal interactions with Trainees 17.08.08

background for the following chapter, which examines how skill development rose to become an important policy priority at the national level, at around the same time. Importantly, it explores how the Indian state emerged as a key actor in driving skill-training programmes in India.

## CHAPTER 5

### SKILLING INDIA

#### I. Introduction: “We Cannot Let This Be A Constraint<sup>53</sup>”

The Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh in his Independence Day address to the nation on 15, August 2006, drew attention to the need to provide skills training to India’s youth. He said,

"We will need to ensure far greater availability of educational opportunities at the higher education levels so that we have not just a literate youth but a skilled youth, with skills which can fetch them gainful employment. As our economy booms and as our industry grows, I hear a pressing complaint about an imminent shortage of skilled employees. As a country endowed with huge human resources, we cannot let this be a constraint."<sup>54</sup>

The speech – which presaged a range of major government skills initiatives, all of them launched within a few years of Dr Singh’s address – reflects, in no uncertain terms, the seriousness within which the Indian state viewed skills training, and its linkage to India’s enormous youth demographic. India’s skills project – which aims, ambitiously, to reach 500 million Indians by 2022 – is projected as one of India’s defining developmental programmes (see Planning Commission 2008). It is also, I argue, an important example of a new trend, which characterises contemporary India’s development trajectory: the coming together of the network state and the network enterprise in achieving

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<sup>53</sup> Prime Minister’s (Dr Manmohan Singh’s) Independence Day address to the nation. New Delhi, 15.08.06

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

developmental goals. This partnership will, I argue, define the manner in which India overcomes this vast challenge.

How does the networked Indian state understand and perceive the skills challenge? How does it translate this understanding into a programme of action? How does it mobilise capacity – including, crucially, the support of non-state actors – for this programme of action, in its ‘networked’ avatar? How are partnerships to implement this programme formed? This chapter seeks to answer the above questions, by examining how this partnership between network state and network enterprise takes place, against the backdrop of India’s skills project.

It starts, in section 2, by exploring how key Indian state actors frame and construct the skills challenge, as a target for state action. It moves on, in section 3, to explore how this understanding shapes the state’s response to this challenge; the second section examines an MoRD programme, which I believe exemplifies the emerging trend of partnership between state and enterprise to address developmental challenges – and, simultaneously, also exemplifies the Indian state’s preoccupation with empowering rural youth. In section 4, I examine – through qualitative research – the manner in which the state (in its emerging network avatar) reaches out to non-state actors, to build collaborative capacity and establish consensus behind its programmes; I use the case study of a conference on employment generation to illustrate the dynamics of this complex process.

This leads to section 5, where I introduce the network enterprise: illustrating the manner in which it courts the network state and partners with it; importantly, I also interrogate the premises and motivations that drive the network enterprise to seek and shape these partnerships. This sets the stage for the next chapter, which explores, in detail, how this

partnership between network state and network enterprise actually works in the field: by examining how rural below-poverty-line youth are mobilised to participate in such skills training programmes, through the specific case of project SEAM.

## **II. Constructing “Skilling”: The Indian State’s View of the Skill-Training Challenge**

Since the launch of the XIFYP skill development has been a focus of policy debates in India. While policy documents repeatedly highlight the huge skill gaps in the country and the need to meet the target of skilling 500 million Indians by 2022, the concept of what it means to be ‘skilled’ has not been defined or explored (Mehrotra et al, 2013). This chapter draws from interviews and interactions with policy makers to explain how ‘skills’ is defined and understood by policymakers. I argue that India’s current skill development policy is based on a multidimensional understanding of the concept of “skills” within the Indian state. The manner in which the Indian state views the skills challenge provides a framework within which skill-training programmes like the SGSY-SP initiative can be understood.

### **a) ‘Skill’ as a Multidimensional Concept**

An analysis of the social science literature on the workplace emphasises the point that as the workplace evolved and became increasingly characterised by flexible employment patterns – the notion of ‘skills’ broadened to include not just technical skills but soft skills – making it a multidimensional concept (see Unni and Rani 2008).

That the Indian state shares this view of skills as a multidimensional concept first struck me during a 2010 interview with the Member Secretary of the Planning Commission, and

former Union Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Employment. The Secretary's comments were an important indicator of the Indian state's thinking. As Member Secretary to the Planning Commission, she was ranking civil servant in a critically important 'horizontal' institution within the Government of India, responsible for setting the tone across ministries and departments, in Central government policymaking. As Secretary (and again, ranking civil servant) to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, she had represented the domain department, with primary responsibility of India's skills agenda. Thus it is apt to begin by highlighting her view of 'skill' and its significance to employment, labour and growth in India.

At the very beginning of the interview, the Secretary made a clear distinction between "education" and "skills training": She said:

Education is a long-term process, which usually takes years and is valuable in itself [intrinsically valuable], and thus may or may not lead to access to employment. However, skill-training is typically undertaken over a short period of time and is usually a means to an end – the end being a job<sup>55</sup>.

Indeed, 'skill development' as articulated in the Commission's Eleventh Five Year Plan (XI FYP), takes in to account this shift in the meaning of "skills" – where it is viewed as an instrument to enable youth to acquire jobs. Unlike vocational training initiatives of the past which focuses primary on technical training, skill development is a broader concept which not only imparts new technical skills, such as operating a sewing machine or using a welding torch – it is also about transforming perceptions and attitudes to work, so that

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<sup>55</sup> Interview, Member Secretary, Planning Commission of India, 22.12.10

young workers “fit in” to the work culture of India’s new workplaces (Planning Commission, 2008). This idea was also emphasized in the interview with the Secretary.

Other bureaucrats and policy makers also echoed this view during interviews: that the term ‘skills’ not just refers to technical competences but includes “soft skills”. The Member Secretary’s view, for example, was also expanded on during another early interview I conducted with the Director General of Employment and Training (DGET) – a civil servant who had worked in the Ministry of Labour and Employment from 2007 (during the early years of conceptualizing skill development programmes). The DGET explained:

“One of the main challenges rural youth face is the fact that they are unable to adjust to the workplace. Even if they are technically trained, they may not know how to dress for an interview, the importance of being disciplined and the value of punctuality...- many of them are unable to obtain jobs in factories because of this gap. These soft skills are even more vital in service sector jobs and in areas like sales and marketing. This is why today we are emphasizing soft skills training, which is now an important part of our vocational training modules.<sup>56</sup>”

Indeed this view of ‘skills’ as being more than technical competence goes beyond the Indian state’s administrators – extending to include its political leadership. At a 29 November 2011 Conference on ‘Generating Employment’, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Mr Kamal Nath explained some of the skill-training efforts that he had initiated in his own constituency of Chindwara, Madhya Pradesh. He gave an example of how had tried to place young people who had just completed a short

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<sup>56</sup> Interview, DGET, 11.07.11.

computer course as entry level technicians, in the IT firm, Wipro. He explained that out of the 100 applications that were received, only two candidates were successful in obtaining jobs in Wipro – primarily because they were not exposed to working in a software company, and they lacked the “soft skills” needed to work as an entry-level technicians in Wipro<sup>57</sup>. The policy focus of the civil servants on multidimensionality of skills was therefore lent colour by the political imperatives of politicians.

### **b) Employability and Youth: The Inclusive Growth Agenda**

If instrumentality and the ‘hard/soft’ focus were two dimensions of the Indian state’s understanding of skills, a third – critically – was an emphasis on youth – particularly rural youth – as a target constituency. In this view, skill development is no less than an effort to empower Indian youth, and, in doing so, harness India’s demographic dividend. This focus on youth and the demographic dividend recurred across my interactions with Indian state actors. It emerges formally in the Planning Commission’s thinking, as a suggestion in its XI FYP’s skill development chapter (Planning Commission, 2008). The Member Secretary articulated this clearly during an interview<sup>58</sup>. She said:

“One of India’s biggest resources is our large population of youth. We are a young country. In order to make the most of this asset we need to provide skill-training to them, to ensure that they are able to acquire jobs and benefit from economic growth. There is a high demand for young semi-skilled and skilled workers – across sectors – whether it is plumbing, carpentry or welding; factory work - in large garment, leather or hardware manufacturing units; or more skilled jobs in the IT or BPO sectors.

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<sup>57</sup> Speech by Kamal Nath, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit, 29.11.2011.

<sup>58</sup> Interview, Member Secretary, Planning Commission, 22.12.10

Unfortunately, our youth, especially rural youth lack the skills to take up these jobs – and they remain unemployed and excluded from the growth process.”<sup>59</sup>

The role of a youth focus in defining skills (and consequently the skill development policy) has, two core premises, according to the Member Secretary. The first premise: is the idea that India’s youth are a resource, to be harnessed through skill-training. The XI FYP (see Planning Commission, 2008; 2011), notes that India’s population is the youngest in the world, with a significant demographic bulge occurring in the 15-39 age group – meaning that while the population in the rest of world will start ageing over the next two decades, India’s population will still remain young, within the working age group (Planning Commission, 2008; see also, Jha, 2008 cited in Unni and Rani, 2008). The second premise: is that training youth (and equipping them with marketable skills to acquire jobs) will also help achieve other objectives: overcoming the high rates of rural unemployment; providing a steady supply of trained workers for India’s high growth sectors; and promoting inclusive growth.

The centrality of this ‘youth factor’ in skills finds consensus across other representatives of the Indian state. The Planning Commission’s view was also explained by the Union Labour Secretary, who cited figures from the XI FYP during the interview. He said:

“The Planning Commission estimates that 80% of India’s workforce in rural and urban areas does not possess identifiable, marketable skills and only 2% of the workforce has basic skills training. In contrast this figure is 96% in Korea, 75% in Germany, 80% in Japan. Also, 80% of new entrants to the workforce have no opportunity for skills training – making them especially vulnerable in a highly competitive job market. Thus, a

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<sup>59</sup> Interview, Member Secretary, Planning Commission, 22.12.10

key objective of the Eleventh Plan is to equip India's youth with marketable skills (which can easily translate into steady, secure employment) to harness this valuable resource and prevent India's demographic dividend from becoming a demographic time bomb<sup>60</sup>."

The Labour Secretary's point on the demographic dividend and its potential to become a "time bomb", also emphasises the urgency of skill-training as a means to not only make the most of an existing resource but to prevent a future disaster. The fact that this demographic advantage could only last until 2040 (Mehrotra et al, 2013) has been a key factor that has led the Indian government to launch a wide range of skill-training initiatives over the past five years. Like the earlier emphasis on 'hard/ soft' aspects of skills training, the importance of the 'youth factor' – with all its implications for growth and inclusiveness, inter alia – is also echoed in India's political leadership. Union Minister for Human Resources Development, Kapil Sibal, emphasises:

"In order for India to compete globally, we need to first tackle the challenge of employment generation. On the one hand, we have a large supply of young workers and on the other we have a growing economy...- which offers great potential for employment in a number of areas– be it – hospitality, entertainment, information technology, health care and or jobs in the service sectors."<sup>61</sup>

There was limited research on the Indian government's skill-training programmes and the skilling targets set in the XIFYP, as a result of which there was the skilling targets proposed in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan or the means proposed to achieve these targets were not interrogated. A paper released in March 2013 analyses recent NSSO data and for the first time, and questions the validity of the target of skilling 500 million young people by 2022.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview, Union Secretary Labour and Employment, 16.01.12.

<sup>61</sup> Speech by Kapil Sibal, Union Minister of Human Resources Development, 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit, 29.11.11.

The paper argues that the current skills policy underestimates the level of skilled workers in India and overestimates the number of people that need to be trained. However, at the time of fieldwork there was a broadly shared understanding within the Indian state – across departments, and at both political and administrative levels – of what skilling means for state policy. This consensus among key actors was, I argue, a driving factor behind the Indian state’s swift response to the skilling challenge since 2008, which was predicated on bringing diverse actors (state representatives, private corporations, industry association, NGOs and training institutions) together to meet the skilling targets laid down in the XIFYP.

The next sub-section explores these responses. Importantly, it selects one of these responses for detailed examination in this thesis – as a representative example of the network state in action.

### **III. From Thought to Practice: The Indian State’s Programme Response to Skilling**

As we have seen above, the XIFYP was a major vehicle for the government’s own understanding of skills, as a multidimensional, youth-focused concept. The Plan’s launch set in motion three parallel streams of skills-focused activity within the Indian state. One response was the creation of a range of institutions to promote, co-ordinate, fund, monitor and implement skill-training initiatives. These included the Prime Minister’s National Council on Skill Development, the Coordination Board and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). The second response was the launch in 2007 of the National Skill Development Policy (NSDP): which offered a broad framework to guide the overall state response to skill development. The third response was to launch, across

various ministries, a range of sectorally contextualised skill-training programmes, following the recommendations of an Inter-Ministerial Group, which was especially constituted to address the challenge of skill development (MoRD, 2007). In response to these recommendations, 17 different government departments initiated a number of initiatives focussed on skills training<sup>62</sup>. These efforts, varied in maturity from simple funding allocations towards skilling in departmental domain areas (in departments such as Information Technology), to more evolved programmes and sub programmes (such as the initiatives launched by the MoRD discussed later on in this chapter).

The purpose of this line of action was to rapidly mobilise the organisational resources and domain specificity of existing line ministries, institutionalising a focus on skills within the fabric of the Indian state's sprawling social development programmes; indeed, many of these skill sub-programmes often sought explicit synergy with existing departmental schemes. More than the overarching frameworks of the NSDP, these programmes (at least the more mature among them) reflected a bias towards execution: inhabiting existing (and scaled-up) schemes, often already underway, and expanding their focus to include (in a domain-relevant fashion) skills.

The Plan also recommended the creation of the National Skill Development Mission (NSDM). The Rs. 22,800 crore (approximately £3 billion) Mission was conceived as an institutional umbrella for these various lines of action. While the NSDM was only launched in 2008, by which time some of the programmes mentioned above were already in effect; however, it continued support in varying degrees and forms to these various components of the Indian state's skill development response.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Secretary Labour and Employment, 16.01.12.

It is therefore clear that the Indian state's response to the skill development challenge was diverse and widespread; however, this thesis focuses on a single, but critically important example of the third line of action: a rural skill development programme under the MoRD's flagship Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)<sup>63</sup> rural livelihoods scheme<sup>64</sup>. The SGSY's skills training programme is of critical importance to this study for three reasons: first is its role in feeding into the 'new workplace'; second, is the manner in which it is designed, which reflects the networked manifestation of the Indian state; and third, is its explicitly rural focus, emerging as it does from the department most responsible for rural development. Together, these characteristics demonstrably address the three driving focus areas of this thesis.

The following section briefly introduces the SGSY scheme and situates it within the context of rural development and anti-poverty programmes in India. This discussion provides the basis for examining the significance of skill-training to the Indian state's anti-poverty agenda in particular and to the broader development agenda in general.

#### **a) Situating SGSY SP in India's Rural Development Policy Discourse**

The SGSY scheme is primarily a rural poverty alleviation programme, which aims to reduce poverty by providing the rural poor better access to livelihoods, primarily through self-employment. This scheme was formally launched in 1999 and has its roots in rural development initiatives initiated in the 1970s, which for the first time focused explicitly on reducing rural poverty. Ghosh (2000) argues that these programmes were characterised by a three-pronged strategy to reduce poverty. This included: the

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<sup>63</sup> Literally translated as the 'Golden Jubilee Village Self Employment Scheme'

<sup>64</sup> The SGSY programme has been renamed as the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) since July 2011. I use the term SGSY when I am referring to the period prior to 2011 (as it was called during fieldwork) and NRLM is used to refer to the scheme in its new avatar since July 2011.

promotion of rural self-employment opportunities, creation of wage employment opportunities and increasing the productivity of small and marginal farmers. Five key rural development programmes were developed in the 1970s to achieve the above objectives. This included, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), which was the MoRD's flagship scheme providing self-employment opportunities to the rural poor, by providing subsidies and access to credit to families living below the poverty line. Another scheme known as the Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) was also launched by the MoRD to focus on developing self-employment opportunities for rural, BPL youth – primarily through vocational training (with a strong focus on entrepreneurship). An impact evaluation of this programme between 1980-1996 found that it had a limited impact. During this 16-year period only 53% of young people trained were employed. In addition, a quarter of these youth had found wage employment rather than self-employment<sup>65</sup>. This led to a shift in policy focus from self-employment to wage employment in future programmes such as the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) which were launched in 1980 and 1983, to specifically provide wage employment opportunities to the rural poor<sup>66</sup>. The SGSY programme had its origins in the IRDP and other development programmes discussed above and was created as one the MoRD's main rural development schemes since 1999. This scheme sought to reduce rural poverty by opening up new economic opportunities and livelihoods for the rural poor, primarily by providing them access to credit to facilitate self-employment. The MoRD website describes this scheme as,

“A process oriented scheme involving processes like organization of the rural poor (BPL) into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through social mobilization, capacity building &

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<sup>65</sup> Source: <http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/inventory/view/130/> (13.12.13)

<sup>66</sup>Source: <http://drd.nic.in/drd/aboutus.asp> (accessed 13.12.13)

training, provision of revolving fund, making available credit and subsidy, technology, infrastructure & marketing<sup>67</sup>.”

This “process-oriented” conception of the programme - on paper, made this scheme distinct from previous rural development programmes characterized by a top down approach, though in practice its implementation followed a top down, targeted approach (Sud 2003). This targeted approach was also observed in the ways in which SGSY’s skill-training objectives were outlined and measured – a point that is discussed in greater depth over the next section.

SGSY aims to bring every assisted BPL family above the poverty line within three years of participating in the scheme by providing them income generation opportunity, through SHG-bank linkages and government subsidies. The organisation of the rural poor into self-help groups was a defining characteristic of this initiative, as participation in the groups was viewed as an opportunity for the poor to take loans to set up small businesses or initiate income-generating activities within the household. The programme’s beneficiaries were identified through a BPL census and the programme guidelines mandate that at least 50% of the beneficiaries are from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories. It was also mandated that at least 40% comprise of women and at least 3% belonged to disabled groups (MoRD 2008).

Apart from income generation, the programme also emphasised capacity building and training of the rural poor through a range of skill-training programmes. The programme featured in this thesis is one such skill-training focussed initiative launched under the umbrella of the overall SGSY scheme.

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<sup>67</sup> Source: <http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/our-schemes-glance/SalientFeaturesSGSY.pdf> (13.12.13)

## **b) Skills for Rural Youth: Targeting the SGSY-SP Initiative**

In 2007, following the launch of the XI FYP, the MoRD introduced a new component under SGSY scheme, known as “Special Projects for Skill Development of Rural Youths under Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)” (popularly known as SGSY-SP) to fund placement linked skills training programmes for rural below poverty line youth, through PPPs<sup>68</sup>. Under this new scheme, the MoRD proposes to fund 75% of the skill-training costs (and currently provides Rs 14,100 per candidate trained); while the remaining costs are borne by the implementation partner. In its design, SGSY-SP reflects every major aspect of the consensus on skills and ‘skilling’ that emerged within the state. It retains the state’s emphasis on inclusive growth and youth: placing livelihood for youth squarely at the centre of its focus:

“To equip the unemployed rural youths from the BPL households with marketable skills, which would enable them to either secure placement in the industry or pursue sustainable self-employment opportunities through micro enterprise” (MoRD 2007).

Indeed, rural youth must not only be trained, but also – quite explicitly, and assuredly – be employed on completion of the training programme. The programme will not work (including in the eyes of the much-feared government auditors) if it cannot achieve,

“Assured placement for at least 75 % of the Trainees. This is a demand driven programme and one of the main pre-requisite[s] of the program is the commitment of the PIA<sup>69</sup>/industry to employ the trained persons.” (MoRD 2007).

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<sup>68</sup> Material on the SGSP-SP programme presented here is based on material collected through interviews MoRD officials and an analysis of grey literature.

<sup>69</sup> Abbreviation for Project Implementation Agency

Accompanying this resolute focus on employability and youth is the multidimensionality of skills, and the ‘hard/soft’ distinction. SGSY-SP programme design alludes to “marketable” skills above; it goes further:

“Soft Skills are also to be imparted to beneficiaries to face transition challenges of moving from an agrarian backdrop [sic] to the industry environment” (MoRD, 2007)

SGSY-SP therefore sought, in its objectives, goals that had emerged from the state’s internal consensus on skills. Importantly, however – and crucially, for this study – it is distinguished from other efforts by the manner in which it sought to achieve these objectives. It is important to note that this programme became more prominent after the formation of the R. Radhakrishnan Committee (RRC), which was specifically created to examine some of the credit-related issues in the implementation of the SGSY programme (Dasgupta 2009). The Committee made two key recommendations. First, it proposed a shift in focus of the overall SGSY scheme from self-employment to wage employment. In doing so, the RRC recommended a focus on skill-training programmes which focus on “learning by doing” bringing in diverse actors as a means to ensure that BPL youth are gainfully employed. Second, it recommended the setting up of National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), which could absorb SGSY in its current form and expand its focus to include both self-employment and wage employment initiatives.

The SGSY programme was incorporated into the broader NRLM in July 2011. The NRLM programme is also known by the term ‘Aajeevika’. The Aajeevika Skills programme scaled up some of the pilot initiatives launched under the SGSY-SP project (such as Project SEAM presented in this thesis). PPPs in the area of skill development

were specifically encouraged and scaled up since the launch of the NRLM<sup>70</sup>. The growth of the SGSY and its incorporation into the Aajeevika project highlights the driving themes of the thesis: the outreach of the network state to non-state actors – particularly, the network enterprise – to achieve development objectives. This distinct manifestation makes SGSY-SP's programme design a crucial focus for this study. I explore this in further detail below.

### **c) Glimpsing the Network State: SGSY-SP Programme Design**

I argue that the SGSY-SP is, in its design, representative of the actions of a network state. As I have noted earlier, the network state is characterised by two main features: first, a pluralised nature, where the state draws on collaboration with diverse non-state actors to achieve its objectives; and second, a role that has shifted from a centralised, monolithic actor to a facilitator, mobilising non-state actors to partner with it to achieve development goals. Both of these characteristics emerge in every major functional component of the SGSY-SP programme.

The very content of the SGSY-SP skills training programme is to be drawn from beyond government. This is an explicit, preferred option: as the programme document notes,

“The PIA has to ensure innovative content development with inputs from the industry to ensure employability as per current industry practices. Course/curriculum should preferably be designed jointly with prospective employers/industry.” (MoRD, 2007:2)

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<sup>70</sup> These points are highlighted in a presentation on the Aajeevika Skills Initiative by Mr Anil Subramaniam, Deputy Secretary, MoRD at <http://hprural.nic.in/ppp1.pdf> (last accessed on 13 December 2013)

Having drawn content from beyond the state, the key functions of the programme: training, and placement, are also to be conducted in partnership with non-state actors. The SGSY-SP programme document highlights the need to collaborate with experienced, reputed training institutions to conduct the training to ensure that the training delivered meets industry standards; addressing the state's programme objective with private sector resources and expertise. Partnership is again emphasised as a preferred programme mechanism; in line with the network state's facilitative role, it is actively solicited (as evident in the excerpt below):

“Partnership with training agencies and employers which have aptitude and capability to conduct training and placement of rural BPL youth after certification acceptable to the industry is solicited.” (MoRD 2007:2)

As further evidence of the state's role as a 'facilitator' SGSY-SP allocates the roles of programme monitoring and evaluation to third party agencies to monitor training quality – mandating that a traditional government role be conducted through partnerships. This is clarified in the following statement:

“Independent certification and assessment by third party agencies acceptable to the industry or employers is mandatory to ensure high quality standards and employment.” (MoRD, 2007:2)

SGSY-SP consciously, therefore, brings in a range of different actors at every stage of its outreach to rural youth, as design elements: a clear demonstration of network state's functioning. The network state's role in the Indian skills project, however, goes beyond mere programme design – extending to programme resource mobilisation and

programme implementation. The next two sections outline these aspects; giving a sense of how multiple actors and stakeholders come together in realising the goal of skilling India. If the network state can be glimpsed in SGSY-SP's programme design, it emerges more fully in the execution of this design.

#### **IV. Networking with Partners: Mobilising Non-State Actors**

How does the network state in India identify potential partners, and co-opt them into executing these programmes? The 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit on Generating Employment, held in New Delhi's Shangri-La Hotel on 29 November 2011, exemplified one of the ways in which these diverse stakeholders are brought together, and networked into partnerships. The next few sub-sections examine this idea in greater depth.

##### **a) Negotiating Consensus: The 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit on Generating Employment**

The Skoch Summit was anchored by a major non-governmental think-tank (known as the SKOCH Foundation<sup>71</sup>) and sponsored by Indian government departments with significant policy focus on employment generation and skills (including, notably, SGSY-SP's parent: the MoRD). Other sponsors included large private corporations, including IL&FS Clusters (who, as we shall see later in this chapter, was one of the implementing agencies for the SGSY-SP programme). While the conference did not restrict its focus to SGSY-SP – encompassing the Indian state's wider skills development project – the presence of both SGSY-SP's prime nodal agencies (from government as well as private

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<sup>71</sup> The SKOCH Foundation is named after its Founder Director, Sameer Kochhar (Skoch); and provides consultancy services to a number of government departments and economic and social development policy.

sector) situated this conference at the heart of the state/enterprise partnership that this thesis focuses on.

The pluralised nature of the networked Indian state was first evident in the membership of the conference. Conference delegates represented three major institutional stakeholders, all of them (as we shall see below) intimately involved with the Indian state's skill development project. The state itself was represented by its political leaders (such as Kapil Sibal, the Union Minister for Human Resources Development and Telecom; P Chidambaram, the Home Minister and Kamal Nath, the Minister for Commerce and Industry), policy experts (such as Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of India's Planning Commission; Kaushik Basu, Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister), and administrators (senior civil servants from the Ministries of Labour and Employment, Human Resource Development, Rural Development, Telecom and Commerce and Industry). The Indian private sector, for its part, was represented by its most influential lobby groups and industry associations (such as the Confederation of Indian Industry [CII] and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry [FICCI]), as well as individual corporations (notably, IL&FS Clusters, prime implementing agency for SGSY-SP). The third included organisations that bridged government and the private sector: the National Skill Development Corporation being a notable example. Finally, a range of different individuals and organizations represented India's active civil society groups.

This plurality was more sharply emphasised by how discussion panels were constituted. Each panel dealt with a different aspect of the state's effort to generate employment (each aspect repeatedly emphasising India's skilling challenge). Revealingly, every panel was typically made up of two union ministers, one senior bureaucrat (equivalent to the

rank of a permanent secretary in the UK); one or representatives from an industry association or a CEO of an Indian corporation and one head of a public or private Indian bank (which typically provides soft loans to support livelihoods and skills training programmes). Observing these diverse groups of actors, discuss the challenge of employment generation in India on a common platform, brought out how multiple actors with different interests are increasingly attempting to work together as “partners” of the networked state - on a wide range of issues pertaining to generating employment – from providing skills training, to establishing and supporting placement linkages.

As the conference went on, it became clear that this Summit was not just a forum for discussing the challenge of employment generation and outlining solutions to overcome this challenge. Rather, it emerged that this was an opportunity for range of actors from the public, private and non-profit sectors (all of whom work in the area of employment and generation) to network, highlight their own work in this field and discuss possibilities for collaboration. It was particularly interesting to note that at the Summit, employment generation was not only projected as a *challenge* that must be overcome; but crucially as an *opportunity*, which the private and non-profit sectors need to tap. This idea was clearly articulated by Mr Kapil Sibal, the Minister for Human Resource Development, who emphasized this point in his introductory address:

“In order for India to compete globally, we need to first tackle the challenge of employment generation. On the one hand, we have a large supply of young workers and on the other we have a growing economy...- which offers great potential for employment in a number of areas– be it – hospitality, entertainment, information technology, health care and or jobs in the service sectors. This presents a huge opportunity for private players and industrial experts from each of these sectors – to

develop a curriculum to train young people and also facilitate placement linkages so that young trained workers can readily obtain jobs.<sup>72</sup>”

Others speakers at the Summit also highlighted how skills training in particular, was central to meeting the challenge of employment generation and invited the private sector to collaborate with state agencies and play an active role in this field. The Union Secretary in the Ministry of Human Resources Development too emphasised this point. She said,

“New jobs are being created in sectors such as information technology and the services sectors. These jobs are open not just to highly skilled workers but to semi-skilled workers, with just a few years of education and basic training. This is where the private sector can step in...they can help design training modules and deliver skills training across sectors – so that youth are made employable.<sup>73</sup>”

On the whole, the summit yet again emphasized three key factors that are central to the driving argument of this thesis. First, it epitomised the pluralized nature of the Indian state and also identified the large number of actors that are currently working together with the state on livelihoods programmes. Second, it highlighted the policy focus on ‘youth’ and expanding the skills of the population in the 18-25 age group to take advantage of India’s demographic dividend. Lastly, it repeated emphasized centrality of “skill development” as a tool to meeting the challenge of generating employment.

What was particularly striking was that each of the actors on the panels represented a different interest group and thus performed different roles during the Summit. The

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<sup>72</sup> Speech by Kapil Sibal, Union Minister of Human Resources Development, 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit, 29 November 2011

<sup>73</sup> Speech by Union Secretary, Ministry of Human Resources Development, 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit, 29 November 2011

representatives of the state acted as “facilitators” – often calling upon the private sector to “take initiative” and “collaborate” with government programmes to create more jobs. Politicians, such as Kapil Sibal (the Minister for Human Resources Development) promised private corporations and non-profits the best possible support from the government. In response, representatives of the private sector went on to highlight their own credentials and their ability to provide high quality training to young people to make them more employable. This was reinforced by the fact that private firms (participating in the conference) who had developed skill-training verticals and NGOs which focused on this area set up small booths at the far end of the conference hall – where they actively met with government officials, distributed pamphlets on their capabilities, exchanged business cards and fixed meetings. The conference venue became an important arena – a neutral space (outside government and corporate houses) where these diverse actors could meet and potentially collaborate.

It was striking that panel discussions did not question any of the premises behind launching large-scale employment generation or skill-training programmes, under government schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), or the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. The target of skilling 500 million young people repeatedly mentioned by conference speakers, as they discussed various means through which they could collaborate and work towards achieving this goal. Notably conference discussions were focused on building mutual consensus while exploring opportunities for further collaboration. Speakers at the conference were often seen in small groups in the hotel lobby, exchanging business cards, setting up meetings and “networking”. Importantly, there was a broad agreement among the among the diverse group of participants on two main points that came up repeatedly during the discussions: first, that skills training is most effective way to generate employment and reap India’s

demographic dividend and that such programmes are most effectively implemented through “public-private partnerships”. The Union Minister for Commerce, expressed this in his speech in clear terms – he said,

“It is clear that the government cannot train...PPP’s are the only way forward which can ensure that high quality training is provided to young people so that they are employable<sup>74</sup>.”

The Union Secretary in the Department of Telecom, also supported this statement in his speech and explained,

“Government programmes can successfully achieve scale, but not quality. PPP’s will ensure that we achieve both these objectives by reaching out to large numbers of young people and providing them the best training, enabling them to access well-paid jobs...<sup>75</sup>”.

In response, the CEO of IL&FS Clusters (who now heads one of the first public-private partnerships in the area of skill development) highlighted some of IL&FS’s achievements in training rural below poverty line youth, supporting the idea that the private sector can indeed deliver quality training and that PPP’s are indeed the most effective ways in which “skilling” can occur. He said:

“We at IL&FS, through our partnership with the MoRD have trained and placed over 150,000 rural, BPL youth, who are now working in the garment manufacturing, leather, engineering and service sectors. In fact, only a few months ago we have opened up two

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<sup>74</sup> Speech by Kamal Nath, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit, 29.11.11

<sup>75</sup> Speech by R Chandrasekhar, Union Secretary for Telecommunications, 27<sup>th</sup> SKOCH Summit, 29.11.11

training centres in two naxal affected districts in Jharkhand<sup>76</sup>. I am happy to inform you that the first batch of Trainees have completed training and each and every one of them have been placed in top garment industries across the country<sup>77</sup> [followed by applause from the audience]

The quotations above emphasize how the different actors on the panel, highlighted their own strengths, as the conference became a site for marketing their strengths and exploring opportunities for future projects. In the case of the private sector the incentive was to obtain access to government funds and ensure a steady revenue stream. Partnering with the government was a great opportunity for the private sector to showcase their work, and build goodwill among key government officials. The latter was crucial for getting further business from the government. For the government, these partnerships with the private sector, NGOs or training institutions ensure that targets are met quickly and efficiently. Indeed, PPPs were projected as a “win-win solution” which draws on the strengths of both the public and private sectors, and there was broad agreement that this is the best possible means to undertake skilling programmes across the country.

As an observer watching the conference proceedings, I got the sense that the consensus displayed by the different conference participants was deliberate. There was no debate on the different ways in which this challenge could be addressed. Rather, there was consensus on PPPs as the only viable solution to generate employment. Thus the conference became a forum for networking to explore possibilities for future partnerships and collaboration. I argue that this kind of consensus building plays a

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<sup>76</sup> Government of India has also been supporting the establishment of skill-training centres in Naxal affected districts in India – as a way to reach out to rural youth, provide them jobs and prevent them from joining the Maoists (who have been taking up arms against the state). This point was highlighted in a speech by the Home Minister, P. Chidambaram at the SKOCH Summit on 29.11.11.

<sup>77</sup> Speech by CEO, IL&FS Clusters 27<sup>th</sup> Summit 29.11.11

critical role in establishing the foundation for partnerships between the network state and the network enterprise – a point I will explore in further detail, when I present a case study of project SEAM.

## **V. Skill Development and the Network Enterprise**

Having established its objectives (and devised programmes to achieve these); having mobilised and co-opted non-state actors - network enterprises – willing to implement these programmes: how does the network state collaborate with the network enterprise to actually execute on them? What incentives drive network enterprises to do so? How do these partnerships work in practice?

In this section, I answer the above questions, drawing on ethnographic evidence based on 11 months of work as a member of the Project Implementation Team of the SEAM programme – a large placement-linked skills training programme, targeting rural below-poverty-line youth, and one of the very first pilot projects under the SGSY-SP programme. The section begins by introducing Project SEAM and examining how the partnership between the network state and network enterprise characterises the conception and operationalisation of this initiative.

### **a) SEAM: An Introduction**

The SEAM programme, initiated in 2007, was the first large skill development programme to be implemented through a public-private partnership between the MoRD (who funded this project) and IL&FS Clusters (a large private Indian corporation –

introduced in more detail below – who acted as Project Implementation Agency). SEAM aims to provide, free, placement-linked skills training to rural, below-poverty-line (BPL) youth, between the ages of 18-25, to work in garment clusters across India. Training is provided in a range of different skills relating to garment manufacturing – from sewing machine operations to garment checking and finishing.

Importantly, SEAM was launched as a pilot programme to test some of the underlying premises behind the new national skill development policy (discussed earlier on in this chapter) and was the first such initiative to be launched in India. It had two unique features, at the time of its launch. First, it was structured – innovatively at the time – as a PPP between the MoRD and IL&FS Clusters; funded by MoRD’s SGSY flagship scheme (described earlier). Second: unlike other skill-training initiatives, which focus merely on imparting skills training, SEAM is placement-linked. SEAM project Trainees are guaranteed placement in garment factories on successfully completing the 30-day training programme. SEAM therefore aimed simultaneously creating training modules and building a number of placement linkages with industry, so that Trainees could also obtain jobs in industries. Together, these two characteristics made SEAM unique.

Crucially, the SEAM skill development project, with its unique characteristics, was not conceptualised by the Indian state. Instead – in a compelling example of the network enterprise in action –it was conceptualised by IL&FS Clusters, and adopted by the Indian state. The next section describes the network enterprise, and explains how this collaboration took place.

## **b) Introducing the Network Enterprise: IL&FS Clusters**

The story of how IL&FS Clusters got into the skill development field, provides yet another example of how partnerships are created in the era of the network Indian state. In order to explore this in further detail, it is important to first introduce IL&FS Clusters.

IL&FS Clusters is a subsidiary of one of India's largest infrastructure finance companies - the Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) Corporation Limited, and which is well known for financing large-scale infrastructure projects – including financing and building highways, toll roads and bridges across the country. The company is headquartered in Mumbai, India's financial capital, and has regional offices across India. The parent company IL&FS works primarily on financing infrastructure projects (primarily through collaborations with state governments); while the projects are implemented on the ground through a host of sector-specific subsidiary firms (such as IL&FS Clusters, IL&FS Education and IL&FS Transport), which are a part of the parent IL&FS Corporation.

IL&FS provides an excellent case study to explore how the state and private corporations interact with each other; particularly how the boundaries between these two sectors are often quite tenuous as these sectors increasing overlap in India, following economic liberalization. In this context, it is important to highlight two key factors: First, IL&FS is an excellent example of the Castellan network enterprise. At this point, it will be useful to revisit Castells' definition of the network enterprise, and situate IL&FS Clusters within this framework. According to Castells, a network enterprise is,

“Organisational form built around business projects, resulting from co-operation of different components of different firms networking amongst themselves for a given project and reconfiguring their networks for the implementation of each project.”  
(Castells, 1996:218)

It is important to note that IL&FS Corporation, as an organisation emerged as a result of “co-operation” between a number of different organisations. Crucially, it was promoted by the Central Bank of India. Major public sector organizations like the Life Insurance Corporation and The State Bank of India are among its major shareholders. Thus, it is a private corporation, which was initially established with public sector support. Second, IL&FS primarily works in the area of infrastructure development, through PPPs. It has entered into hundreds of joint ventures with various State governments in India to undertake infrastructure projects – from building toll roads, industrial parks and SEZs to eco-tourism resorts. In recent years, IL&FS has also diversified its portfolio and now works with state governments, across a range of different sectors including Water and Sanitation, Transportation, Education, Investment, Urban Infrastructure, Cluster Development, Tourism and Environment Management. Thus, its partnerships with the state are constantly “reconfigured” with each of its new projects and initiatives.

As one of India’s the oldest infrastructure development companies, IL&FS (both the parent company and its numerous subsidiary organisations) has built strong relationships with top policy makers – both in the central and state government. These relationships are often of a symbiotic nature, where IL&FS often recruits top bureaucrats (both serving and retired bureaucrats) as Board Directors or CEOs of its companies to liaise with government departments and strengthen networks with the central and state government bureaucracy. This in turn helps IL&FS secure new contracts with a host of

government departments. The next section explores the point made above in greater detail.

### **c) The Network Enterprise in Action: Courting the Network State**

The network enterprise's response to the skilling challenge was predicated on a surprising weakness: IL&FS Clusters had no experience in the skill development field, prior to the introduction of the SGSY-SP scheme. In fact, prior to 2007, IL&FS Clusters specialized exclusively in developing industrial clusters for small and medium scale enterprises across India. Its employees were largely engineers who were infrastructure and cluster development specialists. The company has facilitated the creation of clusters for a number of different industries (such as apparels, textile, leather, agro-business, pharmaceuticals, etc.) by creating purpose-built industrial parks. Its focus was primarily on the development of infrastructure within these "parks" to transform them into enclaves that generate high growth.

IL&FS Clusters officially began its skill development practice in 2007, capitalising on the SGSY-SP opportunity. On learning about this new initiative, the CEO of IL&FS Clusters met with the Union Secretary, Rural Development to discuss SGSY-SP and explore potential funding opportunities it generated for companies such as his own. The CEO was asked to prepare a proposal for the MoRd, outlining a project to train and place rural youth, thus executing on SGSY-SP's remit.

A proposal was accordingly prepared. Called SEAM (an acronym for Skills for Employment in Apparel Manufacturing), the IL&FS proposal envisaged the training of 30,000 young people living below the poverty line, to work in the garment industry over

a three-year period (IL&FS Clusters, 2007). Under this programme, rural, BPL youth would be “mobilized” or recruited from villages and then trained by IL&FS Clusters’ skills training centres (now branded as IL&FS Skills Schools), over a 30 day period. SEAM Trainees would receive a stipend to support a part of their living costs, during the training period. Boarding, lodging and food would be provided to Trainees, (free of cost or at a subsidized rate depending on the location of the industry where the candidates will be placed), during this 30 day period.

Trainees would be trained in a wide range of technical skills (relating to sewing machine operations, garment checking, finishing, etc.); they would also be taught soft skills, sensitising young people to the factory environment, work ethics, time management and punctuality, discipline, personal grooming and hygiene and stress management, and communications skills<sup>78</sup>. The SEAM training programme would be multimedia based (and content is currently prepared in nine different languages). Its training modules would be standardized, in order to ensure uniformity of content across training centres: each module delivered through a series of slides and short films to demonstrate various processes. The Trainer’s primary role in the classroom would be to act as a facilitator, and to monitor the progress of candidates and help them with specific sections of these modules: a role that avoided diluting the carefully standardised impact of SEAM training material.

The proposal also sought to follow through on this training with a crucial component: placement linkages with firms in garment clusters across India. Trainees would be placed at garment factories at the minimum wage; for the next three months, they would go

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<sup>78</sup> The training process will be described in a subsequent chapter, where I will examine the technical and soft skills training process in detail.

through “on the job training” on the factory floor, assisting SMOs (SMOs), garment checkers and finishers. This would ready them for work, finally, as SMOs on the factory floor.

I have noted above that the proposal sought to align with the MoRD’s objectives for the scheme through its design. IL&FS Clusters were also careful to position SEAM – overtly, explicitly – to align with MoRD scheme objectives, and the state’s understanding of skills as a component of inclusive growth and youth empowerment (described in Section 2). Indeed, the IL&FS Clusters skill development brochure describes this programme as one which,

“Endeavours to catalyse, facilitate and manage large-scale, demand-driven skills training and placement programs, with the twin objectives of enabling poverty alleviation in rural areas and meeting requirement of various industries for skilled workers...” (IL&FS Clusters, 2008).

The above language is repeated throughout IL&FS Clusters’ presentations and corporate brochures and indicates how IL&FS sees itself as a facilitator and catalyst to aid the state in achieving its development goals. Notably, IL&FS Clusters’ goals consciously resonate with the objectives of India’s XI FYP document, where skill development is situated as a tool to reduce poverty and promote inclusive growth.

We therefore see how IL&FS Clusters – as a network enterprise – presented itself, in its courtship of the network state. The finished product that was submitted to the MoRD was more than merely a well-aligned proposal: it included the premise of a well-aligned enterprise, one that was willing to court the MoRD, positioning itself to meet MoRD

goals. However, before examining whether this courtship was successful, a final question needs to be answered: what motivated this courtship? Why did IL&FS Clusters – a company that started out in infrastructure and infrastructure services – seek to enter the new, uncharted waters of skill development?

Thus far, the network enterprise appeared to have been guided by the network state: identifying network state objectives, mirroring its requirements, and aligning – demonstrably so – with them. However, the SEAM case study goes beyond showcasing success: it offers the opportunity to question and explore some of the fundamental premises on which the network enterprise operates. My research shows that the network enterprise does not act solely to achieve state objectives: it has its own agendas, which drive and shape its partnership with the network state in crucial, fundamental ways. Understanding these motivations is critical to understanding the nature of the partnership between these two actors.

The next sub-section explores IL&FS' deeper motivations, in collaborating with the Indian state. Having understood the network state's understanding of the skilling challenge, we now examine the network enterprise's understanding of the skilling opportunity before, finally, proceeding to examine whether these different motivations were realised.

#### **d) The Network Enterprise and Skill Development: Aligning with the Government?**

IL&FS' design of the SEAM programme was – from its very earliest stages, driven largely by internal considerations. For all its purported alignment government objectives,

the IL&FS skill development project was very much a child of its own convenience. I argue that four key considerations drove IL&FS' development of the SEAM programme.

First: the choice of the garment industry for the SEAM pilot programme emerged from IL&FS' own background and experience and played to its strengths. SEAM directly addressed a need that emerged from IL&FS Clusters' already-established cluster development business, allowing the company to capitalise on one opportunity; simultaneously, it found synergy within this business, allowing IL&FS to capitalise on a second opportunity. IL&FS Clusters had earlier established a number of textile and apparel parks: its core business, one that was conducted in partnership with local State governments. In the course of conducting this business, IL&FS found that industrial clusters faced a severe shortage of well-trained, skilled workers. The costs of training workers were too high for industries to bear alone; additionally, attrition rates were also high in certain key sectors (such as garment, leather and hardware manufacturing), making it difficult to retain workers. IL&FS Clusters saw a tremendous opportunity in the SGSY-SP, to obtain funding for skills training and set up a new skill vertical: one that could simultaneously (while accessing MoRD funds) resolve existing challenges within its established businesses. Simultaneously, IL&FS' work with garment clusters (again, as part of its established businesses) positioned the company to leverage strong partnerships with some of the major garment-manufacturing firms in India. Its experience working with these clusters meant that IL&FS was superbly placed to form partnerships with a number of these companies, which, in turn, assisted IL&FS in building a strong base of competence in the garment sector. This allowed IL&FS to access these companies' expertise in developing the curriculum, providing training infrastructure (such as venue for the training centre, industrial sewing machines and raw material) and also in creating placement linkages for newly trained workers. It also led IL&FS to use Tamil Nadu (a

major garment industry centre) as the perfect launch pad for the SEAM programme: Tamil Nadu in turn, gave IL&FS an excellent, familiar outlet for aspiring village youth who became SEAM's first Trainees.

Second: usefully for IL&FS, the garment sector also lent itself to employment generation and demand for skilled workers. The sector employed a large number of semi-skilled workers: 33 million young people<sup>79</sup> in 2008, with an estimated 12 million more by 2012 (NSDC, 2009). Most of its workforce comprises of SMOs: semi-skilled workers with no more than a few years of schooling – easily trainable human resources. This, according to IL&FS managers<sup>80</sup>, was a key “success” factor for SEAM's pilot phase.

Third, among IL&FS's internal incentives for developing SEAM, the project gave IL&FS the opportunity to showboat to the government – IL&FS Corporation's most important customer. SEAM was, to a certain extent, a useful marketing tool: a socially focused demonstrator project visibly aligned with the Indian state's “inclusive growth agenda” that allowed IL&FS to build goodwill and strengthen relationships with government officials. A senior executive in IL&FS explained this point to me during an informal discussion<sup>81</sup>, where he explained how crucial good relationships with the government were to IL&FS' success. Not only was it necessary, he explained, to obtain more business from the state (one that increasingly tended to contract development projects out to private corporations): it was also a crucial risk management strategy, in the aftermath of a global financial crisis that had severely affected the garment industry. While the garment companies struggled out of the recession – a phenomenon that impacted the company's traditional cluster development business – shifting focus to skill development gave

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<sup>79</sup> i.e. between the ages of 18-35

<sup>80</sup> Interviews with Vice President, IL&FS Clusters' skill development vertical and Head Skills Team, 18.03.10

<sup>81</sup> Informal discussion with PV (Associate Head, Project SEAM), 22.06.10.

IL&FS Clusters a potential safety net. Lastly, in a final convenience, the conceptualisation of SEAM played to the fact that the CEO of IL&FS Clusters, RCM Reddy is a former civil servant (an ex-IAS officer who recently resigned from the civil service to work in IL&FS). Notably, Reddy worked in the Union Textile Ministry (amongst many other prestigious portfolios in the government of India) and had a good understanding of this sector. The fact that Reddy remains connected with the bureaucracy gives and has direct access to senior government officials (former colleagues, in key ministries) was an added advantage. These personal networks play a crucial role in ensuring that IL&FS Clusters initiatives get government attention and support for these projects continue.

#### **e) From Courtship to Partnership: Winning and Implementing the SEAM Contract**

The courtship worked. The SEAM proposal was submitted under the SGSY-SP scheme in 2007, to request funding. MoRD approval followed shortly. By July 2007, funds for the SEAM programme were sanctioned and the programme was initiated, as a pilot project under the SGSY-SP scheme for a three-year period. A month later, in August 2007, the pilot was formally launched in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Indeed, so successful was IL&FS Clusters in framing SEAM within the state's dominant development discourse of inclusive growth and poverty reduction – so well did the network enterprise demonstrate alignment with network state objectives – that the SEAM proposal attracted considerable attention from government officials, who went

on to endorse this programme as a “success”<sup>82</sup> and called for replicating this model for other industries across India. In fact, the SEAM pilot project proposal, submitted to MoRD in 2007 became the standard template for future projects under MoRD’s SGSY-SP and is currently featured on its website with the MoRD’s emblem – a gesture which permanently sets the tone for this particular partnership between network state and network enterprise.

SEAM became one of the first skill development programmes to be implemented in the PPP mode. In this partnership, IL&FS Clusters acts as the implementation agency; while the MoRD, funds and monitors the functioning of the programme (through a series of routine surprise checks and audits). A network of other institutions is also involved monitoring the quality of training and to conduct routine audits of the pilot. For example, the quality of training is assessed by a South African firm (known as the Methods Workshop), which conducts routine surprise visits to training centres to assess the quality of the training programmes by testing the performance of Trainers in the classroom, checking Trainee records and rating each training centre. These assessments are submitted independently to the MoRD, every quarter. In addition, the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), which is a part of the MoRD also conducts surprise visits to training centres to check attendance registers, training records and to ensure placement linkages are really in place. These efforts were initiated to firstly ensure that the funds provided for this project were effectively utilised and secondly, to ensure that the training programme is of a high quality and meets industrial standards.

Lastly, a key feature of this programme is that it not only guarantees placement of candidates after training, but also makes mandates post-placement tracking of a

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<sup>82</sup> Speech by Secretary, MoRD, 24.11.09 at a meeting of IL&FS Clusters and MoRD officials in New Delhi

candidate's performance, over a one year period (commencing from the first day of employment within a garment factory). This tracking process enables the Ministry to monitor the progress of each of the candidates placed and also assesses their career path. At the same time, this process also helps IL&FS Clusters stay in touch with Trainees during this one-year period, and obtain their support in recruiting new Trainees into the programme.

The pilot phase of the SEAM programme was perceived as a tremendous success, by both employees of IL&FS Clusters, who were implementing it and the MoRD officials, who provided funding. The target of reaching 30,000 young people was met in less than two years (over a year ahead of schedule) and so far over 100,000 young people have been trained and placed under this scheme. The "success" of this model also led the MoRD to expand this programme to other states in India and also increase its financial support for the programme. The amount that MoRD contributes to each candidate's skills training has also increased over the past few years: from Rs. 5000 per candidate in 2007/2008, it went up to Rs. 12,100 in 2010; and is currently Rs 14,100<sup>83</sup>. In addition, IL&FS Clusters has also expanded its skill development portfolio, which now covers 14 states in India and also includes new training modules for the leather, engineering and services sectors.

SEAM therefore appears to be a resounding success - a textbook case that the network enterprise can help achieve the network state's objectives. But is this really the case? The next three chapters of the thesis examine the implementation of the SEAM programme on the ground, in Chennai and Kancheepuram districts in the state of Tamil Nadu, to answer the above question.

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<sup>83</sup> Draft of the SEAM Project Proposal (approved by MoRD in 2011)

## VI. Conclusion

This chapter has made two key points that are central the driving argument of this thesis.

First, it has introduced the complexities of the challenge of “skilling India, at the national level. In this process, it has highlighted how skill-training has emerged as a key policy tool to empower and train youth reduce poverty, generate employment and promote inclusive growth. Drawing from interviews and interactions with some of the key actors who have initiated this new focus skill development, I have brought out the different meanings and dimensions of skills (as perceived by state officials) and explored how these ideas have been translated into policy initiatives.

Second, drawing from empirical evidence collected through fieldwork, I have argued that the implementation of skill-training programmes is characterised by the coming together of two major forces: the network state and the network enterprise. I explored the relationship between these key actors; how they courted each other, negotiated terms of cooperation and formed partnerships to deliver skill-training to India’s rural poor. The example of the SKOCH summit illustrates how representatives of the network state and the network enterprise, share a common platform, highlight their individual strengths and seek out opportunities for future partnerships. The case of SEAM pushes this idea a step further, by specifically detailing how the network state and the network enterprise partner for mutual gain; to meet the challenge of skilling India’s youth. In this process, I have explained how the SEAM programme was conceived and also outlined some of its key features.

These ideas help provide the background for the next three chapters of this thesis – which will highlight specific aspects of implementation of the SEAM programme, such as mobilisation, training and employment. Each of these three subsequent chapters, will return to the ideas mentioned here and will build on them; to demonstrate the complex ways in which the partnership between the network state and the network enterprise is realised on the ground. Through a detailed description of how skill-training programmes are implemented in practice, forthcoming chapter will also explain how the personalities and aspirations of India’s youth are shaped through such initiatives.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CREATING THE “CAPACITY TO ASPIRE” MOBILISING YOUTH FOR THE SEAM PROGRAMME**

#### **I. Introduction: “The Largest Number of Aspirers on this Planet”<sup>84</sup>**

Skill-training in India has become a valuable commodity, which is increasingly being marketed to rural youth by the state and the private sector. Rural BPL youth, have become a major target population for launching initiatives like SEAM, which are now implemented through PPPs. Programmes like SEAM provide an opportunity for the private sector to take on a new role - as an implementation arm of the state, delivering development to India’s rural poor.

SEAM also offers the private sector a chance to reach out to “bottom of the pyramid” (BOP) consumers who are perceived as a rapidly growing, largely untapped market in India. This idea forms the core of C.K Prahalad’s (2004) bestselling book, which argues for a new form of “inclusive capitalism” and has had considerable influence over public policy in India. Initiatives like SEAM which are couched within the Government of India’s “inclusive growth” agenda are a good example of how state-led attempts at inclusive capitalism, focused on BOP consumers (in this case, rural BPL youth). Scholars like Schwittay (2011) are deeply critical of Prahalad’s model and argue that the process by which private corporations are targeting BOP consumers is a form of “marketisation of

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<sup>84</sup> Speech by Kamal Nath, Minister for Commerce and Industry, 27<sup>th</sup> Skoch Summit, New Delhi, 29.11.2011

poverty” as the poor are expected to “enterprise themselves out of poverty” (Schwittay 2011: S71) by consuming specific kinds of goods or services provided by corporations. Programmes such as SEAM call on the rural poor’s ability to take risk and actively consume skill-training programmes, which they can use to secure jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Prahalad’s ideas have deeply influenced policy makers in India. Documents such as the XI FYP and the XII FYP feature a whole range of financial incentives for the private sector, to tap BOP consumers, in pursuit of targets such as “inclusive growth” and “poverty reduction”. These incentives have also led private Indian corporations such as IL&FS to spend a great deal of time, effort and financial resources to shift focus to understanding the aspirations of India’s rural population, in order to make the most of this new business opportunity, access state funds and design innovative products to suit the needs of the poor.

Understanding aspirations form a central component of any advertising or marketing strategy. Aspirations provide an insight into what people desire, how they would like to see themselves and what drives them to make choices. I argue that understanding and managing the aspirations of rural youth is therefore crucial for companies like IL&FS to be able to successfully “market” skills training programmes and make them attractive to rural BPL youth, in order to achieve high enrolment targets.

The idea that ‘aspiration’ is a powerful force, which has the potential to help the poor escape poverty, lies at the heart of the anthropologist Appadurai’s (2004) work. As explained in Chapter Two of this thesis, Appadurai makes a compelling case for the

strengthening the poor's "capacity to aspire" and views it as a potentially transformative force which can help the poor find the means to escape poverty. He writes,

"...in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty." (Appadurai, 2004:59)

For Appadurai, the very circumstances of poverty make the poor lack this capacity, which he argues traps them in poverty. IL&FS staff and government officials often described skill development programmes, in similar terms. They argued that exposing rural youth to skill-training initiatives could encourage the rural poor to aspire high, and equip them with the skills needed to realise their dreams and find a path out of poverty.<sup>85</sup>

This chapter argues that skill-training programmes like SEAM, seek to enhance the "capacity to aspire" of SEAM Trainees. The chapter highlights the strategies used by the network state and the network enterprise as they work together through a PPP to shape and mould youth aspirations, in order to maximise enrolment into the programme. I examine these ideas by focusing on the mobilisation phase of the SEAM programme, where IL&FS markets SEAM to rural BPL youth and recruits young Trainees to participate in this programme. The empirical evidence presented in this chapter was collected while I was a member of the SEAM project team and draws primarily on material gathered through participant observation in IL&FS meetings, job fairs and group discussions with young people at the job fair site. The chapter thus presents an insider's account of the motivations of the different actors involved in SEAM and how

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<sup>85</sup> Chairman NSDC described skill-training initiatives, as a project to "teach India's youth to dream", during an interview.

this influenced SEAM's marketing strategy. I explore these ideas over the next four sections of this chapter.

Section 2, introduces the concept of mobilisation, explores the challenge of mobilising rural BPL youth to enrol in SEAM and outlines how IL&FS' mobilisation strategy was formulated as a response to these challenges. Section 3, examines the centrality of 'aspirations' to the mobilisation process. Here, I identify the key actors involved in mobilising youth and give examples of various tools and strategies used in job fairs - as an example of how aspirations are shaped through the mobilisation process. Section 4, highlights how rural, below poverty line youth perceive and respond to the mobilisation process. This section gives a few examples of young people's aspirations and emphasises how rural youth feel burdened, not only by their own aspirations, but also by the expectations that the representatives of the state, private corporations, family and society impose on them. Thus this section also highlights the darker side of aspiration – where it can be perceived as a burden and a source of disillusionment – an idea that is also a theme of the following chapter. Section 5, concludes the chapter by summarising the main points made in this chapter.

## **II. Shaping Aspirations through Mobilisation**

### **a) Understanding the Mobilisation Challenge**

Mobilisation is the term used for the process of identifying and selecting rural BPL youth to enrol in the SEAM programme. This is considered the most challenging phase of the project, where young IL&FS employees (known as 'mobilisers') travel to remote villages and meet with a range of people – from district and block level officials, village heads,

self-help group members and youth groups, to spread awareness and increase enrolment into the SEAM programme. According to the guidelines of the SGSY-SP initiative of the MoRD, IL&FS is paid a fixed fee (Rs 14,500 in 2012) for every candidate trained under project SEAM. Thus, mobilisers are given fixed monthly recruitment targets in order to ensure a steady revenue stream for the company. This makes mobilisation one of the most important steps in implementing the programme.

When SEAM was first initiated in 2007, 'mobilisation' was perceived as a task, which did not require much training or expertise. It was assumed that a free, placement-linked skill-training programme would be in high demand among rural youth. Thus IL&FS Clusters lacked a single coherent mobilisation strategy in the initial stages of programme implementation. The senior management of the newly constituted skills team at IL&FS Clusters also underestimated the complexity of the mobilisation process. This led the management to focus most of its attention on designing training modules and building industrial placement linkages; and they largely ignored the mobilisation process - a fundamental aspect of the programme.

SEAM employees, with different skills, approaches, strategies and ideas travelled to villages across Tamil Nadu (where the SEAM pilot project was first initiated), reaching out to young people and attempting to maximise enrolment into SEAM during its first two years. Mobilisation was just one of the many tasks that these employees were entrusted with. For example, in 2007, the SEAM Regional Project Co-ordinator in Chennai, handled the task of mobilisation in addition to a host of other responsibilities, which included - managing training centres, liaising with human resource officials from garment factories, maintaining training records, building relationships with key government officials in districts, organizing job fairs, testing potential Trainees to assess

their suitability into the SEAM programme and enrolling young Trainees into the SEAM programme. In Kancheepuram district, which hosts a number of garment clusters, SEAM Project Coordinators focussed primarily on liaising with government officials and human resource managers from potential industrial partners, and were unable to simultaneously focus on mobilising new Trainees for the programme. As a result, ‘Master Trainers’, (who were experts in tailoring and garment manufacturing) who were primarily responsible for conducting the SEAM training programme at the training centres were allocated the additional task of mobilisation. When these diverse IL&FS’ employees (master Trainers, managers and project coordinators) first went to the field to recruit young people for the SEAM programme, they faced three major challenges, which laid the foundation for IL&FS’ official mobilisation strategy launched in 2010.

First, the hybrid identity of the programme (as a public-private partnership) hindered local government officials (whose support was fundamental to the programme’s success) from endorsing the programmes. In rural Tamil Nadu, local officials were not convinced by the fact that the MoRD in New Delhi supported the programme – they wanted to know if the key district-level functionaries, such as the District Collector, the Block Development Officer or a local politician had endorsed this scheme. As the SEAM programme was sponsored by the Central Government, senior staff members of IL&FS Clusters had not been in touch with district officials about the programme and began mobilising youth without the support of the district administration. As a result district rural development officials were initially indifferent to the relatively “junior” IL&FS staff (mobilisers) who reached out to them. When mobilisers sought to contact district officials, their phone calls were repeatedly ignored, meetings were cancelled and in some cases local politicians threatened mobilisers when they distributed pamphlets in a village or held job fairs. Thus mobilisers realised that the support of the district administration

was crucial in spreading word about the programme and mobilising youth. Thus IL&FS' senior managers based in the Head Office in Delhi followed protocol, wrote to the District Collector, arranged personal meetings with him/her in advance, introduced the programme and sought the support of the district administration in mobilising candidates for the SEAM programme.

Second, there are a number of competing employment and livelihood programmes targeted at rural below poverty line youth, in Tamil Nadu, most of which have a strong skill development component. Programmes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) are self-selecting programmes and guarantee 100 days of work at the minimum wage to any individual (irrespective of BPL status). This programme attracts a large number of BPL youth, who are able to physically carry out manual work outdoors – making fewer young people available to enrol in programmes like SEAM. The Tamil Nadu government has also launched another (World Bank funded) livelihoods creation and poverty reduction scheme known as the *Vazhndnu Kattuvom* project, which also seeks to provide skills training to rural BPL youth. A third scheme known as the *Mahalir Thittam*, is also being implemented by the Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women in collaboration with NGOs and community based organizations. This programme targets young women, living below the poverty line and works towards creating livelihoods through the formation of self-help groups, and provides entrepreneurship development and skills training programmes to young women. All three programmes are operational in Kancheepuram district, giving rural BPL youth the region a wide range of different skills training/ employment generation programmes to choose from, making it particularly challenging for the IL&FS Clusters' team to find eligible candidates to enrol in this initiative.

Lastly, specific preferences of the garment industry (pertaining to the age and gender of potential workers) also made the task of mobilisation challenging. While SGSY-SP guidelines state that training under SEAM can be offered to rural, BPL youth between the ages of 18-35. In practice, the garment industry only recruits young people between 18 and 25 years of age. HR managers in Chennai and Kancheepuram's garment manufacturing units explain that young workers are "easy to train", "quick learners" and "hardworking"; as a result older workers (who may fulfil the MoRD's criteria) are often excluded from the scheme, as they may not be eligible for placements. Similarly, the garment industry in Tamil Nadu also prefers to recruit young women over men, as women are perceived as being more "disciplined", "polite" and "hardworking" (by human resource managers in garment units)<sup>86</sup>. This was in stark contrast with other states in India where SEAM was operational – like Rajasthan, for example, where men and women were employed in this sector. These specific preferences of the garment industry in Tamil Nadu further reduced the number of potential candidates who could be mobilised to join SEAM, making the task of reaching SEAM's ambitious mobilisation targets even more challenging.

The need to overcome the three initial challenges described above was instrumental in shifting the attention of IL&FS' senior management to strengthening mobilisation. The next section explains how IL&FS addressed these challenges by creating a formal mobilisation strategy.

## **b) Streamlining the Mobilisation Process: Branding SEAM to "Increase Numbers"**

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<sup>86</sup> Interviews with HR managers at Nokia (July-August 2008) and garment manufacturing firms (3 April, 2010; June, 2011)

<sup>87</sup> Term used by the CEO of IL&FS Clusters to describe the new company effort to strengthen mobilisation and increase enrolments into the SEAM programme.

The first of these efforts to “streamline<sup>87</sup>” the mobilisation process took place in 2009, over a series of meetings in the IL&FS Clusters head office in New Delhi. These meetings brought together IL&FS staff working on mobilisation from across the country, for the very first time. The way in which IL&FS’ mobilisation strategy was created during these meetings and how these strategies were implemented on the ground, provide useful insights into how IL&FS conceptualises mobilisation. Crucially, an analysis of the Minutes of these meetings, reveal how aspirations (understanding what young people’s aspirations are and developing strategies to shape them) emerged as a fundamental component of the mobilisation strategy.

The first of these mobilisation meetings was held at IL&FS Clusters’ head office in November 2009 - in New Delhi and was chaired by the CEO of the company, RCM Reddy, who took a great deal of personal interest in strengthening mobilisation. Reddy had promised to train 30,000 young men and women across India in a two year period, however, he was keen to set a record and prove to the MoRD, IL&FS’ effectiveness in this area, thus he was aiming to achieve this target in just one year instead of two. This strategy was also important from the perspective of IL&FS, as the only way in which skill-training could be profitable is by expanding the scale of the programme. Thus, mobilisation was central to providing the company a steady revenue stream.

An important theme that came up repeatedly during these initial meetings on mobilisation was the idea that skill-training is a *product*, which had to be marketed to rural youth. IL&FS Clusters had to “sell” skill-training to youth, and make it an attractive

commodity, in order to meet the high targets that it had committed to the MoRD<sup>88</sup>. Some of the questions posed by senior managers at a preliminary brainstorming session on mobilisation strategy reflect this perception.

“How can we convince more and more youth to join this programme”? “What strategies can we use to reach out to rural youth”? “How can we increase numbers”? “What do rural youth want most and how can we make this programme appeal to what they want?” “What are some of the outreach and mobilisation tools that our mobilisers can use to create a brand image for our programme<sup>89</sup>?”

The term “numbers” was used frequently in meetings and the goal of mobilisation was frequently described as “increasing numbers”. The fact that almost all the participants in these meetings were engineers with management degrees led to the adoption of ideas from advertising and marketing which were used to find answers to the above questions. One of the very first meetings on mobilisation strategy illustrated this point clearly, when IL&FS Managers concluded that what SEAM needed was a “brand image”, which would make it a recognizable product in rural areas and set it apart from other newly launched livelihood/skill-training programmes. This branding exercise was targeted at three audiences: - senior officials of the MoRD (who would be periodically briefed on the progress made on the SEAM programme at Project Approval Committee (PAC) meetings and appraisals, so that they could continue funding it), local government officials (at the district, block and village levels whose support was essential to organize job fairs and disseminate information on the programme) and unemployed rural youth

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<sup>88</sup> For example, in 2010 IL&FS wanted to train over 30,000 young people across India to work in the garment industry (IL&FS SEAM Project Review Meeting, May 2010, New Delhi)

<sup>89</sup> Notes from preliminary meeting on mobilisation strategy, 12, November 2009. The meeting began with these questions, though they were not posed in the same order.

(who are the target group of the SEAM project and provide the “numbers” which are fundamental to the programme’s success).

The timing of these meetings was also crucial. By November 2009, IL&FS Clusters had completed phase one of the SEAM programme and had trained 30,000 young people within a two-year period (a whole year ahead of schedule). Due to the “success” of this pilot programme, MoRD had sanctioned more funds to scale up the SEAM programme to other parts of the country, and IL&FS had committed that it would train additional 30,000 young people within the next year for the SEAM project alone. In addition, by 2009 IL&FS was also in the process of scaling up its skill development efforts. By that time, it had set up its skills training centres (now branded as *SkillsSchools*) in twelve states in India, and had also started providing skills training for the leather, engineering and service sectors under new projects within the SGSY-SP framework. This made it even more important to have a comprehensive mobilisation strategy in place that could be applied not just to SEAM, but also to newer skill-training programmes in other sectors. In the 2009-2010 period, IL&FS undertook three main initiatives to do precisely this.

*Branding* was IL&FS’ first priority. This was done by launching its website which highlighted the achievements and unique features of the programme. The website was the face of the SEAM programme. Importantly, the website featured a section with numbers of candidates enrolled, trained and placed in each state in India – these figures were updated every month. This made it possible for visitors to actually witness the exponential growth of the programme, in numerical terms. While developing its website, IL&FS also paid attention to designing logos for SEAM (and its other more recent skill development efforts) and they used similar templates to design its training manuals,

corporate presentations, brochures and certificates. All these initiatives were instrumental in making programmes like SEAM a recognisable brand, in rural areas.

Secondly, IL&FS Clusters was also keen to demonstrate the positive “transformative” impact of SEAM, on the lives of its Trainees. One of the first and most powerful ways in which the “transformative” aspect of the SEAM programme was emphasised was through a short film featuring the life of a young SEAM Trainee, called Sakambari - who comes from a from a scheduled tribe family, in Orissa. This ten-minute film on Sakambari, vividly captures the how the life of a young, orphaned girl from one of the poorest villages in Orissa, transforms for the better, after she attended the SEAM training programme. The film was originally made in Hindi (with English sub-titles) and begins by depicting Sakambari’s life prior to joining the programme.

The film begins with poignant images of Sakambari’s life prior to joining SEAM as a Trainee. She is filmed having a meal of gruel, crouched over a small wood fire in her mud hut in Orissa. It shows her walking long distances, barefoot, into a forest, to gather firewood for fuel. In the first part of the film, Sakambari is wearing rags with dishevelled hair and has a look of despair on her face. The film then goes on to capture her at job fair and features her enrolling into the SEAM programme. From the rural imagery of the village, the film shifts focus to the SEAM training centre – with white walls and white sewing machines in neat rows. Young, well-dressed Trainees with neatly combed hair, sit at the sewing machines in their blue SEAM uniforms. The film deliberately contrasts Sakambari’s life in her village, with her new one as a SEAM Trainee. Sakambari at the training centre is well groomed; wearing her crisp new uniform and she’s is smiling. She is then seen attending technical training sessions, soft skills and yoga classes, eating nutritious meals and getting health check-ups at the training centre. The film also depicts

her sense of personal achievement as she collects her certificate (amidst applause), after which she is seen boarding a train to Kerala to work in a garment factory. At the end of the film, Sakambari talks about the wonderful opportunity that she has received as a result of the SEAM training programme and talks of how her life has changed for the better. She specifically highlights how she has experienced financial independence for the first time and expressed her gratefulness for this opportunity. The film ends with a close-up of Sakambari's face – her wide smile, with an expression of hope and aspiration in her eyes, fills the screen.

The film on Sakambari, described above, reflects how many IL&FS staff view the programme and crucially, how they seek to project it to outsiders. It provides yet another example of how skill-training programmes are packaged and projected to outsiders, such as government officials, rural youth, and representatives of NGOs. This film on Sakambari is featured at various meetings – typically in the presence of MoRD officials or staff from other IL&FS companies – to “showcase” this programme. At times, the film is also shown to government officials at the district level, and is used as a tool to obtain their support for the SEAM project. While the film on Sakambari was initially made for an elite audience of government officials, auditors and IL&FS staff – the film was also routinely played at job fairs and mobilisation camps to reach out to rural youth. The popularity of the film has also led the CEO of the company to specifically encourage the IL&FS Skills team to make more such small films in local languages – not just to disseminate information on the progress of the SEAM programme, but as part of its mobilisation strategy to “motivate” other rural, BPL youth to participate in SEAM and transform their lives as Sakambari has.

A senior employee of IL&FS explained how he thought such films could “influence” young people to join SEAM. He said:

“A young person from a village watching this film will be influenced by Sakambari’s story. They will also start believing that they too can change their lives that the way Sakambari has...<sup>90</sup>”

Another IL&FS employee, who is a Textile Engineer by training and works as a Consultant to IL&FS said,

“If I go to villages and tell people about the benefits of SEAM, my words will not have any value as they will think I am simply marketing the programme...hearing Sakambari’s story in her own words will motivate them to join – as they can see for themselves how her life has transformed.<sup>91</sup>”

In villages, this film is played to introduce the SEAM programme and reach out to young people, through the story of someone like them. At the same time, this film is not only a marketing tool to reach out to rural, below poverty line youth, but it has become an important public relations tool to advertise the SEAM programme. Sakambari’s story was included in corporate brochures, company presentations and meetings. Sakambari slowly became a brand ambassador for the SEAM programme. This became very clear, when at a SEAM Project Review Meeting, a senior MoRD official asked the CEO specifically about Sakambari’s progress, even a year after the film was launched. Sakambari therefore became one of SEAM’s first celebrity “success stories”, her face thus came to represent

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with SY, 23.12.09

<sup>91</sup> Interview with KS, 18.04.10

the several thousand young people who participated in the SEAM and her story was projected as representative of how young people experience the SEAM programme.

The above description of the film, and its role as a marketing tool, provides a good example of how the SEAM programme is advertised – not just to rural youth, but also to government officials and other key stakeholders. This kind of programme promotion or marketing, targeted at state officials is particularly important, as it helps build goodwill and strengthen relationships with key state officials. These relationships are crucial in ensuring that the government continues to fund and support this programme. This was particularly evident in a Project Approval Committee (PAC) meeting that I attended with the CEO of IL&FS Clusters, in March 2010. IL&FS had submitted a proposal to the MoRD requesting additional funding for a new phase of the SEAM programme. The PAC meeting is chaired by the Secretary, MoRD and is attended by all the potential applicants for funding, who make a detailed presentation to the Secretary and other MoRD representatives summarising their proposal. IL&FS was allotted the last slot to make the presentation. After a three hour wait, the CEO and I were told that we need not make the presentation as IL&FS exemplary work in this area was well known and the funding was granted. This came as a surprise to me but the CEO seemed to have expected it. Notably, during the three hour long wait the CEO sat in the ante-chamber outside the Secretary's office having a cup of tea with the Secretary MoRD's Personal Assistant and other staff. As a former civil servant, Reddy was aware of the distance that separated the administrative staff from the IAS officer - however my discussion with him revealed that this interaction with the office staff in the MoRD was deliberate as it helped "build goodwill". On the way back to office Reddy explained that he had expected that the proposal will be cleared and was not surprised about the fact that funding was allocated without watching the presentation that we had prepared. Reddy explained that

“building personal relationships” was central to the success of initiatives like SEAM and the fact that IL&FS had invited the Secretary MoRD only a month earlier to IL&FS’ main office to an event where a detailed presentation of the SEAM programme was made and films (such as the one depicting Sakambari’s story) were shown, gave the Ministry officials an excellent impression of the SEAM initiative – one that was clearly strong enough that it led to the approval of a funding proposal without the need to make a presentation.

The success of the film in disseminating information about the programme led to the third major strategy initiative to ‘brand’ SEAM. This time, the focus was on building a corporate outreach and mobilisation strategy, which would facilitate mobilisation and also help spread the “brand” of the SEAM programme to rural areas, across India. This mobilisation strategy was not only integral to providing a common framework for mobilisation across IL&FS’ programmes, but was also an important “outreach tool” which would be displayed at MoRD events and meetings as another example of IL&FS’ commitment to training rural BPL youth.

### **c) Developing a Comprehensive Corporate Mobilisation Strategy: A View from Inside IL&FS Clusters**

IL&FS’s skills portfolio was expanding at a rapid rate and by the end of 2009 and this led to the creation of IL&FS’ corporate mobilisation strategy, which was developed around four key questions. These questions were answered over a series of brainstorming sessions with IL&FS’s project co-ordinators, master Trainers from a few of key SEAM training centres. As an Outreach Specialist, at IL&FS Clusters, I was tasked with documenting the minutes of the meeting and disseminating it to SEAM teams in other

states. This gave me an opportunity to observe these meetings closely. These minutes were also used as the basis to discuss the firm's future business strategy.

The key questions<sup>92</sup> discussed included:

- i) What are the different channels/methods of mobilisation that are being currently used? Can we think of new, innovative strategies to reach out to more young people in villages?
- ii) What are main steps in the mobilisation process? What documents need to be collected from new Trainees?
- iii) What kinds of tools would help the mobiliser be more effective on the field – development of a mobilisation toolkit?
- iv) How can mobilisers be trained to more effective on the field?

The answers to these questions were crucial, not only from the perspective of developing a mobilisation strategy for IL&FS, but because it brought together employees who worked on mobilisation – from across different states in India for the very first time. This helped mobilisers share their experiences on the field and share different approaches to reaching out to young people. Most importantly, it brought out the fact that in the absence of a company-wide mobilisation strategy, the mobilisation process was largely a result of *innovation and improvisation* by mobilisers in different regions.

For example, while job fairs were the most common method of mobilising rural youth across different Indian states; different mobilisers had developed their own methods to organise job fairs and reach out to block and village level officials and local politicians. In

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<sup>92</sup> Source: Minutes of Preliminary Meeting on Mobilisation, 29.11.09.

states like Rajasthan, which was well known for its “innovative” and “dynamic” Project Co-ordinator, the Mobiliser arrived in the village in a *Rozgar Rath* (literally translated as a livelihood vehicle). These are hired auto rickshaws or cars, which are covered with colourful posters and photographs of the SEAM programme. The vehicle is also fitted with a large microphone (the kind often used in political campaigns in India), allowing the mobiliser to ride around the village announcing the job fair and inviting young people to participate in the event. Often mobilisers also played loud film music in the *Rozgar Rath* to attract the attention of village youth.

Mobilisers in Tamil Nadu used an online mass text messaging service (from a website known as [www. timesms.com](http://www.timesms.com)) to send out messages to youth groups, NGOs and local government officials informing them about the location, date and time of job fairs in a region. In addition, they worked closely with women’s self-help groups who played an important role in spreading information about the SEAM programme, at the village level.

These initial meetings on mobilisation, provided mobilisers, a common platform to share their innovative strategies and document them. In this process, mobilisers came up with a number of suggestions on new ways to reach out to young people – this included recruiting local school teachers to mobilise young school dropouts in the village for the programme, speaking to school students, forging links with social work departments of local colleges to recruit students as mobilisation volunteers etc. The meeting also called for mobilisers to “be creative” and “take initiative” on the field. Thus mobilisers were asked to learn from initiatives in different states – as mobilisers in Tamil Nadu were asked to try and use the *Rozgar Rath* as they did in Rajasthan – while the mobilisers in Rajasthan were asked to make better use of mobile phone technologies to reach out to as many rural, BPL youth as possible. While on the one hand, these meetings played a

crucial role in motivating IL&FS' mobilisers and recognising their effort (and rewarding mobilisers who have been successful); it also led the transformed the mobilisation process into a mass marketing and advertising campaign to reach out to rural youth at the “bottom of the pyramid”<sup>93</sup>. While there was a call for innovation and creativity at the meeting, attempts were also made to “standardise” the mobilisation process by clearly laying down its main steps. This was justified on the grounds that the SEAM programme was being scaled up rapidly and it was important that in this process of rapid expansion, mobilisers continue to collect completed application forms and supporting documents – which will be subject to surprise checks and audits by the MoRD. As a result of these sessions, IL&FS prepared a detailed mobilisation manual outlining clearly the steps in the mobilisation process and the roles of the mobiliser which would help orient and train new mobilisers who join IL&FS Clusters' skills team.

These initial meetings emphasised the need to develop a *Mobilisation Toolkit* - a set of tools to support the mobiliser on the field. Until 2009, mobilisers used basic tools to disseminate information about the programme. They typically distributed pamphlets and leaflets, which were printed or photocopied locally with hardly any “professional” elements of design or branding. By 2009, the company wanted to standardise and these tools to advertise the programme, in a uniform manner across India. The development of the ‘mobilisation toolkit’ was another attempt to combine innovation and creativity with an established, standardised procedure. Some of the key tools developed included: photo albums, flip charts, posters and banners (for job fairs), leaflets and brochures on the programme. In addition, a uniform was designed for the mobiliser himself (which comprised of a red T-Shirt and a cap) – with the aim of making him stand out in rural areas. These tools served two purposes: first, it helped disseminate information about

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<sup>93</sup> This approach resonates closely with C.K. Prahalad's ideas, see Prahalad (2004).

programmes like SEAM, to potential Trainees and government officials. Second, the toolkit also helped brand the programme. For example, the colours red and white were used for all the tools (as these colours were perceived as giving mass rural appeal). Similarly, all mobilisation tools prominently featured the IL&FS logo and the Government of India's Lion Seal – this was another step to brand the programme and explicitly draw attention to SEAM's identity as a PPP.

One unique mobilisation tool, which was included as a part of the mobilisation toolkit, was a 'mobilisation song'. Songs (typically film songs) have been used by a number of IL&FS mobilisers to attract young people to the site of a job fair. However, for the first time, IL&FS commissioned a song specifically for the mobilisation process. This song was initially composed in Hindi in 2010 by a team in IL&FS' Education division and plans were underway to dub it in other Indian languages as well. The mobilisation song has an upbeat positive, energetic tune and is based on the themes of aspirations, hope and the potential of the programme to fulfil dreams and transform the future.

The lyrics of the song are roughly translated below:

“Let us travel together towards the future .....Let us go ahead, let us go ahead!

Let us travel together towards the path of the progress we desire.....Let us go ahead,  
let us go ahead!

As we now travel on this path, pursue progress and develop ourselves – we can see the  
bright future that lies ahead

We can see our dreams getting fulfilled

A new sun has now risen.....and we can see a new day

We will realize all our dreams....a new day has come!

A new day has come! A new day has come!”<sup>94</sup>

The song is an important tool to reach out to rural youth and the lyrics reflect how it is targeted at appealing to young people’s aspirations and desire for success and fulfilment. It not only brings out the centrality of ‘aspirations’ in selling skills training to rural youth; but also stresses the values of enterprise culture, individual initiative and their potential to create a “bright future” for young people. Crucially, the lyrics of the song emphasise a break from the past and a journey towards a *new* future, where dreams are realised. The song (and the purpose for which it was designed) also reflects the missionary zeal with which mobilisers are expected to spread the message of the transformative potential of skill-training. The ideas in the song were reiterated by the mobiliser, in his speech to young people at job fairs, and also echoed Master Trainers during the training process.

Other mobilisation tools, which were targeted at appealing to the aspirations of rural, BPL youth included short films outlining the stories and testimonials of SEAM Trainees (like the film on Sakambari), and posters – featuring glossy photographs of training centres and garment factories where trained workers will be employed. In 2010, plans were underway to develop other mobilisation tools: such as developing templates for mobiliser’s speeches – outlining key talking points and short regional films – highlighting the success of the SEAM programme in different parts of the country. Thus during my first six months working in the SEAM project team, I witnessed how the mobilisation process slowly shifted from a creative and spontaneous effort driven by individual mobilisers into a standardised marketing campaign.

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<sup>94</sup> Mobilisation song commissioned by IL&FS Clusters, May 2010

Initially, the mobilisation process was largely a result of improvisation or *bricolage*, where the mobiliser used the limited resources he had at hand to reach out to young people and maximise enrolment. As a result, it was found that the “numbers” of candidates enrolled were highest in regions with dynamic, motivated and innovative mobilisers. The evolution of standardised mobilisation processes had a mixed response from mobilisers. Experienced mobilisers like Rajan (who will also feature later on in the chapter) were particularly creative in his attempts to mobilise youth. In fact, it was precisely this trait that won him company awards for surpassing mobilisation targets in 2009. By mid-2010, Rajan felt stifled by this standard approach to mobilisation. He said that he felt “pressurised” with all the bureaucracy involved in the new mobilisation framework. Newly recruited mobilisers, however, welcomed the fact that they were trained in this new approach, as it made it easier for them to perform effectively in the field.

The first such training programme was held in Faridabad (Uttar Pradesh) in 2010 where a new set of project co-ordinators and mobilisers were recruited to manage the new SEAM training centres. These training programmes are typically three-day events, conducted by some of IL&FS’ star mobilisers to familiarise newly recruited mobilisers on key aspects of the mobilisation process. This included: outlining the protocol involved in meeting government officials and maintaining relationships with them, public speaking and communication skills, an introduction to how the programme should be described at the job fairs and also how to use the mobilisation toolkit (the posters, banners, charts and the mobilisation song) effectively to leave a lasting impact on the audience. “Expert” mobilisers from across India were called in to take sessions on the training process. I myself made a presentation at one of these training programmes, where I described the job fair and the different kinds of questions that young people enrolling in the programme have. These training sessions were also well documented by IL&FS and I

found that the ‘Agenda’ for the training for mobilisers programme and the CV’s of the various individuals in the SEAM project team (including my own) were also enclosed with future SEAM project proposals – as important markers of IL&FS’ “professional” approach to skills training.

So far, this chapter has discussed how IL&FS as an organisation perceives the skill-training and mobilisation process and how they have developed a set of tools to help mobilisers reach out to young people in rural areas in order to increase enrolments. Two specific points emerge from the above discussion. First it highlights the importance of specific objects such as – the film on Sakambari, the mobilisation toolkit, the agenda for the training of mobilisers and CVs of SEAM team members – in conveying a certain image of the programme as one that is professional, creative and committed to achieving programme objectives. Second, the above discussions reflect how mobilisation efforts target youth aspirations and how the different mobilisation tools have been created to spread awareness about the programme and reach out to young people’s aspirations for a better future.

The chapter now shifts focus to the job fair and explores how the tools and strategies devised in IL&FS’s conference rooms in New Delhi are implemented on the ground in rural Tamil Nadu. In the following section, I describe the role played by mobilisers in organising job fairs. I will specifically demonstrate how young people’s aspirations are shaped during the mobilisation process by presenting an example of a job fair in Mylai<sup>95</sup> Village, Kancheepuram District.

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<sup>95</sup> Names of individuals and villages used in this chapter are pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity

### **III. Celebrating Aspirations: A Job Fair in Mylai Village**

Job Melas (or job fairs) are considered the most important and effective channels through which rural, BPL youth are identified and recruited for the SEAM programme. These events are typically organised by a mobiliser (from IL&FS Clusters), who coordinates with local government officials, human resource officials from garment factories and local politicians to gain access into the village. An analysis of a job fair is important from the perspective of this study for two reasons. First, it represents the physical site where key representatives of the network state and network enterprise come together to recruit new Trainees into the programme. Second, it exemplifies the processes by which aspirations are evoked and shaped, during the mobilisation process.

Manufacturing firms, who are looking to employ new workers within their factories, typically hold job fairs to recruit new workers, on a large scale. Human resource staff or representatives from recruitment agencies are the main actors who organise and conduct these job fairs. This is the main channel through which companies like Nokia (discussed earlier in this thesis) recruit young workers. Two factors make job fairs for the SEAM programme particularly distinct from other company-sponsored events that are more common in Kancheepuram district. First, SEAM is primarily a skill development programme and the placement linkage (with a garment manufacturing unit) is only one aspect of the programme. The primary aim of the SEAM programme is to deliver skill-training, not employment. Candidates who are selected to join the training programme obtain jobs only if they successfully complete the training programme. Second, as SEAM is funded by the SGSY-SP scheme of the MoRD (a poverty reduction and livelihoods generation programme), SEAM job fairs are specifically targeted at rural BPL youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years of age. The fact that this section of the population

forms an important vote bank for local politicians attracts a number of other actors such as – MLAs (members of the state legislative assembly), Panchayat Presidents and members of political parties to also participate in these events. These actors play a vital role in endorsing programmes like SEAM or spreading word about the initiative. In some cases they often collaborate with mobilisers in organising such initiatives and project them as their “own” community development efforts. This enables them to obtain credit and recognition within their communities. Indeed, it is common to see local politicians sharing the dais with IL&FS mobilisers and HR officials of garment factories at IL&FS’ job fairs - where they multiple roles of “advisors” (to SEAM and rural youth) or change agents – attempting to transform the local community through skill-training. Some local politicians (particularly those affiliated with the ruling DMK party) were also unsupportive of the SEAM programme. There were two main reasons behind this. First, due to the fact that SEAM was a central government scheme, local politicians preferred that young people benefitted from Tamil Nadu’s own livelihood projects like *Mahalir Thittam* or *Vazhndu Kattuvom*. Second, the fact that SEAM Trainees are often placed outside the region – sometimes in garment clusters in Tiruppur or Coimbatore meant that local politicians were losing potential voters. Thus a section of local politicians were quite suspicious of SEAM and tried to sabotage it in its early stages. For example, one mobiliser in Kancheepuram recounted a story of how a bus carrying young Trainees to a training centre in Chennai was stopped by a group of local politicians armed with sticks, who threatened the mobiliser and the bus driver with violence, if they proceeded on to Chennai. It so happened that this move was happening on the eve of local elections in the region. The bus was stuck in the village for three hours and it was only after the District Collector’s intervention, that it was agreed that the training would start after the elections and the mobiliser escaped unharmed. These examples give a flavour of the complex social dynamics, which make the mobilisation process particularly challenging.

This discussion sets the backdrop against which a job fair in Mylai village, Kancheepuram will be explored.

### **a) Setting up the Job Fair: Introducing Rajan, the Mobiliser**

Between January and April 2010, I worked closely with Rajan, a dynamic mobiliser at IL&FS, to understand the mobilisation process in detail. In January 2010, IL&FS had obtained a letter from one of its placement partners (a large garment factory in Kancheepuram), which stated that it was looking to hire 100 SEAM Trainees over the next three months. Rajan was put on the job to recruit these new Trainees to fill these new positions. Rajan immediately began the task of mobilisation – by reaching out to his vast network of local NGO workers and government officials to choose a site for a job fair.

Rajan is a young man in his late twenties and is primarily a Master Trainer for the SEAM programme. He has spent two years working with IL&FS teaching the SMO training module at SEAM training centres. Prior to that, he has worked in a number of garment manufacturing units in Chennai and Coimbatore, as a Factory Supervisor. Rajan was fluent in both English and Tamil and is very popular in IL&FS and with the SEAM Trainees, whom he has recruited into the programme. He is considered one of IL&FS' top mobilisers and has recruited thousands of young people in Kancheepuram, Chengalpet and Thiruvallur districts to be trained under the SEAM programme and work in the garment industry. He was also one of the main resource persons who trained a newly recruited team of IL&FS mobilisers at the first training programme for mobilisers in April 2010.

Rajan struck me as someone who is very passionate about his work for SEAM. During our trips across village in Kancheepuram, Rajan often explained what he enjoyed about mobilisation. He particularly enjoyed speaking to young people and “motivating” them to join the programme, in spite of the high pressures of his job to meet enrolment targets. Rajan is also well known within IL&FS for his excellent social skills – he has a wide network of relationships with district and block level officials, local NGOs, human resource managers from garment manufacturing units around Kancheepuram and representatives from the Tamil Nadu government’s *Vazhndu Kattuvom* project. He explained to me that these connections gave him access to useful information on where to recruit potential candidates for the SEAM project, and also helped him carefully choose the site of job fairs. I often accompanied Rajan to visits and meetings with government officials (at the block and village levels) and to a local NGO to understand the multiple roles that the mobiliser plays in recruiting new candidates for the SEAM programme.

Rajan epitomizes the enterprising subject, in his role as a Mobiliser. He acts as a *bricoleur* (Levi Strauss, 1962) – intuitively devising different strategies on the spot to obtain the support of a number of key stakeholders to select a site of a job fair and reach out to young people. Rajan explained to me how the support of the local government is crucial, in obtaining access to the village and had set up a preliminary meeting with officials in Mylai village, using his connections with a major NGO working in the village. I also accompanied Rajan to the meeting to observe him in action. The meeting was held at the Panchayat Headquarters of Mylai, where we met with the Panchayat Head (who is locally known as ‘*Thalaivar*’ - roughly translated as ‘*leader*’), the *Tehsildar* (a district revenue official), who was known for his close connections to the ruling DMK party at that time and a Ward Member of the Panchayat. The objective of the meeting was to familiarise

government officials and local politicians with the SEAM programme; obtain permission to hold a job fair and most importantly obtain their approval (or “blessings”, in Rajan’s words) for organising the job fair in the village. At the beginning of the meeting, the officials appeared to be rather cold, distant and uninterested in the programme. However, Rajan’s passionate introduction to the programme, the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets on SEAM (featuring the Lion Seal – the emblem of the Indian state) and his repeated emphasis on the fact that it was a MoRD funded programme slowly got their attention. When interacting with these officials, Rajan was quiet, self-effacing and humble – he listened to them carefully, praised them and had an intuitive sense of how to engage them. He also frequently mentioned the names of senior government officials (such as the District Collector and local politicians who had endorsed the programme over the course of the meeting, a key factor that helped retain the interest of the officials in IL&FS’ work. For example, there was a point in the meeting when the Tehsildar, appeared distracted and started reading papers from a file that he was carrying. At this point, Rajan made sure to include the Tehsildar in the conversation and attract his attention. He pulled out a photo album from his bag. The album contained photographs of different aspects of the training programme – of Trainees being tested at mobilisation camps, working in rows on sewing machines, receiving certificates. The album also featured senior politicians from Tamil Nadu – like P. Chidambaram, India’s Home Minister (at the time of fieldwork – now the Finance Minister) distributing certificates and making a speech. This single photograph changed the mood at the meeting, and crucially helped Rajan obtain the support of the officials in conducting a job fair.

Rajan also had to solicit the help of a local NGO to spread the word about the job fair, to young people in Mylai. The NGO runs an IT training centre for women, in the village and has been working in this area for nearly ten years. Thus, the support of the NGO

(which seem to have credibility in the village) was vital for the success of the SEAM programme. In his meeting with the NGO, Rajan portrayed another side of the programme and highlighted the fact that it though it was state funded, it was largely implemented by IL&FS. He emphasised the transformative potential of this programme on young people and spoke of how it helped thousands of young people escape poverty and acquire stable jobs. In his discussion with the NGO team (who seemed to be quite well known to him) he openly voiced his criticism of the Tamil Nadu government's anti-poverty schemes (which he believed focused on giving the poor handouts such as free televisions and mixer-grinders, rather than empowering them with the skills to acquire better jobs). He emphasised the critical role that skill-training plays in making the rural poor employable and escape poverty, for life. The NGO workers echoed the same sentiment and they shared stories about the challenges they faced while working in the village, which included anecdotes about petty corruption and gossip about local officials. I later learned that this information proved very useful for Rajan, in his future interactions with officials in this region.

The way in which Rajan uses the “public-private partnership” model of the SEAM programme to his advantage, by presenting different faces of the programme to different actors, was an important strategy by which he obtains the support of a range of key individuals and organisations –a particularly vital factor for maximising enrolment<sup>96</sup>. At meetings with officials he projected the “public” face of the SEAM programme, emphasising that it was a rural development/anti-poverty programme sponsored by the MoRD. In his meetings with human resource staff working in the garment industry, he

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<sup>96</sup> This strategy is also observed by Sharma (2006) in her study of the Mahila Samakhya (a programme for women run by a Quango or Quasi-NGO, with state government support). She explains how programme members use the Quango status of the programme to its advantage, by highlighting its connections with the state when dealing with government officials, while emphasising its role as NGO run initiative when dealing with civil society groups.

projected the fact that it was implemented by IL&FS and based on training content prepared by experts from the garment industry. Thus by using the multiple faces of the programme to his advantage Rajan could strengthen his relationship with diverse actors. Their support was fundamental to achieving his mobilisation targets. Conversations with Rajan reveal that his mobilisation strategy was developed through intuition and experience. This was highlighted during a conversation on a trip back from Kancheepuram. He said:

“To be a good mobiliser you have to take the time to build relationships – long term relationships. Today we have spent a whole day visiting officials and NGO workers and talking to them. They have given me a lot of information and have been very co-operative. In just one day – we have been able to plan a job fair. But do you think they will be so open with someone new? When I first joined two years back, I wanted to meet the BDO (Block Development Officer). I travelled for two hours on my scooter in the summer and waited outside his office for eight hours. Finally, I was told that he had left for the day and that I will not be able to meet him. I decided that the only way to attract the attention of local government officials and get their support was to organise an event for the district. I spoke to VP Sir (The Head of Project SEAM) and told him that to increase mobilisation in this area we must spend some money and do something for the community, to show our commitment. We partnered with Shankara Nethralaya<sup>97</sup> and we organised a free eye camp (where free eye check-ups were provided) in Kancheepuram district headquarters. VP Sir spoke to the District Collector about this and he supported us. This was a major event – the local MLA inaugurated the event and even the District Collector came. A large number of people benefitted from this camp. This *was a* big success and through that event they got to know about me, and the

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<sup>97</sup> A prominent eye hospital in Chennai

IL&FS training programme. Because of that now IL&FS has a good name in Kancheepuram and local people are very cooperative<sup>98</sup>.”

The above quotation reflects how the persistence, initiative and creativity of the mobiliser lie at the very heart of the task of mobilisation. Rajan demonstrated this keen sense of initiative and involvement at the job fair, where he played a key role in strengthening the relationships that he had build with local officials, NGO workers and community based organisations in the village.

The following section describes the fair, and aims to convey the mood at the site of the job fair, and to bring it to life. Through this example, I explore the ways in which aspirations emerge as the main tool through which skill-training is sold. The description of the fair also highlights how different representatives of the state and the private sector use mobilisation tools such as speeches, music, banners, posters and symbols (such as the government of India’s Lion Seal) to appeal to and shape the aspirations of rural youth.

### **b) A Festival of Aspirations: A Job Fair in Mylai Village**

It was a Sunday morning in Mylai village in Tamil Nadu’s Kancheepuram district. The atmosphere in the village was festive. A festival of aspirations was about to begin. Large banners were hung on trees outside the school, announcing the SEAM programme. SEAM aims to train rural below-poverty line youth to work as sewing machine operators in clusters of export-oriented garment units in Tamil Nadu’s Kancheepuram district. One banner proclaimed (in large bold letters in Tamil), “Look ahead to a new, bright future – join the SEAM programme today!”. Large posters featuring photographs of SEAM’s

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<sup>98</sup> Interview, ‘Rajan’, 22, January 2010

training centres set against landscaped lawns with rows of young, confident, men and women, sitting in front of white Juki sewing machines wearing neat blue uniforms, were displayed outside the job fair venue. Announcements were made over the loudspeaker inviting youth in the village to enrol in the free training programme offered by SEAM. The announcements were interspersed with catchy Tamil film music, which blared from the loudspeakers outside the job fair site. Slowly groups of young people gathered outside the village school and they were ushered in to the main classroom where the job fair was about to begin.

The hybrid nature of this programme was clear from the vehicles parked outside the school. Cars with the Tamil word '*Arasu*' (or government) on the license plate (or the Tamil Nadu Government emblem) signified the presence of the Block Development Officer and his team. Taxis with posters of SEAM brought in members of the SEAM team and all their equipment for the job fair. Another taxi labelled "NGO", brought in members from a local NGO, which also runs IT training camps in the village. Finally human resource staff representing garment factories in the region arrived in scooters, which were also parked outside. All these diverse actors were the "hosts" of the job fair.

The large banners, announcements, and music from the loudspeakers, made the job fair seem like the site of an election campaign or a village festival. Crowds began to gather, following the announcements. Rajan ushered people into the large classroom, which slowly became packed. Rajan was aiming to recruit at least a hundred young people into the SEAM initiative.

Slowly people started moving into the classroom took a seat on the brightly coloured rugs spread on the floor. A few others seemed unsure of whether they should attend the

fair and chose to watch the job fair from a distance. They peered in curiously through the classroom window and watched the proceedings. The room became noisy and people sat in groups chatting. I remained in the background and played the role of a photographer.

A majority of the audience comprised of young women, who aspired to work in the garment industry. A poster advertising the SEAM programme was hung on the blackboard at the far end of the room. A long table was placed in front of the blackboard to create a dais, where key actors convening the job fair: The Village Panchayat Head, the Block Development Officer, the Head of the local NGO, a Human Resource Manager from a prominent garment company and Rajan - all sat in a row.

The event began with a call for everyone to remain silent and Rajan addressed the crowd from the podium. His speech was inspirational. From the quiet self-effacing person he appeared to be in front of the government officials, just a few minutes ago, his personality transformed into that of a master orator, speaking confidently in Tamil. Like an experienced Tamil politician campaigning for an election, Rajan began his speech with rhetorical questions like,

“Do you want a secure company job in a well respected garment factory”? “Do you want to escape poverty”? “DO YOU WANT TO LEARN A NEW SKILL AND OBTAIN LIFELONG JOB SECURITY?” (Rajan’s voice became louder with every question).

There was silence in the room as the audience listened carefully, to Rajan’s booming voice over the microphone. Rajan’s speech went on to highlight some of the main features of the SEAM programme (free training to rural BPL youth, placement linkages

with garment companies, a starting salary of Rs 4000 per month and benefits such as free medical check-ups, free transportation and subsidised meals). Rajan spoke eloquently about the value of learning a new skill and sited examples of young people who joined as SEAM trainees with no skills at all and went on to become Quality Checkers and Supervisors in garment firms. He said,

“Some of our trainees who have completed the SEAM programme have transformed their lives. Malathi, a poor young woman from a village in Kancheepuram had never seen a sewing machine until she came to our training centre. She had never worked outside her home and she was afraid to try something new. Malathi faced her fears and joined the SEAM programme. She took it as a challenge and in just two years she was promoted as a Supervisor in BA Company. Malathi now earns Rs 8,500 a month – nearly double the income that she started with. The SEAM programme has helped Malathi’s family escape poverty. If she can do it, you can too....”

Another key theme in Rajan’s speech was the idea of making the most of opportunities. This was a topic that Rajan was particularly passionate about. He said,

“Each individual can make a unique contribution to their family, village and the larger society – by making the most of the opportunities before us. The SEAM programme is one such opportunity for you to learn, earn an additional income, obtain a stable job – and create a secure future for you and your family. If you are a rural BPL youth looking for a chance to change your life, apply for the SEAM programme today.”

Rajan concluded his speech by describing the application procedure, listing the main documents to be enclosed along with the application and also listing out some of the tests that shortlisted candidates will need to take to enrol into the programme. He also

offered to assist potential applicants by filling in their application forms on their behalf and distributed his card with his mobile number. He then passed around a small photo album containing photographs of the SEAM training centre and the garment factory, to give the audience a sense of what the factory environment looked like. This gesture too (like the rhetorical questions that were posed at the beginning of the event) seemed to target the aspirations of young people in the group. The images selected were of young, well-dressed employees attentively listening to a trainer, having meals in a canteen, laughing and playing a game in a soft skills training session, receiving certificates and employment letters from prominent garment firms in the region and sitting in rows working on sewing machines, on the shop floor of a garment factory. Rajan then played a short inspirational film on the transformative potential of the SEAM programme, featuring SEAM's star performers. The audience watched film with rapt attention.

Rajan concluded his speech by describing the application procedure, listing the main documents to be enclosed along with the application and also listing out some of the tests that shortlisted candidates will have to take to enrol into the programme. He also said he would be happy to assist potential applicants by filling in their application forms on their behalf.

Following Rajan's speech, the BDO was invited to address the crowd. In this speech (which lacked Rajan's rhetoric) he spoke about the government's commitment to reducing poverty. The BDO's speech was shorter and he presented the SEAM programme as if it is a government programme and repeatedly used the term SGSY. He heartily endorsed the programme by highlighting the importance of skill development in opening up new opportunities for young people in the village and urged young people to join the programme.

The Panchayat President also gave short speech echoing the BDOs sentiments and focused on why this programme was important in this village. He notably said,

“Over the past few years, a number of job opportunities have opened up for young people in our village. A number of prestigious companies have come to recruit and train people here. I want to encourage each and every one of you to make the most of these opportunities so that we can progress as individuals and as a village as a whole.”

These ideas of “seizing opportunities” and “progress” were terms used repeatedly in the speeches of various officials at the job fair as a means to motivate the audience and convince them to apply for the programme.

The Human Resource Manager gave a brief overview of the firm and notably did not talk about the nature of work in the factory but did discuss the starting salary that Trainees would get and also highlighted the fact that Trainees who worked hard could be Supervisors or Quality Checkers and Finishers in the garment factory, in just a year or two. He too, focused on how career progression would depend on individual capabilities and that those who worked hard were well rewarded by the company.

Application forms were then distributed, and there was a rush to collect forms from Rajan, who was suddenly engulfed in a crowd, grabbing application forms. I observed some of the older people in the audience collecting three to four forms. They explained that it was for friends and other relatives in the villages.

The fair ended with a few announcements by Rajan, on the date when completed application forms and supporting material were due to be submitted to the village Panchayat office. As the crowd dispersed, the mobiliser stayed on in the village for an hour, clarifying questions from individuals in the audience and conversing with government officials, NGO staff and HR staff from the garment-manufacturing firm. After seeing off the others in their cars, Rajan and I headed back to the office with a plan to return a week later to collect forms, test candidates and enrol them in the new training programme scheduled for the following month.

The description of the job fair in the section above gives a sense of how IL&FS' ideas about skills training and its techniques to “sell” it to rural youth are implemented on the ground. Three main points, which are central to the driving argument of this chapter, emerge from the description of the job fair.

First, it demonstrates how events like job fairs require the collaboration of multiple actors. Each of these actors, play a role in the community and having all of them sitting on the dais and participating in the job fair, plays an important role in giving the programme credibility. Second, the description of the job fair exemplifies the central role that “aspirations” play in selling skills training to rural youth. Youth aspirations are evoked by the mobiliser in a number of different way from the rhetorical questions posed to the audience by the mobiliser at the beginning of his speech, the posters and banners outside the venue of the job fair, the photo album circulated to the audience. Government officials who attend the job fair also endorse these ideas and call on young people to take advantage of new initiatives like SEAM and transform the course of their lives, and the contribute to the development of the village as a whole. Lastly, an important factor was notably absent in all the speeches. The nature of work on the

factory floor was never discussed. The photographs of the training process, presented images of the pristine training centres and ordered factories. Trainees had little idea about what garment work was actually like, giving them an incomplete picture of what to expect at the workplace.

Thus this chapter shows that aspirations are not only used to sell SEAM to rural youth, but it is clear that the various speeches and mobilisation tools used during the job fair were used as tools to specifically expand “the capacity to aspire” of rural youth, in very specific ways – in order to maximise enrolment into the SEAM programme. How do young people at the job fair site respond to this? What are their aspirations? To what extent do job fairs like the one described above shape the aspirations of rural below poverty line youth? I briefly explore these questions in the following section.

#### **IV. Aspirations and the Burden of Family Expectations: Perspectives of Rural BPL Youth**

One week after the job fair, Rajan and I returned to Mylai to collect completed application forms, test eligible candidates to assess their suitability for the SMO’s training programme. By the time we reached the Panchayat office, there were about 60-80 young men and women (mainly young women), who were waiting for us with their application forms. Often a parent, an older friend or sibling accompanied some of these young women.

Rajan assessed the forms and supporting documents, while Radhakrishnan, Another IL&FS Master Trainer (who was enrolled for a PhD in textile engineering) interviewed

the candidates and administered a range of tests to assess their eyesight, hand-eye co-ordination and finger dexterity. I had an informal discussion with a group of ten young women (between the ages of 18-23) during which we discussed their educational qualifications, what they would like to do, what their families expect them to do and their reasons for applying for the SEAM programme.

One of the main themes that came up repeatedly in this discussion was the desire to acquire a “permanent company job”. The young people who participated in the discussion came from below poverty line families and their parents typically held multiple jobs – working as agricultural labourers, running shops in the village, raising cattle and selling milk and vegetables. They spoke of how agricultural income was unpredictable, and how their families struggled to earn a very basic income for the family. For these young women, programmes like SEAM represented a chance to step out of the village and move out of agricultural work into respected jobs within organisations. Like the young men and women who aspired to work in Nokia (featured in Chapter 3), it was the desire to move out of agriculture which was one of the main factors that led young people to aspire to join programmes like SEAM.

Selvi, an enthusiastic and articulate 18-year old girl, from Mylai who had enrolled for the SEAM programme repeatedly mentioned this idea, during the group discussion. She said,

“I have studied until class five, and had to drop out of school at a young age because of family problems. I have been assisting my family since then, taking care of my younger brother and also selling vegetables in the local market. I earn about Rest 2000 per month and I had no other opportunities to earn money. I chose to enrol in this programme as Rajan Sir said that this would help me get a respectable company job. I want to work

hard, be independent and earn money so that I can look after my family. I hope that SEAM will help me achieve this goal<sup>99</sup>.”

Young people’s perception of these jobs was one of stability and comfort. When asked what they think working in a factory would be like, they spoke of working indoors in an air conditioned “office” and would earn a steady income. Another girl, Thamarai explained:

“I have always wondered what it would be like to work in a large air conditioned factory. Over the past few years, we have seen huge factories come up near the village; but I have never been inside. I now have a chance to learn to work as a SMO, within these factories; earn a stable income and help my family<sup>100</sup>.”

These ideas – of comfort, a stable income and the respectability of a “company job” – were highlighted by the mobilisers job fair and played an important role in shaping potential Trainees’ expectations of factory work. It is interesting to note how Selvi and Thamarai highlighted the same points that the mobiliser also repeatedly mentioned in his speech. For them, SEAM not only represented an opportunity to escape poverty and support their families; but it also gave them a sense of personal achievement – that they *could* aspire to a “company job”, which would open up a range of other opportunities in the future.

Three other young women in the informal focus group discussion dreamed of setting up their own tailoring shop in the village and saw the SEAM training programme as an opportunity to do this. Another young girl, who had completed elementary school, spoke

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<sup>99</sup> N. Selvi, group discussion, 22.02.10

<sup>100</sup> Thamarai, group discussion, 22.02.10

of how one her biggest regrets is that she never had a chance to complete her education and she explained that she chose to join this programme in order to learn something new, which could help her earn an income and contribution to her family.

Events like the job fair continuously emphasise how young people should take the initiative to learn new skills and work hard to help their families escape poverty. Such events repeated call on young people's initiative, hard work. This is a main reason why they enrol in such programmes. While for some this sentiment acts as a motivating factor, which encourages them to take risks and make the most of new opportunities, others (like eight out of the ten of the young girls I spoke to) feel burdened by the expectations that family and society have of them. Six out of the ten girls who participated in the group discussion explained that the only reason why they enrolled for project SEAM was because their family had "pushed them" to do so. These young women were usually accompanied by older (male) siblings or parents who they explained were sent to make sure that they enrol for these programmes and bring in an extra income into the family. Parents and older family members too had great expectations from SEAM and hoped that their children would join SEAM and provide an escape out of poverty.

Thus, I argue that such events not just shape aspirations of youth, but also create a new set of norms for how young people should behave, what kinds of goals they should aspire to. Crucially outlines, events like job fairs repeatedly emphasise the kinds of responsibilities that young people have to their families and to society as a whole. What emerges from these group discussions and other interactions with youth over the course of fieldwork was that young people enter the new workplace, not only with their own aspirations. They also carry the burden of high expectations that their family and the larger society impose on them. They enter the workplace with high expectations yet they

know very little about the reality of work within the factory. The banners, posters and photographs shown at the job fair, while raising expectations (of youth and their families) do not answer fundamental questions about what kind of work they would be doing in the factory, what their prospects for career advancement are and how the training would help them achieve their personal goals. It is precisely this which causes a large gap between the aspirations and expectations of youth and the reality of factory work; a gap, which can lead young workers to experience a sense of personal failure and a feeling of disillusionment after finally acquiring the much celebrated “company job”.

In the next chapter, I explore how aspirations continue to be raised and shaped during training. Through an exploration of the training process, I continue on the theme of aspiration, explore its multiple facets and show how the training process widens this gap between the aspirations set at the time of mobilisation and the reality of work on the factory floor.

## **V. Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates the different ways in which young people’s aspirations are invoked and shaped in order to attract rural BPL youth to join the SEAM programme. It highlights the different actors involved in this process and also explores how young people respond to this complex process. The discussion on SEAM’s mobilisation process (both its conceptualisation and implementation) highlight four key points which are central to the driving argument of the thesis. First, it highlights how skill-training has become a commodity that is sold to rural youth. The success of the programme is measured (by IL&FS and MoRD) in terms of “numbers” – a factor that highlights how the SGSY-SP (now NRLM) retained its target-oriented approach to measuring

development outcomes. Sud (2003) who studied the SGSY programme in an earlier form also highlights this point and argues that though SGSY seeks to project itself as a bottom-up, process-oriented programme, it is target-oriented in practice. Looking at the SGSY a decade later, one finds that the SGSY programme continues to be target-oriented in both its conceptualisation and implementation. Second, it identifies the network of actors – in the state and private sectors who are a part of the conceptualisation and implementation of the programme – thus providing another example of the pluralised, multifaceted state in contemporary India. Third, the programme also seems to push a value system, which is predicated on the values of enterprise culture, hard work and initiative – an emphasis that continues in the training phase of the SEAM programme. Fourth, aspirations are simultaneously used as a marketing tool and motivational tool, in the process of selling skills training. This not only instils the “capacity to aspire” in the minds of young people (with the objective of helping them to find ways out of poverty, as Appadurai believes); equally, it acts a burden to young people who feel compelled to try and meet the high expectations that the state, private sector employers, their families and society has of them.

For Appadurai (2004) aspirations are a fundamentally positive and transformational force. The material presented in this chapter highlights another side of aspiration, which leads to two important questions that Appadurai (2004) has not yet addressed. What happens when the “capacity to aspire” becomes a burden of false expectations, which young people are forced to bear? What are the consequences of expanding young people’s capacity to aspire – based on incomplete information – merely to “market” skill-training to rural youth and achieve enrolment targets? The answers to these questions will be explored in the next two chapters of this thesis, which focus on the processes of training and employment in the new workplace.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CREATING NEW WORKERS FOR NEW WORKPLACES**

#### **I. Introduction: New Workers for the New Workplace**

This chapter explains the processes by which a new workforce is created for Kancheepuram's export-oriented garment industries, through Project SEAM. It begins by outlining the profiles of newly recruited SEAM Trainees, who participated at the job fair described in Chapter 6. It then explains the kind of work Trainees are expected to do when employed on the garment industry, and describes the training process in detail. This description helps clarify the nature of skills that are valued by garment firms. Through a detailed discussion of the training content and pedagogy of the SEAM training programme, I argue that such initiatives are not just designed to create a new cadre of young SMOs, but more importantly, attempt to transform the personalities of rural, BPL youth, turning them into aspirational enterprising subjects, who are ambitious, capable of hard work and determined to transform their lives.

Finally, I highlight the role played by the Indian state in the training phase of SEAM. I argue that the Indian state's role is not just limited to funding SEAM, but also extends to monitoring the training process through routine audits and certification processes. Thus, the partnership between the network state and network enterprise also continues into the training phase of implementation SEAM as these two actors work together to create a new workforce for Kancheepuram's garment clusters.

## **II. The SEAM Training Process**

### **a) Seeking Trainees with the “Right Attitude”**

The launch of SEAM was predicated on the premise that there would be a growing demand for skilled workers to work in this sector, over the next decade. This idea is articulated in a report by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), which estimates that by 2022, over 20 million new jobs will be created in the export-oriented garment industry, of which almost 15 million jobs will be at the shop floor level alone (NSDC, 2010). Apart from the fact that the demand for skilled workers in this sector is projected to be high, the entry requirements for working here are relatively low. Unlike other manufacturing industries in Kancheepuram (such as the automobiles or mobile phone manufacturing clusters, like Nokia, which recruit workers with high school diplomas, degrees from it is and even Bachelor’s degree), the garment industry typically recruits unskilled workers, with just a few years of primary schooling, to work on the shop floor as SMOs. In addition, the training period in this sector is also relatively short and lasts for only 30 days.

Training programmes like SEAM are considered ideal for young, unskilled, unemployed youth in rural areas, who seek jobs in Kancheepuram’s growing garment manufacturing firms. This idea comes up repeatedly during interviews with government officials, Trainers, HR managers in garment firms and IL&FS field staff – all of whom believed that scaling up programmes like SEAM is the answer to India’s skills shortage.

Manufacturing firms look for certain common characteristics when identifying potential shop floor workers. This idea was articulated clearly by a senior human resource manager in a prominent garment-manufacturing firm in Kancheepuram (PS Apparels), who said:

“We look for young workers, who are motivated, eager to learn and are willing to do their best for the company. From my experience, I feel that young people, with no prior work experience are the easiest to train – they are able to absorb the training material quickly and moreover have the right attitude<sup>101</sup>. They don’t complain about working long hours and have fewer family commitments. Older workers are rigid in their thinking and are unwilling to change their ways...in our factory we primarily recruit young women to work as Operators and though initially many of them have had problems in adjusting to the factory environment – within one or two months they perform very well....<sup>102</sup>”

The ideas in above quotation were repeatedly echoed during conversations with human resource managers across the three garment firms in Kancheepuram which employed SEAM-trained workers. The term “right attitude” (in English) came up frequently in conversations. Other qualities which HR staff included as defining features of this “right attitude” included : “willingness to learn”, “taking pride in one’s work”, “being on time”, “being disciplined, hardworking and sincere”, “taking initiative to learn new things”<sup>103</sup>.

The idea that *young* workers, particularly *young women* inherently possess these skills, was another idea that came up repeatedly during discussions with HR staff, who gave examples of successful young women, who joined the factory knowing nothing about using sewing machines and how their desire to acquire new skills enabled them to move

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<sup>101</sup> This term was mentioned in English. Interviews with all the HR staff in the garment firms were conducted in English.

<sup>102</sup> Interview, SM, PS Apparels; 5.04.10

<sup>103</sup> Interviews with HR staff in AB Apparels, PS Apparels and MR Apparels; 5-7 April 2010

from unskilled jobs within the factory (such as that of cleaners or sweepers) to working on the factory floor as SMOs. These preconceived notions of certain kinds of workers – particularly young women – come up repeatedly in anthropological studies of employment in the garment industry in China, Trinidad and Tobago and Sri Lanka (see Pun, 2005; Prentice, 2008; Lynch, 2007); these ideas are also features in other studies focused on the manufacturing sector (see for example, Ong 1987a, 1987b; Ngai and Chan 2012).

Another term that was used to describe the ideal Trainee was that they should possess the “right mindset” – this too, like “right attitude” had a wide range of meanings and included “being open to learning, new things”, “open minded”, “being open to criticism”, “being positive” and “being helpful”. HR Managers at PS Apparels, frequently cited the story of a young Operator named Mala to illustrate what they meant by the terms “right attitude” and the “right mindset”.

Mala is a 26-year-old woman with a few years of primary schooling, who began working in the PS Apparels, as a sweeper in 2005 and now works as a SMO, having attended the SEAM training programme in 2010. A senior HR manager of the firm, who also provides counselling to Trainees within the organisation described her achievement in the following words.

“Mala was a practically illiterate women who rose from being a sweeper to a SMO, through her own hard work and determination. Mala is one of our best employees. She understands every aspects of the garment production process; she is sincere, committed and very fast. She is a role model for our young Trainees....we want to encourage them to learn new skills, so that they can grow and feel a sense of achievem. Some Trainees

drop out in the first few days and they give up too easily. They are intimidated by the factory environment. When they come to me and tell me that they want to quit - I tell them about young women like Mala and how through hard work she has come up in life<sup>104</sup>.”

The remarks of the HR Manager above not only describe the “ideal” qualities that new Trainees ought to possess, but they also emphasise the value placed on individual initiative within these new workplaces. As in the case of Nokia (Chapter 4), garment manufacturing firms in the region, had a strong preference for young, inexperienced workers, particularly young women, from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are perceived as “hardworking”, “committed” and “efficient” by HR staff.

Given this broader context, the following section continues where the mobilisation process left off. It begins by introducing the new batch of SEAM Trainees, who have been recruited from the job fair in Mylai and surrounding villages. It then follows them into the SEAM training centre and describes the process by which these young people acquire the skills to work as SMOs in Kancheepuram’s garment manufacturing firms.

### **b) Introducing Garment Factory Work and the SEAM Training Process**

SEAM had developed a training curriculum to cover five major trades for the textile and garment industry, by August 2010. This included training programmes to train SMOs, quality checkers and finishers for the ready-made garment industry; training modules to train power loom weavers, handloom weavers and spinning mill operators for the textiles industry were also created. In addition to technical training modules, IL&FS had also developed a generic soft skills training module, which aimed to equip Trainees with “life

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with HR Manager, PS Apparels (7.04.12)

skills” and familiarising them with the norms, values and work ethics of these new work sites. At the time of fieldwork, this content was available in Hindi, English and Tamil and plans were underway to translate this into other Indian languages. Trainees who successfully complete this initial round of training are then sent to work on the factory floor, where they assist more experienced SMOs for a three month period as part of their “on the job training”. During this period they assist in finishing up garments, by stitching on buttons or zippers, check garments for defects, and iron, package and ship them for export.

In the next two sections, I will describe the process of technical training, by focusing specifically on one training module - the Sewing Machine Operator (SMO) training programme, which is one of the most basic training courses. This 30 day training programme prepares young workers to work on the factory floor of large garment firms, by teaching them how to use an industrial sewing machine. Material presented in this chapter is based on an analysis of IL&FS’ training manuals, interviews and interactions with Master Trainers and Trainees. It also draws on direct observation of the training programme at the SEAM training centre in Kancheepuram.

The guidelines of SGSY-SP programme (under which SEAM is funded), for the 2009-2010 period stipulates that Trainees who enrol in SEAM’s SMO programme would be paid stipend of Rs. 1000, while undergoing the training process. The Programme also covers the trainees’ transportation, accommodation (in the cases of migrant workers) and food costs. The SGSY Guidelines also state that trainees who successfully complete the SEAM programme, will be paid the minimum wage and are also entitled to subsidised transportation from their villages, subsidised meals, free medical check-ups, provident

fund and other social security benefits<sup>105</sup>. Once they complete the three months of on-the-job training or apprenticeship, they are eligible to become ‘full time’ employees on the factory floor, stitching garments as per factory specifications on the shop floor and shipping them across the globe. At this point, their salaries increase marginally from about Rs. 3000 per month to roughly Rs. 4000<sup>106</sup>.

Kancheepuram’s garment clusters typically recruit young women, between the ages of 18-25. They form the bulk of the workforce in these firms, working on the factory floor as SMOs, garment checkers and finishers. These firms supply high quality finished garments to some of the world’s leading garment retailers and are typically given bulk orders, which need to be produced within a short period of time. In order to meet these tight deadlines, garment firms employ over a thousand shop floor workers – who work rotating shifts (of typically 8 hours each), round the clock to produce garments at a high speed.

In order to maintain speed, different parts of a garment were made separately and then finally stitched on together. For example, when making a shirt – one row of workers produce just the sleeves, another group makes the collars, a third group stitches the buttons and so on. This kind of division of labour requires that operators make each part of the garment accurately, at a steady speed, as a delay in one part of the process could lead to delays in others and severely affect meeting the firms daily production targets. Master Trainers explain that this factor has influenced the design of SEAM’s training modules, which simultaneously describe a technical skill and also explain how these skills can be applied to the production process, in the most efficient manner possible.

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<sup>105</sup> It was observed during fieldwork that the extent of these benefits often vary from company to company.

<sup>106</sup> These figures pertain to the April 2010 – when fieldwork was conducted in the SEAM training centres and garment factories. This figure varied slightly in the 3 garment factories in Kancheepuram, which were studied.

The finished garments are also subject to stringent quality checks, within the factory (by employees known as garment checkers and finishers). Garments with even the slightest defects are rejected. Quality managers across all the three firms studied, explain that these quality checks are crucial as entire shipments could be rejected if buyers find defects<sup>107</sup>.

The brief description above of the kind of work that young SEAM Trainees go on to do on the factory floor also points to the kinds of skills that are valued in these workplaces. Trainers, Supervisors and Managers, identified some of these skills during interviews, which included: speed<sup>108</sup>, excellent control over the sewing machine, a keen sense of attention to detail, precision, discipline, punctuality and consistency in the outputs produced. The SEAM training programme aims to impart these technical and attitudinal skills to young Trainees, within a 30-day period, through an intense technical soft skills training process, which is described in detail over the next few paragraphs.

### **c) The SEAM Trainees and Their Aspirations**

43 new Trainees (38 women and 5 men) were recruited from the job fair in Mylai, to participate in the SEAM programme. These young Trainees were selected after a round of qualifying tests and an interview. They were all between the ages of 18 and 23. It was their first visit to a factory and they were about to be employed in the private sector for the very first time. Most Trainees had completed about 8-9 years of schooling and had dropped out of school for financial reasons. They had no prior work experience in the private sector, though almost all trainees had some experience working in the agricultural

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<sup>107</sup> Interviews with Quality Managers in AB Apparels, PS Apparels and MR Apparels; 5-7 April 2010

<sup>108</sup> This idea of perceiving *speed* as a *skill*, is a characteristic described in detail in Braverman (1974) and also features in Cross (2012). See also Prentice 2008; Siddiqqui, 2000; Pun 2005 and Lynch 2007, for application of this idea to the garment industries in Trinidad, Bangladesh, China and Sri Lanka.

sector or as a part of the NREGA programme. The prospect of earning a regular income seemed, combined with prospect of a “prestigious” private sector job, were the two most common reasons cited by trainees, for enrolling in the SEAM training programme.

During an informal chat outside the training centre, just before the training was about to begin, some trainees appeared nervous. Some of these young women had travelled over 40 kilometres from their home and said they were afraid to be so far away from their families. At the same time, other trainees expressed a sense of anticipation and excitement, as they looked forward to taking advantage of this new opportunity and to learning a new skill. Notably, a few Trainees echoed what the mobiliser had said during the job fair. They spoke of embracing ‘change’ (*marutal* Tamil) and looked forward to changing their family circumstances. Almost all the young people I spoke to emphasised the “insistence” and/ or “encouragement” of family members, who were instrumental in making them enrol in the SEAM programme, in the hope that acquiring new skills would enable them to make a stable contribution to the family income.

In just 30 days, this group of young Trainees would be equipped the basic skills needed to work as SMOs on the factory floor of AB Apparels - one of IL&FS’ first industrial partners. The following section elaborates on the technical training process, highlighting some of the training content and explaining the training pedagogy in detail. I use the description of the training process to illustrate how the process of training young workers to work as SMOs in the garment industry is not a value-neutral process which aims to impart specific technical skills. Most importantly, these processes aim to *create* a certain kind of worker – one who combines psychological skills such as self-discipline, punctuality, motivation and commitment to meeting deadlines with technical skills such as high speed, manual dexterity, accuracy and a keen sense of detail. I go on to argue that

it is precisely these factors that lead IL&FS mobilisers and HR Managers to select young, inexperienced, unskilled women as “ideal” candidates for skills training – as they are perceived as the ideal candidates to quickly absorb these values and least likely to question the authority of line managers and quality supervisors, on the factory floor. Thus the process of skill-training is also an important means or “manufacturing consent” (Burawoy 1982) to create a certain kind of docile, disciplined and motivated worker.

#### **d) Learning to Sew: The Technical Training Process**

The training centre at AB apparels is designed to simulate the factory floor as closely as possible. The large room is spotlessly clean with white walls, white floors and white industrial sewing machines. Large posters, with photographs of the factory floor are pasted on the wall. Trainees put on their blue uniforms (a loose blue top with the SEAM and AB Apparels logo embroidered on it, which they wear over their clothes). They are instructed to wash their hands before using the sewing machines.

The norms and values of the new workplace were imposed on the Trainees, from the moment they slipped into their uniforms and entered the training centre. The Trainer began the class by setting the house rules. Cleanliness of the training centre and personal hygiene were emphasised. Breaks would be timed. Discipline and punctuality were emphasised. Women were also instructed to stop using nail polish, turmeric (which is often used in Tamil Nadu as an antiseptic or cosmetic) or make up, to ensure that they do not damage the fabric that they work with. Some of these ideas are clearly expressed in one of IL&FS’ SEAM project proposals which outlines SEAMs key features. It states,

“Each batch of Trainees are required to maintain a code of conduct, dress code and wear

the uniform while entering the training centre and leave the uniform neatly packed in the respective drawers/ hangers after the classroom for use by the next batch etc. This instils in the Trainees the sense of discipline and the procedures to be followed in a factory environment thus making them easily adaptable to the future work environment” (IL&FS Clusters, 2010:23)

The Trainer is an employee of the garment factory (typically at the factory supervisor level) and was trained by IL&FS Clusters to deliver the training modules. The Trainers’ role is described loosely in the IL&FS project report, as an

“..effective link between the project and the industry for deriving optimal results in terms of skill acquisition as required in the industry.” (IL&FS Clusters, 2010:24)<sup>109</sup>

The role of the Trainer was more clearly articulated during a ‘Training of Trainers’ (ToT) programme where they were described as “facilitators”, “mentors”, and “counsellors”<sup>110</sup>. An observation of the processes by which these Trainers are trained, reveals that their primary role is not to impart knowledge, but to *facilitate* the training process by monitoring how each Trainee performs at the training centre, answering questions, clarifying processes and also maintaining detailed training records of the performance of each Trainee. The actual classroom teaching takes place through multi-media based training modules prepared by IL&FS. The entire SMO training programme consists of 7 key courses. The first few courses are centred on familiarizing Trainees with the sewing machine. As the course progresses, Trainees practice stitches (in straight lines first, then in the form of curves); learn to cut garments according to patterns and finally start stitching a complete garment, by following a pattern, at the end of 30 days.

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<sup>109</sup> Source: IL&FS SEAM VII Project Proposal

<sup>110</sup> IL&FS Clusters ToT, Faridabad, February, 2010

The IL&FS team, who developed SEAM's training modules explained that the training modules have been designed to be as clear, detailed and comprehensive as possible. This was done to ensure that the Trainees could easily follow the instructions shown on the screen, keeping in mind the fact that the Trainer will only facilitate the learning process, while the Trainee actively follows each of the modules and practices what is demonstrated on the screen under the Trainer's supervision.

Training modules are multimedia based and are played for the entire class on a large screen. Each twenty-minute module describes a skill, step-by-step in detail (in Tamil), and then goes on to demonstrate each step using animation. IL&FS' senior consultants<sup>111</sup> who had developed the training modules gave two main reasons why training modules were comprehensively designed and the role of the Trainer was limited. First, they explained that this ensures standardization of content, so that every SEAM Trainee, across India who undergoes the SMO programme, will learn the same skills in the same order. This was also a means to ensure that the training is of the same quality, across all of SEAM's skill training centres.

During my period of employment in IL&FS Clusters, I observed six training programmes in locations across India. The method of teaching, the training content and delivery of the training process were remarkably similar across locations. This is because Trainers (who are typically employees of various garment factories) are put through an intensive training programme (conducted by IL&FS in collaboration with its industrial partners in the garment industry) on how to impart these skills to unskilled/semi-skilled

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<sup>111</sup> These consultants were considered experts who had over 15-20 years of experience working in the garment industry in India. They were specifically recruited by IL&FS to develop the SEAM training modules.

workers. Another important reason why IL&FS wanted to ensure that training processes were standardized was that plans were underway to scale up the programme and open up SEAM training centres in a Naxal-affected district in the state of Orissa. It was difficult to get experienced Trainers to relocate to Orissa to teach. Thus, IL&FS staff felt that limiting the role of the Trainer to a facilitator and making training modules as comprehensive as possible would be the only way that they could rapidly scale up project SEAM, implement it remote, conflict-affected locations and and yet maintain high quality standards. Secondly, the creators of the training programme felt that Trainees must play an active role in the training programme from the very first day. There was a perception that Trainees could be “easily distracted” and “irresponsible”. Thus, by putting the Trainee and his/ her performance at the core of the learning process, IL&FS was trying to inculcate the valued qualities of individual initiative, responsibility and motivation into trainees. This was explained by one of the Trainers, who said,

“The Trainee does have the option of sitting back, or not paying attention... what is demonstrated in each training module needs to be practically applied in a series of practical exercises, and if they do not perform well, they will have to ask us for extra help...it is up to them to learn as quickly as they can”. (Interview, Trainer 13.06.2010)

Thus, this view of the Trainee as an active agent in the training process (at least in theory) is one that IL&FS and MoRD constantly highlight as one of the “innovative” aspects of project SEAM. Both these aspects of the training programme have led MoRD officials, IL&FS’ industry partners, Auditors and Politicians, to praise the SEAM programme for its “holistic” training modules and encourage the scaling up of this programme across India for “the mutual benefit of society and industry<sup>112</sup>.”

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<sup>112</sup> IL&FS Skills Newsletter, Issue 01.11.11.

The Trainer and the Trainee are equipped with training toolkits. The Trainer's toolkit contains a detailed Trainer's manual, which clearly outlines the training modules and also specifies when he/she should intervene in the training process. Trainees' toolkits also include a separate training manual, a notebook, pen and some key tools – such as scissors, needles, thread etc. These manuals were translated into nine Indian languages and serve as useful guides to Trainees. The manual also has a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section listing common questions Trainees may have, and also encourages Trainees to take initiative to find answers to their own questions.

Most of the training process is covered through the audio-visual training modules, which are often animated. For example, the very first module is entitled "Introduction to Sewing Machines", and begins by showing images of different kinds of sewing machines, explaining their uses and functions and then shifts focus to the lockstitch sewing machine (commonly called a Juki machine<sup>113</sup>). This session explains in detail, the right kind of working posture, how to organize the workspace, how to place the foot on the pedal of the sewing machine and operate the pedal, how to fit a needle on the machine, thread the needle and finally operate a machine. These processes are demonstrated through a series of animations depicting a figure of a SMO, in a blue uniform, sitting in perfect posture, operating a pedal quickly (while sitting correctly). Trainees are asked to observe these processes carefully and remember every step in detail.

Until this point, the Trainer is quiet, playing these modules on a large screen, using a projector like device, developed and patented by IL&FS, (known as a K-Yan). Following this animated sequence, the Trainer then asks Trainees to imitate the animated figure on the screen and operate the pedal of the sewing machines in front of them.

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<sup>113</sup> An industrial sewing machine brand that is commonly used in garment factories in Kancheepuram.

As Trainees begin their ‘stitching exercises’, the Trainer walks around the room, observing each person, correcting their posture, and appreciating those who have effectively operated the pedals of the sewing machines. A lot of attention is spent on ensuring that every Trainee is sitting the right way, their desks are well organized and neat, and that they follow safety norms. Trainers explain, that these fundamentals play a crucial role in ensuring that Trainees develop a common work style and can work efficiently (both individually and in teams) on the factory floor. Thus the entire training process is an immersive one, which aims to discipline the trainees’s body and psychological characteristics, to create a new, efficient worker for the garment industry.

Trainers often openly praised Trainees who followed the basic rules exceptionally well. Often, Trainers would call for a round of applause from the class, for a Trainee who has completed a task quickly or shown initiative. Thus, positive reinforcement was an important tactic used by Trainers to encourage workers to conform to rules and perform well at the training centre. The fact that this positive reinforcement was targeted at individual Trainees gradually led to the development of competition between Trainees on the factory floor, within just a few days. As in the case of Nokia’s Smart Operator Bootcamp, SEAM Trainers too encouraged a competitive spirit in the training centre, especially during the practice sessions.

For example, during one of the first such practice sessions, Trainees were given pieces of scrap paper with a dotted line drawn along it. They were asked to thread the needle on the sewing machine and make a row of stitches along the dotted line printed on the paper. These exercises can be quite tedious and frustrating for those who still have not mastered control over the sewing machine. A few Trainees who were sitting in the back row stopped doing these exercises altogether and looked bored and frustrated. The

Trainer saw this, and chose to convert this practical exercise session into a game. He announced that a competition would be held the next day to see which Trainee would be the fastest and most accurate in completing the practice exercise. The winner was promised a prize. The idea of a competition and a prize was well received and Trainees began doing their best, trying to complete their paper exercises as quickly as possible, to practice for the next day's competition.

Trainees were excited and enthusiastic on the day of the competition. The classroom became quiet and all one could hear was the dull whirring of sewing machines, as Trainees focused on doing the exercise as well as possible. The Trainer timed each Trainee and judged his/her work according to the speed, accuracy and neatness with which the task was performed. The winner was Selvi a quiet, girl who completed her exercise in just fifteen seconds. She was awarded a bar of chocolate for her effort, and the class celebrated her success with applause.

As the course continued, Trainees became more comfortable with the training process and understood the dynamics within the classroom. They also started performing more complex tasks and were introduced to new modules on sewing machine work aids, trouble shooting and stitching complete garments – such as a men's shirt and trousers. Each theoretical training module was followed by a number of practical exercises, which would help Trainees master a certain new technique. These exercises were done using cloth or paper and began with the simple stitching exercises (described above) and ended with stitching a complete garment. Every Trainee's work over the entire training period was carefully filed (under the individual Trainee's name) by the Trainer and was kept at the training centre for a one-year period. These samples are used to record the progress that individual Trainees have made and provide evidence to auditors and government

officials, who often visit the SEAM training centres for inspections.

The training process was clearly designed to ensure that the trainee is an active agent in the training process. He/she was encouraged to take the initiative to teach themselves ask questions, set individual goals and work towards achieving them. The very pedagogy of the training process itself encourages young Trainees to act to take initiative and follow the modules on screen, consult the training manuals and practice each of steps demonstrated during practical sessions.

The Trainer facilitates this process of learning, by using positive reinforcement, encouraging competition and also working closely with some of the weaker students and helps bring them up to speed with the other Trainees. Notably, while positive reinforcement was frequently used at the training centre, the Trainer's focus was to maintain a high morale, within the classroom. Thus, I did not see Trainees, being humiliated or punished for giving wrong answers or for not picking up a skill fast enough. The Trainees were also well-behaved and disciplined in the classroom – no one spoke out of turn and only a few students took the initiative to ask questions. The trainer often tried to encourage Trainees to speak up in front of the class. For example, he would call individual Trainees to the front of the class and ask them to name the different parts of the sewing machine or explain a process in detail. Trainers explained that they use this strategy to encourage Trainees to speak up in class, “develop communication skills” and break the monotony of a particularly difficult training module. The Trainer described this as an attempt “to build self-confidence” – an idea that is repeatedly emphasized in the soft skills training module.

Competitions like the one described earlier, put the spotlight on an individual's

performance at the workplace and assess their skills in terms of speed, efficiency and quality. Trainers are of the view that these activities enable young Trainees to internalize values such as competition and individual efficiency and teach them to take pride in their work. Trainers explain that these skills are fundamental to working effectively on the factory floor.

However, different trainees responded to these competitive exercises differently. For some, competitions symbolized excitement and motivation and they gave off their very best in their attempts to win a prize and earn the Trainer's praise. Yet, others, especially those who were slower in acquiring these skills privately confided in me that they felt "left out" and "de-motivated". They expressed a sense of personal failure at not having kept up with the class, and blamed themselves for their poor performance. Such Trainees often stop attending classes or even considered leaving the programme.

One such young girl, named Mani, came from a village near Chengalpet (neighbouring Kancheepuram) and had left home for the first time. She was terribly homesick and was unable to adjust to living in a hostel with other girls, so far away from home. To add to this, she was considered a slow learner and felt unable to keep up with the class. She skipped a couple of classes, which made her fall further behind the class. Finally she decided to quit the training programme, and conveyed this to the Trainer.

AB Apparels (where Mani was going to work) needed this entire batch of Trainees to work on a large new order and thus could not afford to lose any of its Trainees. Thus, the Trainer and the HR team swept swiftly into action and took a number of quick steps to convince her to stay. Mani was counselled by the company's human resource manager and the Trainer for a couple of days. She was then given extra classes by the Trainer to

keep her up to speed and she managed to complete the training. In addition, two other trainees who performed well in the class were also asked to spend time with her and help her through some of the practical work. These strategies worked. Mani stayed on – reluctantly at first, but over time seemed comfortable with her work and with those around her.

The human resource manager narrating the incident to me said,

“Young women like Mani lack self-confidence. She had a lot of fears. This was affecting her performance at the training centre. As human resource managers, we need to understand this and help her realize her potential. During the counselling sessions, we spoke to her and told her the importance of facing challenges and how this will help her in the future. Initially she had a negative mind-set, but slowly we convinced her to stay. Now she is doing very well.” (HR Manager 1 Apparels, 23.03.10)

The idea that the young people like Mani with limited exposure to the world outside their village, lack “self-confidence” or a “positive attitude”, comes up frequently in discussions with human resource managers, IL&FS mobilisers, and state officials. In this context, skill-training is portrayed as an opportunity for young people to acquire a new kind of personality, which is valued in these work sites.

Dynamism, determination, optimism, flexibility and commitment, are some of the main qualities that are actively sought in young workers. While the technical training process tries to inculcate these qualities in Trainees through the training process; the soft skills training modules go a step further, in actively emphasizing these values as they attempt to create a new workforce with new personalities, attitudes and values – to encourage young

people to work hard, aspire high and achieve individual goals.

### **e) Learning ‘Life Skills’: Introducing Soft Skills Training**

The existing literature on soft skills training processes focuses largely on the importance of soft skills in the service sector. Upadhyaya’s (2013) chapter on the IT sector and Gooptu (2013a) paper which highlights soft skills training processes for training private security guards, in India illustrate this point. The section explores the importance of soft skills in the manufacturing sector, through an exploration into SEAM’s soft skills training programme.

IL&FS staff explain that soft skills training modules were designed to enable Trainees “fit in” to the factory environment – a point which was also echoed by Nokia’s HR staff in justifying their soft-skills training focus. This idea is clearly articulated in a document prepared by IL&FS, for the MoRD, which outlines SEAM’s best practices.

“As the project is targeted at the rural BPL youth who were mostly engaged in agricultural tasks with little exposure to the emerging opportunities in the market place, so soft skills training is necessary to provide additional training to make the Trainees capable of integrating smoothly in the industry work environment and meet industry’s requirements. Emphasis is laid on developing skills like basic oral communication; teamwork, etc. Besides candidates are also made aware of how they can contribute to the success of the enterprise, the possible challenges to the enterprise, including job redundancy, so that they constantly strive to upgrade their skills after obtaining placement. A soft skills module is developed which covers essential life skills such as hygiene, savings, workplace etiquette, group behaviour, communication, good health, etc. and imparted to the Trainees to hone them holistically.” (IL&FS Clusters, 2011: 7)

The excerpt above provides an insight into how rural below poverty line youth are perceived by IL&FS and why they believe that skills training – particularly soft skills training – is essential for them. Three points are particularly significant from the above quote. First, it highlights some of the main assumptions that IL&FS Clusters has about rural BPL youth, who were characterised as having “little exposure” to the world outside of agriculture and as being largely ignorant about what a factory environment is like. Trainers, IL&FS staff, HR managers in garment factories and government officials, elaborated on these assumptions about the behavioural and attitudinal qualities of rural BPL youth, during interviews. Rural youth were characterised as “lacking self-discipline<sup>114</sup>”, having “a poor sense of personal hygiene<sup>115</sup>”, “low self-confidence<sup>116</sup>”, “demotivated<sup>117</sup>”, incapable of “future-oriented thinking<sup>118</sup>” and as “unable to manage time effectively<sup>119</sup>”. These varied characterisations of rural BPL youth have been instrumental in developing soft skills training courses, which were specifically designed to overcome these “challenges”, by including modules on “hygiene and personal grooming”, “motivation and positive thinking”, “savings”, “workplace etiquette”, “communication skills” and “time management” among others.

Secondly, the quotation on the previous page highlights a key characteristic of work in the new workplace – the uncertainty of work and the idea of “job redundancy”, which is projected as a very real possibility. Notably these points are not mentioned during the mobilisation phase, when recruiting new trainees. However, it was believed that soft skills training could help workers cope with the precariousness of work in the new workplace,

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with SEAM Project Head, PV (27.01.10); Interview with HR Manager, AB Apparels, (7.04.10)

<sup>115</sup> Interview with HR Manager, PS Apparels, (13.04.10)

<sup>116</sup> Informal conversation with Master Trainer, SEAM Training Centre Kancheepuram (11.02.10)

<sup>117</sup> Speech of a senior MoRD official at IL&FS Clusters head office (30.11.09)

<sup>118</sup> Informal conversation with Master Trainer, SEAM Training Centre Kancheepuram (11.02.10)

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Factory Supervisor, AB Apparels (07.04.2010)

by teaching young people to “constantly strive to upgrade their skills after obtaining placement”. This clearly illustrates Sennett’s (2006) argument on how the uncertainty of work, the absence of a clear path of career progression and the very real possibility of jobs becoming obsolete, require employees to adopt an entrepreneurial approach, constantly upgrading their skills to prove that they remain assets to the organisation.

This idea that young people must constantly “strive” to learn new skills and take advantage of new opportunities for personal growth is a key message that comes up repeatedly during the soft skills training process. Importantly, the way such soft skills training programmes emphasise the values of “enterprise culture” as Trainees are encouraged to use their time efficiently by learning new skills, completing higher education<sup>120</sup> or improve their performance on the factory floor. Anecdotes of successful Indian entrepreneurs, such as N.R Narayanamurthy (the founder of the IT Company *Infosys*) or Azim Premji (the founder of *Wipro*) are constantly cited as examples of how qualities such as “determination”, “drive”, “hard work”, “commitment”, “willingness to learn” and the “ability to aspire high” – can truly transform lives<sup>121</sup>. Trainees are encouraged to cultivate these qualities and are reminded of how they must use programmes such as SEAM as a launch pad to achieve their dreams.

I argue that soft skills programmes serve an important purpose. They seek to instil “the capacity to aspire” (Appadurai 2004) in young people. In doing so, ‘aspiration’ shifts from being a marketing strategy to maximise enrollments into SEAM (as depicted in Chapter 6) and becomes fashioned into a valuable skill that is taught to SEAM trainees. During the soft skills training modules that I attended, trainees were constantly reminded

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<sup>120</sup> For example, some garment firms in the Coimbatore region organise classes for Trainees (after working hours) to help them prepare for secondary and high school final exams.

<sup>121</sup> SEAM soft skills training programme, 2.12.10 (Chennai);

to set high targets for themselves and achieve them just as some of India's famous entrepreneurs like Narayanamurthy or Premji have.

The third key point that comes up in the excerpt above pertains to how *soft skills* are referred to as "*life skills*". In fact, IL&FS soft skills training module is called the Life Skills and Knowledge (LINK) module. This highlights how soft skills are increasingly viewed as fundamental not just in the workplace, but are projected as equipping young people with the tools to cope with challenges in life. The soft skills training modules include modules on health and first aid, stress management, yoga and meditation. Trainers explain that they skills are valuable not just at the workplace, but also could be applied to the personal lives of Trainees.

Having provided the rationale and highlighted some of the key characteristics behind the soft skills training modules, I now shift focus into the training room and describe a specific soft skills training session, to support my argument on the idea of aspiration as a 'skill'.

#### **f) Soft Skills Training in Progress**

Soft skills training typically takes place on the last day of the technical training programme. While SEAM project proposals mentioned that soft skills training programme last about three to four days, within the 30 day training period; I observed that in practice, these modules are typically delivered in one day, usually at the very end of the technical training programme. I attended six training sessions (both technical and soft skills sessions), over the course of my employment at IL&FS clusters, in locations across India. While some of the core modules remained the same across locations, the

examples used often varied depending on the state in which the training was conducted. Two points made the soft skills training programme different from the technical modules, described in the earlier sections.

First, unlike the formal and structured training modules in the technical training sessions; the soft skills training was delivered in an informal, participatory style. Here, the Trainer played the role of a motivational speaker. It appeared that his main objective was to motivate Trainees and convince them to internalize the values of the new workplace. In his presentations, he used jokes, anecdotes, games and role-plays – almost spontaneously<sup>122</sup> – to illustrate the main messages of the training modules. Notably, the Trainer was a professional who delivered such training modules for a number of different organizations, and was considered an “expert” in this field.

The soft skills training module I observed was composed of four main topics. These included personality development (which covers a number of topics of topics from “personal appearance and grooming”, “health and hygiene”, to “communication skills”), workplace etiquette (which highlight the values of discipline, punctuality, efficiency, politeness etc. at the workplace), career planning (which highlighted how they could apply the technical skills they have used in within the organization), ergonomics and yoga (which focuses on Trainees’ posture at the workplace and features number of yoga exercises and stretches to relieve aches and pains which could arise as a result of long working hours). Each of these modules was aimed at modifying the personality of the Trainees – their physical appearance, their attitudes towards their work, their behaviour towards their colleagues and bosses, and their own aspirations for the future.

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<sup>122</sup> An informal conversation with the Trainer outside the training room revealed that this appearance of spontaneity, was well intended and rehearsed, and was a tactic used by the Trainer to “keep energy levels high” within the classroom.

This was particularly evident in one of the first ice-breaking sessions of the soft skills training programme, which involved a game of musical chairs. The Trainer played a popular Tamil film song and Trainees were asked to walk around the chairs and grab a chair when the music stopped. When the game first began, Trainees seemed to not care very much whether they won or not, the girls in the room were self-conscious, walked slowly and almost willingly gave up chairs. In fact a couple of young girls told me that they felt quite relieved when they were “out” of the game. As the chairs became fewer in number, the rush for chairs began. The trainer egged the trainees on. Soon, trainees rushed to grab a chair, with some of them pushing others out of the way in the process. Finally, the game ended and a young woman was announced as the winner. The room was filled with thunderous applause and cheers.

Following this, the Trainer explained the significance of this game. He compared adult life to a game of musical chairs, where opportunities are limited and competition is fierce. He explained that in order to get ahead, one has to be proactive, actively search for opportunities and “grab” them to ensure that they are not left behind. This comparison appeared to have struck a chord with the Trainees. They attentively listened to the Trainer and some of them were observed making notes.

The individual modules began with a section on personal grooming and appearance, and covered topics on hygiene and cleanliness (where the Trainer explained in detail the importance of bathing, washing hands, dressing neatly for work and dental hygiene). All these topics focused on disciplining the ‘body’ of the Trainee. This was followed by a yoga session, where trainees were taught exercises to be “mentally alert”, strengthen muscles (particularly in the back, neck and legs) and prevent health problems that could

arise from sitting for long periods of time. The Trainer explained to the class the workers who do not practice these exercises could experience back pain. All Trainees were instructed to spend 10- 15 minutes a day practicing these yoga exercises.

As the sessions progressed, the emphasis shifted from the body of the workers to the space that he/she lives and works in. These modules highlighted the importance of keeping common areas (such as toilets or hostel rooms) clean. Short 3-4 minute films (made by IL&FS) were used to convey these messages. For example, one film depicts the story of four young men who have moved into Mumbai for the first time. They worked in an industrial unit and shared a small, clean room. Suddenly, a fifth roommate joined in. He came from a remote village and was new to city life. He is depicted wearing dirty clothes, used bad language and left the bathroom dirty, creating tension among the roommates. Soon they began quarrelling, until one of them decided to take a leadership role and “educate” the new roommate about the rules of the room (in a firm, polite manner). This scene was followed by the roommates listing out the dos and donts of clean, healthy living. The film particularly emphasised the importance of personal grooming, politeness and keeping common spaces clean. At the end of the film, the new roommate turns over a new leaf, changes his ways and the room becomes a comfortable and happy space again.

While this film clearly explained the values of the workplace in a limited period of time, it also reaffirmed some of the underlying assumptions about the rural poor as ‘ignorant’, ‘dirty’, ‘impolite’, and yet, ‘open minded’ to learning new things and changing their ways. A consequence of such films is that it could reproduce and reinforce such stereotypes amongst Trainees watching the film. IL&FS staff and Trainers did not see any value in questioning these ‘stereotypes’ and such films were described by them as “innovative”

and “effective” soft skills training aids. By May, 2010 more such films were commissioned to illustrate the value of team work, and discipline and punctuality at the workplace.

The modules on workplace etiquette and career planning shifted focus from influencing the personality of the Trainee to modifying his/her behaviour at the workplace. Role plays were frequently used during sessions on workplace etiquette, and Trainees often were asked to enact various situations, which involved communicating with senior managers within the factory, working closely with others in teams to meet a deadline, or even managing a conflict with a supervisor. Lessons on communication skills (with a specific focus on developing listening skills), discipline, and politeness were conveyed through these sessions.

An important point that was repeatedly echoed in these training modules is the idea of employment in the factory was a valuable experience, which could lead to future gains. Thus, Trainers emphasized the point that following the rules of the workplace, working hard and demonstrating their commitment to senior staff within the factory, would lead to career progression within the factory, and help them move up from SMOs to supervisors. This leads to another fundamental value that the soft skills training programme tried to develop in Trainees – the value of aspiration – a point that was repeatedly emphasized in every training module. At a fundamental level, it could be argued that participation in any kind of training process is closely linked to fulfilling aspirations of acquiring new kinds of jobs, earning higher incomes, or living a life of comfort and dignity. However, what was striking in both the technical and soft skills training programmes was how aspirations were used as a tool to encourage Trainees to continue with the training programme. While the technical training modules taught

Trainees to operate a sewing machine effectively and stitch a complete garment by following a pattern; the soft skills modules taught them that through hard work and commitment they too could aspire for higher, better paying jobs within the garment industry. Trainers frequently cited cases of “hardworking” and “efficient” SMOs – who went onto complete their higher studies while working on the factory floor, or take up additional jobs at a piece rate, in order to supplement their income. Such employees were constantly cited as “success stories” and were used as role models for new SEAM trainees.

Interviews with human resource managers within the garment factories reveal, in reality, only a very small number of Trainees manage to work their way up the hierarchy and rise to becoming quality supervisors, managers or Trainers. In fact, a majority of workers drop out after just one or two years of working on the factory floor, as the low salaries, long working hours on rotating shifts and few salary increments and opportunities for promotion, make young people leave these jobs. This point is never raised during the training process. Moreover, while “successes” of specific exceptional SEAM trainees were routinely emphasised to create role models for new trainees, little is known about those who dropout of the programme, or fail tests. The process of celebrating aspirations during the training programme and projecting it as a valuable skill also has a negative side. It leads to raised false expectations of the programme, which could affect the morale and motivation of young workers. I will elaborate on this point in further detail in the next chapter.

### III. The Role of the State in the Skill Training Process

The description of the training process has focused largely on the role of private sector actors (IL&FS staff, Trainers and HR Managers in garment-manufacturing firms) and trainees, in the SEAM programme. Where does the network state fit into this narrative? Does it play any role at all in the training process?

The SEAM programme is largely funded by the MoRD. However, the state's role is not limited to just funding this initiative. The previous chapter on the mobilization process explained how state representatives were key actors, organising and endorsing job fairs – where they actively encouraged young people to enrol in SEAM. I argue that state representatives play two different, but complementary roles during the training process. First, they act as auditors for the programme, conducting surprise visits to training centres, checking attendance registers, evaluating the training process and checking Trainee records. These audits are aimed at ensuring that state funds are not misused. An organisation within the MoRD, known as, the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), is responsible for conducting these audits. In addition to the NIRD, a South African consultancy firm, known as 'Methods Workshop' (well known for its expertise in the garment industry), conducts third party audits, by evaluating the training content and assessing the quality of the training at the SEAM centre. Representatives of the Methods Workshop sometimes, attend training programmes. Both sets of auditors prepare detailed reports, which are sent to MoRD. The decision to scale up project SEAM and release further funds for training are largely based on these detailed reports. The fact that the MoRD outsources the auditing of the SEAM initiatives to two separate agencies – a state-run institute and a private international consultancy firm, illustrates the Indian state's incarnation as a networked development actor.

Second, state representatives also play an important role in the final stage of Trainee certification. Trainees who have successfully completed the SEAM training programme obtain two certificates. The first certificate comes primarily from IL&FS Clusters and prominently features the Government of India's Lion Seal – to signify the fact the programme is state-sponsored. Apart from this, Trainees who complete project SEAM are also eligible for a certificate from the Government of India's National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT), as SEAM is recognized as a part of the Ministry of Labour and Employment's Modular Employable Skills (MES) programme. This certification is considered prestigious as it is recognized all over India, and could potentially help Trainees find jobs as SMOs across India.

The distribution of certificates to Trainees is a formal event, which like the job fair sees all the key “partners” in this initiative – state representatives, Managers from the garment industry, HR staff representing garment companies, Mobilisers, Trainers, and Auditors (NIRD and Methods workshop) – all come together. A senior state representative (typically the District Collector or a senior district-level functionary) distributes certificates and makes a brief speech and congratulates the Trainees and the SEAM team. For many trainees and their families, the presence of the District Collector at this event is important, as it implies that their qualifications are recognised by the state. For Trainees, this recognition by the state is not just instrumentally valuable – as a means to getting a regular job in a factory, but was intrinsically important to them as it gave them sense of accomplishment. Trainees I interviewed often relived this moment of being awarded a certificate when narrating their life stories. They described the pride they felt when they received their certificates, which hang proudly on the walls of their homes, as a symbol of success. While on the one hand these elaborate certificate distribution ceremonies, like the one described above does increase the morale of the SEAM Trainees; on the other

hand, such events (like the job fair), raise expectations about the nature of work on the factory floor, and opportunities career progression within the factory, which may be realistic.

The next chapter focuses on this issue and explores how Trainees experience work on the factory floor of AB Apparels. It contrasts this case with the case of Nokia, to bring out the similarities and differences in how workers experience work in these two worksites.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCE AND ASPIRATIONS IN THE NEW WORKPLACE**

#### **I. Introduction**

Young people have high expectations from skill-training initiatives like SEAM and Nokia's Smart Operator Bootcamp. The last two chapters of this thesis have examined how trainees' expectations of work are shaped through the processes of mobilisation and training. Chapter 6 has described how aspirations are raised, to market skill-training to rural youth, and maximise enrolments into SEAM. Chapter 7, takes this idea a step ahead, by examining how aspiration is also taught as an important skill young people must possess in order to succeed in the new workplace.

This chapter shifts focus from the site of training where aspirations are nurtured, to the site of employment, where Trainees' aspirations meet the reality of work on the shop floor. It presents examples of work in two kinds of manufacturing industries, in Kancheepuram district. The first example explores work in AB Apparels an export-oriented garment firm. The workers interviewed for this chapter were trained under Project SEAM and worked as SMOs in AB Apparels. The second example, examines how workers (trained by Nokia's 'Smart Operator Bootcamp') experience work on the shop floor of Nokia's largest worldwide manufacturing facility, in Sriperumbudur.

While the goods produced in both these firms are different, there are remarkable similarities in the labour force, at the shop floor level. Both firms recruit young workers

from surrounding villages in the district: typically young women, between the ages of 18-25. In both cases, recruitment takes place primarily through mobilisation camps and job fairs (like the ones described in Chapter 6), which are endorsed by state officials. Workers are trained through short, intensive training programmes (specifically designed for working in those specific factories), which equip workers with the technical skills, needed to produce goods on the factory floor. Workers are also given soft skills training, which attempts to sensitise them to the “work culture” of the firm and also seeks to shape their personalities and aspirations, so that they are most conducive to factory employment.

However, a major difference between these firms is – while Nokia and AB Apparels claim to recruit semi-skilled/ unskilled workers – the profile of workers in both factories were quite different. Shop-floor workers in AB Apparels were unskilled or semi-skilled having completed a few years of primary school or secondary school (at the most); while most of Nokia’s operators are skilled and seemed overqualified for their jobs on the shop floor. All Nokia’s Operators interviewed had completed high school, with a majority of workers holding diplomas from ITIs. Some workers also had Bachelor’s degrees acquired through distance education programmes. I argue that this difference is a key factor that leads to them to experience their work differently, and devise different coping strategies to deal with the nature of work on the factory floor.

The two case studies presented in this chapter highlight two key issues which are central to the driving arguments of the thesis. First, they highlight the fact there are significant gaps in the workers’ expectations of factory employment and the reality of work within these two sites. I explore the nature of these gaps – and explain why they occur. Second, I examine how this ‘aspiration gap’ (Ray 2003) impacts the lives of individual workers,

affect their sense of self and their aspirations for the future. I use portraits of young workers in the garment industry to illustrate the personal, financial and social risks that young people take to acquire new skills and obtain “company jobs”. These portraits also explain the numerous ways in which workers cope with this gap between the expectations and experience and come to terms with their disappointment. I explain how for some workers, this disappointment translates into taking a greater amount of individual initiative to acquire newer skills, taking up multiple jobs to boost incomes and “fight for success” by exploring other employment opportunities. Such “entrepreneurial” workers are hailed as “role models” by the human resource staff within these firms and their stories are cited as “success stories” to further sell skill-training programmes like SEAM. These stories also provide good insight into how “success” is understood by SEAM Trainers and staff.

A large number of workers also expressed a clear sense of disappointment and frustration with their work. These young people experienced low self-esteem and a sense of personal failure at not having achieved what they had envisioned at the time of recruitment. They planned to quit the workplace entirely and dreamed of getting married, starting families, or even continuing their higher education in the hope that they will be able to get better jobs. These workers are less vocal about their experience of the programme (for fear as being branded “failures”); as a result their stories remain unknown. While SEAM is hailed a resounding “success”, as cases of exceptional individuals within it are repeatedly featured to represent the programme, the stories of average trainees or those who fail, are unknown. While failure is a very real aspect of skill training initiatives, the concept of “failure” within the programme is largely unexplored. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the above idea.

## II. Expectations, Experience and Aspirations in AB Apparels

Over the past two decades, the city of Chennai has expanded to include towns like Guduvanchery, in Kancheepuram district (Chengalpet Taluk) – which are now considered the suburbs of Chennai. The town's strategic location, near the National Highway 45, which connects Chennai to the southern and western parts of Tamil Nadu has brought diverse industries into the region. This includes: a cluster of export-oriented garment manufacturing firms, hardware manufacturing firms, pharmaceutical industries, IT firms and notably a large conglomerate of private educational institutions (engineering colleges, medical colleges, institutes of management etc.). These industries have transformed the landscape of the town.

In contrast to Sriperumbudur, where the Nokia factory is based, Guduvanchery is smaller and less industrialised - with small and medium industrial units, co-existing with paddy fields and mango orchards. Unlike Sriperumbudur, the transformation of Guduvanchery into an industrial hub has not attracted much media attention, in spite of its close proximity to Chennai. These changes have placed a high premium on land in the region; with land prices tripling over the past few years. A number of real estate firms and property developers have capitalised on this boom. It is impossible to ignore the large hoardings of real estate firms, which come up every few minutes on the drive from Chennai to Guduvanchery, which advertise “world class”, “modern” and “luxurious” housing projects – targeted at appealing to aspirations of the middle and upper middle classes.

The presence of a wide variety of industries and its proximity to Chennai have also turned Guduvanchery into a hub, which attracts diverse labour pools – from semi-skilled

workers from villages in the region (and now increasingly from other states, due to skill-training initiatives like SEAM), who staff the factory floors of these industrial units – to highly skilled technical and managerial staff from different parts of India and overseas. Semi-skilled workers form the largest pool of workers who flock to Guduvanchery to work in various manufacturing units. While a small percentage of these workers are migrants, from other parts of Tamil Nadu or other Indian states, a majority of workers come from within a 60-kilometre radius of Guduvanchery. Companies in the region provide free transportation to such workers through a network buses (operated by private transport firms). The availability of free and safe transport facilities to these factories is cited as an important reason why so many young women have chosen to work in these new work sites, Guduvanchery.

The growing presence of industry and the emergence of new kinds of jobs for young people with a variety of different skills have also played an important role in shaping aspirations of young people in the area, who view jobs in these industries as an important opportunity – which could enable them to aspire to a “new life” or a “new start” (“*pudu vazhvu*”). Indeed, the term *Pudu Vazhvu*, is also the name of the Tamil Nadu Government’s, World Bank funded livelihood scheme, which offers a wide range of skill-training and income generation programmes for Tamil Nadu’s rural, below-poverty-line youth. This award-winning programme is widely hailed as a “success story” for employment generation in the state, which like SEAM also provides skill-training to rural youth so that they can be employed in the new industries in the region.

Young people come to towns like Guduvanchery, not just in search of new jobs, but to create a new life for themselves and their families. When asked what they thought was “new” about job opportunities in towns like Guduvanchery, Sriperumbudur and

Oragadam in Tamil Nadu (some of the state's newly emergent industrial centres); they explained, that these new jobs offer people like them with few years of education, a “second chance”, to move out of the agricultural sector (in which their families were employed) and obtain “stable”, “well paid”, jobs in private companies. Almost all respondents came from families where agriculture was the main source of income<sup>123</sup> and several of these young workers had worked on (or enrolled in) employment generation schemes such as NREGA (which involve building roads, ponds and construction work) which they described as “unstable”, and “risky”.

New jobs in the region are widely advertised. Pamphlets and leaflets announcing job fairs, training programmes and job openings are pasted on bus stops and the Panchayat headquarters in villages in the region. Young people had a rosy view of these new “company jobs” which they explained were not only valued because they represented stable sources of income – but were considered prestigious, especially if it was in large, well known, multinational firms like Nokia, Ford, Dell or Hyundai. A majority of young people who participated in group discussions felt that these jobs would pay well and explained that even though starting salaries in garment firms were low<sup>124</sup> they believed that they would be able to earn more and acquire better paying positions, and grow within these organisations if they worked hard.

This idea was communicated to them during job fairs and the training process, and was a key factor that led to the high expectations from these new opportunities that were

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<sup>123</sup> Parents of youth who participated in interviews and focus group discussions worked as agricultural labour, sold milk and vegetables in local markets, some had set up small poultry and dairy units in the household. Respondents mentioned that income obtained from these activities fluctuate frequently, as a result of which monthly income varied. Thus, the idea of obtaining a stable salary is a key factor that made industrial employment attractive to young people in the region.

<sup>124</sup> The average salary for a new recruit with no prior experience ranged from Rs 2,800 – 3,500 per month (in hand), in garment firms in Guduvanchery, and other parts of Kancheepuram district. Starting salaries are higher in Coimbatore, at about Rs. 4,500 per month.

widely advertised by the state and private corporations. For many young people I interviewed, the desire to move out of agriculture and break away, from the kind of lives that their parents lived was so intense, that the opportunity to work in a private firm was perceived as crucial opportunity, one, that should not be missed. The families of these young workers also played an important role in creating an aura around private sector jobs and made sure that they enrol and attend training programmes such as SEAM, as they too wanted their children to have “respectful” jobs in the private sector and move away from agriculture as the main means of livelihood. Thus, these new jobs were perceived by young people and their families that as an opportunity which would not only lead to financial rewards in the long term, but would also lead to social rewards in the form “greater respect” and “higher social standing”, within the community.

A range of new institutions have also mushroomed in the region to cater to young people’s aspirations to build a “new life”. These include, ITIs, private coaching centres (which prepare young people to enter engineering and medical colleges, by providing extra coaching classes), IT and English language training centres and finishing schools (which provide a broad range of training courses in areas such as personality development, communication skills etc.). These programmes complement efforts by the state and private corporations to train young people and make them employable in India’s new workplaces.

AB Apparels is one of the four large garment manufacturing units located in Guduvanchery’s garment cluster. A large export-oriented garment manufacturing unit, which primarily specialises in making women’s undergarments; AB Apparels, supplies finished undergarments to global brands such as La Senza and Victoria’s Secret amongst many others. This unit is part of large garment manufacturing corporation (based in Sri

Lanka) – which has three other manufacturing plants in Tamil Nadu (of which one is located in an SEZ), which manufacture a wide range of clothes for men and women: from undergarments to jeans and cotton shirts for exports. The parent firm has also established manufacturing units in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, which also produce garments for export. Thus like Nokia, AB Apparels too is a network enterprise with strong global and local linkages.

AB Apparels' top management (comprising of the CEO, General Manager and Heads of key verticals such as Human Resources; Quality and Supplier Development; Finance and IT; and Logistics) are all male. The middle level management comprises of both men and women, who head the standardisation team, the training team, publicity team, audits and quality. In contrast to the primarily male-dominated top/middle management of the company, AB Apparels' workforce on the factory floor (comprising of shop floor assistants, SMOs, team leaders, line managers, floor supervisors and quality checkers and finishers<sup>125</sup>) – are all young women. In 2010, the company had 2400 young women working in the Guduvanchery factory<sup>126</sup>. AB Apparels' human resource Manager mentioned that 92% of factory floor workers comprise of women living below the poverty line, who have been recruited from villages in Kancheepuram and Thiruvannamalai districts under the Tamil Nadu government's (World Bank funded) *Vazhndu Kattuvom* project (VKP)<sup>127</sup> and programmes like SEAM (since 2009). Over 80% of these workers were described as “semi-skilled” – working on the factory floor as shop-floor assistants, SMOs and garment checkers and finishers. These workers were all

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<sup>125</sup> The terms used for different levels of workers sometimes differ from factory to factory – even in the cases where the products produced are similar. However, the way in which the factory was organised and the broad responsibilities of workers in each of these categories remained broadly similar.

<sup>126</sup> This figure increased to 2500 workers, during a subsequent round of fieldwork in 2011

<sup>127</sup> This scheme is described in detail in the chapter on “Skilling India”. The *Vazhndu Kattuvom* (literally translated as “show the way”) initiative was first called the *Pudbu Vazhvu Scheme*, when it was first launched in 2005 – but its name was later changed. It was observed that government documents on this initiative often use both terms interchangeably.

young women between the ages of 18-25. All the workers I interviewed had no prior work experience; they had typically attended a few years of primary school and only 3 out of the 25 SEAM-trained workers I interviewed, for the study, had completed secondary school.

This chapter focuses primarily on describing how shop floor workers (this includes junior SMOs and garment checkers and finishers) in AB Apparels experience work, what their expectations from their jobs are and how their work relates to their future aspirations. Interviews were also conducted with AB Apparel's top management, human resource staff, counsellors and Trainers in order to understand the broader context within which these workers work, and to explore the relationships between shop floor workers and top management

#### **a) Working on the Factory Floor in AB Apparels**

AB Apparels is located in a large modern glass and steel structure, in a relatively quiet but rapidly changing part of Guduvanchery. A cluster of other garment firms are located near this factory. Wide, open spaces of land are interspersed with large, new buildings, guarded by high compound walls, gates and security guards. The factory's premises are immaculate. Well-manicured lawns lead to the main factory building, which is organised into three wings: the administrative wing, which house the offices where the company's top and middle level managers sit; the training wing, which consists of training rooms (where the factory environment is simulated on a much smaller scale), and the third main section of the manufacturing plant which consists of the factory floor – a vast open space on the ground floor of the main building, where hundreds of SMOs work quietly and quickly, as loud Tamil film songs blare in the background. A mezzanine floor,

overlooks the factory floor, where finished garments are checked, sorted, packaged and organised for shipment. Senior managers observe and monitor the production process from the mezzanine floor – from where almost every individual on the factory floor is visible.

The factory also has a large cafeteria, where employees assemble for their lunch and tea breaks. An adjoining building also has a crèche, medical centre (which provides free health check-ups and medical assistance to all staff) and toilets.

The factory floor is in stark contrast to the calm surroundings outside. The catchy Tamil music blaring from speakers inside the factory hides the intense and high-pressure environment in which production takes place. Workers work quickly and efficiently in neat rows, making women's undergarments for export. Huge piles of finished bras lie at the end of the production line; simultaneously shop floor assistants are seen wheeling in supplies of new components to the beginning of the production line.

The firm's production manager proudly explained that the factory produces 17,000 bras per day. The high production targets are met through a complex system of production, which according to AB Apparels' Production Manager,

“Maximises the efficiency of the individual worker and minimises wastage and line balancing losses<sup>128</sup>”

The factory operates in two rotating shifts with each shift lasting a total of 450 minutes<sup>129</sup>. Workers take two short breaks: one 45 minute break for a meal (lunch or dinner

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with Production Manager, AB Apparels 23.03.10

depending on the shift) and a short 15 minute tea break. The rest of their time in the factory involves working in teams or *lines*. Each team is supervised by the Line Manager, who ensures that the team reaches its production targets. In order to maximise efficiency, the production process is split up into a number of different components and each team member is allotted a particular step in this process (such as attaching straps, or stitching on hooks) and are responsible to ensure that the step is followed with precision, before the product is passed on to the next team member.

Production targets are listed on large whiteboards and the team's outputs are updated every few minutes, on the board. Workers, supervisors and team leads are under intense pressure to achieve these targets on time. An observation of workers working on the production line reveals the nature of work on the shop floor, where workers balance precision, efficiency and speed with the ability to multi task and work effectively in a team. Notably, there is no conversation between workers as they work on the production line and they are under constant surveillance – not only by security guards, line managers and floor supervisors but also from the numerous CCTV cameras that have been installed on the factory premises. The HR Managers desk faces about six screens which are connected to the CCTV system – thus he can monitor workers in every part of the factory, just from his desk. The fact that workers work in teams also means that breaks (even bathroom breaks) have to be scheduled carefully in order to ensure that it does not disrupt the production process. Discipline is strictly enforced. Absenteeism or lateness are penalised with salary cuts. Human resource staff, explain that salaries are cut typically only when a particular worker comes late to work repeatedly, but discussions with workers reveal that the fear of having salaries cut is a very real one – which makes the work environment particularly stressful.

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<sup>129</sup> This excludes time taken for lunch and tea breaks.

While the rhetoric of “team work” and the “value” of every employee, as a member of the “AB Apparels family” is one that comes up in conversations with senior management. For example, on one of the days when I was visiting the factory the HR Head, proudly showed me a set of birthday cards he had signed for some of the workers who had a birthday on that day. The envelope also contained a bar of Cadbury’s Chocolate – this gesture he felt showed worker’s that they were a valuable part of the “AB Apparels Family”. He also felt that such gestures and other bonuses that the firm gives (for festivals like Diwali) make workers in the factory “happy” as a result, attrition rates are only 5% (compared to about 15-20% in other garment firms in the region). Notably, the magazine features three examples of its best employees – an HR Executive, a SMO and team leader– all of whom highlight their ability to overcome all odds and achieve goals, as the secret of their success. These ideas form the core of the organisation’s in house magazine (which is privately circulated to the company’s employees) – which portrays the image of “modern” firm, with a “family” of happy, motivated, committed employees, who work hard to achieve production targets.

For example, the magazine presents the following quotation from one the firm’s HR Executives,

“With my self-motivation and courage, I challenged the hurdles that came across my life like disappointment, frustration and demotivation into Commitment, Excellence and Empowerment...anyone can GIVE UP ; it’s the easiest thing in the world to do. But to hold it TOGETHER, when everyone else thinks you would fall apart, that’s TRUE STRENGTH” (Quoted directly from the company’s Magazine: P. 13)

This idea of turning obstacles into opportunity is a theme that comes up repeatedly in the SEAM training programme and is also emphasised by HR staff and counsellors within AB Apparels. Employees, who demonstrate this ability are given awards like the “Empowered Woman of the Year Award” – and are also featured in the company’s magazines as role models for others. One of the young women who received this award, who is featured in the magazine, is quoted as follows:

“Keep confidence on your abilities and have the right attitude always. When life gives you a hundred reasons to cry, show life that you can have a thousand reasons to smile...”  
(Quoted directly from the AB Apparels’ Magazine: P. 13)

Another young woman, who won the company’s “Women Go Beyond” Award – for excellence is another model employee, who started out as an Operator in 2005 and was promoted to being a team leader after 7 years in the organisation. She was quoted in the magazine as saying,

“I am the eldest daughter from a lower class family. AB Apparels has been instrumental in my transformation...believe you can and you’re half way there. It is during our darkest moments we must focus on the light.” (Quoted directly from the company’s Magazine: P. 13)

These positive, inspirational statements featured in the magazine do not always conform to what was observed on the ground. Conversations and interviews with workers and managers reveal that despite the fact that they project themselves as a unified, happy family, there are clear prejudices. This is clearly observed in a remark by one of the human resource managers in the firm, who said to me during an interview,

“As a majority of workers come from rural areas, with no work experience they are not able to understand the importance of being disciplined and punctual. They don’t value their work and have a casual approach. They do not understand what these production targets mean and why they are important. In addition, many make careless mistakes – as a result of which production gets further delayed....This is big challenge to us as we have to work doubly hard to monitor their work, provide training and teach them the importance of working carefully and efficiently.... we also take disciplinary action – in extreme cases we cut their salary – but this is only to teach them to value their work and be serious... We also have a range of financial incentives for workers who perform well, and this helps create a motivated workforce...<sup>130</sup>”

This perception that the shop floor worker is inherently unprofessional and that management has to instil professional values in these young workers comes up frequently in informal conversations and interviews with HR managers. Some managers also express the idea that their work involves “social service” – by providing jobs, subsidised meals etc. to rural below poverty line youth who work on the factory floor. A senior manager of the company said,

“Private companies have a social responsibility and we are committed to this. Our workers come through programmes like VKP and SEAM and we do our best to integrate them into the work culture here. In addition, we encourage workers to also complete their higher studies and study for Class X exams, while working in the factory. In some cases we even provide tuition classes for motivated workers. So, we also are feeling satisfied that we are doing something for the society<sup>131</sup>.”

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<sup>130</sup> Interview, HR Manager 1 AB Apparels (23.03.10)

<sup>131</sup> Interview, Manager 3, AB Apparels (23.03.10)

Yet, in spite of this rosy picture of the relationship between workers and management, the HR managers were very particular about which workers I spoke to. During initial rounds of interviews, they chose specific individuals who were considered star performers (like the employees featured in their magazine). These young people were trained by SEAM, but were articulate, and had very positive things to say about the organisation<sup>132</sup>. These interactions took place at the factory (between breaks) and the presence of human resource staff (who attempted to play an active role, coaxing these “stars” to speak openly and also added to their responses), made the power dynamics within the factory clear – and also reflected how the “star” workers were very keen to please their managers, and the close watch the management kept on them.

Interviews with other staff at the village level (in their homes or in the village school), revealed a different picture of how workers experience work and relate to management. During these discussions, when workers were more forthcoming about their work and their future aspirations.

Management was described as “strict” and at times unreasonable when it comes to requesting permission for leave. Workers explained that they very rarely discussed their concerns with them, and that they were there only to work for a short time so that they can save money for their families. The gap between the perspective of the managers, and workers emphasised repeatedly during interviews. While supervisors and HR managers, spoke of how workers skip key tasks and compromise on quality, when they are not supervised; shop floor workers explained that they were afraid to raise important issues with senior staff or even speak to them.

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<sup>132</sup> Their answers were similar (often were worded similarly). For example, the phrases, “I am happy to be working in AB apparels”; “I am saving Rs 1500 every month and have a bank account for the first time”..... – were repeated almost word for word in a number of interviews.

Workers also spoke of “feeling cheated” by management, who they say promised them a higher salary, than they currently earn. They explain that Rs. 500-1000 less in hand; due to a range of deductions made for the Employee Social Insurance (ESI), Provident Fund (PPF) scheme, and other “allowances”. The amounts deducted are supposed to be returned to the workers when they leave the company, but interviews with former employees in companies like BA Apparels revealed that in practice, it was almost impossible to claim these amounts. Not only were workers unaware that they could claim these amounts, they were unsure how to do so. In addition, some workers who had left the company explain, that management often “makes excuses” – and failed to return these deducted amounts, especially when workers leave within a year, of joining the company. Other employees explain they are not paid overtime (even when it was promised); while their salaries are meticulously deducted (sometimes arbitrarily) for absenteeism and lateness<sup>133</sup>. These factors are also some of the main reasons why workers choose to leave work in these organisations. Almost all workers interviewed, explain that they accept this as a fact and do not try and question these practices and choose to watch and wait, gain as much experience as they can and leave the company “at the right time”.

The Tamil word “*nambikkai*” (trust) came up frequently in interviews and cited as a key issue, which not only governs the relationship between workers and management (as described above), but also governs the interaction between workers and their peers. Workers interviewed explain that they cannot rely on any of their colleagues, rather they explained how their colleagues could not be trusted. Mary, one of the girls explained this in some detail, in an interview in her village. She said,

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<sup>133</sup> Interviews with shop floor workers, 25.03.2010; 24.06.2011

“In this job, we are alone. We cannot think that others are our friends and that they will help us, because everyone wants to get the best for themselves. Some people in our team, even lie and spread rumours about us to seniors –so that they will be noticed and rewarded by management for their commitment. I don’t have any friends here....- we come work, chat during lunch breaks, but that’s all...<sup>134</sup>”

Friendships among work colleagues developed in the cases of workers who shared a living space in private hostels, or in the cases of young people who came from the same family or village to work in AB Apparels<sup>135</sup>. However, the fact that workers are individually evaluated on their performance, made them quite competitive, as a result of which workers often made a clear distinction between co-workers and friends. The Management encouraged this competitive spirit. Awards (like the “Women Go Beyond” award, or “employee of the month” awards are given individual workers who work extra hours, surpass production and demonstrate “commitment”. Some workers who show promise, are further rewarded by the management with offers to pay for extra tuition classes to pass high school exams, or to learn spoken English.

Competition, based on individual achievement not only prevents meaningful friendships from taking place among shop floor workers, but also prevents employees from coming together to form unions to negotiate better wages and terms of work with the senior management. This combined with the fact that a majority of shop floor workers leave within 2-3 years of joining the factory as SMOs further prevents the possibility of unionisation. The opportunities for SMOs to rise up in the factory hierarchy are limited. At job fairs and training classes, one gets the impression that once workers join the

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<sup>134</sup> Interviews with workers, 25.03.2010; 24.06.2011

<sup>135</sup> It was found that often people within the same family (typically) cousins often attend these training programmes together and choose to work together.

company, they will have opportunities to grow within the organisation and obtain higher skilled, better paying jobs as they become more experienced. However, in practice, very few SMOs reach higher positions. For example, in AB Apparels just three out of the nearly two hundred workers recruited through SEAM, who began as Operators became Team Leaders. One became a Supervisor (and this employee had completed school and was pursuing a Bachelor's degree by correspondence). These young women were considered AB Apparels' best employees (like the young women featured in their magazine) and were called upon to represent the organisation in job fairs, or to speak to government officials and SEAM's auditors about how they have managed to transform their lives through skills training.

How do skill-training programmes like SEAM affect individual lives? How do people respond to the nature of work on the factory floor and cope with the complexities of work on the factory floor? What kinds of lives do these young people aspire to? The following section, attempts to answer these questions through two portraits of workers who have been trained under SEAM and have worked in AB Apparels. These portraits illustrate, how they perceive and experience the training process and their work, and also highlight the diverse strategies they use to cope with disappointment and disillusionment with their work. These portraits also highlight the different kinds of risks that young people take – in order to realise their aspirations for themselves and their families.

## **b) Expectations, Experience and Aspirations: Portraits of Two Young Workers**

### *Anandajyoti*

Anandajyoti was a Trainee at the SEAM training centre in Kancheepuram, when I first met her in November 2009. The technical training process was complete by this stage and Trainees had just completed a game on team-work. There was still half an hour to go, before the end of the training session. The Trainer decided to use this time to have a discussion with the group and highlight the key lessons that they have learned from the training process. A number of suggestions came up from this group of 55 young men and women: “we must plan for the future”, “we must be committed to our work”, “we must learn to manage our time, and always be punctual” – these were some of the main responses that the Trainees shouted out, and the Trainer wrote these out on a white board. A young woman’s voice added another point to the list “we must do our duty to our family and be responsible...” – the Trainer praised her for her excellent point and also went on to elaborate on the idea of “responsibility” and emphasise how these young workers can change the lives of their families through their hard work and commitment to their jobs.

It was her duty to her family and the desire to change things at home by bringing in an additional source of income, that first led Anandajyoti to join SEAM, and aspire to work in a garment factory. Anandajyoti lives in a village, 30 kilometres away from Guduvanchery, where her parents work as daily wage agricultural labourers. Her older brother works as a mechanic in a workshop and her two younger sisters are in a government school.

Anandajyoti's family had taken a loan of Rs. 80,000 to build a room in their house and this has put pressure on them to earn as much as they can, so that they can repay this loan as quickly as possible. In addition, her father has been falling ill repeatedly over the past few months. Piling medical expenses and a reduction in her father's income, as a result of his poor health – led her to drop out of secondary school at the age of 14 and start working. Anandajyoti explained,

“I was never interested in studies in school, so I was happy to start working – and do any job to help my parents and earn money for them, so that we can live comfortably. When my brother started working, things became better for us and we now can hope to live in a good house. I also wanted to help, which is why when I heard of SEAM from a friend, I decided to join it...”<sup>136</sup>

Anandajyoti has done a range of different jobs, before joining SEAM. Apart from working in her home, cooking, taking care of her younger siblings and also assisting her family in agricultural work, working on daily wages and also helping sell agricultural produce in the local market. In addition, she has also assisted her aunt who runs a small shop selling tea and fried snacks, in the village. In 2008, she enrolled in the state's employment guarantee scheme, working with others in the village to build a new well in her village – for a few weeks.

In late 2009, she heard of project SEAM from a friend and she decided to apply for the programme. Her family also encouraged her to do this.

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<sup>136</sup> Interview 1, Anandajyoti, (22.11.2009)

“My family was happy to hear about this programme, because it meant that I could get a respectable company job, with a regular income. They don’t want me to do agricultural work. I also wanted to learn something new and thought that if I get this training, then I could get a steady job, earn a better income<sup>137</sup>.”

Anandajyoti left her village for the first time when she attended the SEAM training programme at a training centre in Kancheepuram district. All the young Trainees stayed at the training centre for 30 days, while the training was in progress. Anandajyoti’s description of the training process, gives a sense of how she experienced it, and also highlights how she believes it will help her in the future.

“The training process was very tough for me in the beginning. I had never even seen an industrial sewing machine, and I could not concentrate, because I was thinking of my family at home. After one week, I told Maya ma’am (Trainer), that I wanted to quit and go home, but she encouraged me and even gave me extra classes, so that I could improve. Slowly, I started making some friends and my speed improved. I started doing well in the tests and also enjoyed the soft skills training classes, where we played games and learned new things. When I first came, I was shy and did not want to speak – but now I can speak openly in the class (smiles). Next week, I’ll start work in the factory. It will be a new experience for me, but I know that with hard work and commitment I can achieve anything. Maybe after working here, one day I can start my own tailoring unit in the village – or even work for a bigger factory at a higher level....- for now, I am happy that I have a new job...<sup>138</sup>”

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<sup>137</sup> Interview 1, Anandajyoti, (22.11.2009)

<sup>138</sup> Interview 2, Anandajyoti, (11.04.2010))

The excerpt above reflects Anandajyoti's optimism about her new job and her high self-confidence which was particularly striking during my first interview with her. The Trainer too referred to Anandajyoti as an example to illustrate how within 30 days, she had transformed from a shy young woman, to confident, determined person.

Four months later in March 2010, I visited AB Apparels again, with a team from IL&FS to conduct a post-placement tracking exercise and review the progress of SEAM Trainees within the factory. This tracking exercise was aimed to document the progress of SEAM Trainees and understand how they fare at the workplace. These reports are documented and the results of these exercises are also sent to the MoRD, who funds SEAM.

As we were completing this exercise, I found Anandajyoti's attendance records and noticed that she has been frequently absent. I remembered her from my first meeting with her and asked about her. The human resource managers explained that she "*did not show interest in her work*" was frequently absent and late. She was also reported to have been sent for counselling, a couple of times – and that she seemed to have a "negative attitude". Strikingly, one of the HR managers also said that she was a "negative influence" on other workers and set a bad example for them. This view of the management, was in stark contrast to what I had encountered during my first interview with Anandajyoti – who seemed determined, confident and optimistic.

I discussed this with one of SEAM's mobilisers (Rajan), who got to know her quite well during the training process. Rajan and I managed to track her down at her at her home, in April 2010. Anandajyoti seemed very different from when I first met her. She had lost weight, looked tired and hardly spoke. In fact, in the beginning she thought we had come

to reprimand her for her poor progress reports, and she was reluctant to speak to us. After explaining to her that we just wanted to know how she was doing, she spoke to us and explained why she had such a tough time working in the factory.

Not only had her condition at home worsened with her father falling seriously ill, but her long working hours made it impossible for her to care for her father. Moreover, she was also unhappy at work and wanted to quit over the next couple of months, after saving Rs. 2000. Most of all, the self confidence that she had acquired during the training had gone, and there was a bitterness in her voice, when she told us how the long working hours, the constant nagging of her bosses, the rotating shifts and the boring nature of work were too much for her to handle.

However, the tipping point came one day, when she made a mistake in the production line. In her haste to achieve production targets she passed on a defective product (with the wrong kind of stitches) to another team member. This error was noticed by the supervisor – who shouted at her in front of the entire team and made her undo all the stitches and redo them, in front of the entire team. The entire line was held up, while Anandajyoti tried to correct her mistake. This episode reduced her to tears in front of her entire team. The humiliation continued over the next few days, when others in the team kept referring to her carelessness and used her example of a “careless” worker. Anandajyoti felt hurt by this experience and slowly felt alienated from other team members, who she says mocked her.

Anandajyoti was deeply disappointed, not just with the kind of work she encountered at the factory floor and the way in which she was treated for making a mistake; but, she was

also disappointed with herself, for failing to achieve what she had set out to. Notably, she said,

“When I began the training, I thought my life will change and become better - but my life has become worse. My salary is lower than I expected, and I feel tired all the time. I thought working in the factory, would give me respect – but I feel like a servant (“velaikari”). If I had known that this is the kind of work in a factory, I would never have joined. My family also tells me to try hard at work – to learn something new – or even try for another job in another factory - but I can’t do this anymore. I have disappointed everyone, even though I have tried my best. I don’t know how this work will help me in the future. I am much better off – taking up multiple jobs here in my village – rather than work in the factory.... At least, I have saved some money and done my duty to my family.... in future, I would like to get married and start a new life....<sup>139</sup>”

Anandajyoti’s words reveal how her expectations of factory employment were in stark contrast to the reality of work, on the factory floor and she could not cope with this. These high expectations can have negative consequences. Anandajyoti’s story highlights how within just six months, her high initial expectations were met with disappointment. This affected her personality and her self-confidence. She dreamed of getting married. Marriage for her represents a fresh start and an escape from her family problems and the stress of the workplace.

Anandajyoti’s story highlights an important point – one that is often hidden when celebrating the transformative potential of skill-training programmes in government meetings and job fairs – that there is a personal cost to aspiring high. This is especially the case, if expectations are raised falsely, just to meet programme targets. Anandajyoti’s

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<sup>139</sup> Interview 2, Anandajyoti, (11.04.2010)

sense of personal failure and disappointment is the consequence of raised false expectations and this had certainly had an adverse effect on her self-confidence and self-esteem, and may have a long-term impact on her life.

A striking point that emerges out of interviews with workers on the factory floor is their overall sense of disappointment with the nature of work on the factory floor. They also repeatedly highlight how competition is encouraged in the workplace and how workers who are not competitive or make mistakes or are slow are insulted and humiliated in front of their colleagues. For many workers, the fact that the reality of work was so different from what they were led to believe when they were joining the factory, was a key factor that made them leave AB Apparels after a year. Contrary to what many young people were led to believe, it is very rare that SMOs can become quality managers or supervisors in the factory. Even in the two or three known cases in Tamil Nadu, where this takes place, it requires a great deal of hard work, patience and experience – and can take anywhere between 3-5 years to rise up to higher levels.

In addition, the work is also physically demanding. This is one reason why young workers between the ages of 18-25 are recruited to work as SMOs. Workers have to sit or stand (depending on the nature of work and the type of sewing machine used), for long hours – and within a few months, workers complain about pain in the back and knees as a result of this work. The introduction of yoga classes for workers, organising their workplaces ergonomically and the setting up of health centres within the factory – do not take away from the fact that working as SMOs takes a toll on the health of workers. A number of studies on the garment industries have emphasised this aspect, of the workplace (See Siddiqui, 2000; Wright, 2006).

During the soft skills training process, Trainers give examples of how young people could use this training to work on the factory floor, acquire experience and go on to set up tailoring units in their villages, or even start their own businesses. In practice, this objective is very difficult to achieve. Typically SMOs can work for a few years and then aspire to become a team leader on the shop floor, but it is very rare for SMOs to become managers or even supervisors. This gap between expectations and reality came up repeatedly in personal interviews with SEAM Trainees interviewed for this study, and was an important finding that emerged out of post placement tracking exercises conducted by IL&FS. This led the organisation to also instruct mobilisers to ensure that they communicate accurate information to Trainees at job fairs and training camps and this was also highlighted in the training manual for mobilisers that was prepared in June 2010. Mobilisers however admitted that in order to meet their high targets and to encourage and “motivate” people to enrol in SEAM, they end up communicating the positive aspects of working in a factory and do not mention the negative points.

A key factor that emerged from interviews was the fact that shop floor workers, are not docile subjects who accept their conditions of work and adapt to it in order to ensure that they keep their jobs. Rather, I argue that workers are active agents – who make choices and exercise agency in diverse ways to cope with the conditions of work on the factory floor and realign their personal aspirations in order to achieve their personal goals. Anandajyoti’s example illustrates one way in which young people cope with and respond to the challenges they face at work: by quitting their jobs and aspiring to get married.

Over the past two years, it has been observed that a few SEAM-trained shop floor workers – who have worked in companies like AB Apparels and other garment units in the region, are now employed by IL&FS Clusters and work as SEAM Trainers, training

rural, below-poverty-line youth to work in the garment industry. These young people are used as examples to illustrate the transformative potential of training programmes like SEAM, and their examples are cited in job fair and meetings with MoRD officials. However, it is important to note that the young people who do rise to become Trainers are exceptional individuals who are extremely driven (and also have higher levels of education than the average SEAM Trainee). These determined young individuals work very hard and take numerous risks, which enable them to achieve these goals. There is a tendency to highlight these exceptional individual achievements in job fairs, and describe them as if they are part of a “normal” career path of a SEAM Trainee. In practice, these individuals are rare and a majority of workers who work in companies like AB Apparels stay there for a year or two years at the most to earn extra money and then they go on to get married, start families and in some cases take up other jobs (as sales girls in shops for example), which are perceived as less demanding.

The next portrait examines the idea above, through the story of Madhumati, a young woman, who joined the programme in 2010 and has recently become an IL&FS Trainer, in Kancheepuram. I use her story to illustrate the extraordinary nature of her achievement, and to highlight how individual agency, initiative and determination have been instrumental in her success story.

### *Madhumati*

Madhumati, was 20 years old when she first joined the SEAM programme. She was recruited from the job fair in Mylai village, in Kancheepuram in April 2010; which is when I saw her for the first time. My first impression about her was that unlike the other girls who appeared shy, Madhumati was very sociable and asked Rajan (the mobiliser) a

lot of questions. My first interview with her took place on the day of the selection tests for SEAM. Madhumati had just completed her dexterity and colour blindness tests and had just learned that she was selected for the SEAM programme. She was very excited about learning something new, and in this discussion she shared the story of her life and what drove her to joining SEAM.

As a child, Madhumati wanted to become a Tamil teacher in a school. She planned to complete her schooling and enrol for a Bachelor's degree in Education, in Kancheepuram. However the sudden death of her father, in an accident – led her to drop out of school in her final year. She was 16 years old, at that time and as her father was the main breadwinner – she and her mother had to start earning money, to run the household. Madhumati had two younger brothers, who were 12 and 14 years old – they were both still in school. In spite of the fact that she had a large family with relatives who were helpful during this time of crisis, Madhumati wanted to start earning a living and contribute to the family income. Madhumati did so, by staying at home and taking extra tuitions in Tamil and mathematics for children in elementary school. She said,

“With my father's death, I knew that I had to leave school and start earning some money for the family. By taking tuitions, I was able to keep in touch with what I had learned at school, earn some money and also look after my family<sup>140</sup>.”

She earned roughly Rs. 1000 per month, tutoring children in the village – and helping them study for their exams. Even though she dropped out of school, Madhumati continued studying for her school leaving exams. One of her teachers (Mani, known as “Mani Madam”) was very supportive in this process. Mani, like Madhumati's mother was

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<sup>140</sup> Interview, Madhumati, 15.05.2011

also widowed and had young children to take care of. The similarity in their family circumstances made her particularly close to Madhumati's family. Mani, provided her with free tuitions and practice exam papers in Tamil and social studies. She also graded her papers in these subjects and encouraged her to work hard and study.

Apart from her tuitions and studies, Madhumati also enrolled in the employment guarantee scheme, in the village, which paid her at the minimum wage for every day that she attended work. She admits that she hardly did much physical labour in the road construction project that she was tasked with, but, signing up for this programme was an important means for her to supplement her income.

“These years were the most difficult because we did not have enough money to buy basic provisions. My mother worked as a daily wage agricultural labour and also worked as a cook in a few homes. She would bring home leftover food when she came home – and that was our meal. I earned a little income from the tuitions and my work on the road project... - with this we survived<sup>141</sup>”.

A year and a half later, she appeared for her school leaving exams. However, the exams did not go as well as planned. She had failed to pass the Science and English papers. She was deeply disappointed by the result, but decided not to give up.

Mani, her school teacher, arranged for a science tutor to teach her for Rs. 500 per month. She then enrolled in private institution (5 kilometres from the village), which taught English in six months for Rs. 5000. She put together her savings, took a loan of Rs. 2000 from her uncle and enrolled in this course. Though the costs of this were high, her family

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<sup>141</sup> Interview, Madhumati, 15.05.2011

supported this decision as they believed knowing English would open up access to well-paying jobs in the private sector. Madhumati continued her studies and finally passed her exams, in her second attempt with a 56% average, in 2009. In addition, she also obtained a certificate from the English language school. While she was not fluent in spoken English, she could read English and understand it well.

Madhumati's achievements were celebrated by her family as she was one of the few women in the family to complete school. However, she was unable to enrol in the B.Ed. programme that she had hoped to, as she did not make the 60% cut off. She then decided to continue taking tuitions at home, save some money and then enrol for a distance learning programme, through which she could obtain her Bachelor's degree. She was earning Rs 1,800 per month, and taught 9 students in her village. By this point her family's financial position was better, as her brothers also started working in Ford's manufacturing plant near Guduvanchery and they started saving up money and contributing to the family income.

In January 2010, a new opportunity presented itself. SEAM was advertised in the village, and Mani her teacher informed her about this new programme, which would provide free training to rural BPL youth work in the garment industry. The posters highlighted that the starting salaries were Rs. 3,200 and that jobs were guaranteed post training. This led Madhumati to the job fair in Mylai – where she met Rajan (IL&FS' dynamic mobiliser) and enrolled in SEAM.

Madhumati's performance in the SEAM training programme was considered exemplary (having achieved some of the highest test scores in her class). She was a very quick learner, and was the first to complete her stitching exercises. The Trainer said it was

unusual to find Trainees like her – who followed the training modules so quickly and also had meticulous attention to detail. Often she was selected to demonstrate a step – or a process to others in the class. In my second interview with her in May 2011, she looked back on the training process and described it as follows:

“For me the SEAM programme was a new beginning, and I was very happy to have enrolled for the programme. I learned new things. I made new friends, in my own age group – this was very nice as for years, I had studied on my own, at home – so it was good to meet other people and learn something new. When I joined, I did not even know what an industrial sewing machine was and in 30 days, I was able to follow a pattern and stitch a full garment<sup>142</sup>.”

Madhumati started work in AB Apparels in June 2010, and worked in a factory environment for the very first time. She also shared a good rapport with the Rajan the mobiliser and the Trainer (Anusha), and continued to keep in touch with them, and even called him on his mobile phone, to recommend other people in.

Madhumati began work in AB Apparels in June 2010. It took an hour and a half to reach the factory and working on the factory floor was not as enjoyable as she imagined it to be. In my second interview with her in May 2011, she explained,

“I enjoyed the SEAM training programme very much. I learned quickly and Anusha ma’am was very encouraging. In the classroom, we could take our time learning, and it was more relaxed. Working on the factory floor was more difficult, because it was very fast-paced. There was heavy pressure to meet production targets and in case we make a mistake, they would shout at us. I was good at my work, and managed to achieve targets

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<sup>142</sup> Interview, Madhumati, 15.05.2011

on time – but, I found the work boring after six months. Also, I had to travel for three hours a day, and this did not give me any time... I knew that even though I was doing well, I will not be able to be promoted – or get a higher salary within the organisation, until I have worked for a few years. I wanted a change...- so I was in touch with Rajan Sir, and told him that even though I am doing well in the company – I am not happy with this work.<sup>143</sup>”

Rajan (the Mobiliser, featured in Chapter 6) remembered this conversation very clearly and told me,

“Madhumati was doing very well and I wanted to help her – otherwise she would quit and her training would be a waste...- so I decided to speak to the HR managers, who I knew well and see if there is a chance for her to be promoted...<sup>144</sup>”

Rajan discussed Madhumati’s case with the HR Managers, and asked whether she could be promoted. The Managers felt that it was too early for a promotion – as she had only worked for six months. They were also worried that it would set a bad precedent and that other Trainees would also demand, higher wages and promotions, without gaining enough experience on the factory floor.

During this time, IL&FS was also recruiting Trainers for the SEAM programme, which was growing rapidly. By January 2011, over 100,000 young people had been trained under SEAM, across India, and there was a high demand for new Trainers. Rajan felt that Madhumati would be an ideal candidate for a Trainer, as she was not only good at her work and learned quickly; he also felt that the fact that she was once a Trainee herself,

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<sup>143</sup> Interview, Madhumati, 15.05.2011

<sup>144</sup> Interview Rajan, 17.05.2011

would also make her understand the Trainees and also serve as a “good role model” for them. Rajan, discussed this with Madhumati and asked her if she was interested in attending the *Training of Trainers (ToT)* programme in Karur district (about 300 kms South West of Guduvanchery). This training programme would bring 35 young people from across India to work as IL&FS’ Trainers in SEAM centres across the country. Madhumati, was delighted to hear the news and enrolled in the training programme in February 2011. She said,

“At the ToT, I met people from different parts of India, and we learned how to use computers and the K-YAN<sup>145</sup>. We learned about how to teach these modules in a class and how to motivate and counsel new Trainees...-it was a great learning experience and I feel I am realising my dream of becoming a teacher.”

Madhumati successfully completed the ToT in 2011, and she joined a new SEAM training centre in Kancheepuram, as an Assistant Trainer (as an IL&FS employee), in April 2011. In my interview with her in May 2011, she explained that she was now earning Rs 7,500 per month – more than double of what she used to make earlier, and that she was “happy” with her work. She said,

“I enjoy teaching and this was something I have always wanted to do....but I never thought that I would become a Trainer in a private company. As I was once in the same position as the others in the group, I understand them – and can also motivate them. I think a Trainer should also be a friend, to Trainees – so that they can openly discuss their problems with them. In my life, I was lucky to have people like Mani Ma’am and Rajan Sir – who helped me get here, and I have a chance to help these young people achieve their dreams....”

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<sup>145</sup> An IL&FS patented teaching aid, on which the SEAM training modules are projected to the class

Madhumati's story was starkly different from the stories of other SEAM Trainees interviewed for the study, who like Anandajyoti, felt disappointed and chose to give up their jobs completely. Madhumati has always strived to overcome odds in her lives – and it is this quality that led to her exceptional achievement of becoming a Trainer. Out of the more than 100,000 Trainees who joined SEAM in July 2011, only 11 young people, across India became Trainers in IL&FS. This points to the fact that their achievements are not the norm (as it is projected in job fairs and the training process), but they are exceptional individuals who take a range of different risks (by taking loans, enrolling in new courses, working in multiple jobs etc.), in order to achieve their goals.

Madhumati's case is often cited as an example of the transformative potential of skill-training programmes like SEAM – however it is important to note that in her case, she too was unhappy with the job she obtained through the programme and used initiative and personal connections to find an alternative. Thus, the narrative which celebrates Madhumati's achievement – and uses it as an example of what a Trainee can typically expect to get out of SEAM is inaccurate and devalues the personal effort that young people like Madhumati put in to avoid being labelled a failure and to make a success of their lives.

This trend – of using exceptional individuals to convey a positive impression of the workplace – as not only observed in garment manufacturing firms, like AB Apparels, but also in other sectors like Nokia's manufacturing plant in the town of Sriperumbudur, which also recruits thousands of young workers from villages across Kancheepuram. The next section of the chapter, explores how workers in Nokia, experience work on the factory floor. How does their experience compare with that of workers in AB Apparels?

What are their future aspirations? Are there gaps between their expectations of work and their experience of it? If so, how do they cope with their gap?

#### **IV. Working as a Shop Floor Operator in the Nokia Telecom SEZ**

As in the case of AB Apparels, Nokia and other companies in the SEZ provide free transportation for its staff living within a 60-kilometre radius of the plant. Nokia's employees arrive for work in chartered buses. The sheer scale at which the Nokia SEZ operates is particularly evident during visits to the factory when the shift changes. Over 40 large buses are parked in the parking lot and hundreds of young men and women walk towards the factory and queue up at the factory gate to clear security formalities (frisking, checking of bags, registering their personal mobile phones and going through metal detectors), as they begin work for the day. Following this workers are escorted by security staff to the factory floor, where they put on a sterile white jacket and shoe covers and begin a long day of work.

Nokia's factory is located in a large low-rise building, which is at the centre of the Nokia Telecom SEZ. The first part of this building contains office space for Nokia's middle and top management who work in Nokia's Operations and HR teams. The factory is headed by Nokia's Operations Manager – who is responsible for monitoring the production processes in the plant. Nokia has also appointed Managers to oversee specific parts of the manufacturing process, in the plant. These Managers often visit the factory floor and interact with the Supervisors and Technicians working in the plant few times a day; however, their offices are located in the “corporate office” section of the Nokia building.

The factory floor is located behind these corporate offices and is a sprawling space on the ground floor. The factory is a high security area, and visitors are rarely allowed inside. The factory is a sterile space, and every individual is given uniforms and sterile footwear to wear when they enter the factory. Every individual (including cleaners, visitors and Nokia's Operations Manager) is frisked while entering and leaving the factory. This practice reflects Nokia's work culture, which places emphasis on the fact that all rules in the company apply to everyone, irrespective of his/her position in the company<sup>146</sup>. Nokia's HR officials and its managerial staff highlight this point frequently in interviews, and also pointed out how workers at all levels, sit together for lunch at the cafeteria – highlight the “modern”, non-hierarchical nature of the workplace – which the management was particularly proud of. Many other company practices related to meetings with workers, eating at the cafeteria also reflect this practice.

The layout of Nokia's factory ensures complete surveillance and supervision of the thousands of workers who work on the factory floor. Production took place on the ground floor and there was a mezzanine floor above this –which provides bird's eye view of the entire factory and the production process can be observed and monitored.

Nokia's factory worked round-the-clock in three rotating eight-hour shifts, when fieldwork was conducted in 2008. Workers changed shifts every two weeks. Thus a worker who worked from 6:45 AM to 2:45 PM, moved to the 2:45 PM to 10:45 PM shift in two weeks. Two weeks later, he/she worked on the night shift from 10:45 PM to 6:45 AM. Nokia's HR team believed that working on multiple shifts is better for workers'

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<sup>146</sup> Interviews with Nokia's HR team – August, 2007. Human resource staff seem to be particularly proud of this fact and mention it repeatedly to explain Nokia's “work culture”.

body clocks than working on single shifts, as this ensured that every worker got a fair chance to work during the day shift. Nokia's operators interviewed for this study, however explained that the shift system was the most difficult factor to get used to when working in Nokia. This point emerged one of the key reasons why workers choose to leave Nokia and take up other jobs that may pay less, but involve better working hours.

There were three main categories of workers who worked on the Nokia's factory floor – the Supervisors, Technicians and the Operators, all of whom worked in rotating eight-hour shifts.

The *Supervisors* were in charge of monitoring the manufacturing process in the factory. They held diplomas in engineering and had considerable experience in hardware manufacturing. Supervisors were typically male, over 35 years of age and were divided into two groups in Nokia's plant. The *Factory Supervisors* were in charge of managing a team of Operators and Technicians who work on Nokia's shop floor, and monitored the production process. '*Shift Supervisors*' were responsible for the process by which shifts are allocated and rotated. The shift supervisors had less technical expertise and experience when compared to the factory supervisors.

The *Technicians* worked under the Supervisors and were responsible for servicing the equipment used to test mobile phone components. Individual components that were found to be defective were also given to the technicians, who either repaired these components or discarded them. The technicians worked in small clusters on the factory floor. Most technicians were in their late 20's and early 30's, and they typically had diplomas from ITT's and had a minimum of 2 years of work experience. Both men and

women worked as technicians in the Nokia SEZ, though a though a majority of technicians in the factory were male.

The *Operators* formed the lowest rung of workers on factory floor and were tasked with assembling mobile phones. This group of workers formed a majority of the workforce in Nokia's factory. These workers were typically between the ages of 18 and 25 and had usually completed high school and with additional technical training qualifications. However, they hardly had any work experience. Over 75% of the Operators in Nokia were female, in 2008.

*Age, gender, education* and *experience* emerged as the four main factors that stratified workers on the factory floor. Older male workers, with more training and experience worked as Supervisors; while semi-skilled workers, with some technical training and experience worked as Technicians. In both these categories, the majority of the workforce was predominantly male. The group of Operators, in contrast, consisted mainly young women with low levels of skills and no work experience. They formed the bulk of the workforce in the Nokia SEZ.

*Age* and *gender* were the two main factors, which separated workers who were more "senior", and "experienced" from those who were less experienced, on the factory floor. The fact that Nokia's Operators came from a patriarchal culture which values age, ensures that this informal system of social stratification, creates a clear hierarchy on the shop floor, where younger, less experienced, predominantly female workers reported to older more experienced male workers. This system ensured that conflicts between workers in different categories were minimised.

*Language* was an important factor that created hierarchy within the Nokia SEZ. Workers on the factory floor (who spoke Tamil) referred to those who were senior to them as ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’, while Nokia’s administrative and managerial staff working in the main office (including the administrative staff) communicated in English use first names when referring to each other. Nokia’s HR team explained that Nokia preferred to recruit young workers, as they were “more likely to fit into Nokia’s work culture”. However the dynamic of labour relations on the factory floor, was distinct from that of Nokia’s corporate office.

Nokia’s policy of hiring young, relatively inexperienced workers to work at the lowest rung on the factory floor made both business and managerial sense. From the business angle these workers could be hired at a relatively low wages, keeping overall costs low for Nokia. From, the managerial angle informally stratifying workers on the basis on age, gender, experience and language, reproduced the structures of inequality and hierarchy that existed in the world outside the factory floor, within it. This is a common strategy used in manufacturing firms, and is also evident in studies of other industrial workplaces (see Breman 1996,1999; Holmstrom 1984; Chari 2004), to ensure that workers conform to the factory norms and minimise the chance of conflict between different groups.

#### **a) Manufacturing Nokia Mobile Phones on the Factory Floor: The Role of the Operator**

“There is no room for errors in a heart surgery, and at Nokia”

The quotation above was strategically placed at the entrance to the Nokia’s manufacturing plant and succinctly summarises its work culture of “zero tolerance” for

errors and mistakes. This idea was repeatedly emphasised during the training programme and on the factory floor where Nokia's mobile phones were manufactured. Nokia's Sriperumbudur plant is known to have the highest quality standards among all of Nokia's manufacturing plants. Its defect rate was less than 1% in 2008<sup>147</sup>. Nokia's senior officials attributed this to the high quality of the Operators recruited, the training process and an effective system of monitoring and supervision<sup>148</sup>.

A newly recruited Operator in the Nokia's SEZ was paid a starting salary of Rs. 3,800 per month (about £50 GBP), in 2008, when fieldwork for this study was first conducted<sup>149</sup>. This salary was higher than what an individual would get at the minimum wage in Tamil Nadu, which would amount to about Rs. 2500 per month (about £25 GBP). Apart from the salary, an Operator in Nokia was entitled to two highly subsidised meals in the Nokia cafeteria and free transportation to and from their residence (within a 60 kms radius of the factory). Nokia's workers were also enrolled in a social security scheme, which helps them cover health expenses. The Nokia telecom SEZ also had a newly established health facility, within in the non-production area of the SEZ, where workers were entitled to free medical check-ups and treatment.

Nokia's Operators typically worked 6 days a week on the factory floor. Though the process of manufacturing Nokia mobile phones was highly automated it was also labour intensive. The system of production in the factory resembled an assembly line. The manufacturing and testing equipment was placed in long rows along the factory and workers worked in lines in front of the equipment.

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<sup>147</sup> Interview, Production Manager, 14.08.08

<sup>148</sup> Interview, Josh Foulger, Head Sourcing, 14.08.08

<sup>149</sup> During a follow up telephonic interview in December 2010, worker's starting salaries had increased to Rs 4,200 per month. (Telephonic Interview, J. Thilagan, 18.12.10)

Operators in the Nokia plant were split into two groups who performed two main activities, which were a part of the manufacturing process<sup>150</sup>.

The first activity, known as ENO or “engine operations”, laid the foundation for making mobile phones. Operators worked in long rows, in front of large machines, that made the “engine” of the mobile phone - a thin strip of plastic, which is covered with a network of circuits on which chips and other electronic components of the mobile phone are placed. This process consisted of five stages. The Operators first fed the plastic strips into a machine, which sticks a network of electronic circuits onto the strip. Another Operator then placed this strip into another machine, which works like a conveyor belt. During this process various micro core components of the mobile phone were fitted onto the plastic strip to make the “engine” of the phone. Following this, another Operator, put the engine with the final components into an oven, which melts the soldering agent on the plastic strip and ensures that all the micro components that are fitted onto the strip are stuck firmly. Once these components were in place, basic software was installed in the engine. Each complete engine was then tested and once it cleared the test it was passed on to another team of Operators who transformed the engine into a complete Nokia mobile phone.

The second set of tasks in the manufacturing process is known as ATO or “assembly to order”. Depending on the market demand, Nokia receives orders to produce specific models of mobile phones. Detailed specifications of these orders are given to the Operators. Technicians prepare the equipment to manufacture phones. Operators then convert the engines that were manufactured in the ENO process and into a specific model of a Nokia mobile phone.

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<sup>150</sup> Interview, Production Manager, 14.08.08

The ATO process was much more labour intensive than the ENO process. Operators in the ATO section worked in long rows and performed a number of tasks in sequence, in order to assemble a mobile phone. These tasks involved manually fitting the camera or the Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) screen on the phone, fixing the keypad, testing the battery, testing the final mobile phone by manually checking all its components and packaging the phone in cardboard boxes (with accessories such as the battery, charger, hands free set and an information booklet).

Operators in Nokia's plant do not always perform the same task during their tenure in the factory. Their tasks often rotate. HR officials in Nokia explained that this measure helps relieve the monotony of work. Rotation of work is also an attempt at quality control. HR officials explained that when a person was assigned the same task for a long period of time, the very monotony of the task could make them "careless" and "negligent"<sup>151</sup>. Thus, rotation of work also ensured that the high quality standards of the factory were not compromised and that the scope for error was as low as possible.

Operators working on the ENO and the ATO process typically stand for three to four hours at a stretch while working. This is because of the height of the equipment and the nature of work, which made it necessary for the workers to stand while they work. As a result working as an Operator in the Nokia's plant, was particularly tiring, according to workers<sup>152</sup>. As in the case of AB Apparels, working in an assembly line, made it difficult for Operators to take breaks between jobs, as this disrupts work for the entire team – thus workers work according to a rigid schedule, with very little scope for breaks or even social interaction during work.

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<sup>151</sup> Interview, HR manager, 13.08.08

<sup>152</sup> Group discussion with Nokia's Operators

Mealtimes give Nokia Operators a chance to take a break. Every Operator in Nokia was entitled to two full meals in the Nokia canteen, one meal is usually in the middle of the shift and the other is either at the beginning or the end, depending on the time of the shift. These meals were highly subsidised by Nokia, and cost about Rs.2-5 for each worker per day. Crucially, mealtimes – gave workers a chance to interact and chat – and workers eagerly looked forward to this.

Nokia's cafeteria followed a buffet system and catered to all Nokia staff. All workers (irrespective of their designation in Nokia) ate together in the cafeteria. Managers often sit on the same table as Operators. Informal interactions with young workers in the factory revealed that it took them some time to get used to this practice. Having been raised in a society, which is highly stratified in terms of caste, class and gender – for many female workers, the idea that a male “officer” would sit and eat with them on the same table is something that made them “feel nervous”<sup>153</sup>. However, they explained that this was something that they adapted to after a while.

Labour unions were non-existent in the Nokia SEZ in 2008. Nokia's HR department discouraged the formation of labour unions in many subtle but effective ways. An excerpt from an interview with an HR Manager in Nokia (below) emphasised this point.

“There is no need to have a labour union in Nokia, because the management and the workers have a very close rapport. Every month, the Operations Manager and other Senior Managers in Nokia, have a meeting with all the workers in the factory. This meeting is done in three different shifts, in order to ensure that he addresses all workers employed in this factory. During this meeting The Operations Manager describes the output that was generated in the factory in the past one month and he also gives awards

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<sup>153</sup> This point was made during a group discussion with young women working with Nokia.

to recognise the efforts of workers in the factory. During these meetings any worker can directly voice their concerns or any problems they face directly to us..... a labour union will not really serve any purpose in Nokia”.<sup>154</sup>

I had an opportunity to observe one of these “All Staff Meetings”, during fieldwork at the Nokia factory, which provides an insight into how Nokia’s workers and management relate to each other. Nokia’s All Staff Meeting was held on 21, August 2008 in a large hall near the factory floor, where Nokia’s Operations Manager, addressed the staff (in English) from a makeshift wooden stage which he shared with three other senior managers. Staff at all levels – from Operators to senior managers were present at the meeting. One of the HR Managers, went on to translate the speech into Tamil, for the benefit of its shop-floor workers. Mr Saxena began by congratulating the team on producing a record number of phones and in setting the quality standards for Nokia’s other plants worldwide.

This was followed by a short presentation by Nokia’s production manager who addressed the workers and gave an overview of future production targets - emphasising the need for all staff to work together and achieve these objectives collectively. This session was followed by a question and answer session – where Operators, Supervisors and Technicians asked questions to the management about production targets for the next quarter, leave policies and the Diwali bonus. Employees also used the meeting as an opportunity to voice complaints on the quality of food served in the cafeteria and on an irregular bus service. Notably, questions were raised primarily by men, though women formed a majority of the overall workforce. Questions were not raised about salaries (even though workers did complain about their low salaries privately, during personal interviews). Nokia’s senior management responded positively to all questions raised and

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with JT (14.08. 2008)

they promised to look into them. One of the HR Managers was also observed recording detailed minutes of this meeting.

The meeting ended with a song sung by one of Nokia's Operators, who emerged as a finalist in a music show on television (the Tamil equivalent of American Idol). The song was greeted by cheers and applause. The meeting ended with the promise of a Company sponsored picnic in the following month, which again drew cheers from the staff.

The monthly All Staff Meeting is a good example of the "human resource management strategies" used in the new industrial workplace to build a good rapport between the senior management and workers. One of the HR managers explained that a major objective of this meeting is that it aims to send a message to staff that the Management is approachable, willing to listen to the workers and take their suggestions seriously. These meetings are aimed at boosting employee morale and letting them know that the Management recognises and values their contribution to the company<sup>155</sup>. The body language of the management, the use of humour, the song at the end and incentives (like the company picnic) were important tools used by the management to keep its young workforce happy. I argue that this strategy, which presents the relationship between labour and management as partners rather than being two opposing classes of workers, played an important role in discouraging the formation of labour unions, in the first few years of operation of the Nokia SEZ.

Personal interviews with individual workers, outside the Nokia factory revealed another side of work in Nokia. Most of them explained that the work was tough. They also expressed a sense of disappointment, with the monotonous nature of work, rotating shifts, and low salaries. At the same time, they mentioned that they were grateful for this opportunity and saw it as an investment in their future. A majority of workers

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid

interviewed mentioned that they planned to move out of Nokia within two years of joining<sup>156</sup>. It was clear from the interviews, that Nokia's Operators entered the company knowing that this is a short-term opportunity. This short-term view of work was a key factor that hinders workers from forming labour unions in 2008 – which worked to Nokia's advantage, at that time.

This also explains Nokia's high attrition rate, which was nearly 20% in 2008. Nokia's Operations manager referred to the high attrition rate in Nokia as *good attrition* as he explained,

“Many of the workers who leave us do not leave us for other companies, but rather leave to pursue higher education. They find that the training and experience they have gained in Nokia as very valuable and we believe that this is our contribution to the larger society”<sup>157</sup>

I would argue that though Nokia loses the money that it has spent on training its workers, when workers leave – the attrition rate is also “good” for Nokia, in the sense that it prevents workers from getting too deeply rooted to Nokia, forming unions and expecting more from the management. The process by which Nokia recruited its workers, its strategy to engage with workers through “all staff meetings” and “company picnics” were part of its larger strategy to build goodwill among its workers and avoid unionisation.

## **b) Perspectives from Nokia's Operators: Skills, Expectations and Experience of Work**

Group discussions and interviews with Nokia's Operators highlighted two main issues, which were central to understanding how workers in the factory experiences work.

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<sup>156</sup> Interview and Group discussions with Nokia's workers (20.08.08)

<sup>157</sup> Interview, Operations Manager, 12.08.08

The first main factor that came out of discussions with operators pertains to the issue of skills. According to Nokia's recruitment policy, Operators were classified as "semi-skilled" workers. However, it was striking that a majority of the Operators who participated in interviews and group discussions for this study had higher qualifications. Out of the 32 Nokia Operators interviewed for this study, it was found that 21 workers were not "semi-skilled" in the conventional sense. A majority of these workers had completed a nine-month diploma course in electronics or information technology, from ITT's in the region. 12 workers in this group had obtained Bachelor's degrees (through distance learning programmes) in subjects like chemistry, bio-chemistry, physics, computer science and electronics. These workers had spent time and limited financial resources to be enrolled in ITT's or long distance learning programmes to obtain well-paying jobs as technicians in large companies. Thus, by putting "skilled workers" into the semi-skilled" category, Nokia's recruitment process devalued the skills, time and financial resources invested by workers in enrolling in ITT's. This had two consequences.

On the one hand, this led to the underemployment of skilled workers (who were in search of jobs in MNCs). On the other, it also excludes a large chunk of semi-skilled workers, (with just a few years of schooling) from accessing the new employment opportunities that were emerging in Sriperumbudur in 2008. Thus, while on paper, companies like Nokia and AB Apparels recruited semi-skilled workers to work on the factory floor; interviews with individual workers revealed that shop floor workers in both firms were very different – with Nokia's Operators being better educated and overqualified for the kind of work that they do.

Nokia's Managers, justify this by stating that that simply possessing an ITI Diploma, does not indicate that an individual is well equipped to work as Technicians or in more senior levels in the company. They explain that the curriculum in ITI's, are outdated, and that Nokia ends up spending a great deal of time and resources to retrain these workers. This coupled with the fact that these workers have no prior work experience, result in them being employed as Operators, at the lowest rung, on the factory floor.

Similarly, Bachelor's degrees, from distance learning programmes (which young people like Madhumati, the SEAM Trainee featured earlier in this chapter, aspire to) were also dismissed by Nokia's staff who questioned the quality of these degrees. Thus, on the one hand young people in Kancheepuram who yearn for new jobs, spend a great deal of time and money acquiring new degrees and qualification in the hope of getting well paid, "respectable" jobs in companies like Nokia. On the other hand, these degrees are not recognised by companies like Nokia— resulting in workers being underemployed right from the very beginning. This was a key cause of frustration, especially among unemployed youth over 25, who felt that their ITI diplomas had no value in the workplace.

Government officials in Tamil Nadu were aware of this and took a number of steps to encourage Industry-Institute Collaboration between companies like Nokia and ITIs, in order to ensure that the quality of training in these institutes, measures up to the standards of industry. How do workers cope with the devaluation of their skills? Why do they still aspire to work in Nokia?

Interviews and group discussions with Nokia's staff explored these two questions in detail. Operators in Nokia agreed that working in the factory was difficult and that their

work was not what they thought it would be. They explained that standing for long hours at a stretch, combined with working in different shifts has led many workers to develop health problems, which include backache, pain in their legs and headaches. However, the fact that Nokia provided free and safe transportation for its workers, subsidised meals, social security were key factors that made working in Nokia particularly attractive for young people – particularly for young women, in this region. In addition, young people particularly valued the prestige of working in firms like Nokia. They felt that the respect that they (and their families) obtained, socially, as a result of possessing a “company job” was worth the tough working conditions. Workers who lived with their families explained that even though salaries were low, they do save a large part of their income. Importantly, they mentioned that they felt satisfied that they could contribute to their family income – an achievement young people I spoke to were proud of. This view was expressed clearly by S. Arasi in an interview. She said,

“I am working in Nokia as an Operator and I earn Rs. 4000 a month. Though the working hours are tough, I am happy because I can contribute to the family income. I am also saving this money and use it to do my BSc in Chemistry in Pachiappa’s College in Chennai, next year.”<sup>158</sup>

Migrant workers from other districts had a different view. They lived in shared rented accommodation in hostels, near Striperumbudur (where 5-6 people share a single room). They explained that they spent almost everything that they earn on accommodation and living expenses. Such workers often leave Nokia in a few months after acquiring some work experience and look for other jobs, which are less strenuous.

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<sup>158</sup> Interview S. Arasi, 26.08.08

For example, Susheela from a village near Cheyyur left her job in Nokia and was looking for a job as a salesgirl in a “fancy store”<sup>159</sup> in Chennai, in August 2008. She explained,

“I spend five hours a day on the bus. The long travel and the shift system... made me quit my job. I’m not working now, but I am looking for a job as a sales girl as this will not be as strenuous as working in the factory..”<sup>160</sup>

For such workers there was a clear gap between the high expectations they had for a “company job” when they applied to Nokia and their actual experience of working in the company. Yet they were hopeful, that their brief stint in Nokia would yield good employment opportunities in the future. They often described their job as a form of internship or as a stepping stone to a solid career in the future. This point came up repeatedly in focus group discussions with Nokia’s Operators. To many young men and women, job in Nokia was not a big break, but an opportunity that they must make the most of, to succeed in life. Trainees described it as a chance to “learn new skills” and “acquire work experience”<sup>161</sup>. Nokia’s operators explained that though they worked long hours were paid low wages and travelled for several hours a day in order to get to work – they felt that this effort was worth it as they believed that it will yield results in the future. This view was in contrast with workers like Anandajyoti, in AB Apparels – whose experience of factory work, made them give up entirely on the idea of working for large companies. They aspired to get married and start a family instead.

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<sup>159</sup> A local term for a shop which sells a variety of items which include clothes, jewellery, cosmetics etc.

<sup>160</sup> Interview, Susheela, 10.08.08

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Vani and Ashwini (10.08.08)

## V. Conclusion

A common theme that emerges in this chapter is that young people's expectations of work are remarkably different from their experience of it. Workers cope with this in diverse ways. For a majority of workers in the garment industry, their disappointment and disillusionment with the work is in stark contrast to the high expectations raised by Trainers, government officials and garment manufacturing firms. Workers interviewed expressed a sense of personal failure, and hopelessness at not having realised their aspirations through employment and they decided to quit the workplace entirely.

Exceptional individuals, like Madhumati featured in this chapter, used her determination, initiative and drive to make the best out of her the SEAM training. She worked hard and used her social connections (such as her close rapport with the mobiliser), to her advantage – to achieve her personal aspirations. While skill-training programmes – use examples like Madhumati's to sell skills training to rural youth and give the impression that this is the "normal" career path that young SEAM Trainees can aspire to; in reality young people like Madhumati are exceptions, not a norm. Ignoring this fact, or glossing over this in job fairs and training camps – not only belittles the enormous effort and initiative that people put in to achieve their personal objectives; but also can lead to thousands of young people, feel disillusioned and disappointed with themselves for failing to have achieved what the state, their families, their Trainers – had expected of them.

The experience of Nokia's Operators highlight how young people cope with the devaluation of their skills at the workplace, long working hours, rotating shifts and low salaries. Ambition helps them cope with these challenges, as they view their jobs as

short-term opportunities, or stepping-stones to their future career, which they were planning while working in Nokia. While there are clear gaps between expectations of work and their experience of it, shop floor workers in both AB Apparels and Nokia, are active agents who craft diverse, innovative strategies to deal with the challenges of the workplace. For some it means quitting work or finding new jobs. For others it means staying employed, to build a foundation for a future career.

The promise of the new workplace and how this relates to the gap between young people's aspirations and their experience of work within these sites is emphasised in a short Afterword, in the following section. This Afterword presents the Nokia SEZ in 2014 and highlights some of the major challenges that Nokia faces today, making it quite distinct from the site where fieldwork was first conducted in 2008.

I use the Afterword, as a starting point for the concluding chapter, which brings together the key arguments and findings from across all the empirical chapters. The Conclusion explores what the examples of the two skill development programmes presented in this thesis tell us about the nature of the partnership between the network state and the network enterprise, and whether the skill-training programmes help fulfil young people's aspirations – or constrain them.

## VI. Afterword: The Nokia SEZ in 2014

“The case of the entire Nokia ecosystem is sad. Our plant is now in a shutdown mode. A Voluntary Retirement Scheme [VRS] has been announced for workers in the Chennai plant. So far, 2000 workers out of a total of 6,500 have signed up for VRS. We are now in the process of devising a new bridge-programme for workers, to teach them new skills, so that they can obtain jobs elsewhere.”

- Former Member of Nokia’s Top Management, Telephone Interview, 4.05.14

The Nokia SEZ was a symbol of success, in 2008, when I first began fieldwork. Since then, a series of events – adversely affected the Nokia Corporation as a whole and has had a particularly negative impact on the Nokia SEZ. Recent telephone interviews with Nokia’s former senior manager and conversations with Nokia union members revealed this story.

August 2009 saw the first labour strikes in Nokia, where workers protested against Nokia’s refusal to pay annual increments in workers’ salary. Another such strike occurred in January 2010, and slowly workers within Nokia started organising themselves into a Union. By 2010, the Nokia India Thozhilalar Sangham (NITS) was established. For the very first time, Nokia’s management recognised the Union, which started negotiating better terms of work for Nokia’s workers. The presence of the Union decreased attrition rates, and few new workers were hired.

On 31 October 2010, a tragic accident occurred on the shop floor of the Nokia SEZ. This gave the NITS even greater bargaining power. A 22-year-old women named Ambika, was working on a loader machine, which suddenly got jammed. Ambika put her

head under the machine, in an attempt to resolve the issue, when suddenly, the machine started working again and crushed her head and neck. Ambika was rushed to hospital, but sadly, succumbed to her injuries. Nokia's management paid her hospital bills, covered her funeral expenses and also compensated Ambika's family by guaranteeing employment to her siblings and providing health insurance coverage for her parents. Nokia was severely criticised for not prioritising the safety of its workers. This event also gave Nokia a great deal of negative publicity in the Indian media. These events made it impossible to obtain access into the Nokia factory and conduct further fieldwork there in the period 2010-2011.

From 2010-2012, NITS began negotiating better terms of work, higher wages and better benefits for workers. By January 2012, Nokia's management and NITS arrived at a new wage agreement, as a result of which workers salaries, benefits and overtime rates increased. At this time, Nokia Corporation was in the midst of a financial crisis and were laying-off staff in its global offices. Hiring was frozen in the Sriperumbudur plant. In September 2013, Microsoft announced its merger with Nokia. The Nokia SEZ was also included as a part of the deal. It was assumed that Microsoft would take over the SEZ and that Nokia's employees would become Microsoft employees. Things took a turn for the worse, when India's tax authorities levelled tax evasion charges against Nokia in 2013, claiming that Nokia owes India's Income Tax Department \$3.4 billion, since 2006. As a result of this lawsuit, Nokia's assets were frozen – and the fate of Nokia SEZ and its 6,500 workers hangs in the balance. NITS has been taking up the cause of Nokia's workers, with its members going on hunger strikes outside the Nokia SEZ on several occasions since March this year.

The former member of Nokia's top management, whom I spoke to over a telephone interview on the 4, May 2014 (on the condition of anonymity), was referring to these events when he spoke about the "sad" state of affairs in the Nokia plant. He explained that it is likely that the factory will shut down in the next few months. He added that Nokia's management is in the process of designing a range of new skill training programmes (referred to as "bridge programmes"), which seek to equip its workers with new skills, by funding course in sewing machine operations, entrepreneurship development, personal grooming and beauty, and agriculture. He mentioned that Nokia plans to provide such "re-skilling" training opportunities to its employees who obtain VRS, so that they can find jobs in other workplaces.

In just a few years, the Nokia SEZ went from a celebrated "success story", employing thousands of young people, into a factory in a "shutdown mode", forcing its workers to take up voluntary retirement and search for newer opportunities.

Recent events at the Nokia SEZ, raise a number of new questions on durability of the partnership between the network state and enterprise and the high price that Nokia's workers have to pay for aspiring high. Future fieldwork in the town of Sriperumbudur will help answer these questions.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **CONCLUSION**

This thesis brings three driving themes together, using the lens of skill development: the confluence between the network state and the network enterprise in India, the broadening of the meaning of “skill” within the new workplace, and the aspirations of youth. How does the empirical material that I present contribute to the existing social science literature on these themes? This concluding chapter answers this question: recapitulating this study’s key findings, and highlighting their significance to understanding contemporary India’s development trajectory.

#### **I. The Symbiotic Relationship Between the Network State and Network Enterprise**

The symbiotic relationship between the network state and the network enterprise is an overarching theme in this thesis. But what is the nature of this relationship? I investigate this question by using a series of empirical chapters to explore different aspects of this relationship, focused on the examples of the Nokia SEZ and Project SEAM.

The first aspect of the network state/ network enterprise relationship consists in how they collaborate to set up new workplaces. Chapter 3 examines this particular collaboration within the context of SEZs in Tamil Nadu. Kohli (2006 a,b; 2012) characterises the Indian state as “pro-business”. Chapter 3 confirms this characterisation, and demonstrates it through an analysis of Tamil Nadu’s Industrial Policy, noting that it explicitly promotes the establishment of SEZs and industrial parks. The chapter further

illustrates the “pro-business” stance of the state, by describing how the Tamil Nadu government, acting in the role as a *facilitator* of industrial growth, convinced Nokia to set up a manufacturing unit in the State. Specifically, it describes how Tamil Nadu’s bureaucrats attracted and retained Nokia’s interest in establishing the Nokia SEZ through the instrumentality of a financial package – customised to Nokia’s interests by government agencies such as TIDCO, SIPCOT and the Guidance Bureau – composed of tax concessions and other incentives (subsidised land, power etc.). In describing this facilitative role of the state, Chapter 3 details the “midwifery” or “husbandry” (Evans 1995) roles played by particular industrial development agencies in negotiating with Nokia; describing how the state went so far as to have agency officials work personally and directly with the Nokia team to expedite administrative clearances and reduce bureaucratic hurdles, so as to establish the SEZ as quickly (and, for Nokia, conveniently) as possible. The chapter therefore illustrates how close the relationship between the network state and network enterprise has become.

If Chapter 3 described the magnitude of the state’s effort to attract Nokia – how far it went to help the company establish the ‘new workplace’ of the Sriperumbudur SEZ – Chapter 4 illustrates the state going even further in this courtship. The chapter explores another aspect of the network state’s relationship with the network enterprise: its efforts to recruit young workers for the company. Tamil Nadu’s “pro-business” state went beyond financial packages, to actively organise job fairs for Nokia (and other MNCs) in Kancheepuram’s villages. Chapter 4 offers empirical material describing how the state mobilised youth in villages around Sriperumbudur to apply for jobs in Nokia, reaching out to local NGOs for assistance.

Having explained the relationship between the network state and the network enterprise at the sub-national level, Chapter 5 examines this relationship at the national level: using the example of how skill development became a *national* policy priority in India since 2007. My thesis argues that the processes through which the Indian state has *formulated* national skill development programmes – and, through PPPs, *implemented* them – demonstrates an even more intimate version of its relationship with the private sector. If the Tamil Nadu example showcased the state’s role in the relationship as that of *facilitator* (as observed in the Nokia case in chapters 3 and 4), the national case – where the state collaborates with actors in private sector in delivering skill-training to the rural poor – depicts a more intimate role: that of *partner*. This deeper relationship evidences a further ‘pluralisation of the state’ (Chandhoke 2003), highlighting the entry of the private sector as a key development actor. Its role in the skill development sector was emphasised by no less than the central government’s National Skill Development Policy, which saw private sector partnerships as a central component of the Indian state’s broader response to the “skilling challenge”. Terms such as “public private partnerships”, “institute industry collaboration” (see Planning Commission, 2008; Government of Tamil Nadu 2007) feature repeatedly in policy documents prepared by the Government of India. Chapter 5 uses these documents, and accounts of government-industry summits, to reveal the state’s concern at its own lack capacity for implementing skill development programmes – and its solicitation of private sector (including MNCs and private training institutes) and NGO collaboration and capacity to deliver skill-training to Indian youth. The chapter then illustrates how the private sector – specifically, the network enterprise – *responded* to this solicitation, using the example of IL&FS’s collaboration with MoRD in Project SEAM to investigate this question. It depicts the incentives of the different actors, particularly the network enterprise’s interest in securing government revenue and goodwill, in their deliberate negotiation of consensus: one that leads to a new role for the

network enterprise, as the implementation arm of the state, working with it to deliver development programmes to India's rural poor.

Chapter 5 then offers a detailed observation of how these interests are aligned, and partnerships initiated and consolidated, by describing the 2011 Skoch Summit in New Delhi – a key forum for such activity, where NGOs, corporations, industry associations, representatives from government departments all came together to “network”. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates and emphasises the strong interest – motivated in part by the heavy funding now allocated to skill development – possessed by a range of non-state actors, in collaborating with the state in its skill development effort; and offers an account of how this interest is translated into attempts to court the state, by describing the enthusiasm private sector firms and industry associations at the Skoch Summit expressed about their readiness to collaborate to meet the challenge of skilling India.

Chapter 5 further uses the Skoch Summit to illustrate how the different actors work, as they align their interests to establish *consensus* – emphasising the centrality of the role of consensus building between the diverse actors in setting up potential partnerships. The alignment is visible in how these diverse actors spoke the common language of inclusive growth and skill development (the urgency of the latter being emphasised by all actors). Indeed, the Summit itself was an event dedicated to explicitly demonstrating this consensus or “synergy<sup>162</sup>”, between the state and private sector – a point that was repeatedly highlighted across conference presentations. This idea of synergy came up repeatedly in speeches of representatives from industry bodies, private companies, NGOs, banks, Indian politicians and bureaucrats at the Summit. I argue that the fact that

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<sup>162</sup> This term was frequently used by speakers at the conference to highlight the shared interests between the government and private sector.

these diverse organisations chose to demonstrate this consensus is deliberate, as it makes explicit the alignment of interests between the different actors and attempts to lay the foundation for future partnerships.

Having offered, through the case of the Skoch Summit, a general glimpse of how consensus building occurs between the state and its potential partners, Chapter 5 goes on to provide a detailed description of how this consensus was consolidated in the form of a partnership – using the example of how IL&FS courted MoRD to secure the SEAM implementation contract, as part of the national SGSY-SP scheme. By describing the important role played by the IL&FS Clusters CEO – a former Government of India civil servant – in actively engaging with the MoRD to set up SEAM, and the fact that the SGSY-SP template was taken directly from an IL&FS document submitted to the MoRD – the chapter points to the increasing convergence between the network state, and IL&FS as a network enterprise. The findings highlighted in Chapter 5 also link to a larger trend in India, where private corporations are increasingly viewing various departments in the Government of India as its key clients. At the time of fieldwork, over 80% of IL&FS Clusters' overall business came from various government departments (at the central and state government levels).

Significantly, the thesis places Chapter 5's description of a private sector that actively courts the state (in IL&FS' pursuit of MoRD), both in *contrast with* and *additional to* the depiction in Chapters 3 of a state that courts the private sector (in the Tamil Nadu Government's efforts to attract Nokia to Sriperumbudur). This is an important finding. Most scholarship on the “pro-business” state portrays the state as an actor that serves the interests of the private sector by providing it with a range of benefits to boost industrial growth (see Kohli 2006a,b; Sud 2012; Dutta 2009). While there is some evidence that

private sector firms have courted the state to secure specific favours in the past (see Kohli 2006), and while media reports frequently suggest this link, there is limited research on exactly how this courtship takes place in practice.

Chapter 5 provides empirical evidence on the emergence of the private sector as a key actor in the social development sector, a collaborator with the Indian state that implements development programmes on its behalf. This draws out a new facet of what Kohli (2012) calls the “state-business nexus”, where prominent network enterprises such as IL&FS work with the state to implement development programmes and as a partner in the state’s anti-poverty and redistribution programmes. I therefore suggest that the network state and network enterprise share a complex, symbiotic relationship in contemporary India, where state actors and private sector representatives seek to collaborate for mutual gain. I emphasise the porosity of the boundaries between the two actors, through an exploration of how PPPs in skill development are conceptualised and implemented. In doing so, I suggest that the network state and network enterprise now work together as one governance network.

The characterisation described above therefore seeks to go beyond existing portrayals of the relationship between the Indian state and the private sector, which describe the relationship using terms such as “pro-business” (Kohli 2006a,b), “crony capitalism” (Kochanek 1995), “embedded” (Evans 1995), “pluralised” (Chandhoke 2003), all of which are premised on the idea that the state’s objectives of redistribution are separate from (or at odds with) the objectives of private corporations. By examining the confluence of the network state and network enterprise in the specific instance of SEAM, Chapters 3 and 5 explain how these actors attempt to align their interests.

Chapter 6 offers an example of this alignment, through a description of IL&FS aggressiveness in mobilising youth into the SEAM programme, in order to maximise enrolments into SEAM. In maximising SEAM enrolment, IL&FS aligns its profit maximisation goals with the state's (specifically, MoRD's) objectives in expanding skill training (and meeting targets thereof). IL&FS is paid a fixed rate by MoRD for every young person who is trained under SEAM. Thus, by maximising enrolment, IL&FS not only demonstrates its commitment to achieving MoRD's skill-training targets, but also ensures that it maximises profits by achieving scale.

There remains an important qualification to describing this relationship between the network state and network enterprise. A striking point which emerges in Chapter 5, is that the pluralisation of the state does not mean that the state's role in driving development initiatives has diminished in any way. The state has not rolled back. Rather, I argue that it continues to play a powerful role. While it outsources implementation of these initiatives to private organisations or NGOs, the network state continues to set the terms for its partnership with non-state actors: retaining its position as the prime source of funding for such large skill development programmes, and its monitoring and audit powers over such initiatives.

How might this relationship between the network state and network enterprise develop? This remains an important question for future research. In recent years private consulting firms in India have been setting up public policy practices to "advise" the government on policy issues. During fieldwork I observed representatives from the Tata Administrative Services seconded to the Planning Commission, working as 'Young Professionals'. Staff from consultancy firms, such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers were seconded to the Ministry of Information Technology; a team of consultants from Ernst and Young, were

seconded to work in the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. These trends highlight even closer connections between the network state and network enterprise, which need to be examined. Are cases like SEAM or the emergence of private sector consulting firms playing an advisory role to the state, short-term trends or does it indicate a complete reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and private sector? Does this mean that the private sector will become a more dominant actor in the field of public policy and development in the years to come? These are questions for a future research project and merit deeper investigation.

Lastly, the empirical chapters of the thesis emphasise how these two actors align their goals, establish consensus and enter into partnerships, through the examples of the establishment of the Nokia SEZ and the SEAM programme. These initiatives were both examined at an early stage, shortly after each of these projects were initiated. The material collected through fieldwork from 2008-2013, suggested that these two actors shared a harmonious relationship. For example, Nokia's Operations Manager mentioned that there was "no government interference in factory matters"<sup>163</sup> and he described Tamil Nadu government officials as being "very supportive"<sup>164</sup> to the Nokia, during an interview in 2008. As discussed in the Afterword (in Chapter 8) Nokia's relationship with Tamil Nadu government officials, in particular and the Indian state in general, became strained, since 2013, when the Income Tax authorities, levied tax evasion charges on Nokia and froze its assets last year. Nokia was entering into a merger with Microsoft in 2013, and the tax-evasion case made Microsoft reluctant to include the Nokia SEZ as a part of the deal. As a result, the fate of the Nokia SEZ and the thousands of workers currently working there hang in the balance. The rising labour disputes within the Nokia SEZ and

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<sup>163</sup> Interview SS July 2008

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

the affiliation of workers to a strong labour union, has further soured the relationship between the network state and network enterprise in the Nokia SEZ case. From an initiative, which symbolised hope, success and employment generation to government officials, Nokia's staff and young people in Kancheepuram district, the Nokia case now represents a crisis. These events emphasise the dark side of "pro-business" state's interventions and question the sustainability of this partnership between the network state and network enterprise.

## **II. Youth and Skill Development for the New Workplace**

The thesis began with the premise that new workplaces in India are looking for a specific kind of young worker: one who is simultaneously technically capable of performing a task, as well as disciplined, dynamic, open minded, keen to learn, docile and capable of following instructions (Gooptu 2009; 2013b). By focusing on the processes of skill-training within the Nokia SEZ and Project SEAM, Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis identifies the kinds of skills that are valued in these new work sites, and explains how such skills are imparted to create new workers for new workplaces in India.

Three key points emerge from the material presented on skills training from the case studies of Nokia and SEAM. First, a combination of technical and soft skills training is provided to workers in both kinds of manufacturing firms, suggesting that both sets of skills are interrelated; an argument that is made in Chapter 7 (as also in Chapter 4), which shows how – despite the separation of technical and soft skill training courses – soft skills elements (such as efficiency, hard work, time management) remain an important component of technical skills classes; and how soft skills training also draws on technical

training processes and focuses on how to use tools correctly and safely and highlights techniques for improving efficiency on the factory floor.

Second, Chapter 7 evidences the multidimensionality of the concept of 'skill' in the new workplace is clearly evident through the nature and content of both technical and soft skill-training programmes. Importantly, this study emphasises the point that the value of 'emotional labour' is not only limited to service sector jobs (as illustrated in the work of Upadhy 2013; Gooptu 2013a; Nisbett 2013), but also form an important component of training for new workplaces in the manufacturing sector. While workers in the manufacturing sector do not engage with other clients as a part of their everyday work (as in the case of IT sector workers; retail staff or private security guards), soft skills (typically associated with such engagement; including interpersonal and communication skills) remain salient in their training. Interviews with trainers and factory managers reveal that these skills are taught in order to facilitate peer-to-peer communication on the factory floor and to ensure clear communication between workers and their seniors. A key set of soft skills include that of following instructions and listening skills, taught to workers to maximise their performance at the workplace. Other soft skills taught in these programmes include discipline, punctuality, work ethics and the value of hard work and determination. Trainers often refer to these skills as "life skills" and explain that these skills will "make them employable<sup>165</sup>" in any job they choose to pursue.

Lastly, while soft skills modules do focus on teamwork (taught through games and role play exercises), skill-training programmes in both SEAM and Nokia have a strong emphasis on developing and testing individual skills. Chapter 7 (as also Chapter 4) shows how individuals are routinely assessed on their performance periodically and competition

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<sup>165</sup> Interview SEAM Trainer, Kancheepuram, 22.06.2010

between trainees is encouraged through tests and games, which establish clear winners and losers. These values are also consonant with the norms of the workplace, where workers are given awards for achieving efficiency targets or excellence.

Chapter 8 of this thesis presents individual stories and experiences of workers highlighted in the thesis to explain how young people encounter such training initiatives, and how they experience factory work. By presenting a few examples of SEAM trainees and workers in Nokia and AB Apparels factories, the chapter draws out how individuals develop their own strategies to strive for success at the workplace and how they deal with the disappointments. The individuals who strive for success, like Madhumati in Chapter 8, use their networks with trainers, mobilisers and factory supervisors to their advantage and strive for better opportunities despite disappointments and personal struggles. Other individuals (like Anandajyoti) who are disillusioned take a conscious decision to quit their jobs (despite counselling by trainers and human resource staff – through formal, repeated sessions – to remain in their jobs). Anandajyoti, notably, blames herself for her “failure” to realise the promise of SEAM, and this was a key reason why she aspired to get married and exit the workplace.

Thus the stories of individuals like Anandajyoti and Madhumati highlight the fact that while skill-training programmes aim to construct a specific kind of efficient, disciplined and successful worker – young trainees do not blindly accept everything that is taught to them. They develop their own responses to it and take full responsibility for the success or the failures that they encounter at the workplace. The next section develops these ideas further by exploring the theme of aspirations and youth, and explaining how skill-training programmes attempt to shape young people’s aspirations and how they respond to these processes

### **III. The Many Dimensions of Aspiration**

Aspiration is a driving theme in this thesis; which sought – as a core objective – to connect the future-oriented visions of public policy with that of young citizens, through the lens of skill development. The thesis uses different chapters to highlight different dimensions of aspiration, by analysing skill-training programmes within India's new workplaces. In doing so, makes a theoretical contribution to the existing literature on 'aspiration' and by highlighting aspiration's multiple facets, within the context of skill-training programmes in India.

#### **a) The centrality of aspiration to skill training**

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical context for a study of aspiration. It highlights how aspiration has been theorised by scholars such as Appadurai (2004; 2013): as a positive, transformational force, that can act as potential pathway out of poverty for the poor. The empirical chapters – specifically Chapters 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 – engage and question Appadurai's conception of aspirations. They attempt to provide an alternative account of the nature of young people's aspirations; highlighting the ways in which 'aspirations' are deliberately instilled in young people (by government officials, private corporations and skill-training initiatives); and explaining how youth respond to these processes.

This empirical engagement begins with Chapter 3, which looks at what rural youth aspire to, and how these youth perceive the new workplace. It draws on field interviews and group discussions conducted in 2008, with young men and women – some employed at Nokia, others not – in their native villages in Kancheepuram District. I examine how rural youth perceive the opportunities generated by the rise of the 'new workplace' at the

Nokia SEZ; and by describing how these youth aspired to acquire prestigious new “company jobs” – and how they were trying their best to acquire new degrees for ITIs to become a part of these new workplaces – I show that rural youth viewed jobs in these worksites as opportunities not merely to earn additional sources of income, but also to acquire the prestige attached to these new jobs.

Chapter 4 transfers the empirical examination of aspiration from the village into the workplace; and, crucially, links aspiration to skill development. It examines aspiration among youth trainees in the Nokia SEZ – the shining new workplace and aspirational site that young people in Kancheepuram wanted to be a part of in 2008 – through an investigation of Nokia’s Smart Operator Bootcamp training mechanism. By exploring how youth are transformed to become shop floor workers in the SEZ, the chapter highlights the expectations that young trainees have of working in Nokia. Importantly, the chapter demonstrates how the training process plays a key role in shaping young people’s expectations of factory work and their future aspirations.

Chapter 5 then examines aspiration at the level of national policy, and explains how India’s skill-training programme was constructed; by explaining some of the underlying ideas and values behind the current skill development policy I reveal youth and aspiration as two driving themes of India’s national skill development project. The national skill development programme was targeted at India’s youth, and constructed as an initiative to harness India’s ‘demographic dividend’: transforming youth into a valuable resource with which to fuel national economic growth and development. Skill-training was also viewed by policymakers such as Kamal Nath (Minister of Commerce and Industry in 2011) as a policy response with which to meet the aspirations of India’s youth, whom he notably

described as “the largest number of aspirers on this planet<sup>166</sup>”. Simultaneously, national government skill-training initiatives are also attempts to instil aspiration in the minds of young Indians – a point emphasised during an interview with Mr M.V Subbiah, Chairman of the National Skill Development Corporation (at the time of the interview), and one which invokes Appadurai’s idea of the transformative potential of aspiration.

Chapters 6 and 7 expand the empirical investigation into the theme of aspiration, highlighting two of its other dimensions through participant observation focused on the implementation of project SEAM. In describing the processes by which skill-training is marketed to rural youth through SEAM’s mobilisation campaigns, Chapter 6 explains how aspiration is used a marketing tool – a means to sell the idea of skill-training to rural youth, in order to maximise enrolment into the programme (thus satisfying the objectives both of network state, and network enterprise). Chapter 6’s description of a SEAM job fair illustrates this use of aspiration, and young people’s response to it: an enthusiastic grab for SEAM programme applications at the end of the job fair. Youth at the job fair highlighted their desire to contribute to their families’ income through their participation in SEAM. Chapter 7 shifts focus, examining aspiration as a *skill*. In examining the skill-training processes within SEAM, I use Chapter 7 to highlight the point that aspiration is also an important skill, in and of itself, that is taught to young people at the training centre. The two uses of aspiration sometimes coalesce: I note, through ethnographic research as a member of the SEAM team, how “success stories” of exceptional SEAM trainees – who successfully went on to become SEAM trainers – were used as role models to “motivate” trainees to persist with the training programme, at the very same training centres where aspiration is taught as a valuable soft skill; their stories featuring in posters plastered across the centres. I describe how these soft skill training programmes

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<sup>166</sup> Speech by Kamal Nath at Skoch Summit 29.11.11

included the screening of inspirational films like Bollywood hit *Guru* (which features the rags-to-riches rise of a powerful entrepreneur), and the citation of stories of such Indian entrepreneurs: all to explain to young trainees that they too could aspire for such success, through hard work and determination.

### **b) Disillusionment and Hopelessness as Facets of Aspiration**

Aspirations are celebrated for their transformative potential, in the design and implementation of skill development programmes. However, I argue that the darker sides of aspiration – characterised by disillusionment, failure and hopelessness – are often overlooked.

Chapter 8 offers evidence for this proposition, by juxtaposing the aspirations of trainees – heightened as they are by the mobilisation and training process (both at Nokia and in SEAM) – with the harder reality of work on the factory floor. What emerges from the evidence presented in this chapter is the gap between trainees' expectations of factory work and their experience of it. Workers in Nokia and AB Apparels (the garment firm linked to SEAM) are shown to experience an initial disappointment with the high pace work on the factory floor; the multiple shifts, long working hours, long commutes, low wages, and the fact that for most workers this is their very first encounter of factory work, make many of these trainees disillusioned with factory work. Importantly, my research finds that this gap between aspirations and reality can be primarily attributed to the fact that young people receive limited information on what factory work is actually like when they first enrol for skill-training programmes.

If, as my research indicates, there was a gap between the expectations of youth trainees and the realities they experienced: what precisely did these rural BPL youth think they were going to get from the factory work they were being skill-trained for? Young people interviewed for the study described SEAM as an opportunity to make a new career for themselves, and were accordingly quite enthusiastic about joining the programme. “Success” to these youth meant a number of things: “to have a respectable job<sup>167</sup>”, “to be able to support my family<sup>168</sup>”, “to be independent<sup>169</sup>”, “to save money for the future<sup>170</sup>”, “to make my parents proud and happy<sup>171</sup>”.

These youths’ ideas of success, and their expectations of factory work in the new workplace, and the gap between these expectations and reality, did *not* factor into the considerations of programme design or implementation, by either actor – the network enterprise of IL&FS, or the network state represented by the MoRD. Indeed, the shared imperative of maximising trainee ‘numbers’ – the operational SEAM performance measure – generated a marketing programme that portrayed extraordinary success of exceptionally successful trainees as *typical*. This further raised aspirations, and presented these elevated aspirations as easier to fulfil; thus making the skill development programmes more attractive to youth, and more likely to enjoy higher SEAM enrolment rates that satisfied the interests of both network state and network enterprise.

Having raised rural youths’ aspirations and expectations of factory work so assiduously during the mobilisation phase, how seriously did IL&FS – or its network state partner in the MoRD – consider their fulfilment during the placement phase? My research indicates

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<sup>167</sup> Arathi, group discussion, 16.06.10

<sup>168</sup> Rani, group discussion 16.06.10

<sup>169</sup> Kanchana, group discussion 16.06.10

<sup>170</sup> Rosy, group discussion 16.06.10

<sup>171</sup> Kala, group discussion 16.06.10

that while IL&FS placed a great emphasis on meeting the expectations of the MoRD and the garment factories – it appeared to give less attention to the expectations of rural BPL youth, who attend the training programme. While goals of MoRD, the priorities of IL&FS, and the expectations of young people are different – each embodying its own conception of “success” – it would appear that the design and operation of SEAM implementation frameworks prioritised IL&FS and MoRD’s overall objectives over the personal aspirations of the young trainees the programmes were supposed to serve. These priorities are most evident in the measures of success – and sources of these measures – that were selected for SEAM. Trainee feedback was omitted entirely from SEAM programme evaluation and audit frameworks; missing both from MoRD assessment checklists as well as IL&FS impact evaluation systems. Feedback from the trainees – the consumers that would typically be prioritised by private sector service providers – was not collected or evaluated in any organised way during my year of participant observation at IL&FS. Rather, the selective “success stories” of exceptional individuals described above were discretely selected, highlighted, and – through posters at SEAM training centres, government inspections, and job fairs, *publicised* – by the firm, to communicate a message of the SEAM programme’s success and confirm that its impact validated the positive, transformative framing of aspiration that lay at the heart of the programme’s conception.

I argue that this bias not only presents an incomplete view of the programme’s impact, but also creates false aspirations among young people – with negative consequences for them. The lack of an accurate portrayal of the realities of factory work (including career progression within the garment industry), at the time of mobilisation and training, lead young trainees to experience a sense of *disillusionment*. Those who are dissatisfied with

their jobs in garment firms chose to quit, citing reasons such as marriage or family pressures.

This important phenomenon was detailed in Chapter 8, which described young people who are disillusioned with the programme such as Anandajyoti. The chapter is particularly important as it explains why people are disillusioned with such initiatives and how they blame themselves for their “failure” and develop individualised coping strategies to deal with the shame and humiliation of failing to persist in their new jobs. Anandajyoti’s story is crucial as it also highlights the darker side of aspiration, which is marked by hopelessness, disillusionment and the failure to meet the expectations set by others. Anandajyoti described feeling “burdened” by the expectations that her family and trainers had of her and despite her attempts to work hard and complete the training programme, she was unable to cope with the work on the factory floor. This gap between her expectations and her experience of work also emerged as a result of the fact that she joined the programme with incomplete information about the nature of work on the factory floor. Having only heard about the success stories that were repeatedly highlighted to motivate trainees, she blamed herself for her failure to cope with the workplace and thus planned to quit. High aspiration therefore came at a personal cost to young people like Anandajyoti.

This brings out an important gap in Appadurai’s (2004; 2012) work. In celebrating the transformative potential of aspiration, his work does not examine what happens when aspirations are raised falsely or when specific exceptional cases of success are projected as average cases, in order to “motivate” youth to aspire.

This dark side of aspiration is often invisible, as it is easily labelled as “failure” and thus ignored within programmes like SEAM. As a result, the stories of these individuals are unknown as they quietly exit the programme in shame. In the process of celebrating – perhaps selectively – specific success stories of extraordinary individuals within SEAM – the stories of people who leave the programme or feel disillusioned by it are missing. Limited information is available on trainees who leave their jobs and many such individuals are impossible to locate, as they move to other locations in search of other jobs or as a result of marriage. Meanwhile the circle of recruitment, training and placement of new young people with heightened aspirations and false expectations continue. Numerical targets set for the programme continue to increase as the programme continues to expand rapidly and train more people. SEAM continues to be proclaimed as a “success” by the MoRD and IL&FS Clusters and this model is now replicated by other private companies in India.

The material presented in this thesis demonstrates that aspiration is characterised not just by success and hope, but also – and with little acknowledgement – by failure and disillusionment. There is little anthropological research on the latter. These stories, presented in my thesis, begin an inquiry into this dark, but equally powerful dimension to aspiration.

Aspiration can be transformative. Equally, it can act as a burden and inhibit individuals from realising their potential; the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai 2004) has a dark side. For some, this “capacity to aspire” does (as Appadurai suggests) provide a map out of poverty; but for others, aspiration raised falsely – born of false hope, and dying in unrealised dreams – can lead to disillusionment.

At the very heart of aspiration lies failure and disillusionment, alongside the success and elevation that is most readily recognised. Acknowledging this will not only add value to the existing literature on aspiration; but will also ensure that the aspirations of the network state and network enterprise meet the aspirations of young Indian citizens, as they strive for a better future.

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