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Interrogating What Reproduces a Teacher

A Study of the Working Lives of Teachers in Birgaon, Raipur

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ABSTRACT

This study, situated in an industrial working-class neighbourhood in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, aims to look at what sustains and reproduces an elementary school teacher in low-fee private schools.

Within a highly stratified system of education such as ours (NCERT 2005), both at the level of school and teacher education itself, as well as in the context of a highly stratified society—where the imagination and reality of “a teacher” is informed as much by a historical domination of teaching by specific caste groups as it is by a contemporary reality in which the bulk of the teachers in schools across the country are women (UDISE+ 2019-20)—how do we understand the working lives of teachers and the work of teaching? This study thinks through this question by inquiring into the labouring lives of teachers in our fieldsite—centring tensions between productive and unproductive labour and paid and unpaid work.

The need for this study emerged from our own location and practice as teachers. We were compelled to grapple with questions such as: What wage and what social support systems would enable women to fight pressures of marriage and caste society to continue working as teachers and activists? What kind of in-service support would allow for a reflective and critical teaching practice? Why is there resistance even among progressive movement spaces to acknowledge the labour of teachers as political work? We drew upon the work of social reproduction feminists, particularly anti-caste thinkers and African American scholars' writings about women's work. Carried out over a period of one year, the study is a qualitative inquiry. Initial data was gathered through surveys and in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and unstructured interviews with school heads. This was accompanied by school visits and a group discussion. It is a study conducted collectively by four practising teachers themselves.

Findings from our study sample reveal that the teacher workforce in the low-fee private schools in Birgaon is primarily composed of women under the age of 30. They belong to the working class and lower-caste communities and are paid much below the minimum wage.

Across such schools one finds a male director often actively involved in his caste-association, and an all-female staff, enabling a relationship not only of extreme exploitation that is strikingly similar to unpaid labour within the household, but also one that is cemented by Brahminical and caste-patriarchal norms as the disciplining forces of such labour. Supported by policy documents and court rulings, in conjunction with responses from our study, we also intend to start a conversation on the myriad ideological formulations, working in tandem with the forces of capital that govern the status of teachers in India and devalue their labour. We make an appeal to acknowledge teaching as work and teachers as workers, arguing for the need for more detailed empirical studies into teachers' everyday labour both within and outside the school. Drawing on data gathered in the field, we make a case for studies to go beyond a gendered analysis, stressing the need to weave caste into any structural analysis of teachers' work in India.

Keywords: Teachers' work, low-fee private schools, social reproduction feminism, anti-caste thought, teacher-researchers

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Introduction

What the study seeks to do

Our study, situated in an industrial working-class neighbourhood in the city of Raipur, Chhattisgarh, aims to look at what sustains and reproduces an elementary school teacher primarily in low-fee private schools in the field site of Birgaon, Raipur. Within a highly stratified system of education such as ours (NCERT 2005), as well as in the context of a highly stratified society, where the imagination and reality of “a teacher” is informed—at once—as much by a historical domination of teaching by specific caste groups as it is by a contemporary reality in which the bulk of the teachers in schools across the country are women (UDISE+ 2019–20), how do we understand the working lives of teachers and the work of teaching? This study seeks to think through this question by inquiring into the labouring lives of teachers in our field site.

Situating the Study

Context of the field site

On the fringes of the city of Raipur, Chhattisgarh, lies Birgaon, made up of a collection of working-class settlements surrounded by factories and commercial establishments. Birgaon was once an agricultural stretch of land like the surrounding areas of Urla and Sarora. In fact, the older government teachers who have been there since the early 1980s say they would leave their bikes at the edge of the highway that leads to Bilaspur, and then walk the remaining 3 km stretch down to their school in Urla because the marshy fields meant there was no motorable path for a two-wheeler. Some of them would even carry their bicycles over their heads for the last stretch. During the rains it seems, school would be shut for weeks on end because it was impossible for many of them to reach. Gradually, all of these areas were transformed into a large industrial complex of small and medium scale factories, interspersed with working class settlements or *bastis*¹ that sprung up around the factories, since no organised housing was ever provided for, either by the State or Industry, despite worker's struggles that made such demands. In 2014, Birgaon became a part of the newly formed Birgaon Municipal Corporation composed of the 6 villages of Urla, Accholi, Rawabhata, Urkura, Sarora and Birgaon.

Such transformation is characteristic of Chhattisgarh's history even prior to state formation. since industrialisation began in the region just after Independence with the construction of the Bhilai Steel Plant under the guidance of the Soviet Union and the mines in Bailadila, Dantewada which began exporting iron ore to Japan in the 1960s (Tillin, 2013). Industrialisation resulted in large numbers of the peasantry being “proletarianised”, however ambiguously, pushed as they were into waged work at factories with the landless agricultural workers doing the most menial, precarious and low-paying jobs (Parry, 2005).

The state of Chhattisgarh was formed in 2001 when it was carved out of Madhya Pradesh. Chhattisgarh is known for its wealth of minerals, having large coal deposits in the northern parts of the state. Some of the world's best-quality iron ore can be found in the forested lands of Bastar and the hilly region south of Durg. The plains however, dotted with diamond and gold reserves, have always been largely agricultural.

¹Throughout the report, we use the term *basti* to denote working-class settlements or urban slums.

While the southern and northern parts of the state are predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes (STs), accounting for around 31 per cent of the population, the plains are predominantly populated by Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who were estimated to account for around 50 per cent of the population as per the 1931 Census, which was the last to account for caste.² Scheduled Castes (SCs) comprise close to 13 per cent of the state's population (Census of India, 2011). Thus, together, the SCs, STs and OBCs account for over 90 per cent of the population of Chhattisgarh.

Interestingly, the demand for separate statehood arose from the social and political elites located in the plains, who were historically engaged as rich peasants collecting land revenue on behalf of the Maratha and British rulers. The elites stood to benefit from such a reconfiguration as it would lead to a concentration of power in their hands. These “ex-Malgujas”,³ as they were called, consisted mainly of Brahmins and Kurmis⁴ (Venkatesan, 2000). It must be noted that Brahmins accounted for less than 2 per cent of the population in Chhattisgarh as per the 1931 Census, and together with the Kurmis, their combined population stood at under 5 per cent.⁵ These figures reveal the level of concentration of land and wealth in the hands of a few.

Despite the fact that Chhattisgarh had no popular statehood movement nor a strongly mobilised politics of indigeneity like the neighbouring state of Jharkhand (Tillin, 2013),⁶ the story of state formation does not end with the demands of its elites. It must be noted that the history of state formation is inextricably linked to the history of the vibrant labour movement that began in the late 1970s under the charismatic leadership of Comrade Shankar Guha Niyogi and the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS), a trade union of workers in the iron ore mines of Dalli Rajhara.

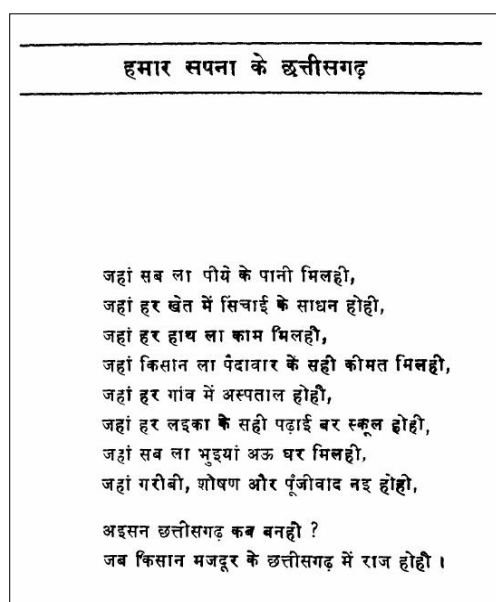


Figure 1.1: “Hamar sapne ke Chhattisgarh” (The Chhattisgarh of our dreams), a poem by Shankar Guha Niyogi

Source: Niyogi, S. G. (1991)

² The current Chhattisgarh government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel (2018–present), launched a survey to count the Other Backward Classes (OBC) population in 2021 (Drolia, 2021).

³ The Malgujas typically owned large tracts of land on which the small peasants would work for part of the year, forced as they were into becoming casual labourers due to the frequent occurrence of droughts and famines (Parry, 2005).

⁴ The Kurmis are a cultivator caste aspiring for Kshatriya status. They rose to political power in the state in the 1940s–1950s (Tillin, 2013).

⁵ Statistics taken from a table that appeared in Christopher Jafferlot's 1996 publication *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, reproduced in Tillin (2013).

⁶ “It was competition in the 1990s between the two national parties of the Congress and the BJP who were vying for power in the region that brought the issue for a separate statehood to the fore rather than pressure from social movements” (Tillin, 2013, p. 1).

For Niyogi, the demand for a separate state was seen as a “democratic demand”; as a call by the people of Chhattisgarh to actively contribute to national progress and the utilisation of natural resources. While recognising that even though it was the “bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois [who were] becoming increasingly devoted to and enthusiastic about the idea of a Chhattisgarh state” (Niyogi, 1991, p. 6), the likelihood of it becoming reality made it imperative that the working class actively support the demand. There was a need to rescue the struggle for self-determination from the narrow vision of the bourgeois elite and turn it into a call for transformative politics and the struggle for a society free from exploitation. Importantly, as is reflected in the poem in Figure 1.1, he stressed that this would require a radical redefinition of what it meant to be Chhattisgarhi in order to prevent the campaign from “degenerating into militant chauvinism” (Niyogi, 1991, p. 11).

Chhattisgarhis are those who within the geographical area of Chhattisgarh live their lives through honest toil, who are prepared to devote their lives to secure the freedom of the people of Chhattisgarh, who neither economically nor in any other way conform to the scientific definition of the feudal class, who desire the end of capitalist relations, and who will not hinder the development of a democratic Chhattisgarh and who feel brotherhood towards the proletarians of the world. (Niyogi, 1991, p. 11)

The Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM), (broadly translating to “Front for the Liberation of Chhattisgarh”) was born in the mines of Dalli and Rajhara.⁷ It quickly spread to the industrial township of Bhilai, which was built around the Bhilai Steel Plant to which the raw iron ore from these mines was supplied. At its peak, hundreds of thousands of workers agitated under the *lal-hara* (red-green) flag of the CMM that signified worker–peasant unity. Unlike any other trade union movement of its time, women played an extremely important role, enabling the movement to grow from the worksite into the homes of workers, and extending the struggle beyond trade union activities into all other areas of life. Campaigns regarding health issues, particularly alcoholism, became trademarks of the movement and led to the formation of worker-run institutions such as Shaheed Hospital and the setting up of several schools.⁸

In the 1990s, as industries expanded beyond concentrated pockets in and around Bhilai and Durg, factories began to encroach on the outskirts of Raipur. Small peasants and migrant workers flocked to these regions in search of work and formed the mass of workers in this newly burgeoning industrial complex. The CMM began organising workers in the region. One of the first agitations was the demand for worker housing. Since the demand was never met, the union established small worker *bastis* by capturing tracts of unclaimed land that surrounded the factories. Shaheed Nagar in Birgaon was one such *basti* set up by the union. It is here that Shaheed School, the worker union-run school at which we work, is located.

The majority of the population of Birgaon is employed as informal contract workers in the surrounding rolling mills, slag dumps and factories that manufacture rubber, plastic and dyes, among others. Many also work as daily wage labourers engaged in heavy manual work, like loading and unloading raw materials at factories or as construction workers. Many others are engaged in informal work such as selling vegetables or fish, or running small provision stores and food carts.

⁷ Earlier, this was known as the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (in the late 1970s), which then went on to form the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM).

⁸ For a history of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM) and a collection of Niyogi's writings, see Sadgopal & Bahadur, 1993.

Access to clean drinking water is a major issue in all the *bastis* in this area. The presence of industries has contaminated groundwater supply and the treatment plant that filters water from the municipal supply line has outlived its capacity. Pollution levels in the area are shockingly high. A report published by the State Health Resource Centre (SHRC) of Raipur in March 2019 revealed that particulate matter (PM) levels were at 2.5 at two sites in Birgaon, which were reported as hazardous. Manganese, nickel and silica levels were also several times higher than World Health Organization (WHO)-accepted levels (SHRC, 2021).

As per the 2011 Census, Birgaon has a population of just under 1 lakh. Of this, around 12 per cent comprise of SCs and just under 5 per cent comprise of STs. While there is no official figure available, the largest proportion of the remaining population undoubtedly belongs to the OBC category. As the oft-quoted phrase “Birgaon belongs to the Dewangans” suggests, Birgaon is heavily populated by the Dewangans, a weaver caste. Prior to industrialisation, most of the land was owned by them in the form of small- and medium-sized landholdings. According to older inhabitants of the area, up until a decade ago, a weaving loom would be found in a fair number of homes in Birgaon. The neighbouring region of Urla, it seems, was populated predominantly by the Satnamis, a former untouchable caste of leather workers who, under the leadership of Guru Ghasidas in the early 19th century, turned away from the Hindu fold, and rejected its religiously ordained social hierarchies in search of a more egalitarian vision of society.⁹ While Urla was completely taken over by industry and most of the Satnami small landholders seemed to have had to sell off their lands at very low rates, in Birgaon, even as the area industrialised, a fair proportion of the Dewangans were able to retain some land ownership, start small businesses and live off renting their property for residential and commercial purposes. The Dewangan's are politically powerful in the area and the traders' *sangh* (guild/association) of Birgaon is reported to be as being exclusively under their control. The Sahus, who are traditionally oil mongers, are the other predominant caste group in Birgaon. The educated middle class and educated members of both these castes are very active in their respective caste associations, which try to unite the different sub-castes¹⁰ within them. Such caste associations essentially accept caste hierarchy while simultaneously using caste identity to compete for a higher position within the hierarchy (Omvedt, 1982).

There are two government schools in Birgaon: a primary school and a higher secondary school. The latter, which was set up in 1981 on land donated by industrialists, was also chosen in 2018 as one of the many schools to be turned into an English medium school and follow NCERT syllabus. Today, it is one of the largest government schools in Raipur, with a strength of over 3,000 as of 2022.¹¹ That same year, the school was declared to be a Swami Atmanand Excellent English Medium School under the new project of English medium schools launched by the state government. This was fraught with enormous and seemingly insurmountable difficulties for teachers and students alike. So, in effect, it is as though three independent schools are being run out of the same campus.

In the early 1990s, government schools were the only ones in the area. There were a handful of private schools that began to come up in the mid-to-late 1990s. Data from the Unified District Information System

⁹ George, G. M. (2019, December 18). 200 years on, the legacy of Guru Ghasidas' Satnam revolution. Forward Press.

¹⁰ See, for example, this call to unite Dewangan's across the country: <https://www.naidunia.com/chhattisgarh/raipur-raipur-news-308250>

¹¹ Data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) does not reflect this figure as it dates to 2020, but this is updated information gathered from the principal and teachers of the school.

for Education Plus (UDISE+) shows that by the early 2000s, private schools began mushrooming all over Birgaon. A list obtained from the town's nodal officer reported 39 private schools under the Birgaon nodal circle, with eight permanently shut down in 2022 and a few more on the brink of permanent closure. The neighbouring Urla nodal circle was reported as having 16 active private schools under its jurisdiction. While some schools were counted under the same nodal circle, they were outside the geographic radius of our field site, which covered an intersection of the Urla and Birgaon nodal circles. Together with one school that came under the Urkura nodal circle, there were approximately 35 schools within our field site. Through our survey, we were able to gather information about 15 of these schools.

How and Why the Need for this Study Came About

The need for this study emerged from our own location and practice as teachers at a union-run school, which has historically had a largely working-class, female, Bahujan¹² workforce.

Shaheed School was set up in 1996 by the labour movement that led to the formation of a faction of the CMM known as CMM (Mazdoor Karyakarta Committee), a workers' *sangathan* (collective/union). The school has seen many changes over the years both in terms of teacher flux as well as pedagogical approach. The teachers have transformed classroom practice in order to make learning a more meaningful process, rooted in the lived realities of their students while also enabling them to engage with the larger world in informed and critical ways.

Yet, they continue to face challenges. Teacher flux primarily occurs due to pressures of marriage, causing migration and other demands of reproductive labour that are inevitably made of women by the family and caste-society. Along with objections to raising teachers' salaries and resistance to the emerging political agency of young women teachers, we found ourselves confronted by questions such as:

- What wage and social support systems would enable young unmarried women to fight the pressures of marriage and caste society to continue working as teachers and activists?
- What kind of in-service support would allow for a reflective and critical teaching practice?
- Why is there resistance even within progressive movements and unions to acknowledge the labour and intellectual activity of teachers as political work?

Conversations around these issues in a variety of progressive movement spaces—within the left as well as more liberal education non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and institutions—pointed to a deeper refusal to engage with the question of what reproduces labour power in the first place. What this meant in practice, then, was a denial to acknowledge that for women, particularly working-class women who were severely constrained by the demands of reproductive labour in the household, it is precisely *this* that determines their ability to participate in work outside the home, whether as teachers or as full-time union activists. The refusal to engage with the relationship between productive and reproductive labour fails to acknowledge the critique of why certain people dominate leadership positions. Moreover, in the context of a left movement, it adds to the glorification of the politics of "sacrifice" and *shahadat* (martyrdom), hailing those who have fewer demands of reproductive labour placed on them as great leaders who are willing to dedicate their entire working lives to a revolutionary cause. It ignores the fact that such leaders are sustained and reproduced by the unpaid domestic labour performed by women—who feed, shelter, and heal them—and that this is what enables them to continue to pursue their grand cause.

¹² Throughout this report, the term Bahujan is used to refer to those belonging to OBC, SC or ST communities.

This is what led us to engage with the work of early social reproduction feminists. One of the first collective readings we did with teachers and women in the *sangathan* was a translation of Silvia Federici's 1975 pamphlet *Wages Against Housework*, which sparked lively debates and discussions. It prompted us to conduct a survey that attempted to map women's work, both within and outside the home, to gain insight into their waged and unwaged labour. We collected this data from about 100 women in Birgaon between 2017 and 2019. Around the same time, we began exploring the situation of teachers in low-fee private schools in the neighbourhood. We found that the teacher workforce in these schools is in fact women, often under the age of 30, from working-class "lower" caste¹³ communities who are paid salaries much below the minimum wage. Further, across low-fee private schools one finds a single male principal/director and an all-female staff, enabling and cementing a relationship of extreme exploitation—something strikingly similar to unpaid labour within the household. Yet, as we searched for a language in which to speak about teachers in the Indian context, we found that tracing the basis of teacher status and exploitation to women's unpaid labour in the household did not quite grasp the complex ways in which their terms of entry into the labour force were determined, or the ways in which multiple ideologies governed their working conditions and served to devalue their work.

Scholarship on gender and teachers' work has examined how the ways in which the idea of good teachers being seen as selfless, caring, "mother-like" figures willing to sacrifice the self is directly linked to social expectations from women and the notion of teaching as women's work. (Acker, 1995, p. 124). However, this does not sufficiently explain what we were confronted with in the field: It seemed to miss the myriad connotations associated with sacrifice and martyrdom that are prevalent in the context of India.

In keeping with the way in which the ideals of *shahadat* and sacrifice are valorised in particular strains of left and Gandhian activism, we were often confronted with expressions such as the use of *yogdaan* (contribution) instead of salary/wages, and conflating the ideals of *nishulk* and *niswath* (free and selfless) to describe teachers' struggles to raise wages. Such notions did not seem to speak to social expectations of women per se, but to expectations of *seva* (service), which are central to one's position in the graded hierarchy of caste society that is characterised by notions of servitude and debt. The inability, or refusal, to see how such notions simultaneously enable exploitation and uphold the very ideology that perpetuates enslavement under the caste order is less an irony then, and more a disturbing contradiction woven into a politics that claims commitment to social transformation.

Such notions, however, are in no way restricted to the left, liberal educators or movement-run schools alone. They are resonant of much deeper abiding contradictions that lie at the heart of teachers' work in India. Compelled by the need to unravel these contradictions in order to describe our own situations as teachers, we began interrogating what reproduces a teacher; or more particularly, what reproduces the Bahujan, working-class, women teachers of Birgaon.

¹³ Primarily from OBCs.

CHAPTER 2 - ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERATURE

This chapter describes our engagement with literature, categorised into four broad themes: a) labour process theory of teachers' work and the proletarianisation thesis; b) social reproduction and women's work; c) gender and teachers' work; and d) policies, privatisation and changes in teacher workforce. We describe our engagement with the texts under study, highlighting the relevance, resonance and lacunae in each theme.

We also refer to literature that does not necessarily fall into these categories but speaks to them in a way that is relevant to our study.

Labour Process Theory of Teachers' Work and the Proletarianisation Thesis

Early literature on labour process theory of teacher's work draws on Braverman's famous book *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, published in 1974, which argues that the imperative of accumulation under capitalism organised work in such a way that workers experienced "deskilling": an increasing loss of control over their work and separation of conception from execution as the labour process was fragmented into controllable parts (Ozga & Lawn, 1988; Reid, 2003). This early body of work tries to show how this process of "proletarianization", which made teachers more akin to industrial worker, was characteristic of the changing nature of teachers' work caused by shifts in education policy and practice under capitalism (Acker, 1995b; Reid, 2003). However, these theorists were critiqued for being overly deterministic and reducing individuals to "passive bearers of structures" (Reid, 2003, p. 4). More importantly, they were also called out for ignoring how teachers' work is gendered and for having excluded this from their analysis altogether (Ozga & Lawn, 1988; Reid, 2003).

Intent on according greater attention to gender, Apple (1998) stresses that unless the connections between class and gender were unravelled, the "roots and effects of proletarianisation" could not be understood in any meaningful way (p. 41). He emphasises that deskilling was accompanied by another process that he called "intensification", which involves extracting more and more labour by which "the work privileges of educational workers are eroded" (Apple, 1988, p. 41). He goes on to argue that this came to be "misrecognized as professionalism" (Apple, 1988 p. 45). This interpretation was later critiqued by Acker (1995), who argues that Apple provides little empirical evidence to support his claim of why women teachers should "misrecognize what was going on" (p. 110).

Stories of teachers' resistance and the subtle strategies they evolved to respond to control processes compelled theorists to reject the more deterministic aspects of the proletarianisation thesis. Through rich empirical work, Connell (1985) shows how, in practice, the division of labour is far from absolute and control does not quite operate in straightforward ways. Apple (1998) too provides several examples to demonstrate this. In fact, in an honest, self-reflective critique of their own work, Ozga and Lawn admit to some of the significant shortcomings and oversights of their earlier work, which they refer to as "polemic", and argue that in not paying necessary and sufficient attention to the social construction of skill, they had overlooked the importance of gender in analysing teachers' work. Offering a belated recognition of the

fact, they called for a study of “schoolwork”, i.e., to return to their “initial aim ... to study teachers’ work with attention to lived experience, collective actions, group cultures, strategies, struggles and so on” (Ozga & Lawn, 1988, p. 329).

While teachers’ work continued to be a growing area of inquiry, after what Reid (2003) calls a “brief and vigorous appearance in the 1980s”, labour process theory became “a marginal presence” in the literature on teachers’ work” (p. 559). While articulating the problems with the early body of work, he laments the fact that labour process theory has been sent to “a premature grave”(p. 5). He rescues a case for it, arguing that it would serve us well to subject it to a “theoretical renovation”, given that it provides us with very important tools to understand control and how capital has reconfigured teachers’ work.

Apart from insights into the organisation of teachers’ work, the literature that has engaged with proletarianisation has also contributed greatly to the discourse around professionalism. Professionalism as a social goal rose to prominence during a particular phase of capitalism and was taken as the gold standard against which occupations were assessed, associated as it was with status and skill (Acker, 1995; Apple, 1998). However, “the strategy of professionalism has historically been used to set up ‘effective defences’ against proletarianisation” (Apple, 1988, p. 46). Importantly, Ginsburg (1997) argues that “professionalism should be recognized as an ideology — ‘not only an image which ... inspires collective or individual efforts, but a mystification which ... obscures [or at least provides a partial representation of] real social structures” (p. 6). Reminding us that “the process of professionalisation is inextricably linked to the kind of society in which it takes place — to its political form, its cultural norms, and its social structure”, he writes that professionalism as an ideology serves the interests of the ruling elite (Ginsburg, 1997, p. 136). This implies that often, those who seek to be recognised as professionals tend to “adopt racist, sexist, classist, and nativist rhetoric to exclude lower status groups from their ranks” (Ginsburg, 1997, p. 7), something that found resonance in our field observations. One of the most important points he makes, however, is that historically, in most countries, professionalism was accompanied by proletarianisation (Ginsburg, 1997). This has particular importance for understanding teachers’ work in India because of the ways in which shifts in the demographic of the workforce make teaching a “logical target for proletarianizing efforts” (Acker, 1995, p. 110), while simultaneously being accompanied by a rise in efforts to promote teacher professionalism.

What draws us to this body of work is what Ozga and Lawn (1998) see as its main purpose: “The study of teachers’ work as work should remain at the centre of research in this area. Like other forms of work, teaching should be properly served by a thorough study of its practices, struggles, lived experience and contradictions” (p. 334).

However, there is a way in which such an articulation presents what British sociologist and anti-racist activist Barry Troyna calls “a ‘globalising’ picture of teaching”, with little interrogation of whose practices, struggles and experiences are being studied (1994, p. 330). Despite the fact that they admit the need to subject their understanding of how skills are constructed to “critical scrutiny” since it is shaped by “whoever is laying claim to them”, somehow, Ozga and Lawn are only able to see the “who” in terms of gender and class, neglecting the ways in which racialised relations too are institutionalised. This oversight, however, as Troyna argues, is not an accidental one-off phenomenon particular to the work of Ozga and Lawn, but in fact part of

“an enduring and discernible pattern in the exemplary sociological literature on teachers ... which promotes (and colludes with) *deracialised* interpretations of teachers and their profession”. He goes on to explain that deracialisation is the “omission—deliberately or otherwise—of issues of ethnicity and, more particularly, racism, from the interpretive and analytical frames found in academic discourse” (Troyna, 1994, p. 326).

Importantly, Troyna is not simply making a plea to ensure diversity in the samples of such studies in order to make “perfunctory noises” about racism. In fact, he draws on Mary O’ Brien’s work to stress this point, which describes how a theoretical model based firmly on class analysis alone faces difficulty in assimilating the experiences of other “disadvantaged” groups into its analytical frame, thereby leading to “a ‘commatization’: social class (comma) women (comma) blacks (comma) gays (comma) youth (comma) and so forth’ ... (r)esearchers who work within a class reductionist perspective are compelled to view women, like blacks (comma), gays (comma) etc. to be seen as ‘incidentally oppressed’” (Troyna, 1994, p. 332). Further, he argues that such deracialised discourses also “reinforce ethnicist conceptions of ‘The Other’” (p. 334).

In simply acknowledging and not probing further the fact that teachers are not a homogenous category, or at best indicating the need for sharper inquiry, studies on teachers’ work in India seem to carry familiar gestural concerns towards factors such as caste (comma) ethnicity (comma) religion (comma) etc., without weaving them into a structural analysis of teachers’ work. In the context of India, where the question of labour and work is inextricably linked to the caste system, it would serve us well to heed Troyna’s caution in our approach to understanding, theorising and analysing teachers’ work in India. This would mean subjecting the qualities associated with the gendered nature of teaching to a critical scrutiny of how the distinguishing characteristics of any work in caste society are shaped by who is laying claim to them.

Social Reproduction and Women’s Work

Our history knows no category called ‘women’s work’: there is ‘white men’s’ work, ‘white women’s’ work, and ‘n[.....] work.’ ‘N[.....]work’ has its roots in slavery in the ‘new world’, and in the inscriptions of less-than-human characteristics to Black peoples as a whole.

— Dionne Brand, 1993 (qtd. in Fergusson, 2019)

Despite the tremendous contribution Marx made in stressing that all value is generated by labour in the capitalist system of production, his analysis, ironically, stopped short of explaining how the most extraordinary and unique commodity of labour power itself is produced (Ferguson, 2020; Fraser, 2017; Mezzadri, 2019). Social reproduction¹⁴ feminists were the first to point out Marx’s silence and have since opened up important ways of understanding how the dynamic between production and reproduction is pivotal to an understanding of capitalism itself.

Our initial questions for study emerged out of our struggles about a similar silence—a denial, in fact—of what reproduces the labour power of full-time activists in the workers’ union that runs Shaheed School, and how such a denial found a companion in the politics of martyrdom. Given the pervasive notions of sacrifice in teaching and its link to social expectations of women—the good teacher as a caring, self-sacrificing, motherly figures —and the “persistent motif of the martyr’s classroom” (Acker, 1995b, p. 124),

¹⁴ Our use and engagement with the term social reproduction is linked to the body of work concerned with the relationship between production and reproduction under capital as theorised first by the Marxist and autonomous feminists. We do not engage with social reproduction as it is used in education literature, relating to the role of schools in replicating and reproducing social inequalities.

made it all the more necessary for us to understand how such notions govern the terms and conditions of teachers' labour. This is what led us to begin our engagement with the work of early social reproduction feminists like Silvia Federici, Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James and the Wages Against Housework campaign which problematised the ways in which women's labour is devalued under such notions of sacrifice, duty and love (Dalla Costa & James, 2017; Federici, 1974).

These early feminists centred their analysis on the "most subtle and mystified forms of violence" that is housework (Federici, 1974, p. 76) by showing how capital created the modern family and a fictitious divide between the realms of production and reproduction. They argued that the unpaid labour of housework was a source of value generation under capital and that it was "precisely through the wage (that) the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organised" making the exploitation even "more effective" by the lack of the wage (Dalla Costa & James, 2017, p. 10). They extended their theorisation to other forms of unpaid work such as sex work (Fortunati, 1995), and contributed to the recognition of the relationship between production and reproduction under capitalism and how the devaluation of reproductive work means that "women will always confront capital and the state with less power than men and in condition of extreme social and economic vulnerability" (Federici, 2014).

However, not all women confront capital with less power than all men and it is not only women who confront it in a condition of extreme social and economic vulnerability. The work of African American abolitionists, socialists and feminists has been crucial in pointing this out as far back as the 1940s (Ferguson, 2020; Jones, 1949), pushing the white feminist Marxists to expand and redefine their understanding of housework and providing alternative theorisations of sources of exploitation and oppression.

Turning to the history of slavery, Claudia Jones shows how it is the enduring legacy of slavery that shaped Black women's waged work under capitalism as well, confined as they were to the lowest-paying jobs even after emancipation, often that of domestic labour itself where they were once again tied to servitude to white employers (Jones, 1949). In a critique of the wages against housework movement, Angela Davis points to the fact that not only is housework historically fluid, but that the bourgeois notion of the "housewife" only reflected a partial reality since Black women have historically always worked outside their homes. Transforming a partial reality into an ideology established the housewife and mother as universal notions of womanhood and so women who were compelled to work for wages paid the price of this in the form of "long hours, substandard working conditions and grossly inadequate wages" (Davis, 1985, p. 206). While agreeing that their exploitation is far worse than that of their male counterparts, Davis and Jones complicate how domestic labour has been understood by white feminists, allowing for a new direction for the theorisation of women's labour under capitalism that goes beyond gender and class (Ferguson, 2020). By pointing to the enduring legacy of slavery in Black people's lives, both Jones and Davis stress the need to look at the terms of entry into waged work under capital, and how the servile nature of jobs like domestic labour, sanitation work and other forms of menial labour was and continues to be racialised. The fight against capital is also a fight against racism and sexism (Davis, 2021; Ferguson, 2020; Jones, 1949).

Their analysis is particularly important for conceptualising women's labour in India where the enduring legacy of servitude under the caste system determines the terms of entry into waged labour under capital for Bahujan women and men.

Ferguson points out that despite this incredible body of work, it took decades for white feminists to get over their “fatal oversight” of refusing to move beyond a gendered analysis of work by failing to see “the racialized underbelly that attended ‘housewifification’ and the devaluation of women’s waged work” (Ferguson, 2020, p. 18)

While debates between social reproduction feminists around the value-generation of reproductive labour continue (see Ferguson, 2020 and Mezzadri, 2019), what they agree on—after finally paying heed to Black feminists and socialists¹⁵—is the key role social reproduction plays in contemporary capitalism, and that “all processes of social reproduction, not just those in individual households alone, come up against capital’s hostility to life” (Ferguson, 2020, p. 114). One of the most important and insightful contributions of Marxist feminists however was the recognition of the contradiction at the heart of social reproduction under capitalism: that it is “simultaneously indispensable and an obstacle to accumulation” (Vogel, 2013, p. 163), and therefore “exist(s) only by consistently thwarting the flourishing of human life on which it nonetheless depends” (Ferguson, 2020, p. 112). In fact, Nancy Fraser redraws the entire history of capitalism in terms of the shifting dynamics of this very contradiction under various historical phases of capitalism (Fraser, 2017).

The other crucial insight that such work provides us with is the relationship between capitalism and other structures of social oppression. Admittedly, the underlying dynamics of systems of social oppression and capital cannot be collapsed into one another. However, it is crucial to recognise that they are not unrelated, and that a socially differentiated workforce sustains capitalist accumulation. The enduring legacies of various systems of oppression such as casteism, patriarchy and racism force those oppressed by these structures to take on reproductive labour at extremely low wages or for free, thereby also ensuring that there are always those in precarious situations who are forced to accept such exploitative terms.

In addition to unpacking the dynamics of production and reproduction under capital, a social reproductive framework also allows us to analyse how workers are divided through differences of gender, caste, race and so on in ways that are central to sustaining and reproducing the capitalist system (Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017; Ferguson, 2020; Mezzadri, 2019).

An understanding of Bahujan working-class women’s labour in such a perspective then, to begin with, must at least look into the following: a) the histories of various forms of unpaid labour in India and its relationship to different systems of social oppression; b) the historical material conditions of these systems of social oppression that determine the terms of entry into the labour force; c) how the ideologies associated with gender and caste serve to determine the value of their labour power; and d) the demands of reproductive labour in determining their entry and exit from the workforce in contemporary times.

In order to do this, we draw on similar work in the Indian context. Any understanding of the history of unpaid labour and the historical material conditions of social oppression that determine the terms of entry into the labour force in India must necessarily look at the caste system, since the extraction of surplus in pre-capitalist agrarian society rested on the unpaid labour of the lower castes defined by traditional caste duties. Given the empirical reality of distribution of the workforce in waged work under

¹⁵ However, several studies continue to narrowly focus on gendered care work under global labour regimes, often running the risk of collapsing “social reproduction” and “care”.

capital even today—with those belonging to the Shudra castes employed as factory workers and Dalits (former untouchables) engaged in the most low-paying, unskilled jobs (Parry, 2020)—any understanding of the relationship between social reproduction and capital must be informed by the ways in which these relations were transformed. While there may not be a robust and universally accepted theoretical framework on the relationship between caste and capital (or even an associated vocabulary where, for example, one can talk of capital being “caste-ised” in the way that scholarship on racial capitalism has developed), the work of scholars such as Gail Omvedt points to the complex ways in which the dynamics of caste and class are reconfigured historically in India through the coming of capitalism mediated by a colonial state. She reminds us that while caste cannot be identified with or collapsed into class, they continue to be “heavily interlinked” and cautions against “ignoring the ways that this social system of caste has historically shaped the very basis of Indian economy and society and continues to have crucial economic implications today” (Omvedt, 1982, p. 15). Recognising the contribution of social reproduction feminism, Omvedt (2014) says,

Theorists have raised the issue of seeing women's unpaid domestic labour and even 'natural' provisions of the 'conditions of production' as crucial to the accumulation of capital, while 'worlds systems theorists' like Immanuel Wallerstein have stressed the role of non-wage labour (in his analysis, in particular serf and slave labour, while we would add petty commodity production, and caste-mediated forms), in being central to capital accumulation from the beginning. In these models also, not simply 'economic subordination' to holders of property but cultural/community forms and force and violence play a major role. On this basis we can construct at least the elements of a revised historical materialist understanding not only of the linkage between the 'economic base' and the 'superstructure', but of economic processes themselves. (p. 9)

Studying local histories of how the dynamics of caste and class are reconfigured in particular contexts would not only enrich our understanding of labour under contemporary capitalism but also strengthen the theoretical framework Omvedt suggests.

More recent studies by economists such as Ashwini Deshpande and Sukhdeo Thorat provide empirical evidence in wage and employment discrimination on the basis of caste. As Thorat himself writes in a review of Deshpande's book *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*,

The book provides considerable evidence that while part of the present inequalities are a result of past discrimination, part of them are also due to continuing discrimination in employment and wage earning in the formal private sector in rural and urban areas in the 'present'. (Thorat, 2012, p. 33)

Deshpande argues that the caste system formalises exploitation while also providing insight into the material aspects of disparities that exist in India. She demonstrates that “economic outcomes might be shaped more by social identity than by class status” (Deshpande, 2011, p. 29). Commenting on overlapping identities, she says, “There is evidence of increasing casualization of jobs, with women bearing the brunt of this change. Given the established caste hierarchies, it is not difficult to imagine that low castes, women, and especially low-caste women would be the first to bear the adverse impact of these changes” (p. 58). Deshpande's work also shows how participation in the labour force is contingent on variations in demands of reproductive labour, a factor that is pertinent to our study.

The work of feminist economists such as Diane Elson has shown that women enter the labour market on unequal terms because of the disadvantage of the burden of unpaid reproductive labour and social stereotypes of “women’s work” (Elson, 1999). Such studies seem to indicate that in the Indian context, labour markets are not simply “gendered” but also heavily dependent on caste; “casted” or “caste-ised” if you like, until more work in this area allows for an expanded vocabulary to reflect the empirical reality that we are confronted with.

Gender and Teachers’ Work

Gender and education is a vast domain, within which is contained a small yet diverse body of work on gender and teachers. While many of these studies focus on how gender operates in the classroom and teachers’ responses to students in gendered terms, for the purpose of our study, we focus on teachers’ work and working lives. Needless to say, in no way is our engagement exhaustive.

By the mid-1980s, there was a general recognition that gender must be taken into account in order to develop a meaningful understanding of teachers’ work. In fact, Apple emphatically claims that the history of teaching itself is the history of a gendered workforce. In studies on teaching, “[g]endered labour is the absent presence behind all our work” (1988 p. 53). Picking up on Apple’s claim, Patty Lather argues that if our task is to understand the relationship of social structure and consciousness, then “gender cannot be ignored” (1987, p. 25). After outlining what she calls the history of a “stormy relationship” between feminism and Marxism, she claims that there is an “interactive reciprocity” that binds the needs of patriarchy and capital, which may help understand teachers’ working lives. Women’s labour in professions such as teaching becomes “motherwork” and argues how this leads to the “reproduction of classed, raced and gendered workers” (Lather, 1987, p. 29). She throws light on some of the contradictions in the lives of women teachers that such an analysis allows us to see: how women teachers are expected to place family above career and yet be dedicated professionals, resulting in “an occupational subservience”; how they are both powerless and in positions of power at once; how women’s subordination has been built into the very dynamics of teaching, given perceptions of teacher–student relationships as similar to that of mother–child; how they are witness to a devaluation of care work, and have to bear the burden of the “double day” given how little domestic labour is performed by men; and so on (Lather, 1987). Such insights have been echoed and independently put forth by a number of studies on women teachers.

By the mid-1990s, a fair amount of rich empirical work on gender and teachers’ work seems to have been done in Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States,¹⁶ even if, as Acker reminds us, the number of such studies paled in comparison with other lines of inquiry in education research which seemed to ignore the question of gender. Many scholars focused on issues such as “gender imbalance” in teaching and were flooded with sexist anxieties about the increasing number of women in the teacher workforce (Acker, 1995). In an attentive review of the more sociologically informed literature on gender and teachers’ work, she surveys the field in order to illustrate the major trends and classifies approaches into functionalist, interactionist, conflict and critical perspectives, and “other trends” in which she includes what she calls the “teacher voice” category. Most importantly, she shows how the pervasive notions of teaching as women’s work not only informs occupational culture but also approaches to research itself. She stresses

¹⁶ See, for example, the work of Sandra Acker, R.W. Connell and Michael Apple.

the importance of studying teaching as work as it reveals not just a tension between work and “profession”, but also the way in which gendered notions associated with teachers’ work speak to a difference between work and non-work (Acker, 1995). Both Acker’s ethnographic work as well as our own findings highlight this.

Despite the call to pay attention to teaching as work, an exploration of gendered dynamics continues to be limited in “mainstream” teacher research. Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) classify existing literature into two broad groups: sex differences studies and gender dynamics studies. However, they critically point to the fact that the goals and research questions formulated by both traditions in how they conceptualise gender and interpret research results run parallel to the older essentialist and constructionist perspectives respectively. They see this as a larger problem of how teacher research on gender “lacks an integration of the theoretical frameworks, methodologies and findings of both groups” (p. 532). What was striking for us, however, was that there continues to be a more persistent and uncritical preoccupation with teacher professionalism and professional identity, and a continuing evasion of recognising teaching as work.

More recently, the revival of social reproduction feminism and a surge of studies on gender and care work has been cause for progress. For instance, Sarah A. Robert, in her empirical work, studies how 20 Argentine teachers negotiate policy while balancing the demands of care work that teaching places on them. She observes that in some cases teachers even took on care work in order to sustain teaching. She points out that the “occupational divides between teaching, counselling, parenting, or social work, are eroded in the globalising education space” and argues that gender is useful to understand how global education reforms that move into local spaces place policy demands on teachers beyond those of the curriculum and instruction (Robert, 2016, p. 460).

In the Indian context, there seems to be limited empirical research on gender and teachers’ work. Recognising this vacuum, Nandini Manjrekar (2020) points out that the focus of scholarship in education around social reproduction and gender has focused on mainly girl students. She “turns the gaze” on to women teachers, who have been “under-researched” in India. In the context of neoliberal reforms which have fundamentally altered national systems of school education, Manjrekar describes what she calls “new times” for education in which “gender is precariously located within the confluence of state and market forces shaping social reproduction” (p. 309). Centring social reproduction allows for a recognition that teachers inhabit spaces of both social and societal reproduction at the home and the school. Manjrekar points out that these spheres are historically linked and locates women teachers within this history. The demand for women teachers in India came from two related impulses of a growing social demand for girls’ education and opening up of paid employment for women. Given the ideologies of maternalisation and care as well as the sexual division of labour in the household, women were easily naturalised as ideal teachers and the school as a site of employment with “limited” working hours was seen as “respectable” and “convenient”. This resulted in what the “contradictory legacy of women’s education—opening up possibilities of entering the public space of paid employment, but within the ‘caring profession’ of teaching”, pointing to the fact that this makes the place of education also an institutional site for patriarchal control. It must be noted that such ideologies and were restricted to the upper castes. There are other emancipatory legacies of women’s education in the history of India that come from the anti-caste movement which have not been explored here. However, in situating women teachers in the larger context of education reform in India, where the logic of the market and an increasing social demand for education have pushed school education in the direction of greater

stratification, and the fact that this has been accompanied by a steady and drastic increase in the number of women teachers in the workforce, Manjrekar points out,

It would be fair to say that important linkages between education and society—the role of the State, social reproduction of class, caste, and gender inequality, politics of knowledge, labour, and sexuality—have remained unexplored areas within feminist discourse in the contemporary context. (Manjrekar, 2020, p. 313)

In doing so, she points to many areas of necessary inquiry, some of which find deep resonance in our study and what it hopes to do.

Of the few empirical studies on women teachers in India, Indumathi and Vijayasimha's ethnographic study of teachers in Bengaluru city stands out as one of the few which attempt to look at teachers' working lives in totality. They interviewed 50 teachers about how they view their profession and themselves, how they balance work and family commitments, how they envision their career path, and so forth. Their findings pointed to how many women in urban settings turned to teaching since they were caught between needing to contribute to the family income and having to do so in socially acceptable ways. The study highlighted the endlessly strenuous lives women teachers led, with practically no time for leisure. They point to the precarity of working conditions in private schools, and finally conclude that women teachers' roles are embedded in the gendered ideology of society, making a case for more in-depth studies of women teachers' lives and their relationship with classroom teaching in order for policy decisions related to teacher recruitment and professional development to be informed by these complex realities (Indumathi & Vijaysimha, 2010).

On the other hand, Sriprakash's study does not focus on gendered ideologies in shaping teacher work, but examines the ways in which teachers are differently positioned with regard to their career entry and recruitment contexts, and to the moral authority, social status and bureaucratic regulation of their work. She looks at this in relation to their navigation of a reform-induced pedagogical intervention. Through work-story interviews with both male and female teachers—mostly from dominant caste groups—in 16 government primary schools in rural Karnataka, she seeks to explore how their work has been repositioned by the introduction of child-centred education programmes. Drawing on teachers' accounts, Sriprakash focuses on teachers' views on teaching, and the meanings they ascribe to it. She found that for many, primary school teaching “signified a duty to the family, economic gain and in some cases, economic survival”, and that they “themselves benefited from a competitive, performance-based education largely dominated by rote learning and didactic instruction” (Sriprakash, 2011, p. 14) which meant their conceptions of being a teacher were in relation to these realities. She argues, importantly, that policies must take into account these “social contingencies” and “the ways in which the multiple meanings of ‘being a teacher’ offer up conditions through which reform ideals are negotiated, resisted and reshaped” (p. 29). However, there seems to be an uncritical and unfortunate conflation of teaching being “understood as work” (as though that is something to be problematised in itself) and as “a marker of teachers' success in a competitive, performance-based education system” (p. 14). Further, despite the claim to engage with the social significance of teachers' work and authority relations, Sriprakash does not factor in social location and how it determines terms of entry into the labour force and status in a society

such as ours that is shaped by a graded inequality historically tied to a division of labourers (and not merely labour), one that is characterised by a religiously sanctioned restriction on access to education and teaching. Given the teachers' layered articulations that she quotes, her analysis would have benefited greatly by an engagement with critical caste and social reproduction of labour perspectives.

Any analysis of teachers' work that takes gender seriously necessarily draws on the pervasive gendered ideologies that characterise the contexts in which the teachers under study labour. Often, this means needing to look at how these ideologies are shaped historically in conjunction with the material realities they are born into. Works like Karuna Chanana's *Hinduism and Female Sexuality: Social Control and Education of Girls in India* (2001) seek to do this.¹⁷ However, as is characteristic of much feminist scholarship on the history of women's education and subordination in India, statements such as the following clearly reveal that there is no admission or recognition that the default "woman" being spoken of is an upper-caste, specifically Brahmin, woman. While women in the north and central India are generally secluded, they are segregated even in southern India. While seclusion leads to clearly marked physical and social spaces for women and men, segregation can be equally constraining. For example, girls and women were not secluded in southern India yet the Agraharam or the residential quarters of the Brahmins were so designed that women could move from one house to another through doors that directly led into houses on both sides (Chanana, 2001, p. 42).

This default imagination and lack of admission allows for certain claims to be framed as dominant historical narratives on legacies of women's education and enslavement that then come to define how we see gendered ideologies operating in the context of women teachers. Take the following examples:

Protection of female sexuality accounts for whether girls have access to education or not. It also determines the quality, type and duration of education they receive and what they do with it later, i.e., whether they work or not and what kind of jobs they take up; whether they work to earn before or after marriage. (Chanana, 2001, p. 38)

There is a general agreement that women did not have access to education for most periods of India's history. Examples of exceptional women scholars in the Vedic era do not detract from the fact that during the colonial period, little is known about the girl students, if any, in them, even though one reads about one school in every village. (Chanana, 2001, p. 44)

While it may be true that we know little about girl students in general at the time, one could hardly imagine that during the very same colonial period we have a "girl student", enabled by the education that caste-Hindu society was determined to deny her, but anti-caste revolutionaries such as Savitribai and Jyotia Phule were able to provide, writing not only a reasoned critique of Brahminism but pleading the importance of education as the only real course to emancipation.

We are without the Book—we are without any religion. If the vedas are for the brahmans only, then we are not bound to act according to the Vedas. If merely looking at the Vedas

¹⁷ Even though scholarship relating to this does not fall within the category of gender and teachers' work exactly, we still found it necessary to engage with some of this work because of how deeply the history of women's education is linked to an understanding of women teachers' labour.

can get us into grievous sins (as the brahmans claim), then would not following them be the height of foolishness?

Only the medicine of knowledge will cure and heal you. It will take you away from wild beliefs and superstitions. You will become righteous and moral. It will stop exploitation. People who treat you like animals, will not dare to treat you like that any more. So please work hard and study. Get educated and become good human beings. But I cannot even prove this. For example, those who have received good education also sometimes surprise us by doing very bad deeds! (Salve, 2015)

Around the same time, in the late 19th century, her teacher, Jyotiba Phule, whose radical characterisation of education as the *trutiya ratna* (third eye) that would lead to new enlightened ways of knowing and emancipation from mental slavery (Rege, 2010; Velaskar, 2012), made a submission before the Hunter Education Commission with a plea to expand primary education for girls in India (Phule, 1882). Ambedkar, who retrieves this emancipatory role of education, stressed the importance of education even beyond the primary level, believing it to be the only way to be freed of mental slavery and raise the “consciousness of the significance of their [Dalits’] lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order” (Ambedkar, 1974 as qtd. in Velaskar, 2016).¹⁸ Ambedkar not only argued that the importance of education for women was as important as that for men, but also drew a link between how the caste order, upheld as it is by endogamy, rests on women’s subordination through the control of their sexuality. Thus, the fight against caste discrimination and the fight for the emancipation of women were inextricably linked. It is in this context that education found a revolutionary and emancipatory role in anti-caste vision and thought, and became a central organising feature of the oppressed castes as well as the women in the Ambedkarite movement during colonial times (Velaskar, 2016). The following passage from a speech by Mukta Sarvagod delivered at the Asprushya Mahila Parishad at Solapur in 1941, reflects the radical role imagined for education in women’s lives.

Collectively, we women should think about what women’s improvement means. Which direction must we take? What kind of reforms do we need? Neither the political, economic nor educational situation is conducive enough for us to raise our heads. We are trampled upon in the name of religion, and have suffered thousands of years of cruel tyranny. Our social status will be determined totally by our politics. There is no alternative to politics ... We need to cultivate our intellect. Lacking this, we would be impoverished to the core ... That is why we must all begin with education. (as qtd. in Velaskar, 2016, p. 262)

This emphasis on the need to fight for their own education—and for the right to be teachers, which was a necessary part of spreading education among their community—needs to be seen in the context of the denial of this to them under the Hindu social order. Take Gandhi’s words for example. While Gandhi believed that the “caste system is the natural order of society”, and that arguing in defence of the varna system which he claimed was “based on birth”, he writes that “[t]here is nothing in the Varna system which stands in the way of the Shudra acquiring learning or studying” but that it only holds that a “Shudra will not make learning a way of earning a living”¹⁹ (Moon & Ambedkar, 1987).

¹⁸ Excerpt from the speech at the foundation stone-laying ceremony of Milind College, Aurangabad, 1951.

¹⁹ Extracts from an article by Gandhi which was reproduced in the book *Varna Vyavastha* as quoted in Moon & Ambedkar (1987).

And yet, despite this, Chanana makes a note of Gandhi's "instrumental" role in "bringing women out of their homes", but fails to mention Phule's role in the education of girls and women and his plea for it as far back at the late 1800s, or Ambedkar's emphasis on education for women on an equal footing with men, or the many women from the anti-caste movement who fought for women's education throughout India's history.

This complete silence on the most radical and perhaps the only truly emancipatory legacy of women's education, both in the practice of its provision and in its vision, has had far-reaching repercussions in how gender and teachers' work is theorised in India. In failing to recognise the limitations of the default imagination of an upper-caste woman in such literature, there is no critical engagement with the link between women's subordination and its roots in the preservation of the caste order, inevitably leading to the crucial link between women's relative positions in the caste hierarchy being overlooked—that the upper caste woman's acceptance of her gendered subordination in exchange for caste status and power, and the resulting dominant ideology of "the ideal woman" coming from Brahminical notions of womanhood, is contingent not only on the caste oppression of lower-caste women but on a sanction of violence (sexual and otherwise) on their lives and bodies (Wadekar, 2021).

The point of critiquing such scholarship is not to push for a study of "difference" while looking at gender and education based on relative positions of women in a stratified society. Instead, we aim to point out how the canonisation of such work on the history of women's education that refuses to engage with caste oppression and radical views of anti-caste intellectuals and movements while at the same time claiming to be a view from the margins of gender (Chanana, 2002), in fact ends up "marginalising" all other experiences and visions, thereby creating a space for them to be viewed in terms of "the other", and forcing studies to be articulated in terms of difference rather than weaving caste into a structural analysis. All other studies then are forced to qualify and situate their work as being specifically about Dalit women, Dalit education or education for the "disprivileged" even if they were grounded in widely popular mass historical movements (Paik, 2014; Velaskar, 2016).

It is thus a refusal to engage with the ways in which caste relations are institutionalised, in quite the same way that feminists argue how the ways in which gendered relations being institutionalised is overlooked in mainstream scholarship in education and in the scholarship on teachers work and lives in particular.

In a beautiful article on Ambedkar's thoughts on education, Velaskar draws our attention to how historically, education has not only been seen as a tool for liberation from oppressive structures of Hindu caste-patriarchy and reconstruction of a new social order by anti-caste and Dalit struggles since the mid-nineteenth century, but also how women were "integral to this visionary egalitarianism and were consciously mobilised as political actors" (p. 245). She notes her surprise at how Ambedkar's writing remains neglected even in liberal Indian educational discourse, despite the "significant social import and the phenomenal impact it has had in transforming Dalit lives" (p. 247). Were it not for the hegemony of upper-caste scholarship in education and their problematic categorisation of their work as seminal (beyond the obvious problems with the phallic connotations of such adjectives), perhaps her statement could end instead with "transforming lives", full stop.

Velaskar also draws from the writings, speeches, historical accounts, biographical sketches and autobiographical texts of Dalit women activists and educators. One of her main sources is the extraordinary book *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement* by Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar.

In the third chapter of the book, "Laying down the foundation for education", Moon and Pawar describe the efforts made towards the promotion of education for women, presenting a glimpse of a rich and completely overlooked history of women's education in India (Pawar & Moon, 2014). It is of utmost importance that scholarship on gender and education and women teachers in contemporary times turn to these erased legacies and rich histories, in order to develop a more critical and insightful perspective.

In her book *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*, Shailaja Paik draws on a vast number of sources to discuss the history of women's education and role of education in Dalit women's lives, also revealing some of the vehement opposition to it by upper-caste reformers and nationalists. She points to both contradictions and connections between upper-caste and Dalit agendas of women's education, but stresses that "unlike Muktabai, Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule, and Ambedkar, elite women failed to take into account the historical legacy of upper-caste men's oppression of women and Dalit men" (Paik, 2014, p. 139). She describes multiple constructions of modern womanhood(s) and points out that in refusing to see the ways in which the advancement of Dalits was linked to the advancement of women, upper-caste women and all nationalist reformers also failed to accept the layered articulation and liberatory potential of what she calls the "Dalit theory of education". Instead, she says, the "disciplinary power of education shaped new ideas of chastity, virtue and marital devotion as well as consenting subjects, who reproduced upper-caste and gendered norms", making upper-caste women complicit in sanctioning Brahmin-exclusive control of knowledge (p. 140). She also says that "upper-caste, middle-class political strategy of homogenising gender also led to the exclusion and invisibility of Dalit women" (p. 136). She focuses throughout on the construction of "difference" in womanhood(s), visions of education, circumstances and experiences, and provides a detailed study of discrimination in terms of the field of education.

However, given the demographic of teachers in our field site where there were hardly any Dalit teachers, the experiences of discrimination and articulations of difference put forth in such work did not quite fit in with the everyday experiences and reality we were confronted with. Yet, we were constantly coming up against the complex ways in which caste-patriarchy and caste Hindu morality governed the lives and labour of the predominantly OBC working-class women teachers in our field site. Neither purely economic arguments based on class, nor the gendered articulations of how Brahminical patriarchy operates in upper-caste women's lives, or the violence and discrimination that characterises Dalit women's lives and how they relate to women's work captured the nature of labouring lives we sought to understand. However, the work of anti-caste intellectuals, revolutionaries and scholars, and the explanations and insights they offered in terms of how mental slavery under the caste order functions, how caste-oppression and the subordination of women are linked, and most importantly, how caste and class are entwined under capital, helped us find a way of faithfully speaking about teachers' labour in the context of our field site. Needless to say, it was not simply the sharply articulated insights offered, but the emancipatory promise and egalitarian ethic at the heart of anti-caste thought that forced us to pay attention to how the dominant Brahminical ideologies and organisation of education continue to both reproduce and be structured by caste.

In an article that explicitly combines theoretical strands to offer a framework that she calls a “feminist sociological approach”, Velaskar attempts to structurally integrate caste, class and gender and their interaction into a framework for analysis. Drawing upon the work of Phule and Ambedkar in particular, and also on Omvedt, she proposes to see caste “as part of the material structure both in its constitution of mode and relations of production” (Velaskar, 2016, p. 398). This is of particular importance to our study since we feel the need for empirical studies of teachers’ working lives to focus more explicitly on the question of teaching as *work*, which means understanding not only how the organisation of teaching tasks are structured (which are governed to a large extent by the hegemonic curriculum and system of repeated testing and examinations), but also the conditions of labour—that is, the terms of entry and exit from the workforce, precarity, wages and work hours—and how these are shaped by state and market forces on the one hand, and social structures on the other.

In order to do this, we must look at the literature pertaining to policy, privatisation and shifts in the teacher workforce to which we turn in the next section.

Policy, Privatisation and Changes in the Teacher Workforce

Since Independence, there has been a consistent expansion of public schooling in order to achieve the goal of universalisation of education in India. What was 200,000 schools in 1950 has expanded to around 1,500,000 today, and enrolment of students increased from 22.3 million to 265.2 million (Govinda & Josephine, 2005; UDISE+ 2021–22). The National Policy of Education (NPE), 1986 precipitated a surge in the number of schools in the country. It also reorganised the landscape of schooling in significant ways, changing the focus of the level at which education was provided, how education was financed, and how it was administered: it shifted the focus from tertiary to primary education, increased the primary education budget, centralised its financing, and encouraged state governments and foreign sources to invest in education. At the same time, the policy also decentralised the management of education to the local level, giving them a relatively “free hand” in teacher recruitment (Govinda & Josephine, 2005). These changes, as Davies argues “combined to create pressures to increase the provision of education at the level of government least equipped to handle rapid increases on the demands of the state” (Davies, 2018). Having more schools meant two things: greater demand for teachers and greater financial demands. In order to meet these demands, states turned to international financing and models for the provision of education. Programmes such as Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan, Bihar Education Project, Basic Education Project in Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme (APPEP), and the Shiksha Karmi and Mahila Samakhya programmes were introduced through the late 1980s and early 1990s in a number of states in order to promote rapid universalisation of education. All of them were funded by foreign donor agencies. In order to achieve their goal and yet be cost-effective and function under financial constraints, they began recruiting “para teachers” (or contract teachers), marking a lasting and significant shift in the teacher workforce in India that had, and continues to have, huge ramifications for school education in India (Beteille & Ramachandran, 2016; Davies, 2018; Govinda & Josephine, 2005; Ramachandran, 2020).

Picking up on these state-level programs, in the 1990s, the central government together with the World Bank introduced the District Primary Education Program (DPEP), which was the largest education programme in the world at the time (Davies, 2018). While NPE 1986 made no mention of hiring contract teachers, through DPEP and later the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) funds, contract teachers began to be hired at a massive

scale across the country (Beteille & Ramachandran, 2016; Govinda & Josephine, 2005; Ramachandran, 2020; Robinson & Gauri, 2010). Govinda and Josephine (2005) point out that the first major reference to contract teachers can be found in the National Committee of State Education Ministers recommendations, which stressed the issue of teacher shortage in India as a means to justify the recruitment of contract teachers in “a manner that the state can afford”. They also observed a “non-economic” argument, stating that

Locally selected youth, accountable to the local community, undertakes the duties of teaching children with much greater interest. The accountability framework is well defined and by making the local authority as the appointing authority, the para teacher's performance assessment is the basis for his/her continuance. The quest for UEE [Universalization of Elementary Education] as Fundamental Right signifies a certain sense of urgency in doing so. (as qtd. in Govinda & Josephine, 2005, p. 12)

Thus, exploitative and precarious working conditions for teachers came to be justified under the urgency of universalisation of education, burdening local youth with settling for extremely low wages and undertaking the teaching of children with interest as an inherent sense of duty. These justifications, however, had their roots in the many state-level programmes that preceded the DPEP that offered a wide-ranging set of justifications for the hiring of contract teachers. Although these programmes claimed to introduce contract teachers with the aim to meet the shortage of teachers, they also saw it as a way of correcting teacher–pupil ratio, combating the problem of teacher absenteeism and the lack of willingness of teachers to work in remote rural schools (Govinda & Josephine, 2005).

Contract teachers were employed on a part-time basis, typically for a year, with no social security benefits and on extremely low wages—sometimes much lower than the stipulated minimum wage of unskilled workers (Beteille & Ramachandran, 2016; Ramachandran, 2020). They were also often subjected to arbitrary dismissals and harassment. Studies such as those by Govinda and Josephine (2004) and Beteille and Ramachandran (2016) provide glimpses not only into the scale at which these contract or para teachers began to be employed, but also into their conditions of work, wages, status and lives. They also point to the lasting legacy of what began in the 1990s apparently as a stop-gap measure to meet the rising demands of education, showing how it has now “become a permanent feature of staffing of public schools in many states” that has “deliberately [been] used to reduce the financial commitment of the states and to also open up a highly discretionary [and prone to abuse] alternative to the appointment of teachers in the regular cadre with full employment status” (Ramachandran, 2020, p. 9). In a recently published report from 2020, drawing on UDISE+ data from various years, Ramachandran reveals that as of 2018, the total number of contract teachers in public schools have steadily increased from 562,504 in 2012–13 to 632,316 in 2017–18, making them account for 13.80 per cent of total teachers at the elementary level (Ramachandran, 2020).

Pointing to some of the major differences between regular and contract teachers, the studies of Beteille and Ramachandran (2016), Ramachandran (2020) and Govinda and Josephine (2005) draw our attention to the following.²⁰ As of 2004, wages (or “honorarium” as it was called in some states) of contract teachers

²⁰ These points have been collated from all three studies as they find resonance in our findings from the field among the teacher workforce in low-fee private schools.

were in the range of ₹1,000–₹5,000 per month and as of 2020, ranged between ₹6,000 and 20,000 per month, figures significantly lower than even entry-level wages of permanent teachers.

Apart from being paid significantly less, unlike regular teachers, contract teachers do not receive annual increments.

- Contract teachers hired as a part of a project (usually under SSA or RMSA) are often paid very late
- They are often subjected to arbitrary dismissals and harassment.
- Contract teachers in general have little scope for career progression in terms of promotion within the contract teacher cadre.
- A significant proportion of contract teachers do not fulfil the required norms for being a teacher. Around 30 per cent of them do not even have an undergraduate degree and the total number of contract teachers without professional qualifications is 29.50 per cent as of 2017–18.
- Contract teachers are disproportionately deployed in schools catering to the most disadvantaged and the most deprived, that is, those run by the Ministry of Labour and those managed by the Social Welfare Department. These schools have a large proportion of contract teachers, at 41.60 per cent and 22.50 per cent respectively.
- The hiring of contract teachers has led to a change in the attitudes. Teachers are now perceived as the lowest rung in a hierarchical bureaucracy. The respect teachers had in society got eroded as untrained youth began to be hired.
- Young people are reluctant to join the profession on such dismal wages given that the salaries are even lower than the minimum wage stipulated for unskilled workers.

Inevitably, such precarious and exploitative working conditions meant a drastic shift in the teacher demographic itself. The increase in contract teacher jobs was accompanied by an increase in both male and female teachers from the lower castes. Govinda and Josephine (2005) point to the findings of the study done by DPEP in 1998 which reported that majority of those who became para teachers were “unemployed, doing odd jobs or working as casual labourers” signifying a certain caste-class demographic that is reflected in the findings of Samson and De (2011). In their chapter on India in the report *Women and the Teaching Profession: Exploring the Feminisation Debate*, they state that

the recruitment of contract teachers has contributed to very visible changes in the gender and caste background of teachers. The proportion of female primary school teachers was found to have increased from 21% to 37% in 2006. There was a decline in the proportion of general caste teachers, and an increase in the proportion of OBC teachers. Among male ‘permanent teachers’, 41% are ‘general castes’ whereas this figure is only 24% among male ‘contract teachers’. Contract teacher jobs are clearly not a preferred option for ‘general caste’ males. Male ‘contract teachers’ are mostly OBCs (42%) ... (a) substantial proportion is from the disadvantaged SC/ST groups (33%). (Samson and De, 2011, p. 156)

Thus, the “feminisation” debate in India centred on the drastic rise in the number of women teachers in the workforce²¹ must be seen in the context of this larger shift in the demographic of the teacher workforce in India, the policies that precipitate it and the processes that it accompanies.

²¹ UDISE+ data reveals that for the first time in India women teachers outnumber male teachers in the country (Ministry of Education, 2020).

This shift has not been a smooth or happy transition. It has been met with much resistance and shaped by stories of struggle and violence. While on the one hand, Govinda and Josephine note that professional teacher associations were “quite vocal in their opposition” about the hiring of contract teachers, Beteille and Ramachandran remind us of the many contract teachers who courageously struggled for better wages, working conditions and dignity:

In 2010, Kiranjit Kaur, a 27-year-old contract teacher in Punjab immolated herself to protest against the service conditions of contract teachers, demanding regularisation. That same year, approximately 18,000 contract teachers in Jharkhand went on strike seeking improvement of their service conditions and salary regularisation (Telegraph 2010). In Chhattisgarh, between 3 December 2012 and 30 January 2013, nearly 2,50,000 contract teachers went on strike demanding regularisation of service and pay. (Beteille and Ramachandran, 2016, p. 42)

Other examples include a woman teacher in Haryana who was shot dead by the police firing rubber bullets into a crowd of hundreds of contract teachers demanding that they be allowed to fill vacant regular teacher posts in 2008, and in the same year, in Chhattisgarh, 50 contract teachers were arrested during a march to raise their monthly payment (Gauri & Robinson, 2010). In recent years, Chhattisgarh has witnessed a wave of such protests, demanding regularisation, and equal pay for equal work (see, for example, TNN 2022, August 23). Why teachers had to take to the streets to fight for basic rights is linked to shifts in government labour policy (Gauri & Robinson, 2010). It was initially assumed that contract teachers are less likely to unionise than regular teachers (Beteille & Ramachandran, 2016). It has been argued that contractualisation itself was brought in precisely to curb teachers' opposition to reforms, linking this to the fact that bringing in women was particularly recommended to mitigate possibilities of political dissent (Govinda & Josephine, 2005; Manjrekar, 2020). However, in reality, the complete opposite happened. Contract teachers have unionised all over the country and also regularly filed court cases, as is evident in the study done by Gauri and Robinson. They pulled out several cases involving contract teachers in the Supreme Court and four high courts between 1980 and 2010. They found that as central, state, and local governments began relying more on contract labour for a variety of services, from healthcare, to education, to cleaning streets in the 1990s, it was accompanied by a gradual shift in Supreme Court's labour jurisprudence. While this change was not immediate, they argue that by the late 1990s and early 2000s there was “a clear trend on the Court away from upholding labour protections that were perceived to promote labour rigidity, such as regularisation, unionisation, or the doctrine of equal pay for equal work” (Gauri & Robinson, 2010, p. 21).

Using evidence from Supreme Court and high court rulings, they demonstrate this very marked shift with respect to contract teachers in India, showing how from the 1990s, the Supreme Court, which was more favourable towards the rights of contract teachers, began to frequently deny petitions for regularisation, equal pay and other labour rights. In the landmark case that was brought forward by A. Sundarambal, a school teacher from Goa whose services had been terminated by the management, the Supreme Court of India ruled in favour of the state, arguing that contract teachers in private and public sectors are not skilled or unskilled labour, and could not be considered “workmen”. The basis of their argument is what is particularly telling:

Even though an educational institution has to be treated as an industry the teachers employed by educational institutions whether the said institutions are imparting primary, secondary, graduate or post graduate education cannot be called as 'workmen' within the meaning of section 2(s) of the Act. Imparting of education which is the main function of teachers cannot be considered as skilled or unskilled manual work or supervisory work or technical work or clerical work. Imparting of education is in the nature of a mission or a noble vocation. A teacher educates children, he moulds their character, builds up their personality and makes them fit to become responsible citizens. Children grow under the care of teachers. The clerical work, if any they may do, is only incidental to their principal work of teaching. (*Miss A. Sundarambal vs Government Of Goa*, 1988, p. 2)

Defining teaching as a "noble vocation" meant that teachers did not come under the protection of the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, or to the wage scales stipulated by the central government's Pay Commission. It also has other far-reaching consequences and implications for understanding teachers' labour in India. Reading this against official documents from state programmes that precipitated the bringing in of contract teachers into the workforce in the first place adds an important dimension to understanding teachers' work. Take for example the programme document from Uttar Pradesh which states that para teachers should have *seva bhava* (*attitude for service*) (Govinda & Josephine, 2005, p. 21), or the fact that their payments were not referred to as salary but as honorarium. These point to the way in which teaching and teachers' work is viewed in India, restructured as it is by policy shifts and changes in labour law, is deeply entwined with notions of *seva* and nobility which are tied to caste-Hindu morality in complex ways. This, coupled with the fact that it was not just a surge in the number of women teachers but also teachers from OBC, SC and ST communities that has characterised the shift in the teacher workforce in India, complicates the feminisation debate and begs deeper inquiry into the relationship between caste and labour: how it shapes the terms of entry and exit, how labour is valued/devalued and what changes in conditions of labour such the changing demographic of the teacher workforce in India results in. Our findings in the field speak to this in numerous ways.

However, the first question before us, given that all of these policies and judgements pertain to government teachers, is what does any of this have to do with private teachers or the growth of privatisation of schooling in India?

As Davies argues, the hiring of contract teachers became common practice in government schools as a result of state-level programmes, along with courts becoming more friendly to liberalising labour laws, turning away as they did from upholding the labour rights of contract teachers created a situation that normalised the hiring of contract teachers, something private schools were sure not to miss (Davies, 2018). Private schools used these laws to rampantly hire contract teachers whose contracts and hiring practices closely resembled those of contract teachers in the government system (Dixon & Tooley, 2005; Jain & Saxena, 2010), which is something that found resonance in the data from our study as well.

However, this still does not explain what created the conditions for private schools to operate in the first place. Literature on the subject offers multiple explanations. The work of Nambissan and Ball for example points to the emergence of "transnational advocacy networks", following the push for an increase in private service providers by large international donor agencies such as the World Bank. They argue that

these networks lobby governments through individual policy entrepreneurs and changing the discourse on “school choice” through “research” funded by such networks (Nambissan & Ball, 2010). Yet another explanation was sought through tracing the entry of private providers to budgetary cuts in education (Batra, 2021). However, Davies departs from these explanations, arguing for: a) greater market integration in India coinciding with increased expenditure on government education; and b) that while transnational advocacy networks “have been powerful advocates for greater private education, they do not serve as a causal force for understanding when and why private schools emerged in the first place” (p. 21) because the growth of private education occurred much before the formal date to which liberalisation is traced in these studies, and before the aforementioned transnational advocacy networks exerted any significant influence on education policy in India. Instead, he offers another explanation drawing on literature pertaining to “policy drift”. The first stage of this drift occurred in how the attempt to universalise education in India “drifted” to a reliance on contract teachers and local-level bureaucracies, a process that has been described above. The second stage of the drift was the role of the courts in institutionalising this service regime. Drawing on three cases: the case of *A. Sundarambal vs. Government of Goa and Daman and Diu* in 1988 mentioned above, *Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka* in 1992, and *Unni Krishnan vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* in 1993. While in intent the latter two cases were to enable greater access to tertiary education, especially to students from low-income backgrounds, what they ended up doing was something else altogether. In the *Mohini Jain* case, the Supreme Court held that the “right to education flows directly from the right to life”, and *Unni Krishnan* confirmed this ruling and made clear that the right to life included the right to education (Supreme Court of India, 1992, 1993). The cases themselves sought to curb the fees charged by private institutions, which thereby made them inaccessible to those who could not afford it and foregrounding the issue of access to education for all and paved the way for the larger right to education movement which culminated with the passing of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. With those two judgements, the courts interpreted the right very broadly with respect to where the service of education was provided, thereby bringing in private institutions into the ambit of their rulings as is evident in the *Mohini Jain* ruling that states “[w]hen the State Government grants recognition to the private education institutions it creates an agency to fulfil its obligation under the Constitution. The students are given admission to the educational institutions—whether state-owned or state-recognized in recognition of their ‘right to education’ under the Constitution” (as qtd. in Davies, 2018, p. 16). Yet another thing to be noted is that these rulings were “successful” in what they set out to do, in that they did manage to place severe constraints on fees charged by private institutions. However, this meant that private institutions were forever and urgently in need of cost-cutting measures. With a judgement such as the *A. Sunderambal* ruling in hand, which codified a different kind of labour law in favour of the hiring of contract teachers, they were able to “quickly and cheaply” hire teachers to expand their provision (Davies, 2018).

Davies, thus, argues,

What this series of legislations did, especially as related to the eventual passage of the Right to Education in 2009, was codify and normalise private schools in Indian law and include them as part of India's education provision regime. While the NPE in 1986 made no mention of private schools as an important pillar upon which India could meet its commitment to universalizing education, the last two major policy pronouncements on education policy by the Indian government, the Right to Education Act and the draft of the third National Policy on Education in 2016, have

made frequent reference to the role that private schools play in fulfilling India's commitment to universalizing education. While the Right to Education sought to regulate private schools and also bring them under greater government sanctioning, the other effect that provisions like Section 12.1(c) had was to normalise the idea of private schools as part of the larger service provision landscape in India. (p. 17)

He also notes that "[t]hrough the centralization of education policy and financing, India was able to credibly commit to providing and expanding education. However, through the decentralisation of the management of education, the lofty objectives of the central government were left unfulfilled at the local level. This in turn provided an opening for the low-cost private sector to enter" (Davies, 2018, p. 23).

Since our study is based primarily in low-fee private schools in an urban, industrial, working-class neighbourhood, we also looked at studies concerning such schools, both those that advocated the expansion of low-fee private schools such as Tooley and Dixon (2005) as well as those that critiqued this work, such as the work of Samson, De and Noronha (2002), Nambissan (2012), and Jain and Saxena (2010) among others which provided important counter arguments to the highly objectionable arguments and claims made by the former (something our data also clearly challenges). Empirical studies of teachers' work in such schools, however, continues to be very limited.

The insights provided in all the literature on policy changes, contract teachers and legislations regarding teachers' labour are incredibly valuable to us not only in order to be able to explain the expansion of low-cost private provision of education and the shifts in the teacher workforce, but crucially, because they compel us to engage with deeper issues of teachers' labour in India—in terms of the tension between work and non-work, the historical processes that shape the ideologies governing teachers labour as well as teachers contemporary working conditions and the materiality of the contexts in which they labour.

This also reaffirms our need to understand teacher's working lives as a central and necessary part of understanding various aspects of education, from issues of quality and inequality to the role of education in social transformation. These links will be elaborated upon through the following sections as we engage with and think through the findings from our field, while trying to put them into critical conversation with the strands of literature discussed above.

CHAPTER 3 - THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Research Questions

The objective of our study was to develop an understanding of the labouring lives of teachers in the elementary schools of our field site. The following are our research questions, which were first conceived in Hindi.

1. हमारे फील्ड में टीचर “कौन है” (यानि कि उनके उम्र, जाति, जेन्डर, मैरिटल स्टेटस, परिवार की आर्थिक स्थिति आदि) व उनकी “श्रम की स्थिति” यानि कि टीचिंग व नोन टीचिंग और वैतनिक व अवैतनिक श्रम में क्या क्या आता है, व श्रम/काम की प्रकृति व परिस्थितियाँ (वेतन, काम के घंटे, छटनी व नियुक्ति का आधार आदि) क्या है?
 2. हमारे फील्ड में टीचरों के आत्मछवी व टीचर के काम का समाज में नज़रिया किस तरह/प्रकार के हैं? ऐसे क्यों हैं? यह दोनों कैसे जुड़े हैं? इसका टीचर के श्रम के प्रकृति व प्रक्रिया में क्या प्रभाव पड़ता है?
 3. प्रिन्सिपल व स्कूल मेनेजमेन्ट व टीचर के आपस में किस तरह का रिश्ता है? यह ऐसा क्यों बना व इसका टीचर के श्रम के प्रकृति व प्रक्रिया में क्या प्रभाव पड़ता है?
 4. हमारे फील्ड में टीचरों के आपसी रिश्ते किस तरह के हैं? ऐसे क्यों हैं व कैसे बने/बनते हैं? इसका टीचर के श्रम के प्रकृति व प्रक्रिया में क्या प्रभाव पड़ता है?
1. “Who” is a teacher in the field site we have chosen (i.e., what is their gender, caste, class, marital status, etc.) and what is their “labour situation”, i.e., what kinds of teaching and non-teaching, paid and unpaid labour do they do, what is the nature of the work they do and what are their working conditions (wages, work hours, conditions for hiring and basis for leaving/laying off, security, etc.)?
 2. What are the self-images of teachers in our field site and how is their work looked upon by society? How are these two related? What effect do these have on the nature and process of their work?
 3. What is the nature of the relationship between teachers and school management (principal/school owner)? Why has it become so and what is the effect of this on the nature and process of teachers' work?
 4. What is the nature of relationships between teachers in our field site? How and why did they form this way? What effect do these have on the nature and process of their work?

Research Plan and Implementation

Designed as a qualitative inquiry, we began the data collection process with an initial questionnaire to gather primarily quantitative and some qualitative data. This was followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and in-depth unstructured interviews with school heads, education officials in government schools and members of the community. This was accompanied by school visits, field observations and a focus group discussion with teachers.

We drew inspiration from some strands of workers' inquiry²², which examines the process of work and experience as a form of "proletarian self-activity based on the understanding that knowledge of the working class [that] could only be produced by workers themselves" (Haider & Mohandesi, 2013). Our choice of methods, such as in-depth interviews and reflective writing, were informed by the belief that descriptions of and reflections on everyday experiences of life and work could help in the creation of meaningful theoretical categories. Mario Small warns against the tendency of researchers to make qualitative research more quantitative in the name of "rigour" and exposes preoccupations with questions like "generalisability" and studies being "representative". Distinguishing between case study logic and sampling logic as an example, and arguing that qualitative research strengths come from understanding the "how" and "why" and not "how many", he points out that "it is possible to conduct rigorous research without employing the assumptions of classical statistics in any way" (Small, 2008, p. 8). Arguing that scientific methods of inquiry are like languages, elsewhere Small (2019) laments the lack of qualitative literacy in public discourse and outlines three basic components of qualitative literacy: cognitive empathy, attentiveness to outward homogeneity bias and sensitivity to the differences between types of qualitative data. We believe that the first two components are more likely to be realised when those conducting the inquiry are themselves engaged in the practice that is being researched, something this study attempts to do, given that the investigators themselves are teachers in a school in the field site.

The principal investigator (PI) is a teacher and mentor at Shaheed School. For the past eight years, she has been engaged in designing the academic curriculum and transforming classroom practice and is an active member of the women's group of the workers' union. The other three members of the research team also teach at Shaheed School and have been teaching for the past 7, 6 and 4 years, respectively. Two of them are now lead-teachers, mentoring and supporting new teachers. All three were once students at the school themselves and have grown up in the *bastis* surrounding the school. Since this study was envisioned with a commitment to collectivising the process of knowledge creation, in a way that encourages teachers to reflect on their practice, a central aspect of the research process was the work done to make it a collaborative endeavour. The research team engaged in guided theory reading sessions, worked on framing the research questions and drawing up the research plan, collectively conducted the initial fieldwork, and received feedback on interview tools generated and the way in which interviews were being conducted. The teacher-researchers also provided guidance in discussing the findings and arguments and developed auto-ethnographic accounts.

While our collective efforts to try and make the research process more democratic did challenge some of the hierarchical ways in which knowledge is produced, we would also strongly caution against fetishising or celebrating our attempts, given the ways in which power "is never really external to 'dialogue, participation and experience'" (Rege, 2010, p. 97). The poem by Bhujang Meshram that Rege invokes in offering her warning is reproduced here, without which such a reminder would almost feel incomplete.

²² The original proposal for what came to be known as the workers' inquiry was formulated by Karl Marx as 100 questions to investigate and bring to light the "facts and misfacts" of the organisation of work, the process of production, and life, which is obscured and mystified by capitalist power. It was later theorised and reworked very differently in different contexts in Europe and around the world. For an exposé of these developments, see Haider & Mohandesi (2013).

The Teacher asked,
'Name any three tribal villages',
So I told.
Slap me if I was wrong
But do tell me do closed doors open without a push?
I only told – Shelti, Varud, and Kondpakhandi'.
The teacher asked, 'For what are these villages famous?'
I only told, Shelti for Holi,
Varud for the woman – Gowarin Bai,
And Kondpakhandi for the theft of cotton.
The teacher roared and slapped with his hands
He broke a couple of staffs of the Mehendi bushes.
Go get a reference from three people
Or else no entry for you in this school – he said.
That's when I decided to get introduced
to Birsa kaka, Tanya nana and Ambar Singh Maharaj!!
– Bhujang Meshram

Box 3.1: Poem by Bhujang Meshram Source: Rege (2010).

Defining the field site

Shaheed School is located at the edge of Birgaon, right where Urla begins. In fact, the school comes under the jurisdiction of the Urla nodal circle. Today, the municipal corporation of Birgaon is composed of the six villages of Urla, Accholi, Rawabhata, Urkura, Sarora and Birgaon. Our usage of "Birgaon" connotes the village that was Birgaon and not the larger area of the newly formed municipal corporation made up of 40 wards. We identified a rough area of a radius of 1 km around Shaheed Nagar, the *basti* in which Shaheed School is located, as our field site. This radius covered 30–35 schools that fell under the jurisdiction of the Birgaon, Urla and Urukura nodal circles.

Selection

Teachers to whom the initial questionnaire was handed out were chosen broadly based on two criteria:

1. **Diversity:** In terms of caste group, age, marital status, teaching experience, economic status, work experience of teaching and non-teaching work and various age groups of children taught. We faced limitations by virtue of the demographic itself. For example, majority of the teaching workforce in all the schools belonged to the OBC category. Only an odd teacher from the SC and ST communities was reported and very few from the General category. Muslim teachers too were next to none. The two Muslim teachers in the area had moved away from Birgaon, either due to a new job or marriage. We were unable to reach them for our study. Details of the demographic of the sample can be found in the next section.
2. **Accessibility:** We first approached teachers through informal friendship networks and relationships we had built in the area through work. Subsequently, their circle of friends and colleagues were approached.

In terms of diversity, UDISE+ data for each school, updated as of September 2020, provides workforce composition data only in terms of gender and not caste. However, in at least three instances, we knew for a fact from school visits and conversations with staff and management that there was no male teacher employed, even though UDISE+ data reported otherwise. Thus, in terms of composition, it is not a reliable source for corroboration.

Data sources and collection

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed by the research team through a series of discussions based on a pilot conducted in 2019 and based on the shape our research questions had taken. The questionnaire focused largely on gathering information on demographics and working conditions, with some qualitative questions that would help guide the second stage of sampling and designing the in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was piloted among four teachers, then refined based on feedback, and subsequently handed out to 37 participants. We were able to retrieve 30 completed forms. We had follow-up meetings or phone calls with every respondent to understand their responses, clear doubts, and probe certain questions that needed further investigation. These interviews helped information beyond responses to the questionnaire and helped us select teachers for in-depth interviews and build relationships with them.

Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and school heads.

Teacher interviews: Out of the 30 participants who had filled out the questionnaire, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 of them. We had initially proposed to conduct seven–eight interviews but given the insights from our follow-up phone conversations, we believed it would enrich our understanding of teachers' working lives to take into account certain diversities and similarities that we observed during the first stage of data collection. The in-depth interview schedule was designed with broad leading questions, each with a few possible follow-up questions. In the actual interviews, in a few instances, we were forced to take new directions based on the responses of teachers but it was finally the semi-structured tool that guided and gave shape to the interviews, providing a consistency that allowed us to focus on certain patterns at the analysis stage. Most of the interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes, usually around a public holiday. A few were conducted on school premises on the request of the respondents, who said they would be pulled into some work or the other at home and would not be able to speak at ease.

Interviews with school heads: We conducted unstructured interviews with three school heads. Two of these were conducted on school/office premises, and one was conducted at a house that they rented just across their school where they would come to rest or work out during the day since their own home was a half hour away from Birgaon. In this interview, both husband and wife who were director and principal, respectively, were present.

School visits: We visited five private schools, where we spent time with teachers in the staff room, witnessed the transition of shifts among staff, witnessed the prayer sessions, and talked to school heads. We also visited the two government schools. Since many of our Class 5 students from Shaheed School graduate and enrol in the government-run middle school, we were more familiar with them. At various

points prior to this study, we have also visited a few other private schools to meet with school heads and also during the sudden resolution of the Chhattisgarh government to conduct board exams with external examination in 2018 (which was in fact in blatant violation of the RTE Act). Extended school visits and classroom observations would add many layers to the discussion that could enrich an understanding of school environments and everyday working conditions.

Focus group: We conducted a focus group discussion with 11 teachers, including three from the research team. We tried to ensure that at least two teachers were from the same school. The focus group was a crucial component as we felt there were certain themes such as relationship with management and finer details of teaching work that would emerge better in a group setting. The focus group was one of the most enriching interactions we had during the course of this study. The minutiae of teachers' work really came to life as they shared notes, amidst both laughter and indignation at the range of situations they encountered at school. As we learnt, it is a rare and precious thing for teachers to get time together given how their working lives both within the school site and outside are structured.

Data analysis

All the data from the questionnaire was computerised and fed into a spreadsheet. The interviews and the focus group discussion was conducted in a mix of Hindi and Chhattisgarhi and transcribed. All the interviews were digitally recorded, and the interviewees were assured about confidentiality and anonymity. No names have been mentioned in this report to ensure confidentiality. The subsequent analysis was coded with the help of Quirkos software, using various codes some of which merged into larger categories. The codes emerged after several rounds of listening to the recordings and reading and rereading the transcripts several times. Some of the codes were also informed in part by our research questions. Coded data was shared with the teacher-researchers for feedback and guidance.

Other steps in the research process

Apart from data collection and analysis, there were several steps that were crucial to shaping the research process. Our study was designed and conceived such that almost each step of the research process also contributed to capacity building since the research team comprised of practising teachers rather than trained researchers. Below are some of the other important steps in the research process.

Guided sessions on qualitative inquiry

The PI and teacher-researchers were part of a series of sessions to understand the nature of practice of qualitative research under the guidance of a research consultant who was familiar with the field site. The sessions helped us understand aspects of qualitative literacy and how it has a language of its own, entirely different from that of quantitative inquiry. They also helped us distinguish between theoretical and empirical questions and allowed us an opportunity to get a taste of what good empirical studies can be like, enabling us to refine and sharpen our own research questions.

Mentored engagement with research and policy

The teacher-researchers were supported by the PI through guided reading workshops and presentations of chosen themes and papers in order to engage with literature relevant to our study. While a few identified

pieces were translated into Hindi, financial and time constraints meant that this was limited to a handful. For the rest, summarised presentations and notes were prepared by the PI.

Supported reflective writing

The teacher-researchers were supported to develop writing that described and reflected on their journeys as teachers, with a focus on particular aspects that were identified through a series of discussions and preliminary drafts.

Developing research skills

Research requires a whole range of skills that we realised we needed to acquire. Some of the basic skills required to conduct research are rendered invisible by the fact that most researchers come from certain social locations where access to these skills is taken for granted, or they have been trained by virtue of having been part of the academy over a period of time. For us however, even some of the most basic of these skills were something to be learnt, even if, importantly, our lack of access was not nearly equal. Given social location and the infinite privileges associated with caste and class of cultural capital, language, university education and material privileges, the PI had easy access to a wider range of skills and knowledge, despite no formal training in research or the social sciences. None of the teacher-researchers speak English nor did they have a working knowledge of basic computer skills at the beginning of the study. While they were able to pick up the latter during the course of the study, access to academic literature and discourses in education research were severely constrained by the lack of a working knowledge of English. While the guided theory reading sessions, translations and summarised presentations were a step towards trying to break the language barrier, they were not nearly enough. As we all know, language itself is not merely a tongue to be mastered, but has a whole cultural universe folded into it that is structured by social power and knowledge hierarchies, thereby making it inaccessible and exclusive in many complex ways. Thus, despite the small yet earnest attempts, for reasons far beyond a lack of knowledge of the English language, access to the world of research and discourses in education continue to be denied to the teacher-researchers. Mounting a challenge to the ways in which knowledge creation are tied to structures of power requires a much more sustained effort, with a commitment to egalitarian ethics and a radical reconfiguration of relationships and processes that structure the academy. Given these constraints, here are some of the very limited skills that we attempted to acquire:

- Conducting surveys, approaching participants and interviewing them
- Research ethics
- Using Microsoft Excel to computerise and code data
- Structured note-taking, writing, and analysing data
- Coding qualitative data with the help of relevant software
- Structured writing and reflection
- Engaging with academic writing
- Developing a “research outlook”: how to ask questions, be attentive to our biases, differentiating between empirical and theoretical questions, and trying to build qualitative literacy skills

Table 3.1: Broad timeline of fieldwork

Step/Method	Timeline	Notes
Preparation of ethics documents and approval	December 2021–January 2022	
Selection and consent	February–March 2022	This was accompanied by sessions on what is qualitative inquiry, guided theory readings as well as preparation of the questionnaire tool.
Questionnaire	11 April–27 April 2022	
In-depth interviews	25 July–17 August 2022	The break was caused due to summer vacations at school.
School visits	July–September 2022	
Focus group discussion	4 September 2022	
Coding and analysis	Mid-September–5 October 2022	Between January and September, guided engagement with research and policy, collaborative design of interview tools, feedback on interviews, and guided reflective writing sessions with teacher-researchers continued.
Meeting with nodal officers	July 2022 November 2022	

Source: Compiled by authors.

Limitations of the Study

Some notable limitations of the study, both methodological and otherwise, are listed below.

- A lack of training in research meant that we did not develop a methodological framework informed by any particular disciplinary grounding.
- The study would have benefited greatly from more school and classroom observations. Restricted access to private schools made this difficult.

- Although our focus was teachers, more interviews with school heads would have perhaps provided important insights into the low-fee private school ecosystem from the perspective of school management.
- Interviews with families of teachers and parents of students would also have enriched our understanding of teachers' working lives and how their work is socially perceived.
- The study would have also benefitted from more focus group discussions since teachers lack the time to get together to share experiences, exchange notes and reflect together. We hope this is something we are able to do in the future.
- Limited translations of texts into Hindi and a limited time frame meant that engagement with theory and analysis of data was less of a collective process than we wished for it to be. We hope that over time we are able to find ways and means to access and engage with theoretical resources, and more importantly, are able to find sustainable practices for teachers to engage with literature in education research and policy, despite the severe constraints of time and the many other structural obstacles to engaging with academic knowledge.
- While theoretical points have been made at various places, our lack of academic and research training means that perhaps much more labour is needed to argue them out rigorously. Despite this important shortcoming and its acknowledgement, we have still attempted such an engagement, hoping to invite feedback and criticism.
- While this is an ongoing endeavour, we feel the study itself would have been enriched greatly if we had had a longer and deeper engagement with anti-caste scholarship and thought.

Needless to say, this list is not nearly exhaustive, and there are also probably many limitations of the study that we are unable to see by ourselves. We hope that those who read our work are able to help us identify these.

CHAPTER 4 - PART I: FINDINGS FROM THE INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The Field Site

Our field site covered a radius of around 1 km in the industrial outskirts of the city of Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Nestled in the heart of the larger Urla Industrial Area, the schools in our study sample were spread within this radius, but juridically distributed under the “nodal” circles of Birgaon and Urla, with one school belonging to the Urkura nodal circle. While there is no official list of the total number of schools in any given nodal circle, we met with the nodal officers of Urla and Birgaon and got an unofficial list of schools in their circles. Figure 4.1 gives a sense of the geographical layout and has a rough marking of the area which all the schools we covered came under.

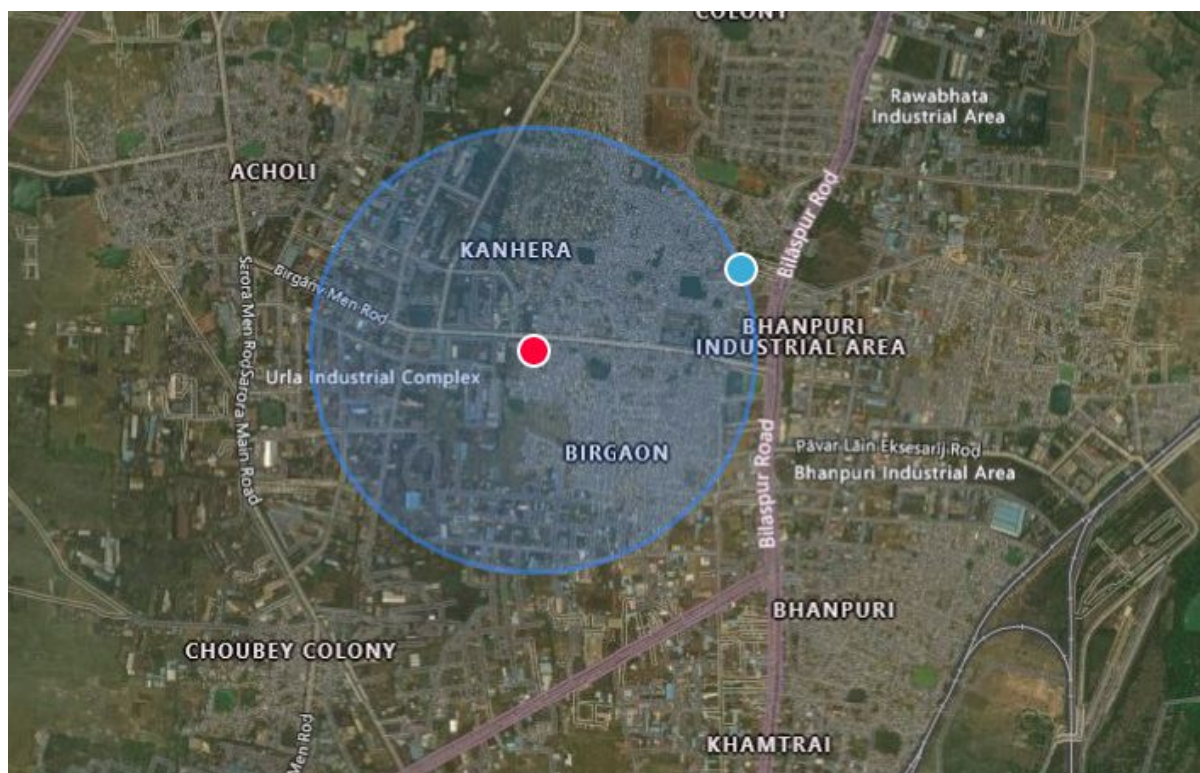


Figure 4.1: The field site | Source: Compiled by the authors using CalcMaps

Note: Radius of about 1,200 m around Shaheed Nagar, Birgaon

We handed out the initial questionnaire to 37 participants and were able to retrieve a total of 30 completed questionnaires. Three of these were teachers at government schools, while the remaining 27 taught at private schools. In addition to individual data pertaining to teachers, we were able to gather data on 15 private schools that they were either currently working at, or where they had been previously employed. These 15 schools are all formally registered schools and data pertaining to year of establishment, student and staff strength, shifts and medium are publicly available on the UDSIE+ database, updated as of 30 September 2020, and shared at the end of this section. Findings from the data gathered through the initial questionnaire, informal meetings with nodal officers, as well as some from school visits are presented in this chapter.

School Ownership and Management

There were 39 names of schools in the list of the nodal circle of Birgaon, out of which eight schools were reported to have been permanently shut down as of 2022, and the nodal officer reported that they suspected a few more were about to be shut down. In the list of the nodal circle of Urla there were 19 schools listed, with three reported as having been permanently shut as of 2022. For the 47 (perhaps closer to 45 given impending closures) schools that were functional, there were at least five school owners who owned two or three schools each, which brought the number of school owners down to less than 40. Out of these, less than 10 schools belonged to “upper” caste owners, one was owned by a Muslim, one by a Christian, two by those belonging to the SC category, and all the rest owned by those belonging to the OBC category.

In the 15 schools covered through our study sample of 30 teacher participants, 11 school directors were from the OBC category, two were from the general category, one was a partnership run by two people—one from the general category and the other from an OBC category—and we were unable to ascertain the caste of one who was a native of Punjab. Two of the schools were run out of premises rented out by the affluent Dewangan property owners. Details of nodal circles to which schools from the sample belong are provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Number of schools in the sample under each nodal circle

Nodal Circle	No. of Schools in Sample
Birgaon	10
Urla	4
Urkura	1

Source: Khemani et al., 2023; UDISE+, 2020–21

Except for three, all other school owners either run more than one school, or had at least one more business or, in a few cases, had a government teaching position, or someone in their immediate family was reported as having a government teaching position. In fact, one was the son of one of a retired government teacher of the area who had earned a name for himself through all the priestly duties he performed at weddings and funerals and his practice of palmistry. One of the two Brahmin school owners had a fairly large amount of land in the area just off the main highway, owned and ran two petrol pumps and was notorious for many backdoor dealings. But he was also known for his benevolence: his students and teachers were all given unlimited rides at the annual temple fair (mela) which ran out of the land that he owned, and he offered tea/coffee for free at one of his petrol pumps. A couple of school owners ran coaching centres after school out of the school premises, which was a far greater source of income than the school itself. One reportedly owned a large garment shop and a jewellery store, and had invested in the school, which ran out of his property but was run by someone else. One school head, who owned a couple of schools outside of Birgaon in other parts of the industrial belt and likely has investments in other businesses, said he only got into the business of schooling for his wife, because it was her “hobby”. (*“Shauk tha unka, isiliye school khola”*.)

Only one of the 15 schools was reported as having a female director (who was also the principal). On paper, there were three schools with female directors. But, in two of these schools, the male school

“heads” were in fact officially employed in teaching positions in government schools and were not allowed to legally own a school. Thus, on paper it was their wives who were both director and principal. But, from interviews with the teachers who worked at these two schools, it was clear that for all practical purposes, it was the husbands themselves who were directors. *“Sir shows the way, and Ma’am carries it all out in practice”*, as one teacher said. They were also reported as being the ones who handed out the salaries to teachers and, even in the unofficial typed list handed to us by the nodal officer, it was their names and numbers listed against their respective schools, and not those of their wives.

In five of the schools, the director and principal were one and the same, in one the director and principal were in partnership (and had started three schools together), while in one the principal was the younger brother of the director. Eight of the 15 schools were reported as having female principals (one who was also the only female director), and four were the wives of the directors. One school was run by a workers’ union and so there was no “owner” or director and, in the remaining three, senior teachers had been appointed to the post of principal.

School Information and Amenities

Five of the 15 private schools were reported as having English as their medium of instruction, while the medium of instruction was Hindi in the rest. All schools were reported as having a staffroom and a staff toilet, which was not usable in one school because it was not maintained and, in another school, the toilet was located in residential premises belonging to the school owner at a distance from the school. All were reported as having cleaning staff. One school did not have cleaning staff earlier, but had recently hired someone who would work both at the residence of the school owner and the school. One school was reported as having someone come in only intermittently to clean. Most schools had cameras, while one had them only in the staffroom. All schools except for two had a uniform for teachers (one being the union-run school). Of the 15 schools, we were able to verify in 13 schools that all, except the union-run school, were reported as performing either the Saraswati Puja or reciting the Saraswati Vandana or both. Eleven of these 15 schools ran in shifts—typically, this means that primary and middle grades were held in the same premises albeit at different times or in “shifts”. Some teachers worked single shifts, while some worked double shifts. Table 4.2 shows UDISE+ data on the schools.

Table 4.2: School data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+)

School	Year Established	Medium of Instruction	Classes	Female Teaching Staff	Male Teaching Staff	Student Strength	Shifts
PS1	2002	Hindi	1–8	16	1	651	Yes
PS2	2003	Hindi	6–12	11	1	236	Yes
PS3	2002	English	1–12	28	0	1,131	Yes
PS4	2010	English	1–8	24	5	855	Yes
PS5	2003	Hindi	1–12	23	1	1,265	Yes
PS6	2012	English	1–8	12	1	601	Yes
PS7	2013	English	1–8	16	1	637	Yes
PS8	2017	English	1–8	10	1	290	No

PS9	2004	Hindi	1–8	7	3	384	Yes
PS10	2001	Hindi	1–12	18	5	721	Yes
PS11	2003	Hindi	1–12	16	18	841	No
PS12	2006	Hindi	1–8	8	1	144	Yes
PS13	2003	Hindi	1–12	6	2	134	Yes
PS14	2004	Hindi	1–10	13	1	558	No
PS15	1996	Hindi	PP1–Class 5	9	1	41	No
		English and					
GS1	1981	Hindi	6–12	10	15	1,677	Yes
GS2	1954	Hindi	1–5	8	4	146	No

Note: PS = Private School; GS = Government School | Source: UDISE+, 2021

We would like to note that at least three of the schools in this list which reported more than one male teacher (often the one male teacher is the director himself), and one school that reported one male teacher, in fact had no male teacher currently employed. Further, one of the schools which reported a student strength of over 100 in 2020 is now at around 35 as it is about to be shut down. The government schools have much higher student strengths in 2022 than in 2020: the high school has around 3,000 students, while the primary school has around 300.

Teacher Demographic Data

All participants except for one were female. Of the 30 participants, 27 belonged to the OBC category, and of the remaining three, one belonged to the SC, ST and General category each. There is no official data pertaining to the caste composition of the teacher workforce in schools across our field site. However, based on what the teachers reported on the workforce in each of the schools in the sample, as well as from what we gathered from school heads, school visits and discussions with the nodal office, our reported caste composition can be taken to be a faithful picture of the workforce in schools in the field site. A majority of the teachers in all of these schools belong to the OBC category, with only some schools reporting the odd SC/ST teacher and a few general category teachers at best. Muslim teachers were reported as having been employed only at three schools, two of whom were reported as having left now. All participants identified as Hindu.

Thirteen teachers were married, while 17 were unmarried. Fourteen teachers were in the 21–25 age bracket, nine in the 26–30 age bracket, five in the 31–35 age bracket and two in the 50–55 age bracket.

Of the 27 private school teachers, 19 were untrained, five had completed a Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed) and three had completed Bachelor of Education (B.Ed).

Fifteen of them were either enrolled in or had completed a master's degree, eight were either enrolled in or had completed a bachelor's degree and three had completed Class 12 and were currently not studying any further. One teacher had completed a course in nursing.

Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 depict data relating to age, marital status, training and caste composition.

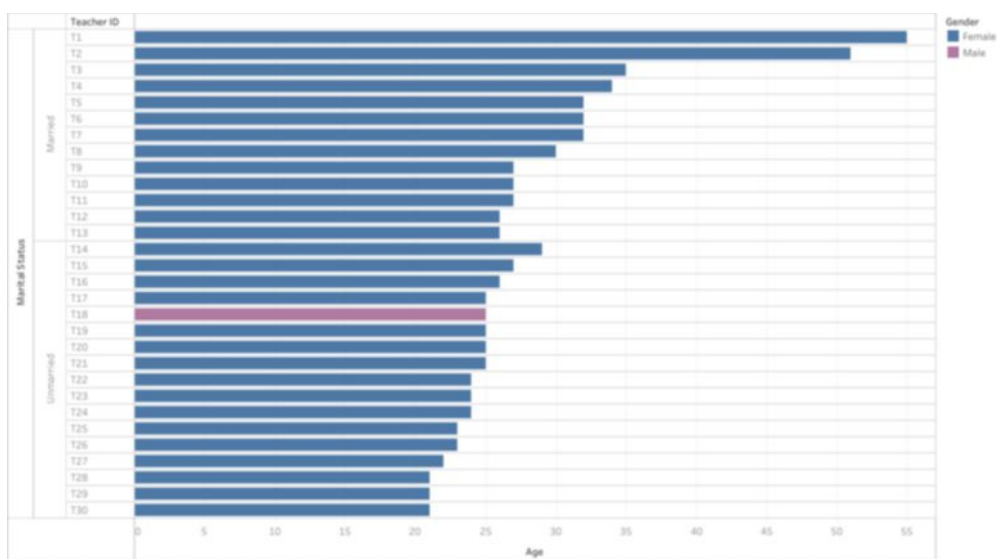


Figure 4.2: Age, marital status and gender | Source: Created by authors from data collected

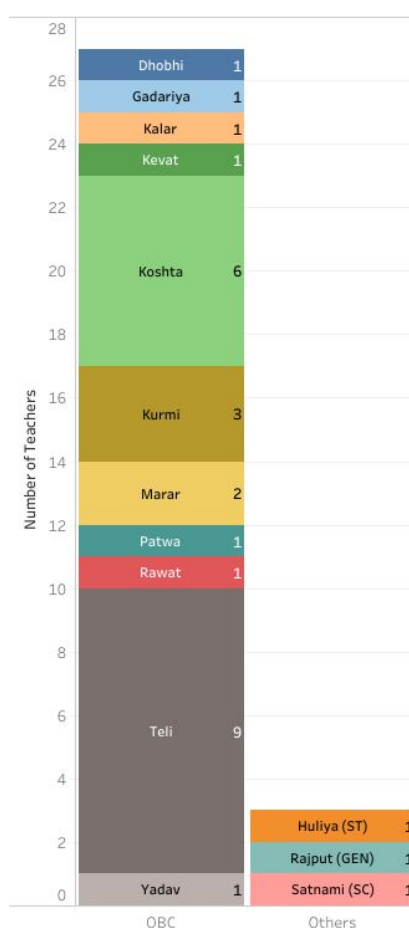


Figure 4.3: Caste composition of teachers in study sample | Source: Created by authors from data collected

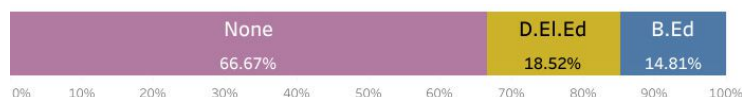


Figure 4.4: Pre-service qualification in private schools | Source: Created by authors from data collected

Wages and Working Conditions

In April 2022 when we handed out the questionnaire, 14 out of 30 teachers were currently not employed as teachers, while 16 were employed. These numbers changed subsequently with respondents transitioning in and out of the workforce.

All private schools, except for one (a school that was about to shut down and had only 35 students), were reported to have cut salary on any extra leave taken (beyond the stipulated annual or monthly leaves). One teacher said that her salary was not cut because she was a relative of the school head.

Five teachers reported having worked two shifts, while eight reported having above four-hour but less than five-hour workdays at school. Sixteen teachers reported having between five and six hours, and three reported having between six- and eight-hour workdays. Four reported having above eight-hour workdays, all of whom worked two shifts.

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 depict information with respect to work experience. Figure 4.5 shows that the largest number of teachers have worked for less than two years in the same school, and the number of teachers keeps reducing as the number of years keeps increasing, indicating a high rate of flux in the workforce. This is a significant aspect of our findings, central to understanding the disciplining forces of teachers' labour, elaborated upon in subsequent sections. What Figure 4.6 reveals is that there is no real correlation between age and experience, both in terms of the number of schools in which teachers were previously employed or years of service in the same school. The same applies to teacher training and experience.

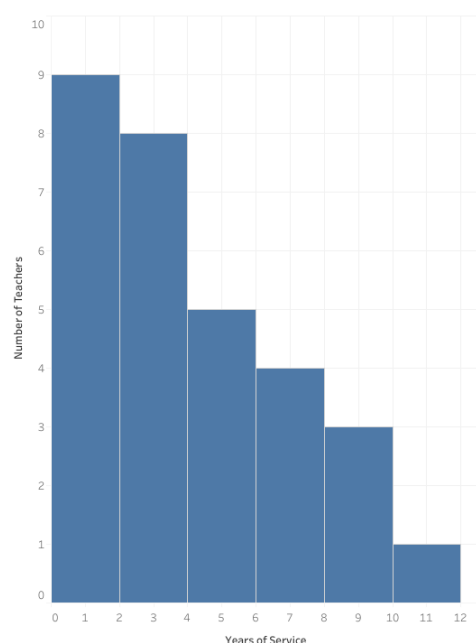


Figure 4.5: Years of service | Source: Created by authors from data collected

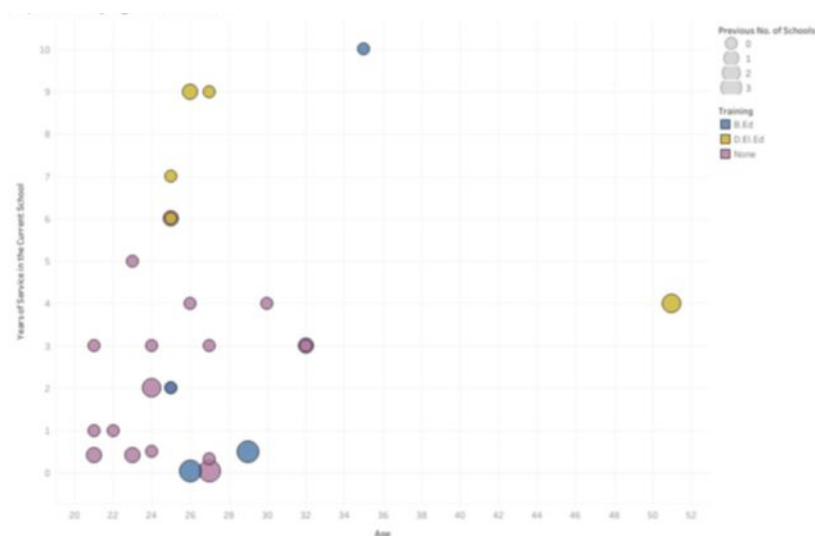


Figure 4.6: Past experience, age, training and years of service | Source: Created by authors from data collected

Figures 4.7 to 4.10 depict information about wages, as seen against training, years of service, past teaching experience and employment status. What these figures tell us is that, for one, there is not all that much variation in the range of salaries between those not currently employed and those who are currently employed, even when seen against those who were last employed over 3 years ago. Of those currently employed, seven teachers were paid ₹3,000 or less per month, five were paid between ₹3,000 and ₹5,000, and only two were paid above ₹5,000 as of April 2022.

In July 2022, this changes to eight being paid ₹3,000 or less, four being paid between ₹3,000 and ₹5,000, and three being paid above ₹5,000 (up to a maximum of ₹7,000). The three government teachers, in contrast, were paid between ₹27,000 and ₹31,000 per month (Figure 4.11).

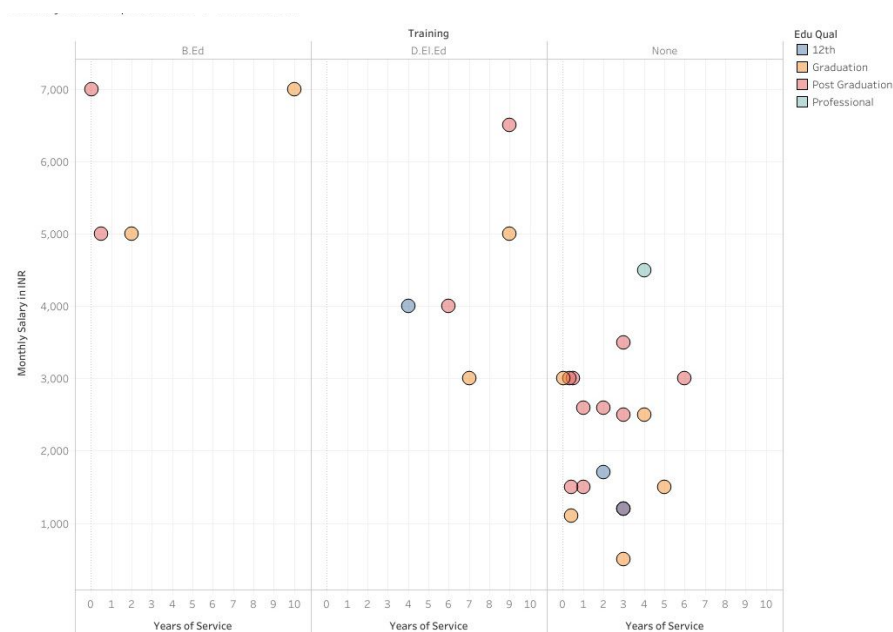


Figure 4.7: Salaries, training and experience | Source: Created by authors from data collected

Last Salaries of Teachers Not Employed Now

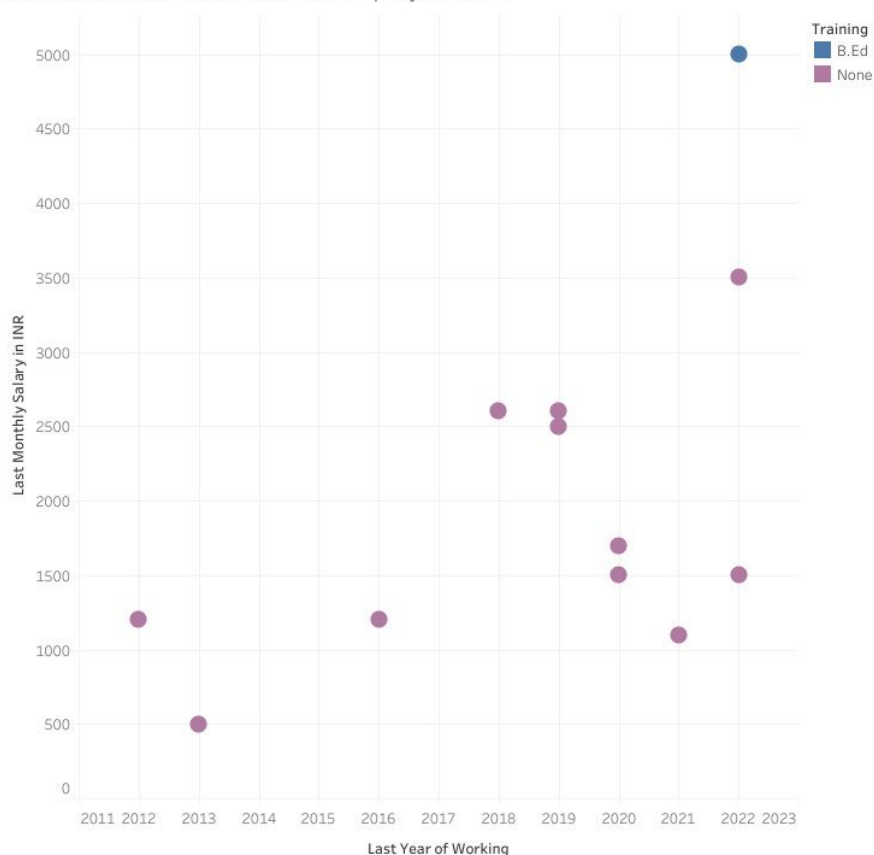


Figure 4.8 : Salaries and training (not employed) | Source: Created by authors from data collected

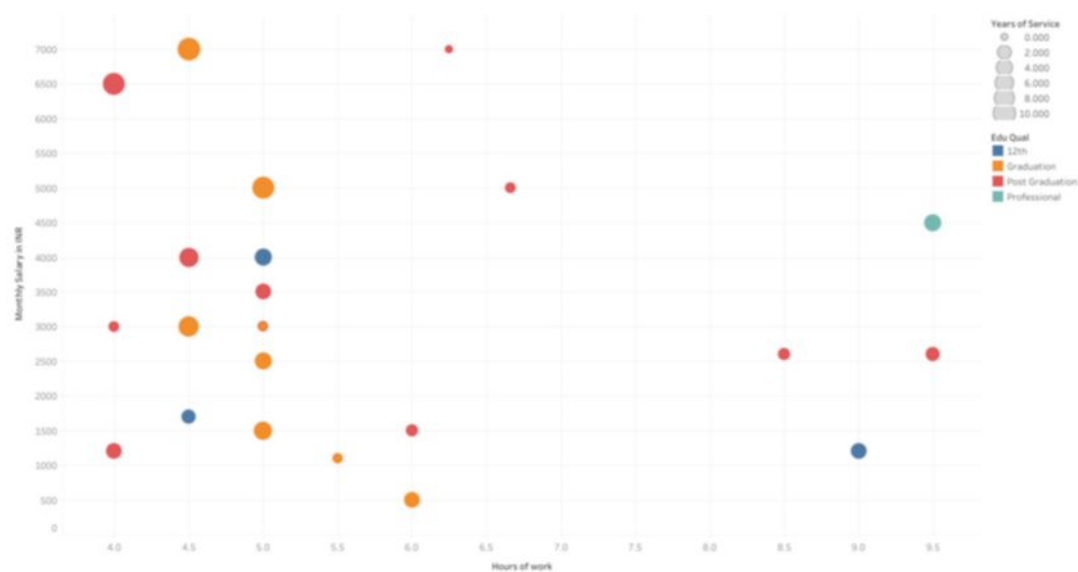


Figure 4.9 Source: Created by authors from data collected

Salaries, Shifts and Work Hours

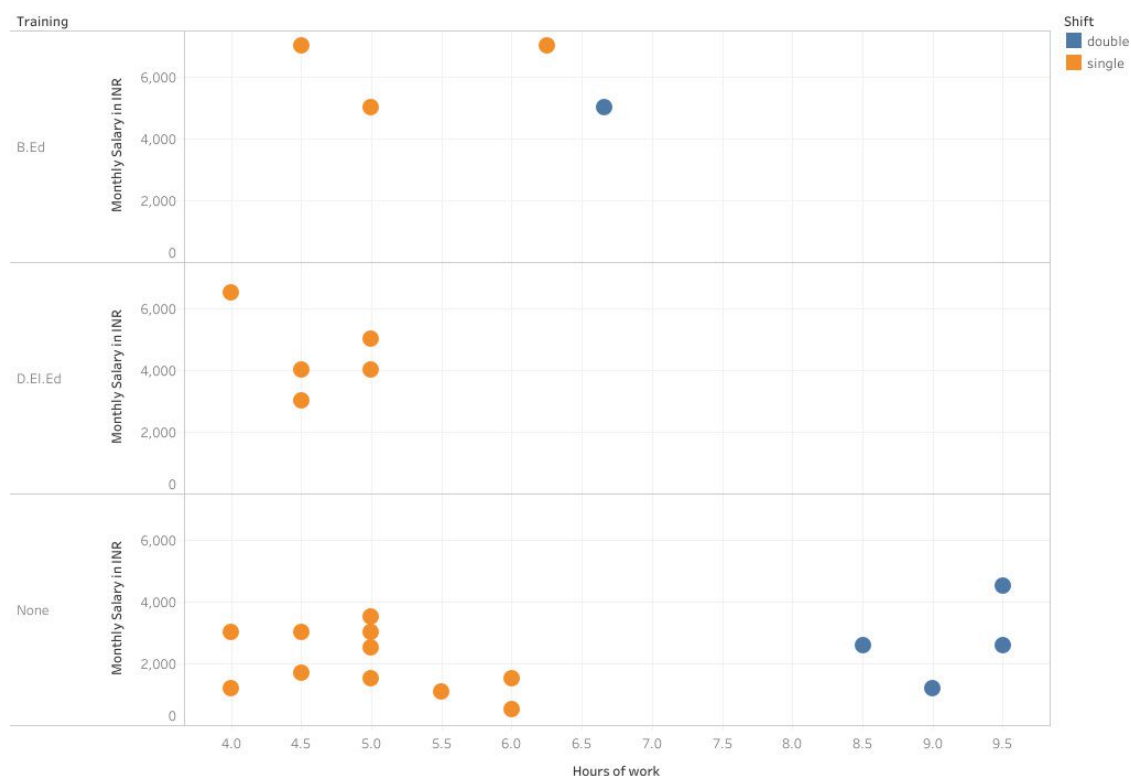


Figure 4.10 : Salaries and training (not employed) | Source: Created by authors from data collected

Salary of Teachers in July 2022

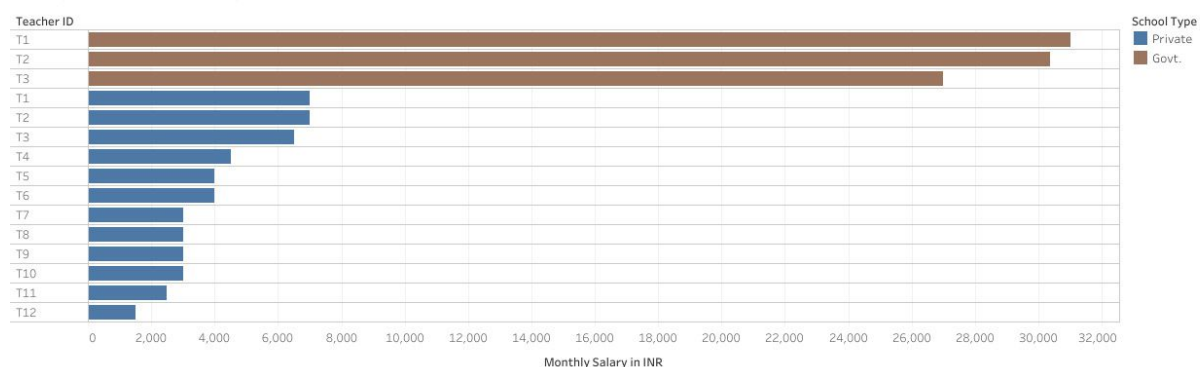


Figure 4.11: Salaries in July 2022, private and government | Source: Created by authors from data collected

These figures also show that there is no real identifiable basis to explain the salaries being received. You can have a teacher with an experience of 10 years receiving a wage very similar to someone who has worked for less than a year in the same school while having similar educational qualifications. You can have someone working a double shift getting less than ₹3,000 a month, and someone teaching high school receiving half the salary of someone teaching primary school, with all other parameters of medium of instruction, teacher training and experience being the same. The only somewhat discernible pattern is that, to some extent, training does matter in determining the wage (albeit in not a very straightforward way). This was corroborated by what teachers reported in the in-depth interviews: several teachers said that often new recruits who had no teaching experience were paid as much as, and often even more than, those who had been teaching at the same school for over five years if they held a B.Ed or a D.El.Ed degree. They expressed this as, “*There is no ‘value’ for old teachers*”. However, as it turns out, we found that there was often a very high exit rate among new recruits and that overall, a higher starting wage did not mean sustained increments leading to a much higher wage for trained teachers over time. Further, the burden of the extra workload would fall on the older teachers who would have to perform the additional tasks with no additional remuneration. This high turnover was something management and teachers were acutely aware of. And thus, paying them a higher wage temporarily was not that much of a financial burden on the school, but was more a means to reduce the bargaining power of teachers and maintain a certain level of precarity in the teacher workforce. For those who stayed on, increments were either not consistent or sustained or very high (in some cases there was no increment for several years), and thus it did not mean that a trained teacher would be at a much higher wage as her experience increased.

Non-Teaching Work

A considerable amount of non-teaching work, outside of classroom work was reported. Conversations with respondents revealed even more non-teaching work that was not recorded in the survey—respondents would tick multiple choices, but these were not nearly exhaustive and very rarely did teachers fill out details under the “other” option.

Around two-thirds of respondents reported taking after-school extra classes for children and an even larger number reported helping children after class over the phone—a development likely to have increased during the pandemic and school closures. Needless to say, neither this nor work done at home was counted in reported working hours. All except for three teachers reported having to do administrative work, one of whom said it was because her unmarried colleague, who was also a new recruit like her, would do her share of administrative work since she had to leave early to fetch her young children from school. The only male participant filled “office work” under the “other” option in addition. Strikingly however, most teachers reported *not* visiting children’s homes or only rarely. Only five teachers from private schools reported not having any other source of income. All the others either did home tuitions, tailoring work, or both; and one teacher earned money from renting out rooms in her home.

Six teachers had been working for less than a year at their current or last school, two teachers had worked for a year, three for two years, five for three years, four for four years, three for five years, two for six years, one for seven years, three for nine years and one for 10 years. Fifteen teachers were working at a school for the first time, eight had worked at one school, three had worked at two schools, and another three at three schools and one teacher had worked at four different schools previously. Figure

4.12 indicates the time periods spent at each school. The only data point which seems to have longer continuous periods of work is of a teacher who was employed on contract in a government school for 15 years before that particular contractual post was abolished by the government. She was forced to leave the second school which was run by an NGO because it shut down. Despite months of demonstrations (which in fact resulted in wage cuts at the school she worked at after the NGO school, since she would often leave early to take part in the protests), the school was never reopened and none of the teachers were supported to find positions elsewhere.

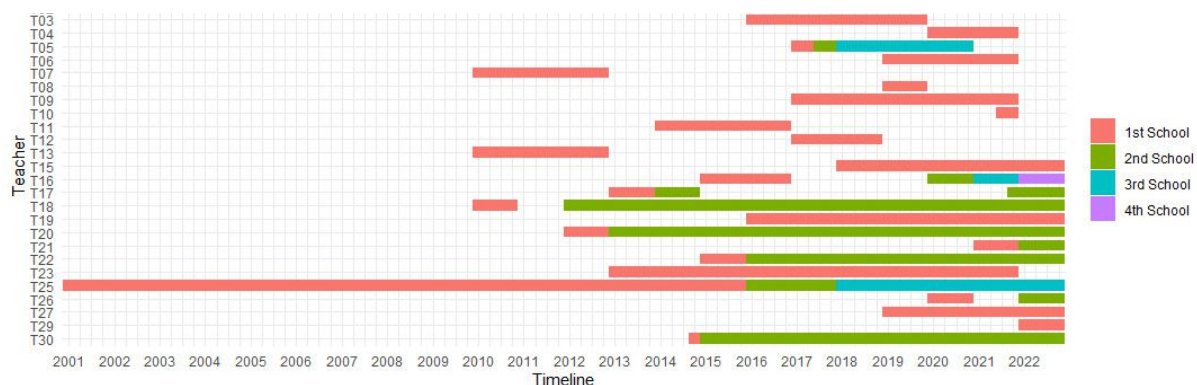


Figure 4.12: Transitions in and out of the workforce | Source: Created by authors from data collected

CHAPTER 4 - PART II: DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

Teachers' Work

In her book *Teacher's Work*, R. W. Connell reminds us, "Teachers are workers, teaching is work, and the school is a workplace. These simple facts are often forgotten" (Connell, 1985, p. 69). We could perhaps even take this a step further and say that these facts are often *ignored*. In this section, we hope to draw attention to teachers' work: what it entails, how it is organised and who does what.

Teaching Work

One of the first expressions we came up against during negotiations with teachers' families about reconfiguring domestic duties to accommodate and account for teachers as working people (and not just young daughters of the household) was "*Vo to padhayel bas jathe*" ("*She only goes to teach*"). We struggled to articulate or explain why that expression was offensive. Behind the seemingly effortless, "unskilled" task of teaching is hidden a whole world of (endless) tasks structured by complex social and economic forces. "There is something a little mysterious and evasive at the heart of the business of teaching", Connell says, for it is "a labour process without an object ... this work does not produce any *things* ... as a consequence the definition of the task can expand and contract in alarming ways" (Connell, 1985, p. 70–71). As teachers, we know this to be true.

Teaching tasks at all the schools within the study were governed by the 40-minute period. In the pre-primary years there is more flexibility and there is usually one class teacher who is with the children through the five- or six-hour day. Moving up to the primary and middle years, classes are usually divided into sections, with each section comprising 30–50 children. Here, teachers move between sections and between grades to teach particular subjects. Depending on the size of the school, there were two or three such sections. Continuous admissions and re-sectioning meant the class size often varied even during the period of our research, but most teachers typically had a class size of around 40–45 most years, including in 2022, post the COVID-19 pandemic which witnessed a drop in private school enrolments.

With the exception of one or two schools, most had chairs or benches for children to be seated in the primary and middle years, and *chatais* (mats) or *daris* (rugs) in the pre-primary and early primary years. Seating arrangements were not fixed and "arranging" the children took up the first few minutes of the class. In almost all schools, children were seated in vertical lines with passage-like gaps between each row for the teacher (or child) to walk up and down to the teacher's table or blackboard. As a confident teacher, who had been teaching young children for the last five years, said:

The first thing I do after entering class is to say good morning. But I don't suddenly begin to teach after that. The first thing I do is look at how the children are seated—whether they are seated in a systematic way or not. I need them to be seated perfectly, only then do I like teaching. So, I arrange them one by one. Only once that is done do I write the date on the blackboard.

She also mentioned that some children cannot see when they are seated at the back, and then there are those who create a ruckus and have to be brought to the front.

Within this 40-minute period, after children have been “arranged” suitably, there is much to be accomplished. As one teacher, who had returned to teaching after a break for three or four years (she had had two children of her own), said:

In those 40 minutes we have to do classwork, check that, then give homework too ... in the beginning I was at a loss as to how to do all this in 40 minutes—the reading, the writing, the checking. I was very troubled.

However, she said she soon picked it up again and now she has a system and it is easy for her to manage. All teachers were expected to do the same and, apart from some minor variations, all of them reported that they structured their classes into chapter reading, writing of question–answers²³ and copy-checking. One day for reading, one or two for writing, and explanation time (ranging from 10 minutes to a maximum of 30 minutes) was fitted in between. In this way, a chapter typically took two–three days to complete depending on the subject and length. What was astonishing was that it was during this same time period that all copies were checked in class too. Unable to comprehend how this was achieved, we asked teachers how they do all this while still managing to check copies in class itself. All teachers in the primary grades reported that they would check copies as they made children read aloud two lines each from the textbook, or gave them some other writing or reading work in anticipation of the next chapter. As teachers, this was still hard to imagine: How can you engage 40 children in tasks that are most likely not meaningful to them? Teachers however admitted that, especially for the younger children, it ultimately also meant scolding them into silence as teachers finished checking copies or giving them homework in each of their copies since younger children could not write by themselves.

In response to a question about what they disliked most about school, the only male teacher we spoke to had put down “constant changing of rules”. When we probed this with him later, he said that the management had the right intentions, that their suggestions “*would improve the ‘skills’ of teachers and students alike*” and help complete the syllabus. However, he felt there was never enough time given to teachers to adapt. We pressed further about what rules he was referring to and his response speaks to how such organisation of teaching tasks in the 40-minute regime under the constraints of a predetermined syllabus is also accompanied by a loss of meaningful teaching.

New teachers tend to want to do things in a ‘proper’ way [he used the word proper in English]—to teach proper, to then give homework proper, and to check copies proper, even to explain a little. But this can’t be managed in the given time. With young children you have to give them homework, check their copies, explain to them and handle them too, all during this time.

Homework mostly consisted of memorising—“*yaad karna*”—and writing “question–answers”, often even rewriting the exact same “question–answers” they wrote in class. Children from Class 3 and up are also often expected to read the next chapter to be taught in advance. (This is even as some teachers admitted that there are also children who have made it to Class 8 but cannot really read and write.)

Teaching can also be physically and emotionally demanding. We asked teachers to think about how much of those 40 minutes they had to spend talking and standing. Many of them said they were either

²³ Question–answers is intentionally written as a unit as this is how it is used in common parlance, as a task to be completed.

talking or standing or both almost the whole time. Some even reported that chairs had been taken away from their classrooms, or they would be chastised by the management if they were caught sitting down:

The main problem with new teachers is that they keep sitting on the chair. They never get up. So, children continue to be playful and disorderly. Madam [principal] has even shouted at new teachers for this. She said 'You're new here. You've come here to teach. At least pay some attention'.

Another fairly senior teacher of pre-primary classes at the same school said,

I sit on the chair. I deliberately sit on the chair for a certain period of time. But I get called out about it by [principal] ma'am. She keeps telling me to go to the children. She says I delay my classes because I sit on the chair. But the fact is that children at that age do not even respond to their names in the beginning. I have to recognise them by their names. And they have to learn to respond when their name is being called out. That's why I sit on the chair in the beginning. Of course, I also go to my children. But, I also sit on the chair, even if [principal] ma'am tries to not let me.

While all teachers reported having to talk almost continuously, teachers of the pre-primary and early primary grades also spoke of the consequences of stopping:

If by mistake we stop speaking, it all begins—'Teacher ji this, teacher ji that'. Sometimes, after speaking for so long, we end up just being quiet for a little while. But, then they start to ask us, 'When will we have our lunch break, when will we have our lunch break?'

Non-teaching Work

Teachers described a whole world of non-teaching tasks that formed a core part of their working day and the labour expected of them—unwaged, unaccounted for and rendered invisible like almost all of teachers' work. From maintaining daily diaries, to preparing the timetables, collecting fees, meeting parents, doing admission campaigning, maintaining registers, preparing transfer certificates (TCs) and results, buying saris for their own uniforms, planning and executing all functions and programmes at school, mentoring junior teachers, looking for resources for the classroom, staying overtime for children to be picked up—the list was endless. In this section, we describe the range and nature of these tasks and what teachers had to say about them.

Planning, Scheduling and the Timetable

Despite the impression that creation of the timetable is usually the task of the management, in almost all schools it was the senior teachers who worked out the detailed timetable and through collective discussion divided teaching tasks among the teachers. Even in cases where at first teachers claimed that the timetable was designed by the management, it was later revealed in conversation that either they simply provided a broad framework and asked the teachers to work out the rest or the teachers designed the timetable and then shared it with the school head for approval. During the pandemic, when online classes were on, some teachers reported having scheduled and made a timetable for that too without any involvement from the management. Designing a timetable is a complex task—it involves distributing work based on subjects and assigning this to between 10 and 15 teachers and 500–800

students. It meant working around which subjects teachers were comfortable with, what shift they could attend and the use of classroom space, all in a way so as to ensure that no matter what, the syllabus would be completed. As teachers ourselves, we know how challenging a task this is. Further, this task became complicated in most schools due to the high rate of teacher turnover. Across the board, teachers mentioned this as a challenge while talking about planning and scheduling the timetable.

"It's not necessary that teachers who are there at the beginning of the year are going to last through the year. And then new teachers can be hard to find mid-year. So, we have to rework the timetable and reassign classes among teachers", said one teacher. This obviously also means additional workload. *"There are also those",* she says, *"who leave when just a month of the school year is left. Then all their work is left to be done".* A colleague of hers added, *"Just when exams are about to happen or just a month and a half left and they leave. That's a real headache. Because then we even have to sit and prepare the results of each of the children in their classes".*

Box 4.1: A Note on the Curriculum

The primary school curriculum comprises the study of mathematics, language and environmental science. In the middle years, science and social science are also included in the curriculum. Most of the Hindi-medium private schools follow the Chhattisgarh state textbooks, while the English-medium schools use textbooks published privately and include social science at the primary level itself. They also introduce the study of computers and "general knowledge" either in the primary years or in middle school. "Completing the syllabus" then usually means reading each textbook chapter and then completing the writing and memorising of all the questions given at the end of each chapter of each textbook.

Copy-checking

As described in the previous section, copy-checking forms a large part of teachers' work. It is not only time-consuming, but a major preoccupation and source of anxiety, because it makes sure the machine is running smoothly and is the means through which cascading discipline is enforced. The "completed copy" is the means to check whether or not the syllabus is being imparted on time. In some schools, there may be random checking by the management, while in others, each completed copy, once checked by the teacher, has to be stamped with a seal to show that the required syllabus before each set of exams or tests has been completed. It is thus a major source of stress for the teacher and student alike—an incomplete copy (incomplete syllabus) means that the teacher is chastised and called out by the management, which in turn means the child is scolded and punished by the teacher. Some teachers of middle grades said they kept a day a week for copy-checking, wherein they would schedule some extra writing work for children or some activity, while most others said they did it within the 40-minute period. Some used their "free" period to complete it and some even took it home, but for many, taking work home meant being yelled at by mothers or husbands.

"We have to put up with gaalis (insults) at home. My mother shouts at me for bringing school work home", said one young but fairly senior teacher who had been teaching at the same school for nine years.

Administrative Work and Supervision

Teachers also perform a whole range of administrative tasks. In some schools, teachers themselves

were entrusted with fee collection and maintaining transaction records. All teachers also had to maintain attendance records, fill formats to be submitted to the nodal office or education department, prepare TCs, and even supervise new teachers (observe their classes and provide the management with feedback on their performance). Some teachers said that each year, in the summer before the start of the new academic session, they were sent in groups to roam the *bastis* (urban slums) and do publicity work for school admissions, hand out brochures door to door and solicit prospective parents to bring their children to their school. *"We have to tell parents about the facilities at our school to make it attractive and explain that the admission process is easy ... but I do not like this work one bit. We have to walk all day in the sun and it is very tiring"*, one teacher shared.

Academic Support and Mentoring

We wondered how teachers learnt to do all the labour they were describing. When asked about this, almost all of them said they either picked it up as they began to do it, or were helped and supported by senior teachers. Senior teachers said categorically that mentoring junior teachers as a part of their work was a given:

Ma'am [principal] tells the new teacher that she has to go to this or that class. So, she goes there. But, we [senior teachers] explain to her what she has to go there and actually do. Students have to be disciplined, this is what has to be written on the blackboard, that's when children will understand, etc.—all this stuff senior teachers teach them.

Another senior teacher said,

Us. No, no, definitely us only. When they [junior teachers] have difficulty teaching we personally tell them what trick to use to what end. You see, the thing is that parents talk to us—they tell us when something goes wrong. Since almost all the children here are our children only. We regularly take classes with them, so we come to know mistakes [new] teachers are making. So, we personally go to them and show them their mistakes and then tell them this is how you should correct it so that you don't have to face complaints from parents because it's better that we correct you before parents come and directly tell you, so follow what we are saying. That's what we tell them.

One teacher, who had changed her shift when we met her in the new academic year, explained that the school head had asked her to make a shift: *"Sir said to me, now look, bring some changes, bring in the new things that are happening ... like conduct activities with children, etc. ... teach the new teachers"*.

For specific subject support in subjects like mathematics, many teachers reported that for that they either went to "sir" [director] or, as was the case in one school, another "sir", from coaching classes that were run after school on the same premises, who would upload educational videos in maths. One teacher shared that although her husband had not studied much, he had done a B.Com and was an electrician at a factory, and his maths was strong. *"Whenever I have a problem, he also solves it and I share his technique with my children and tell them to follow that"*.

Preparation and Resources

Many teachers said they spent time at home preparing for classes, especially the newer teachers. In the absence of formal training and qualification and minimal academic support made available at school—

together with having not had good school education themselves—teachers have to teach themselves all that they then have to teach students. One teacher, who left teaching for an office job, said, *“Teaching is a lot of hard work. It may not be physically demanding. But it is a lot of mental labour. What to teach and how to teach it requires pre-planning. I have to spend time preparing so that I can go and teach the next morning”*. The only real resource available to teachers and students in most of these schools was the textbook; few schools mentioned having games and toys for young children. In the English-medium schools, textbooks used were those from various private publishers, and one teacher even reported that they were not allowed to take these textbooks home to prepare. Other teachers said they also had to look for resources beyond the textbook to engage children; none of the schools have a working library and so some teachers shared that since children like listening to stories, they would search for stories on the internet and narrate them. The one government teacher we interviewed was assigned to teach in the English-medium section which had adopted the NCERT English-medium textbooks in place of the state textbooks, under a government order in 2018. Given the shortage of books, and since the school had not provided teachers with the textbooks, they would look at them online. But, she later reached out to us and requested to borrow the physical books from our library. *“I thought about it and then I said to myself I should check with you, that you all would most likely have copies and that’s where I would find it. Because we don’t have the books and have to set questions for assessment soon. So, I knew to call you”*, she said.

The “Free” Period

In some schools, teachers were given one “free” period a day. But, as one teacher described, the name is deceptive: *“Free doesn’t actually mean free, like a holiday. We use this time to fill up attendance registers, formats, complete copy-checking, preparing for class, making results and all the other work we need to do”*. Another teacher said, *“Some teachers get a ‘free’ period during which they can sit down, but in practice almost no one is actually ever free. Some or the other teacher is absent almost every day and so we have to proxy for them and take their class. It’s a ‘rare condition’ [she used the phrase in English] that we actually get a free period even for copy-checking”*.

Other non-teaching work included the emotional labour of caring for children, especially very young children who would spend hours crying. Teachers also reported spending extra hours working with “weak” students and filling in often for absent teachers (often having to manage more than one class at the same time). None of the schools had a dedicated sports or arts teacher, and so these tasks too were carried out by regular teachers from time to time. It was also the teachers themselves who did most of the labour involved in organising all the festivals and events at school. Senior teachers received many phone calls from parents and children every day asking about various rules, timings and homework. (This seemed to have increased after the lockdown and school closures as everyone was settling back into regular school.) Teachers also had to meet and communicate with parents and negotiate their demands. They spoke of being at the receiving end of much blame. Laughing ironically, one teacher said: *“If a child is crying, there can be no other reason for it. It is definitely your [the teachers] fault!”* Shaking her head, another teacher said, about writing personal homework for each child, *“Among 43 children, if one child doesn’t get homework, parents start to complain. Arre yaar, if one day they don’t get homework ... what will happen? One day!”*

One of the most common experiences of teachers of the early grades was the time they spent searching

for things the children had lost. *“Every day a pencil or a bottle or a bottle cap is lost. Most often, it is the pencil. Parents think we are only looking after their [one] child. And so, it becomes our job to find the missing eraser, the missing pencil, the missing bottle cap. To stand there, holding lost water bottles till they are claimed”, she laughed. “Even if one pencil is lost, it comes to mean that the teacher wasn’t paying attention”.* But, having said that, three teachers, who were exchanging notes about searching for lost objects amidst much laughter, to our astonishment concluded with, *“See this is how our days are. It’s really a very nice feeling to handle young children”.*

This reminded us of Sandra Acker’s acknowledgement of teachers’ work as seeming like “an impossible job” (Acker, 1995, p. 21).

“Fifth-hour People”

One of the most vocal teachers we spoke to, who had left teaching a few days before we met her to focus on her own studies and clear the Teacher Entrance Test (TET), said:

Every school should give a bonus salary for non-teaching work. Or else they should hire someone specifically to do all the non-teaching work—someone who does all the office work and the corrections ... I am talking of all schools here. If you look at government schools, there too, teachers are made to do so much non-teaching work.

In private schools they extract work from you as though you are ‘government type’ teachers, [meaning] they expect you to be the best at your work, but never think of raising salaries ... People don’t look at teaching as work. And those who do not teach, think we [teachers] do not do any hard work. Teaching is not hard work to them. Once they start teaching themselves, only then they will know. For teachers only those 5 hours [of classes] are counted. All the time we give over and above that—whether you are doing school [administrative] work, checking papers or anything else—none of that time is counted. If you look at all other private jobs, people get paid for 8 hours. But us, [despite the hours we put in], we are only looked as the ‘fifth-hour people’.

While in private schools the added burden of high teacher flux meant constant increase in extra unwaged work, the situation in government schools is a whole different story, where teachers’ official deployment for non-teaching work, such as election duty, has been a topic of much debate, discussion and struggle. The one government teacher we interviewed listed all kinds of work, such as mid-day meal entries, filling and submitting of scholarship forms, a whole host of administrative work such as attendance forms and registers, making TCs and results, issuing notifications to parents of absentee children and lots of other bureaucratic paperwork, including having to appear and answer in court in some cases of incidents with children. This was also mediated through an endless cascading chain of authority beginning at the school with the headmaster, the principal above them, the block education officer above them, the district education office above them and so on. Particularly humbling was her description of the COVID-19 duty they were deployed for. Like other government teachers across the country, she too had distributed rations door to door, sat at the railway station and done COVID-19 testing, helped with contact tracing and conducted a survey on oximeters. She also said, *“Despite all this, we also held ‘mohalla’ [neighbourhood] classes and online classes, including uploading of content to the online state school portal. When school*

re-opened, despite 'general promotion', we had to prepare the marksheets and results for each child too". Thousands of teachers lost their lives during the pandemic, she said, and the tragic part was that the families of contract teachers are still struggling to get the compensation the government owed them.

While she said she would hardly count the COVID-19 work as a burden because it was a pandemic and everyone had to chip in, she said something pertinent about the usual non-teaching workload—that it was this that caused a lowering of teachers' status. *"Time spent in fighting for our rights²⁴ and doing non-teaching tasks doesn't allow us to spend the time needed in actual teaching",* and this invites the wrath of others. *"This is what has caused a loss of respect for teachers",* she said.

Skills, Strategies and Struggles

The section above laid out a whole range of tasks of varying complexity and skill that teachers are expected to do. In addition to social forces²⁵ that shape the status of teachers' work, and the fact of having no tangible "object" of labour as such, so much of teaching work is rendered invisible not only in terms of the range of tasks folded into it, but also in the skill, strategies or craft it demands. In the absence of formal training and little academic support, teachers are left to pick up these skills as they go along—it is somewhat like learning to swim after being thrown into the sea.²⁶ What's more, the contradictory demands placed on teachers by the predetermined syllabus (often alien to, and in conflict with, the lived realities of working-class Bahujan children and teachers alike), an intensified work regime, the tyranny of tests, and demands of parents and school management on the one hand, and children seeking to learn on the other, forces teachers into developing a whole range of strategies to get the job done. In many ways, as we learnt, the challenges of teaching and learning that is *not* meaningful are far greater than we can imagine.

"Young children cannot read and write and yet we have to give them some written homework every day. And, we have to manage the class while we write out the homework in their copies one by one", said one teacher of the early grades.

Another teacher who taught older children all the way up to Class 10 in a multi-grade setting said, *"Children do not understand the language of the book. We need to provide them with examples they relate to. That's when they understand".* Being working-class Bahujan students in the same neighbourhood when they were children, such alienation from the standardised curriculum and language of the book was entirely familiar to most teachers.

One teacher said, *"I write in their copies because if they see the teacher themselves writing, then they are inspired to do their homework and come. Otherwise, they don't do homework".*

Since learning is based on a system of rote, drill and practice, teachers develop strategies to somehow engage children so that they digest drill and practice as the accepted form of learning. From building a repository of examples that work, to making drawings on the blackboard, and searching the internet for

²⁴ There have been many teacher strikes and agitations in Chhattisgarh in 2021–2022. See, for example, (TNN, 2022, August 23). At the time of the interview, teachers were in fact between two big strikes demanding regularisation and raises in dearness allowance. During the second round of our interviews in August 2022, this teacher slipped me an order across the table that had been released by the union just that day declaring an indefinite strike.

²⁵ This is discussed in subsequent sections.

²⁶ As the initial data presented revealed, 19 out of the 27 private school teachers did not hold a D.El.Ed or B.Ed degree, and even in the case of those who did, there is sufficient evidence to show that the quality of most privately acquired teaching degrees is suspect (see NCFTE, 2009).

stories and educational videos, teachers devise multiple strategies and “tricks” to complete the syllabus, check copies faster and discipline students. Over time, they also develop highly complex management skills—given the level of teacher flux and the blurry lines of management and teaching, they are forced to repeatedly perform the very skilled task of scheduling and rescheduling the timetable and reorganising teachers’ labour across classes and throughout the school year.

When we asked teachers how they manage to learn or acquire all the skills required, and if anyone teaches them how to teach, grade, make questions, manage the class, etc., most of them said they picked it up by themselves, somewhere along the way. One teacher said it kind of hardened into a “habit”. Only one or two teachers acknowledged the time it took to really “become” teachers so to speak:

I used to teach children in tuition. But, that was a small number. When I first joined school, I had to teach 40–45 students and that was a real headache. But, in a year, year and a half, watching senior teachers, I learnt the techniques they used to manage the class. I learnt how to ‘deal’. Today, if you gave me much larger classes also I could sit in the middle and handle the whole class! I’ve been doing it for 7 years so I can now handle it. Also, I’m strict and so children are scared of me—even small children—and so I can manage.

Almost all other teachers were not very forthcoming about how they learnt all that they did. Most said they picked it up very soon or even “from the start”. There was an almost nonchalant pride in possessing the skill to teach without having been trained or supported. We wondered if this was in part because of the widespread notion that “anyone can teach”, combined with teaching being identified as women’s labour—to be seen as someone who “just teaches (*padhayel bas jathe*)” and yet has trouble learning the skill too could perhaps lead to further diminishing of status and respect. It also spoke to ways in which teaching skills become associated with hierarchies of knowledge. Teachers of higher grades were dismissive of teaching in the lower grades, and one even said, “*They only have to make them play with toys*”. She also spoke about a hierarchy of subjects,

You can teach the easy subjects while sitting down all day, and they still get paid the same salary. But we [who teach science] have to stand at the blackboard for hours on end, writing and making detailed diagrams. The social science syllabus gets completed much faster because there are no diagrams, etc. There should be a gradation of salaries, at least among grades if not subjects.

But it was rare to find teachers so confident of their knowledge and ability. Often, flux and the delegation of teaching tasks with little choice in work undid this confidence even for those with experience and training. As one experienced and trained (she had taken a break from teaching to pursue a B.Ed degree) teacher, newly recruited to a school, shared, “*Social science is not my subject. I am a science person. I’m having to learn a lot*”. Pointing to the pile of books by her bed at home, she said, “*As you can see, my workload has increased drastically*”, and later added, “*You keep wondering if you’re doing something wrong, keep questioning yourself*”.

Another teacher said, “*If I have a half hour or so free at home after all my main work is done, then I don’t just sit around. My English is weak so I look up and try and study the tenses and verbs. I keep feeding something or the other to my mind*”.

And so, the development of skills and self-learning seemed to be an ongoing part of teachers' work, even if many did not themselves acknowledge this aspect of their labour. But this was most stark in the curious case of English-medium schools. All those teaching in English-medium schools themselves had studied in schools where the medium of instruction was Hindi. Almost none of them actually spoke any English, and most did not understand much spoken English beyond a few basic words or sentences. And yet, they were expected to use textbooks that were in English. "*The English textbooks of private publishers are very tough. It was a challenge for me to work with them*", one teacher confided. Another laughingly said,

I'm telling you really. I hadn't studied in English medium. And so, in the beginning, on my very first day at school, when I saw the book, I couldn't understand head or tail of it. I said 'God' and ran downstairs with the intention of quitting and never returning. I told my friend who worked there that I will not teach. She gave me courage and said, go teach, if you have any difficulty ask me, and so, I felt a little reassured and returned to the classroom. Then, slowly, I learnt, but that [language] has been the biggest challenge for me. Now, it amuses me to think of my reaction that day.

Despite being one of the most confident and fairly senior teachers we interviewed, she later admitted that she still had a fear of English. "*I really want to get rid of that fear*", she said.

Wanting to run away is not uncommon, however. In fact, as senior teachers described, many teachers do not last because they are not able to manage all the demands teaching places on them. While in some contexts this has been read as resistance (Apple, 1988), we would caution against drawing such conclusions, especially given that there is so much more at play in shaping and disciplining teachers' labour than intensification²⁷ under capital or a hegemonic curricular regime.

Many teachers expressed wanting to acquire a teaching degree (B.Ed or D.El.Ed). However, this was only because they either wanted to work towards landing a government teaching position, starting their own school or finding a better teaching job with a slightly higher wage. Across the board, however, there was complete certainty that they would not actually learn anything from this to better their teaching skills.

"So many B.Ed and D.Ed ones come. They don't know the first thing about teaching. Eventually they come and ask us only, who have been working for 6 years, what to do in class", said one teacher, and later added, "If I were to start my own school I won't look to hire B.Ed-D.Eds. That's not what I would look for. It doesn't mean they can teach". Responding to this, another teacher said, "Okay, say they even manage to teach. But they don't know how to handle. In the first year, no one has the experience to know how to handle children".

Interestingly, however, one school head, who himself had done a B.Ed, said he knew that the degree did not mean that you learn how to teach, but said that he still preferred hiring teachers with that training. "At least there's a familiarity with the language [of education]", he said. "So, it becomes easier to teach them".

²⁷ As described in Chapter 2 in the section on Labour Process Theory and the Proletarianisation Thesis, Apple (1998) describes what he calls a process of intensification as something that accompanies deskilling—the tendency to extract more and more labour in less amount of time.

Division of Labour and Delegation

Despite expressions such as “Sir gives direction” or “Sir shows the way” while “Ma’am [principal] carries this out”, the separation of conception and execution that some have argued to be characteristic of teachers’ work under capital (Apple, 1988; Ozga & Lawn, 1988), is not so distinct here, as was clearly evident in the section on planning and scheduling.

In the larger schools (with 1,000 students or more), there seemed to be more distinct hierarchies with a director, followed by a principal, a vice principal, and the designated “in-charges” who supervised work at various rungs of primary, middle and high school, above the rest of the teaching staff. In the relatively smaller schools (of less than 1,000 students), there seemed to be fewer defined hierarchical positions, with more often than not a single director, single principal, the senior teachers who did a lot of the non-teaching and management work, albeit with no official supervisory title, followed by the remaining teaching staff.

As described in the sections above, it is the 40-minute period and the timetable that structures the organising of teaching work in a school day. In the pre-primary grades there is typically one single teacher (or two in case of larger classes) who is with the same group of children through the school day, while in the primary and middle grades teachers teach particular subjects and switch between sections of the same grade and across grades. Teachers may be assigned to multiple sections of one single grade or five–six different grades, teaching one or two subjects from Classes 1–5 or 3–8, etc. How does this assigning happen and who does what? When asked about this, responses mentioned one of two criteria that seem to be used to deploy teachers: you were assigned work either according to “ability” or “your subject”, the latter broadly correlating with educational qualification. However, as we learnt, each of these needed further probing: What constitutes ability and how is it determined, what does having one’s own subject mean and to what extent do these two determine the division of teachers’ labour and how rigid or fixed is it?

Typically, the first point at which delegation happens is at the interview stage of recruitment. Teachers said they were all asked what they had studied and then asked if they were willing to teach a particular class or subject and sent there. Crucially, it also depends on what shift they are able and willing to work that determines the delegation of work (often married women with younger children seemed to prefer the first shift so they could be home when their children return from school). But, whatever shift one worked, it was not at all necessary that they were actually accorded subjects and grades according to the subjects they had studied. While in some cases this may have been true initially, often this changed within a few months of working and continued to be switched around from time to time through the school year and through their teaching careers. So educational qualification seemed to have little bearing on the delegation of tasks in the primary and even middle years.

There are many layers to the question of who takes what “subject” even in the cases where that is the basis for delegation of duties. Hierarchies of knowledge and access are a function of deeper structures of social and economic inequalities, where gender, class and caste determine who pursues the sciences and who pursues the arts and humanities, and who pursues graduation or postgraduation. It was only in two

schools that the male school head was reported from time to time to have taken mathematics classes in the higher grades and board years, but the complete absence of any male teaching staff in all except for one school meant that one cannot draw conclusions of a stark gendered division of labour in teaching tasks. However, there were other determinants of who taught what that were entwined in complex ways with structures of social inequality: in one case a senior teacher said, *"Before marriage, maths was my subject. But my family couldn't afford for me to continue with mathematics in graduation and so I had to switch streams. So, I told this to the school head here when I was joining—he asked me what I was interested in and I said I am still interested in mathematics and so I have been teaching maths to Class 5 to Class 8 ever since I joined nine years ago"*. But the teacher in question was related to the school head and, as we found out, this was a major factor in all aspects of teachers' work, from recruitment to delegation of tasks. Another instance where notions of hierarchies of knowledge and skill and delegation were enmeshed in complex ways is revealed through this teacher's negotiation with the school management:

I told [principal] ma'am that I won't be teaching from this year. I had expected they would give me a higher grade. I've been teaching for so many years now, I wanted some more experience—and instead they were giving me the nursery class! So, I told her that she should give me Class 3 or 4 (since I had been teaching 1 and 2) and then there was friction between us, so I told her I won't work there anymore. Then she herself phoned me and called me back and now I teach Class 3.

One teacher who had taught at four different schools and held a Master of Science (M.Sc) in Physics had not received a callback after the pandemic from the school at which she was working when we first met her. So, when we met her in July, she had found a position at another school where she had been assigned all subjects for Class 2. For the first time, she was teaching very young children and it was a completely new challenge for her, with a lot of work that she had not anticipated. It was a struggle, she said. We met her again a few days later, and she had been reassigned to Classes 5 and 8 to teach English and Social Science! As it turned out, the reassigning had happened because one teacher had been suddenly asked to leave. *"They asked me if I would do it and it's not my subject, but I told them, if they think I'll be alright at it, then okay"*.

Teacher flux seemed to be a major determinant in the delegation of duties and division of tasks. There were many instances where teachers were reassigned, shuffled or had more classes added to their work through the school year. When asked about whether they think they would be teaching the same grades in the coming year almost all teachers said they had no idea, and will have to see what the management said or how it worked out depending on who was teaching next year and how many teachers there were.

The criteria of "ability" is also a complicated one determined by similar notions of hierarchies of knowledge and skill but is governed in practice by a lot more than such notions. In most schools, there seemed to be a practice of what they called "demo classes". In some schools, at the time of recruitment, teachers were asked to take a single demo class which was observed either by the school head or senior teachers, while in some others, they were on a sort of probationary period varying from a week to a month or two where they would be observed. One teacher, who had taken a break and then returned to teaching after some years, said, *"No we don't ask, they [management] assign classes to us. They ask you if you will be able to teach this or that class and then they observe you for a month or a week—watch how you're teaching. If they find you're not doing a good job, they reassign you to a lower grade"*.

It is in the division of non-teaching tasks that these complexities are starker and more apparent. Beyond the obvious gendered division of male director—all-female teaching staff, there are many more layers to how the division between management and teaching get both defined and blurred. For one, there seemed to be no clear divide in terms of gender or teaching experience in the division of either supervision or administrative tasks, and while school owners had the final say, decision-making too varied based on what level of decision is in question.

With the exception of one school, where the male owner was also the principal, respondents across all schools, when asked about the work of the management, said either *"Sir does not do anything"* or *"Sir only keeps an eye on things"*. On probing further, it was revealed that "sirs" held meetings and delegated duties, played a role in surveillance and paid salaries, among a few other things. But, there were three types of broad dynamics within the management that seemed to determine the nature of division of non-teaching labour. One, where the wife of the male director²⁸ was the principal, one where a senior teacher was the principal and one exception where owner and principal were one and the same. In the first case, the female school head played a greater role in decision-making: in conducting interviews, making recruitment and lay-off decisions, and in the disciplining and surveillance of teachers, among other things. It was only in the payment of salaries, meetings on bureaucratic issues such as guidance on new education department rules, or the filling of government-required formats that the male director is reported to have played a role. However, most teachers said that the principal would likely discuss the big decisions at home with her husband before taking them, and that whenever teachers approached the principal to negotiate about wages, they were told by her to go speak with the husband.

In the second case, teachers said it was the principal who did all the hard work of management, but that the director always had a clear final say and she had to run all decisions by him. As one teacher said about the principal, *"She handles everything. Even the making and enforcement of rules—sir would just tell them to her but all the execution was her work. He did not do any work. He would come, see the school, see the students how they were studying, question the teachers a little bit and then go away"*. She later revealed that he would be present at assembly and he would ask students after the prayer to report on any mistake or problem created by any teachers *"right there in front of everyone, with teachers all in a row in front of students"*. In other such schools with a senior teacher as principal and a male director, unlike in the case of the husband–wife run schools, the role of disciplining and surveillance of teachers was done much more by the director himself.

While on the face of it, the bulk of all administrative and managerial work was done by senior teachers, the question really is: Who is a senior teacher? That is, who *stays* a teacher long enough to count as senior in such schools characterised by such high teacher flux? The answer to this question requires an interrogation into larger social forces that govern teachers' labour and will be explored in subsequent sections. However, the following example, in stark contrast to a division of labour along lines of "seniority" and experience, offers some insights into the matter.

One teacher who had worked at three–four different schools in the neighbourhood over a long period of time, marked by exit and re-entry due to marriage and motherhood at various points, said that it was

²⁸ In the first case, the male director did not necessarily mean they were the director officially on paper (because in a couple cases they held a government teaching position and thus an official post would not be legal), but for all practical purposes and major decision-making, it amounted to the same.

natural that management were always closer to senior teachers and trusted them more. “*Those with more experience will have more knowledge. And so, Sir will trust them more*”, she said. But, later, while talking of her teaching career, she also revealed that it was at the first ever school she worked at that she enjoyed the most freedom and had the most responsibility.

Directly after Class 12, three–four of us [friends] joined that school together. That was where I began teaching. It was a good experience. Sir was of our caste only. We used to run the place according to our will. Things like taking fees, etc., also we would do—one friend of mine, who was a ‘Sinha’, and me. We were given a lot of responsibility saying, ‘you’ll handle it’. Sir was in politics, so he wouldn’t always come to school. His wife would come and go from time to time, and have a look at what’s going on at school.

Clearly, it was not at all always the case that gender, experience or educational qualification determines who performed what tasks.

In government schools, the organisation of tasks and division of labour is entirely different and it is not part of what we attempted to study. However, on the matter of delegation of work, the single government teacher we interviewed shed some light on the complete loss of control they experienced as they were shunted from one school to the next randomly, and sometimes even in between the school year on the basis of teacher shortage and new government programmes and orders that were endlessly doled out with little or no consultation with practising teachers: “*It feels awful*”, she said. “*I had just finished preparing a detailed work plan for my children when the government order came and I was shifted [‘attached’] to the middle school. I feel bad for the kids*”. In fact, this is where she used to teach before and during the pandemic for the last few years, and it is something she had come to enjoy. “*How I had perfected the chapters in the English-medium Class 6 science textbook. I knew every word. What should I tell you? I really enjoyed teaching it*”, she said. Although she was officially posted at the primary school in the area, she had been sent as an attaché teacher for the last few years to the middle school. But, at the start of the 2022 academic year, she was once again sent back to the primary school—in fact, it took us a few rounds of visits to find her because there was such confusion as to where she would be. A few weeks in, she was once again sent back to the middle school where she has now been made class teacher for one section.

The Tyranny of Time

For most teachers, one of the biggest difficulties in their working lives—which, as Bahujan working-class women included their domestic life and its demand for endless labour—was the question of time. In almost every interview, in response to at least one question or the other—whether about spending time with other teachers, about leisure or even about food—teachers responded with “*There simply is no time!*” One of the most striking—and disturbing—facts of their working day within the school was that most of the teachers reported not eating anything for the full five- or six-hour duration that they were at school—particularly unmarried teachers and particularly those who worked the first shift (typically 7:30 a.m. –12:30 p.m.). And, one teacher said that she was usually so tired when she returned that she did not feel like eating, and so she would take the time to rest a little and her first meal of the day (after waking up at 5 a.m., taking care of her paralysed grandmother, doing the housework and rushing to school) would be at 2 p.m. or sometimes 3 p.m. There was no separate lunch break for teachers, but they could all eat during

the 20-minute lunch break given to children. However, as described earlier, teachers of younger children spent several minutes opening and closing the lunch boxes and bottles for children, and as one teacher said, *“Even if you do sit down to eat, some child or the other would arrive asking for help with something or the other, and before you know it, it’s time to take them to wash hands and use the toilet”*, and so squeezing in lunch in this time was near impossible. So, she preferred not to eat until she got home, where she could eat with some measure of ease. Another teacher who worked two shifts said that, for her, lunch break meant that she would rush home (a five-minute walk), gobble food and return—all within 20–25 minutes.

Apple (1988) describes such tendencies that involve extracting more and more labour in less time that “erode the work privileges of educational workers” as *intensification*, which he says accompanies the processes of deskilling and separation between conception and the execution characteristic of labour under capital (Apple, 1988, p. 41). Acker problematises this characterisation of teachers’ work saying, “It may be time to stop generalising about all [women] teachers and give them credit for being able to distinguish among ‘good’, and ‘bad’, forms of intensification” (Acker, 1995, p. 110).

However, as practising teachers ourselves, while we agree with the distinction Acker makes, in the case of the women teachers interviewed in this study, this has to be seen in terms of the near logic-defying hours of labour that Bahujan working-class women have to put in to make sure their families survive and their labour power is reproduced just enough to work the next day, even if the wages being brought in are mostly going to service debts, while they simultaneously sink into deeper debt traps (See for example Ponnathpur, 2021 and Sruti, 2021). In the context of food, particularly, it also has to be seen together with the fact that under caste-Hindu morality, these women are also invariably the last to eat even in their households, once they have served hot food to all other members of the family.²⁹

The Conditions of Teachers’ Labour

Wages and Work Hours

As seen in Part I of Chapter 4, all teachers are paid much less than minimum wage for even unskilled workers (which is under ₹400 a day in Raipur). Some who reported working even double shifts were getting less than ₹5,000 a month as of 2022. And, some teachers were getting as low as ₹1,500 a month. Even those with a B.Ed or D.El.Ed were at similar pay scales. For example, one teacher with seven years of experience in the same school and a D.El.Ed was getting ₹3,000 per month.

This is in keeping with the literature that pointed to the fact that teachers in private schools were often on wage scales very similar to those of the early contract or para teachers that were employed by the state-level programmes for universalisation of education, such as Lok Jumbish and Bihar Basic Education, and subsequent use of para teachers under the DPEP (Davies, 2018; Govinda & Josephine, 2005; Tooley & Dixon, 2005).

In addition to the fact that wages were dismally low, several teachers reported that they were not always paid on time, quite like the contract teachers whose wages would be delayed since they depended on the release of SSA or DPEP and other project funds. Some said there were times when they had not been

²⁹ As studies have shown, this has a tremendously harmful impact on their bodies and nutrition. See for example (Chakraborty, 2019)

paid for three to five months at a stretch. During the pandemic, this became particularly acute with many teachers only being paid half a wage for online classes or not at all, and paid for exactly the days they worked and not on a monthly basis. But stories of non-payments and delayed payments preceded the pandemic too. For example, one young teacher described her experience at the previous school: *"I left because I hadn't been paid for 5 months. I went back several times to claim my payment. Once, even my father went with me. That's when the director told us outright that he wouldn't pay up because I had left",* she said, noting ironically, *"I had left because I hadn't been paid and, now, here he was telling me that I won't be paid because I had left. Anyway, there was nothing we could do. And, I didn't want to go back there".*

All teachers spoke about their extremely depressed wages, albeit with varying degrees of concern and frustration, and sometimes even in contradictory terms, reflective of the very curious position of teaching in the landscape of work.

For example, one teacher said, *"We are not being paid for nothing. It's not like we just enter class, teach whatever and leave. Bhai, children have to actually learn, we have to see to it that what we are teaching actually gets into their heads. We have to work very hard for this. We have to make sure children remember things, we have to work so hard with our mouths, constantly talking, when children can't write we even hold their hands and show them, there is so much hard work to teaching",* and later agitatedly added, *"Everything else [at school] is alright. The only real problem is our payment. They pay so little that I get very angry. Why do they pay so little?"* At the same time, however, with an almost mocking resignation, she said, *"Yes, of course, I'd still teach if I weren't being paid. It's what we like to do, we will always continue to teach, but if you pay us what is our right, then that would be better. But, of course, I'd still go and teach if I weren't being paid, what else?"*

Many teachers described the wage they received as "pocket money" of sorts, some even used the very term. One teacher, who had also worked at a petrol pump where she earned far more than she had as a teacher (almost five times more), mentioned that she would hand over all her petrol pump earnings to her mother to be added to household income, but the wage she received as a teacher, that she kept.

Yet another teacher said, *"I mean you can't really call it a salary. It's just enough to buy our own cream-powder [personal toiletries]. So, I guess, yeah, what we're doing is seva only of sorts. But I don't go there for seva. I go because I have to handle my personal expenditure at the very least, earn a little so I don't have to ask my mother and father for money. That's the idea with which I go, not for seva".*

One married teacher, who had joined the school run by her uncle, said, *"I've done a course in nursing. Now that has no value in teaching. So, you can consider me to be 12th pass only. In that case, what we are getting is quite alright".* Later, when asked how she manages with such a meagre wage, she said, *"I mean we don't have to run the house now do we? That's not our responsibility" and "there's no pressure from my [husbands] family. They've let me quite free—I go to teach out of a hobby. And I get to keep my wage" (which was ₹4,500 when she worked the double shift and ₹2,300 for a single shift).*

Such framing adds to the devaluation of these teachers' work, making it more invisible and seen as non-work in a sense, thereby reiterating the *"padhayel bas jathe"* view of teachers' work. It is also reflective of

studies that have argued how women are socially conditioned to undervalue and underreport their work, something we witnessed a lot of during our interactions with teachers (Deshpande, 2011, p. 96).

This is reflective of a paradigm shift in how teachers labour is viewed—socially (and legally)—that accompanied the rise in contractualisation of the teacher workforce. In their study on para teachers, Govinda and Josephine (2005) point out that some official documents describing the employment schemes for para teachers spoke of para teachers being paid an “honorarium” and not a salary. “In fact”, they say, “some of the documents such as the one in Uttar Pradesh specify that the aspirants to the position of para teachers should have *seva bhava* (attitude for social service)” (Govinda & Josephine, 2005, p. 21).

Teachers in different schools also described how often new recruits (mostly those with a B.Ed or D.El. Ed or higher educational qualifications) were paid more than senior teachers who had been teaching for years. *“So what if they’ve done a D.Ed. We are the ones who know how to teach, how to handle children”*. Such expressions were common across experienced teachers. *“There is no value [worth] of old teachers”*, one teacher said, and another added, *“The most filthy record of our school is that they’re paying the new recruits more than us”*. Despite collective attempts at bargaining for better or at the very least equal wages, she said *“All they do is tell us their own [financial] problems. How they can’t afford this and that and how they are managing somehow to run the school. That’s what they do each time. They never even say, ‘okay, we’ll think about it’ when we approach them for an increase in our salaries. Never. If it gets too much, they just show us the door and tell us we’re unhappy, we are free to leave”*. It seemed that this was one way in which schools maintained the precarity of teachers’ situations and suppressed their bargaining power by constantly convincing them (and perhaps genuinely believing) that they were highly dispensable and easily replaceable.

In one instance, a teacher spoke about a new recruit at her school who was in fact a highly experienced teacher. She had worked at one of the larger English medium schools in the area (and in fact the oldest) for 10 years straight (a rare accomplishment). When she approached the management for a wage increase saying she’d been around for so long, she was categorically told she was free to leave. *“After all these years she was just told that. In a single line. That’s what hurt her the most. Not that she didn’t get a raise. And so she decided to leave. After 10 years, imagine! Old teachers are really not valued, I tell you”*, she said.

As we argue in subsequent sections, teacher turnover is not really a concern for the management—in fact, in many ways, it is a *premise* around which teachers’ work is organised.

There were other kinds of articulations on wage in relation to the “value” or worth of teachers’ work. The only male participant we spoke to (who would receive ₹2,600 for a double shift and ₹1,300 for a single shift during 2017–19 when he was employed as a teacher) had an elaborate and rather convincing case to make about wages in private schools:

Teachers who go to private schools are asked, ‘What do you go to there to do?’ The government should be chipping in with this, paying half of the teacher’s salary. After all, we are also teaching children only, no? Then people will also say, ‘Yes [haan yaar], they’re even getting paid by the

government!’ Private schools cannot afford to pay, so the government should make up for the shortfall. Teachers in private schools are not motivated because of low salaries. Finish the lesson, and that’s it. If the government is paying, their focus would increase. There would be this feeling that I should teach my children better. Teachers will start to respect themselves more. That’s the main thing, more important than the wage.

One very senior government teacher described the situation of private school teachers by drawing an analogy to the factories that surround our schools. “You’re familiar with contractors?” she asked. “You know, there’s the worker who should be earning ₹500 a day, and then there’s the contractor who takes that ₹500 and pays him only ₹300 out of it. That’s what’s happening with private school teachers”. When we shared this with teachers, most of them were delighted at the analogy and said they agree.

And yet, here is what we came up against when we asked teachers to state what they think the ideal wage—or as many of them framed it, the ideal minimum wage—should be.

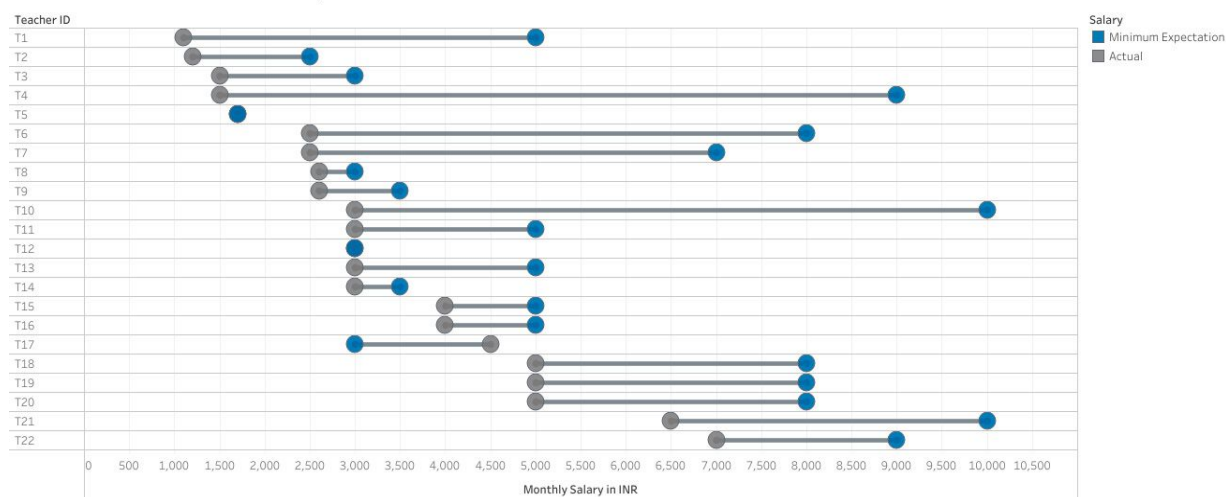


Figure 4.13: The ideal wage | Source: Created by authors from data collected

As Figure 4.13 shows, only three teachers felt it should be around ₹10,000 per month, which is around the same as what the monthly income of an unskilled worker on minimum wage in Raipur would be. A few felt it should be half that wage and an even larger number felt it should be less than even ₹5,000 per month. The one data point that appears as a single dot indicates that the received wage and ideal wage were one and the same, that is, ₹1,700 per month (“What we are getting right now is alright”, is what these teachers had said). The data point with actual wage more than the ideal wage is so because the actual wage was the wage one of the teachers was receiving for a double shift (₹4,500 per month) and the ideal wage is what she stated for a single shift (₹3,000 a month).

Some of these responses were based on an understanding of the economics of a low-fee private school, but explanations such as “We need at least that much to take care of our personal expenses and not ask at home” speak once again to the peculiar position of teachers’ labour, characterised as it is by deep contradictions, by the moral high ground of being a “noble vocation” suited for women and being a site of extreme exploitation at the same time. This contradiction has particularly harsh ramifications for those women from economically worse off homes for whom even this wage is an important source of household income.

Salaries were reported to be handed out by the male school head in almost all schools, including the ones in which the principal was their wife and handled most day-to-day decisions. With an exception of one school that made online transfers to some and another which handed it out all at once, teachers were typically called into the office one by one to receive their payment. Some teachers from the same school laughingly told us, “*Sir tells each of us—I’ve raised your salary now by ₹100. Don’t tell anyone else, and we all anyway find out that he’s raised everyone’s by that much!*”

Teachers also reported some instances of wage negotiations, some of which were described above; not all were successful. And, more often than not, teachers said they never felt they could actually go and demand a raise. But, in one strikingly different instance, teachers reported that their wages were suddenly raised by ₹1,500 rupees per month (all senior teachers) when school reopened after school closure for the new academic session. They said they had all collectively discussed demanding a raise and approached the school head, saying that since there had been no raises during the pandemic years, he should now raise salaries a little more since children were back in almost full strength. When we spoke to the school head, he did not mention the teachers’ demands, but explained his benevolence:

They stood by me during the COVID years. I paid them half the wage and still they continued to work. If they can put so much trust in me, then I can do this much. A school runs because of its teachers. And, I’m confident I’ll make up the money. Everyone is reporting a drop in admissions in private schools after the pandemic. But I know I will meet the target of 900 students at least. You have to be that confident”

All teachers reported that their salaries were cut for leaves, except for one who said, “*I’m from the family, so they don’t cut mine. Maybe they cut for the others, I don’t know*” (As it turns out, they did). But, there were also others who added, “*But we hardly ever take leave anyway, so it doesn’t really matter*”. This is reflective of the fact that it was perhaps not the wage that disciplined teachers into not taking leave, but a number of other social forces and perceptions of what it means to be “a good teacher”.

Recruitment

Who constitutes the teacher workforce in such low-fee private schools and how do they come to be appointed? This was one of the first questions we wished to explore and what we found was that multiple informal networks mediated through family, friends, neighbours, caste associations and the school itself worked to push and pull teachers in and out of these schools. When asked about the process of recruitment, teachers typically described a process of submitting a resume, being interviewed and, in some cases, being asked to take a “demo class” after which they were notified as to whether they were to be appointed. Interviews consisted of short one-on-one conversations with the school head, and what questions you were asked mostly depended on the route through which you were there in the first place, and the degree of familiarity. Demo classes varied from a 15–20-minute class with children that was observed by the school head, principal or senior teacher, to a sort of probationary period ranging from a week to two months during which time teachers would be observed in class by the management or senior teachers who would report their impressions to the director. Only one school—in the higher grades of Classes 11 and 12—was reported to take feedback from students after a demo class. The channels through which prospective teachers approached schools were more often than not through their friend

networks—fellow young women, ex-classmates or neighbours who were teaching at a school would be requested to enquire about an opening, or they would simply accompany them to meet with the school director or principal directly. The older schools in the area sometimes hired their own ex-students or older siblings of students they had become familiar with. Hiring family members, both distant and immediate—from nieces and wives and sisters-in-law, to the daughters of male relatives or known male members from the same caste association—is a common practice. One of the schools, which ran one of the larger “coaching centres” in the area after school hours on the school premises, recruited many of its teachers from these coaching classes. In fact, as one teacher said,

When I went there to submit my resume the school was shut. But if I had gone at a time when it was open I'd have definitely got the job. They knew me well there. I attended coaching classes there. Sir had even kept a name for me, Brahmini, because of how devout I was about pujas and rituals, and because I would touch his feet every day. He would have definitely hired me.

The networks you relied on also depended on whether you were a new recruit or returning to teaching. As seen in the beginning of the section on data, teachers typically exited and entered teaching several times in their lives, sometimes even during the course of the same year. In such cases, old teacher friends and even school heads under whom you once worked become instrumental in finding you a new position. For example, one 26-year-old teacher who has worked at four schools (and one more for a single day) has left teaching at two points, once to complete a B.Ed and another time to complete her M.Sc. When she returned from the latter, she went back to the school she used to teach at, but since there was no vacancy, the school head was the one who helped find her another teaching job. *“I got into that school through Sir only. He phoned the Sir in the other school and told them he was sending someone”*. In another such instance, one new teacher, who had spent less than a year at one school, had told them she would not be able to work the first shift anymore because of domestic work obligations, and needed a position in the second shift. Since there was no vacancy in the second shift at this school, she submitted her resume to a number of schools in the area. But, finally, it was because the school head from the previous school put in a word for her that she landed her current position.

Sir from here said take her ... they both knew each other. So, he phoned the sir and said she's a very good girl so keep her ... I found out because Principal sir here [in the new school] told me later ... yeah, that sir would talk to Principal Ma'am [in the previous school, who are husband and wife] and ma'am was in the gau-seva group that I am a part of. Everyone knows me there because I'm very active. So that's how it happened.

There were also some instances where school heads sought out teachers—young women they would approach or get after to come and teach at their school. One teacher said that the school head had watched her drop off her younger sister every day at school for years, and when she was finally in Class 12, he would keep asking her to think about coming and teaching there once she finished. In another case, a teacher who left school because of increased labour in the household after her older sister was married off said that the school head, who was also a member of the same caste-association that her parents were a part of, came inquiring after her all the way till her house a few times. And, that even after some years out of school, yet another school head from the same caste with stronger ties to her family

(he was also a fairly powerful local businessman in the area) would “constantly” ask her to come join at what she thought was a fairly high wage (₹4,000) which was double what she was being paid in the previous school.

Other teachers who were not originally from the area, who had either come to live there on rent with relatives to pursue their education or had migrated after marriage, didn't have the same networks to rely on. Many teachers also complained that it was more and more difficult to get a teaching job now because school heads would hire anyone who had passed Class 12:

Nowadays everyone is 12th pass. All housewives, mothers, all of them. So, they also think, better to go and do something instead of sit at home idle, and so anyone applies for teaching jobs these days and gets it too ... that's the main problem, directors of private schools think if they're getting someone at ₹1,500 a month who has completed Class 12, then why should they invest more and give someone ₹6,000. That's why the level of education too is slowly-slowly dropping.

The only teacher whose family lived in the village while she stayed with a relative here in Birgaon, shared a very different experience of the interview process. “They start getting into questions about your personal life—Where are you from? How, what, when, what is your background, etc. They blatantly ask you questions like who do you live with? You don't live alone do you? If you live alone, we can't offer you the job, I've been told this directly”, she said, demanding to know why they would do that when you are teaching with sincerity, showing up every day on time for work, giving students homework regularly—“Then why?”, she asked. “I think they assume that if you're living alone your character is not alright”. She said she had visited quite a few schools with her friends who stayed in the main city alone and worked. “You're constantly questioned about it. If by mistake when asked so many times again and again the truth slips out and you admit to living in a hostel or a PG (paying guest accommodation), so then they ... what should I say ... pull back somehow”.

She also mentioned that while she was doing her B.Ed internship at the government middle school in the area, she and some of the other student-teachers put the word out that they were searching for a teaching job once the internship ended. One of the government teachers there told her of a vacancy at one private school in the area.

He phoned the Sir from that school and told him there was an interested candidate. But the school head only asked him one thing: Is she pretty? And so even this sir who had called cut the call and later told me that he himself was embarrassed at what had happened ... Yes, some school heads are like this also. Imagine, to ask if she is good looking or not.

Another striking thing to note is that given the high rates of teacher turnover, recruitment takes place practically through the school year. Many teachers referred to the “pile” of resumes lying on the principal's desk and every time negotiation of wages or work hours was talked of, most teachers confidently said that more often than not, they'd be silenced immediately by being shown the door since there were scores of teachers who could replace them in an instant.

Despite resumes and interviews and demo classes, what we see is that the process of recruitment is certainly not one that mirrors the workings of a “profession”. There are no advertisements for job openings, no laid out systematic procedures or an objective set of criteria (or any criteria for that matter) that define the recruitment of teachers to these schools.

The following statements by school heads too are particularly insightful. One director said, *“Teaching is the best for women. But men are the best teachers. But men don’t come. And now if you tell me we should pay the women like men should be paid ... how can I do that? I won’t be able to do that”*. But other directors and principals we spoke to had theories about women as teachers— notions that are typically associated with teachers’ work and its gendered associations—that they are most suitable for younger children, they have the necessary maternal instinct and sensitivity and all the rest. One school head even gave us an age break up, *“Women are the best for ages 0–11, and in that I reserve the married ones for Class 3 to Class 8”*, and added, rather seriously, *“Everything I’m telling you is all there in the B.Ed course. I’m giving you a B.Ed course for free. Write it down”*, making us wonder at the state of teacher education programmes in the country as we furiously scribbled down his words. We tried to probe how they dealt with such high teacher turnover and if they tried to ensure some kind of commitment while hiring teachers, and if that meant hiring unmarried teachers was less desirable. However, we found that there is a complete acceptance of turnover as being an inescapable fact, and there was no real concern about requiring commitment. We asked the school heads we spoke to about the investment and energy that goes into training a teacher, but that too was brushed off by those we spoke to with a nonchalant *“it happens, we manage it”*, or a pride in their ability to have a teacher be “trained” in their school in record time. Further, one school head said,

You see, when an unmarried girl comes, she comes free [of burdens]. ‘Mummy I want to teach, Papa I want to teach’, that’s what she says at home and comes. She’s the little girl of the house, free of domestic tensions. Married women, the bahu of the house, on the other hand, have all the woes in the world—especially those from joint families—and they often come and take out all the strain with husbands and in-laws on the children in school.

Also, consider this remark by a teacher who worked at one of the only schools run by a Brahmin owner. She first said, *“No, there’s no discrimination there, everyone takes part in everything”*, but when asked whether there were any Muslim teachers, she said, *“No. I don’t think Sir will take any Muslim teachers. He’s one of those very patriotic kinds”*.

The caste homogeneity in the teacher workforce at each school that we observed in the initial data we gathered made us wonder if there is something woven into the process of recruitment itself that points to a particular preference. While the reliance on the informal networks described is most likely to result in such homogeneity, the answer to this is not quite as straightforward and cannot be understood by looking at the recruitment process alone. It is in what *retains* a teacher and not that much is revealed. This is explored in the following section.

Leaving, Lay-offs and Teacher Turnover

In the initial questionnaire handed out, reasons for leaving stated by teachers were broadly—marriage, pregnancy, pursuing higher education and most of all “low wage”. Marriage, pregnancy and higher

education, from what we gather, often do not mark permanent exits from the labour force, but are pauses between transitions. There do not seem to be any empirical studies on the transitions in and out of the workforce of private school teachers that we were able to find, but we think it would be a useful point of inquiry in order to understand teachers' labour and the workforce composition of private schools at micro and macro levels. However, as economists caution, there are problems with taking what they call "supply-side explanations" at face value, and restricting labour force participation explanations to these (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2019), and thus together with quantitative studies on exits and transitions, inquiries into why teachers leave need to be explored more attentively. However, it was the last—and most common—response of "low wage" that caught our attention the most, and did not quite seem to fit, because teachers are well aware and openly expressive about low wages at the time of recruitment and all through their teaching careers. That so many would have left for significantly better wages too is unlikely, given they were all searching for positions at schools in the neighbourhood alone. Probing the question of exits further during in-depth interviews revealed much about the conditions of teachers' labour at the school site as well as their labouring lives as a whole.

For example, as it turned out, one teacher who had cited low wage as her reason for leaving, actually quit at the time her older sister was married off. This meant that there was now a greater demand for her to perform a larger share of the reproductive labour at home. In fact, we found that every time we saw her, she was entirely consumed by labour at home (we visited her home at various hours around eight times). As it turns out, she was doing much of the labour required to run the family *thela* (cart) which sold tea and snacks on the main road at the edge of the *basti*. She did not actually work at the *thela*, but her day, as she laughingly said, always began at sunup with the peeling of potatoes for the samosas made by her older brother at the *thela*, and it never seemed to end. "*I wake up and the first thing I do is peel potatoes*". Through the day (in addition to all the regular housework) she would do multiple rounds of this, prepare all the other ingredients, boil the water, knead the dough, steam the potatoes, mix the spices, sometimes even run up and down to the *thela* to deliver new batches and so on. "*The thela won't run without me*", she admitted. And yet, despite her central role in the productive labour of the household, she wouldn't be counted as "in the labour force" and she herself would describe her current status as "*I'm not doing anything at the moment*", reinforcing both the belief that her contribution is not productive (as has been well researched in the case of women engaged in agricultural activities), as well as the claims that women underreport (and undervalue) their participation in productive work (Deshpande, 2011, p. 96). It also clearly blurs the fictitious productive–reproductive divide, revealing how this fiction serves as a source of gross exploitation of those who traditionally perform more reproductive labour, rendering it invisible. At the same time, however, the appropriation of labour in such ways is "necessary to ensure social reproduction in a context characterised by extreme fragmentation" (Stevano, 2021, p. 14).

Demands of reproductive labour causing exits occurred in other ways too. For example, one other young teacher who cited "low wage" also had left teaching when her younger sister fell sick and she had to do more reproductive labour at home. In another instance, we met a teacher who had to leave her job to take full-time care of her husband who had fallen severely ill. And so they were left to fend for themselves—him out of work and practically completely bedridden, and her, struggling with debt to meet hospital bills and doing all the labour to run the household, care for the children and escort her husband between multiple hospitals and home. How illness can cripple a working-class family resulting in a lifetime of

being trapped in debt and long-term reconfigurations of living arrangements cannot be overstated in any way. The privatisation of healthcare coupled with the blatant violation of all safety and precaution norms in factories often ends up being like a death sentence for working-class families. This teacher used to earn around ₹2,000 rupees a month before she had to quit. *"We were paid close to nothing. But I've only studied up to Class 12"*, she said, *"so, I guess in that sense it's all I could expect really anyway"*.

There is a contradiction in how teachers' work is valued and thus waged—on the one hand, the requirement of a D.El.Ed, B.Ed or higher educational qualifications is an admission that teaching requires skill, and yet, at the same time, legally as the Supreme Court judgement in the case of A. Sundarambal says, teaching is "neither skilled nor unskilled". Together, these conflicting definitions successfully manage to devalue teachers' work and justify extremely depressed wages, also complicit in the forced exits of teachers from work.

Another striking finding in the questionnaire data was that almost all teachers reported that no one was "laid off" by the management as such—with the exception of a couple of cases of relatively new recruits who had disobeyed work-hour rules or taken extra holidays. A different picture emerged about this too, as we explored it further during interviews. Often, teachers simply did not receive a callback for the next academic year after summer vacations, for example. This was possibly more pronounced in 2022, post the pandemic, which witnessed a fair drop in student strength and enrolments in private schools—and a major shift towards public schools. Some school heads too admitted that they could not afford to keep as many teachers as before since the number of children had dropped. One school reported a drop from about 3,000 students to less than 500. When we spoke to the government nodal officer in-charge of looking into the private schools of the area, he remarked that quite a few schools had permanently been shut down after the pandemic-induced school closures had hit, especially those that were running out of rented premises. This was corroborated by the other nodal officer of the neighbouring cluster, both of which intersect with our field site. This meant that several teachers were out of work. We asked him what he thought they would now be doing and his answer speaks volumes about how such teachers' labour is viewed. *"They must all be at the malls and shops now, working as sales girls, where else will they go?"* he said.

In another instance, a highly qualified teacher (with an M.Sc and B.Ed) who we met in the summer of 2022, was fairly fond of the school she worked at, assumed she would be back at work in June. Schools in Chhattisgarh usually open on the 16 June. Sometime after the first week of June, she got a call from a colleague asking if the principal had got in touch and telling her that it was possible that those who had not received a call were not going to be reinstated for the upcoming academic session. She did not make so much of it at the time, but closer to the date, worried by the implications of this, she phoned the principal and on 15 June was told that she need not come back this year. She frantically began looking for jobs and in a few weeks found herself a job at another school. *"Yes, I'm back at work now"*, she said, almost despondently, *"but I don't like the management here. They're very strict. We don't have time for lunch and [principal] Ma'am speaks to us rudely"*. We met her again at the end of July, at which time she smiled, anticipating our shock and said, *"Now let me tell you one more thing—I got a call from [the old] school just today. This time asking if I'd come back"*. They were now faced with a shortage of teachers since they had begun an English-medium wing at the primary level, and so the principal, who was a senior teacher, advocated for her reinstatement, *"She only told guruji [the director/owner], why do you want to take someone new when I was still there. Why don't we call her back, she said to him, and*

so he agreed". When we asked what she now planned to do, she said, "I'm in a real dilemma now. I liked that school, it's true. But now I've just joined here. And it doesn't speak well when a teacher changes so many jobs. What will they think?"

Changing jobs, however, and teacher turnover is one of the most prominent characteristics of this teacher workforce. We had collected our first round of data through the initial questionnaire in April, which is the end of the academic year. When we began meeting teachers again in June and July, much had changed: some who were unemployed were now employed and vice-versa, and some had shifted schools. Insights gained through in-depth interviews, talks with school heads and working as teachers in the area over the last eight years confirms that such transitions in and out of the teacher workforce of the private schools of our field site happen with a very high frequency. Take the following example.

At the time of our initial data collection through the questionnaire, we found that almost all teachers were not able to answer questions of the workforce composition, that is, state with precision the number of teachers employed or their caste demographic. As anyone living and working in the area would tell you, if you interact with someone on a regular basis, it is impossible for you not to know their caste. And, as for numbers, the schools in question were hardly that large that it would be hard to keep track of all teachers working there. Take the following example of someone who had been working at the same (relatively small) school for nine years and was unable to answer the question. Baffled by this, we made all sorts of estimates, decided to probe how much time teachers spent with one another and jumped to initial (completely mistaken) conclusions that teachers' labour had been subjected to so much intensification and was under such control and surveillance that they were confined to their classrooms and barely got any time with one another and so on. But something about this explanation did not fit with everything else, even as we tried to convince ourselves that we needed to interrogate all these aspects of teachers' labour for the answer to this phenomenon. But, when we met that same teacher for a longer period of time and when she took part in a focus group discussion with other teachers, including two more from the same school, what we learnt was something entirely different. As it turns out, this particular teacher knew the workings of the entire school minutely. In fact, for the two years before as well as during the pandemic-induced school closure, she was practically solely responsible for creating the entire school schedule and timetable—one of the most complex managerial tasks involving the management of the entire teacher workforce. She also was the one who handled much of the programmes and events. Her dynamic with the other teachers of her school that we observed during the group discussion also revealed that they held her in a certain regard and called her "*didi*" (older sister) or "*ma'am*", even though they were mostly around the same age. What then could possibly explain her inability to answer the simple question about the number of teachers at school? "*It's not necessary that a teacher sticks around for the whole year*", she said. "*So many come and go even within the same school year, it's hard to keep track*". Each time someone leaves it not only meant more labour for other teachers but a reworking of the timetable which was what she would end up having to do. "*I don't think I'll be able to say how many have come and gone in my time at the school. Many. Many*". "*10? 20?*", we asked. "*Oh definitely. More in fact, much more. Some stick around for less than two months! They come, and they're gone*", she laughed, as her colleagues chipped in, in agreement. This was a recurring theme in all our interviews with senior teachers, particularly all those who would actively take part in planning and scheduling. Without even being asked about it, it was one of the first things they mentioned while describing their scheduling work and its challenges. In many ways, the organisation of teaching tasks itself rested on this kind of teacher flux or turnover.

Using a high frequency panel of three times a year to look at women workers' transitions in and out of the labour force, Ashwini Deshpande argues that not only is the rate of this transition very high (and higher in fact for those hailing from the most marginalised sections of society, who are also the ones most willing to work outside the home), but this has been ignored together with women's own under-reporting of their work and the wrong classifications in status of employment that is at the heart of India's much talked about (and as this shows, perhaps misrepresented) low female labour force participation (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2019). Given what we have observed in our field site, we believe it would be meaningful for quantitative studies to gather high frequency panel data of transitions in and out of the teacher workforce in private schools (conducted in various regions and at both macro and micro levels) because such high turnover has a direct influence on the quality of education being imparted.

Across the board, almost all teachers said that the way they were treated and the nature of the work environment was a major factor in teachers' decisions to leave. Even one of the least forthcoming teachers who was the niece of the school head and an ex-student of the school, and constantly insisted that there was nothing wrong with how they were treated—that they were only scolded when necessary, that it was alright whatever they decided to pay since teachers only worked five hours, and that her dismal wage of less than ₹5,000 even for a double shift was alright given her qualifications—said that often teachers are forced to leave because of bad work environments. One teacher said she left because she was very rudely chastised for having taken extra leave. *"I had completed all my work and it was year-end. And even then, he said all kinds of things to me for having taken an extra uninformed leave. He shouted and shouted and told me not to come back. So, I left, but I went back in June for my payment, at which point he said, 'You'll be coming to work, yes?' to which I only said that I will not return, please clear all my dues. I told him directly",* she said.

Another teacher said that they felt like they were being treated like "servants", and that the management was far too strict about the smallest of things and that they had no respect for teachers.

One day I was speaking with another teacher just outside school after we had finished for the day trying to coordinate where I could drop her off, when Sir [the school director] came and said [rudely] 'What are you'll doing loitering about and speaking nonsense?' I don't take such things from anyone—and so I gave back. 'Did you even hear what I was saying that you are saying this?' I said to him, after which he dismissed us saying, 'All this is not acceptable here'. So, I said, 'Oh, so what is acceptable then? Only your dadagiri (bossing around)?' After this, I told him he could keep his money but I won't be coming back. My self-respect is far more important to me than anything else.

Another teacher left the same school within 15 days of joining. She had joined the school because it was where she had studied as a child, but she did not realise how teachers were treated by the director. *"He says anything he feels like. He even calls teachers names in front of students—I've seen him call a teacher an 'ass' [gadhi] in front of the students in her class. I didn't want to be treated that way and so I left—just after 15 days of having joined".*

However, (mis)treatment as a reason for exit cannot be taken at face value either. Folded into it is yet another question of who gets mistreated and who does not, who experiences certain treatment as disrespectful and who does not, and for whom does the school become a conducive environment? What we found is

that it is likely that this had more to do with teachers' relationship and familiarity with the management through family or caste association ties and adherence to Brahminical notions of womanhood—and less to do with those who were more punctual, adhered strictly to timings or to do with skill and qualification. For example, one teacher who had been at the same school for 10 years had left during pregnancy but returned to the same school (which as we found out was not a common occurrence) after a two-year gap. As it turned out, she was also related first by caste, and then somewhere during those 10 years it became what she termed a “double relation”, since some member of her husband's family married some member of the school head's family. In some ways, perhaps, given the relationship with the school head, apart from her competency and will to teach, ensured a place for her to return. She had multiple responsibilities at school and home—she was responsible for taking care of two children and all the household labour. It was, in fact, very difficult to find a time to meet her and when we finally sat down for the in-depth interview, she said, *“My son has returned home, and that's why I'm so relaxed, otherwise I would have had to postpone our meeting once again”*, she laughed. As we saw, strenuous demands of reproductive labour are one of the main reasons for school exits. When she described her daily routine, it sounded near impossible to keep up, given that her children were studying in different shifts at the school and she had to also get them ready and bring them to school. As it turns out, she was allowed to go home in the middle of the workday, get her son ready and return with him to school before completing the last hour of her school day. Such accommodating environments at school that took into consideration the constraints placed on women by demands of reproductive labour were only available to some teachers. This had implications for not only their ability to continue as teachers, but also what disciplined their labour.

A lot of teachers leave if they get a slightly higher paying position elsewhere. But not us. We are known to the people where we work and children too come because of us. Payment is something that if we don't get today, we'll get tomorrow, but if we join work somewhere else, will we get the nature we have here? This feeling of being with family, this family-like behaviour, that will go away and so even though we joined on a very low wage and it is still a low wage, we still stick here.

Speaking about what makes a teacher “stick on” or “*tiko*”, one teacher laughed and said with confidence,

The main thing is that you have the ability to quietly bear it all and not 'create opportunity' for yourself. That's one. Second, you have to be ready to bear insult, that you will shut up and listen when someone is scolding you and third, that you say nothing of wanting an increase in your salary; and fourth, the biggest reason, is if you say nothing at all. Quietly do as you are told and you'll stick ['tik jaoge'*].*

This teacher, unlike the one from the example just before, was not actually from Birgaon and did not have too many ties there. She was the one teacher mentioned earlier whose family was in the village while she had come to stay with a relative to pursue her education and work.

What we learned is that there are typically a few senior teachers who have been around for five years or more, while the rest of the workforce is made up of a constantly changing group of relatively new recruits.

Thus, as we saw in this section, despite the fact that teachers reported “low wage” as a reason for exits in the initial questionnaire, exits had much more to do with variations of demands of reproductive labour

placed on them in their domestic lives, and due to mistreatment by management. The important thing to note however was who was mistreated and disrespected and who was not, and who felt it was their duty to listen to being chastised by the management and who took offence. This had everything to do with the personal relationship between the management and individual teachers in how it was shaped by larger social structures—relatives, both immediate and distant (those with familiarity through caste associations) were more likely to make statements about school heads being “understanding” and that it was their duty to listen to a scolding here and there. However, it was also not restricted to individual relationships; but the degree to which one adhered to notions of ideal womanhood, as well as the extent to which the material convenience the school offered you (allowing you to fulfil duties at home as a wife and daughter while still continuing to work) became reasons to stick on.

The School as a Workplace

School is a defining experience of most childhoods in the modern era across caste, class, race, religion, gender and region. However, something we often forget is that it is also a workplace defined by a complex set of tasks and relationships mediated not only through how those tasks are structured or the state-imposed curriculum and assessment, but also by the social and material forces that shape the lives of all those connected to it—teachers and other staff, school management, and students and their parents. This section attempts to provide a glimpse into some of these relationships as well as the resulting work environment. In no way does it paint a complete picture, for which much more long-term school observations would be required.

Relationship with Children

The relationship between teachers and children is a very important aspect of understanding teachers work, school and the nature of learning taking place. However, this was not the focus of our study, and to do this justice, a dedicated inquiry through long-term school observation and participant observation in the lives of teachers and students outside the school site would be necessary. However, the centrality of this relationship in understanding teachers' work, and our own instinctive curiosity about it as practising teachers meant that we were able to glean some important insights.

While it is true that the defining aspect of the teacher–student relationship is that of fear, it is in fact more the predominantly accepted ideal rather than the defining characteristic in reality. While describing how she sees herself as a teacher, one fairly experienced teacher said, *“I’ve been doing the same thing for 7 years now, so I can now handle it. Also, I’m strict and so children are scared of me—even small children—and so I can manage”*.

The same teacher however also described a whole set of strategies she had developed over time to get to know children better and to care for them. *“I go and sit beside them on the floor in the beginning, so they begin to feel comfortable in school”*, she said. Thus, fear and care always co-exist. In fact, when parents in the *basti* complain about their children, one of the most common laments is, *“They’re not afraid of us, what can we do?”* Then, they add, *“Please scare them”* or *“They must be afraid of you, so please do something”*.

Teachers and children in most of the schools in our field site all belong to the same area and come from similar class and caste locations. Some of the younger teachers even taught at schools where they themselves had studied or had studied in the other schools in our sample, but had chosen not to return

as teachers either because of their notoriety as students, as one teacher gleefully confided, or because, as another teacher said, that while as a student her experience of school was not all that bad, when she returned as a teacher, she realised how horrifically mistreated the teachers were by the school head, following which she left within 15 days of having joined.

Despite belonging to similar socio-economic backgrounds, while describing the locations of their students, several teachers used the term “labour class” children, as though to imply they belonged to a very different class. But, as it turns out, it was likely that most of the teachers’ parents and siblings worked similar jobs in the surrounding factories or were engaged in informal work, such as selling vegetables and running food carts. In many ways, this reflected an ideology of professionalism and its tendency to “[not only] distance teachers from parents, students, and other members of the community, but to establish a hierarchical relation between professionals and the lay public” (Ginsburg, 1997, p. 8). This will be discussed in greater detail later.

The contradiction folded into this was captured most succinctly in the following statement by a teacher: *“Fear is necessary and not necessary, both (Dar zaroori bhi hai aur nahi bhi)”*.

What it also meant is that teachers and students have complicated relationships. While it seemed easier for teachers to switch between creating an atmosphere of deep fear and acting in caring and nurturing ways, how children experience such deeply conflicting and contradictory behaviour is something that needs greater attention. Children’s resilience often allows us to imagine that such behaviour, common as it is, ends up being rather benign, allowing us to assume that they emerge largely unscathed by it all. However, our own experiences as teachers, where students have shared their memory of a time when one of us was angry or upset in class and they simply did not understand why—and how that somehow stayed with them for so many years—compels us to believe that it is not as benign as we would like it to be. But, more importantly, the ways in which fear and anger are tied to power and structures of inequality make it all the more necessary that, as teachers and educators, we give it the attention it deserves.

There were a few other notable contradictions that seemed to define teachers’ relationship to students. The distant language of the hegemonic curriculum not only has no bearing, but blatantly erases working-class Bahun lives, along with the associated system of repeated testing that together ensure a rut of meaningless (and, in fact, violent) education characterised by a complete divorce from the lived realities of teachers and students alike. This has meant that, under the veil of authority, fear and discipline, teachers and students have to find a way to navigate the alienating system of education. As described in the section on strategies, skills and struggles earlier, this resulted in a host of small measures teachers would come up with to ensure some kind of motivation for students and themselves to get through this together. Often, this ends up not being nearly enough for the most marginalised of students and, in general, we were quite surprised by the lack of empathy given that teachers themselves had similar alienating experiences during their school lives. The shared burden of navigating an unfamiliar and alienating curriculum was most apparent in the English-medium schools that used privately published textbooks.

In both Hindi- and English-medium schools, however, this was further complicated by more recent pedagogical paradigms pushed for by liberal (and left-liberal) educators and popularised through the

state curriculum, state-sponsored schemes, education NGOs, and teacher education programmes that focused on “activity-based learning”, “child-centric learning”, and so on. Experiences of the introduction of programmes based on these paradigms across the country tell us that, despite the intention being otherwise, such approaches manage to mould into measures that reinforce rote and drill all over again, as older pedagogical beliefs of drill and practice endure and the continued everyday reality of teaching–learning being structured around read–write–memorise–repeat stands unaltered.³⁰ Some schools had recently begun the practice of having “activity Fridays” or “activity Saturdays”. While nothing about it suggested a shift towards meaningful learning, it usually meant an increased burden on senior teachers to navigate their way through teaching themselves and junior teachers how to work with this new set of activities introduced into their curriculum and working week. The introduction of concrete material, changed seating arrangements and transformed physicality may mean a reconfiguration of how teachers and children relate for those few hours, but we suspect the change is both limited and marginal. One teacher pointed to yet another particular aspect of the relationship between teachers and children. *“Teachers end up staying exactly where they were, while children continue studying and they move ahead, they move ahead of teachers themselves”,* she said.

While talking about children, most teachers used common phrases judging and categorising children as “weak” or “intelligent”, “naughty” or “an ass” (*gadha*) or even a “duffer”. But probing a little further, the way in which most of them looked at children certainly is not restricted to these age-old demeaning stamps that mirror knowledge hierarchies and the way in which intelligence has been (mis)measured in racist, casteist and sexist societies.

In addition to this, there was also the matter of reverence. When talking about their greatest achievements as teachers, or what about teaching gives them joy and fulfilment, all teachers shared some or the other instance with respect to children. Most of them described their experience when they would bump into their former students years after they had left and the respect and affection they got from them. However, this respect was often in the form of a certain reverence ritualised by Hindu social practices. For example, more than one teacher described how children touching their feet is what made them feel good, and feel respected as teachers. *“Children touch our feet in respect, it feels very good”,* one teacher said.

Teachers of younger children expressed deep joy and pleasure despite the exhaustion, while teachers of older children spoke of both fear and exhaustion, but also the pride they experienced in the respect and affection they received from their students. In a particularly poignant instance, one high school teacher described what she considered her greatest achievement and most memorable moment, *“When I was leaving, my students all begged me not to leave. They said ‘You teach very well. You show us the diagrams so well and you always give us examples from “social life” and not from the book, from things that are happening around us, you always explain so well’. I’m not one of those teachers who dictates notes and makes them spend hours just copying and copying. I taught them how to take notes as I thought. I would point out when something was important and tell them to always keep a pen ready”.* Her description of how she had carved a space to make meaning in the midst of a largely meaningless system was very touching.

³⁰ Experiences refer to teacher training workshops that the PI has been a part of conducting with government teachers at the primary and middle level in mathematics education in various states, including Chhattisgarh. Differently, for a detailed study on how child-centred classroom reforms implemented in government primary schools in Karnataka have repositioned teachers’ work see Sriprakash (2011).

In another heart-wrenching incident, the government teacher we spoke to told us of a child who had been raped. *"She was one of my students. What happened to her was very wrong. She was only in Class 5 when she was raped by an older man when she was on her way back from school who stopped to ask her an address. Children of course are deeply affected by something like this. They withdraw completely. I spent a lot of time talking to her, counselling her to get out of this difficult phase. I think I was fairly successful because her mental condition improved a lot. Today she is so much better and continues to go to school. She's now in Class 10"*, she told us. *"It makes me feel good that I was able to be there for her. Other teachers were initially sympathetic—they all say, 'how sad' and what not and also things like 'baba re baba [god oh god]', but she needed support. And, I'm glad that I was there for her"*.

We could not help but remark how little formal teacher training prepares us for the challenges that teachers actually have to face during their working lives.

An important aspect of teachers' relationships with children is in fact also their relationship to children's parents. Empirical studies in the context of the West have shown that parents play a considerable role in shaping teachers' relationships with children and that the nature and extent of their role is a function of their social class, with middle-class parents able to use cultural capital to secure advantages for their children much more than what working-class parents are able to (Calarco, 2011, p. 863). In our field site too, teachers across the board had a lot to say about the pressures imposed by parents. *"Some parents check each and every spelling. One wrong matra [vowel signs] that has been overlooked by a teacher and they land up to complain"*, said one teacher. In the question about "most disliked work at school" in the initial questionnaire handed out, one teacher even put down *"making a relationship with children's parents"*. We probed this further with her in the in-depth interview and she said, *"Parents seem to think you only have to handle their one child. They don't realise we are dealing with 40 children at once. One day we don't give homework, and they come down on us heavily"*.

Another teacher said, *"Everything is our fault. Everything. The child hasn't finished their lunch, it's our fault, they have lost an eraser, or a bottle, that's our fault too—it means we weren't paying enough attention!"*

Some parents can be very rude. We try to continue to be polite but some of them start shouting and put us down ('daba dete hain'). Recently, it was raining and we had to send the children home. It's a real challenge to get children home on the days it's raining. I asked one parent who was in the way to make some room, and he shouted at me saying you bring my child home then and started to leave in a huff. I had to tell him to watch how he speaks to a teacher.

This particular school, like most of the smaller schools, was run out of a medium-sized house with a sort of mini quadrangle in the centre and an extremely narrow passageway (enough only for a single adult to pass at a time) through which children entered and left school. It was run in two shifts. That meant that the leaving time for one shift coincided with the entry time for another. We happened to be present to witness the mayhem that this was, with teachers (one even had a baton) lining children up in the quadrangle and then herding children out like sheep as older children were in long lines outside waiting to be herded in, with parents scattered about waiting to pick up those who had been let out. This was also the only regular time teachers got to interact with parents and so any questions parents had,

such as about holidays or what copies to buy, were also being shouted out above the lines of children as teachers distractedly attended to their queries. We even witnessed an exchange between a parent and two teachers: they had called for the mother because her child had just had a haircut that made it too short to be tied into the two mandated pigtails and too long to be just left loose. And, in the midst of all the mayhem, talking across the lines of children, the three of them debated what was to be done so that the discipline about hair could be followed. Oblivious to the teachers whose energies were being spent in staying composed through the chaos, the little girl was on the brink of tears. It amazed us at how there can be so much chaos, ironically on the account of enforcing discipline—inevitable as it all was, given how externally imposed and irrelevant the disciplinary standards were!

The sentiments expressed by teachers about being under constant pressure by parents, however, must be read with a note of caution: one, because we did not speak to the parents of children in the schools of our field site as a part of the study and their views have not been expressed here, and two, because we suspect that their own versions of interactions with schools—the management in particular, but also with teachers—would not always mirror the narrative in which they are the ones who wielded all the power. Witnessing parents waiting for hours on end to meet with a school head, requesting for a partial fee waiver or a delay in payment, experiences of parents who, each time they are called to school, have to lose a day's wage, watching them stand in the rain and sun to pick their children up, and scores of stories of parents in the area who have increased debts only on account of putting their children through these private schools are familiar to us through the years of our work in the area. But, teachers who often mark themselves as a class distinct from that of the children they teach (and those that they come from themselves) can sometimes be very demeaning in how they speak to and view a parent. Casteist and classist notions of “careless”, “lazy” and “disinterested” parents who have no value or understanding of the meaning of education seemed to be fairly commonly shared among teachers and the management. During school closure, since we were one of the only schools to run a physical mohalla or neighbourhood classes, several students enrolled in the schools in our field site ended up coming to us for those months. As it turns out, many parents were not in a position to pay up the fees that were being demanded in the name of “online classes” that never actually reached their children during the many months of lockdown-induced school closure (please note that India had the world's longest school closure and it was the children of these working-class Bahujan parents who bore the brunt of it). And so, many of them decided to pull their children out of private schools and put them into public schools. This has been well documented as a nationwide phenomenon (see for example Iftikhar, 2021). But, we intimately witnessed the struggles that parents faced in doing so, as we negotiated with various school heads who refused to issue TCs, forcing us to eventually accompany parents all the way up to the district education officer to make sure that their children would be granted admission in the government school in the absence of a TC. This was an arduous process, during which time we saw the heart-wrenching effort that such parents—especially mothers—put into ensuring that their children get the education that they themselves were denied. But, teachers—particularly young teachers—too experienced disrespect and suspicion from parents. One teacher seemed to think it was a function of privatisation and the times that had made “*this generation*” of parents “*overly [kuch zyada hi] sensitive*”. She said, “*Any problem they have, they land up and say it to the teachers in front of the children only. It makes it odd for the children also. Respect for teachers is diminishing. And, this has increased with the increase in private schools. Earlier most of us would study in government schools. No matter what happened, parents would rarely land up to complain at school.*”

They trusted teachers". After a moment, however, with a tone of evident sadness, she said, "*But then, look at what happened in Rajasthan. How awful it was*". Just days before our meeting, a nine-year-old boy from an SC community was beaten to death by his schoolmaster allegedly for drinking water out of the headmaster's pot (Jangid, 2022). "*It's also something that, then understandably, has repercussions for all teachers and how they are viewed*", she added, as we let a moment of silent shame descend over the grief and rage we both felt.³¹

Relationship Between Teachers

Once again, in order to unpack the relationship between teachers would require a longer, more dedicated study with much more school observation as well as more participant observation and, perhaps, focus groups discussions and meetings that we were able to accomplish in the duration of this study.

Teachers' own articulations of their relationships with colleagues varied widely between individual teachers. In the initial questionnaire handed out, every teacher said that they received help from their colleagues. Stories of friendship and support were many, albeit all with the reminder of the constraints of time. Further, since most schools worked in shifts, interaction between teachers across shifts was near to nothing—they would meet only during school programmes and events, or exams. Most teachers in the same shift said they spent most of their school day inside the classroom, giving them little time with their colleagues. The last 15 minutes or half an hour after the children left was the only time teachers could get, but this too was not guaranteed since some teachers would choose to finish off their pending copy-checking and other administrative work either in class, or they would all do it under the supervision of the principal. Some teachers, however, said this was the brief time in the day that they could relax and while most (especially younger unmarried) teachers strongly stated that they spoke only of work during that time, they admitted that it was with an air of conviviality which was quite pleasurable. One teacher said that it was also a time they spoke of their personal affairs because between "ladies-ladies", by which she meant married women, there was a shared understanding and ease in talking about such things. Senior teachers had their own dynamics, which sometimes pushed the newer teachers together into a group of sorts. Unmarried teachers said they formed easier friendships with others who, like themselves, were unmarried. But, there was also one married teacher—who had joined work only this academic year along with another new, unmarried recruit—one of the only teachers who reported not doing any administrative work. "*There's another teacher who joined along with me this year. She does all the admin work, including my share. She says to me 'I know you have two young children and can see how busy you are. I'm just sitting around and don't have much to do most of the time, so I'll do it, don't worry.' So, she does it all,*" she said.

Friendships outside school often predated their entry into school since many had been teaching at that particular school for a very short time. Friendships with ex-colleagues too were reported, but as women who laboured all day both at school and at home, it meant mostly being in touch through texts and phone calls with little or no chance of actual meetings.

Disagreements and conflicts between teachers seemed to mostly revolve around work timings and the distribution of responsibility and workload or about unnecessarily taking matters to the principal or

³¹ This teacher was the only teacher in our sample from the scheduled tribe (ST) community and (along with the only other teacher from the SC community in the sample) spoke about facing caste discrimination while searching for a house to rent but also in school itself.

management. All teachers said they preferred handling and sorting out matters amongst themselves rather than approaching the management, albeit for varied reasons, from not wanting to have to deal with being scolded to adhering to displaying a certain reverence and adhering to ideals of a “good teacher”. *“First of all, nothing should reach Sir. We should know how to deal with it ourselves. If the problem is very big then of course Sir is always there to sort it out”*. In a couple of instances, teachers said the management tended to play an active role in obstructing their friendships. *“Teachers don’t do it, they are made to do it”*, said one teacher speaking about teachers making complaints or displaying seniority. *“Sir and Ma’am tell the senior teachers openly not to mingle too much with newer teachers”*. The following statement made to us in an interview with a school head (albeit from a different school) suggests her analysis may not be off the mark. *“I let my teachers very free”*, he said with great pride. *“I trust them. Teachers are the backbone of a school. Without them it won’t run”*. This was an unusual expression of respect for teachers, however, he went on to say, *“Yes, but this I have to say. There is one circumstance in which I interfere. Only one. And that’s when there is ‘unity’ among them”*. *“This is something you would understand well”*, he said, *“because female teachers make a lot of unity. That’s when I interfere”*. When asked why, he said the answer was simple:

Now tell me this, if your principal is so cooperative and understanding, what is the need for you to go about making unity? There can only be one leader, and that is the principal. Otherwise, factions and groups begin, which give way to gossip (‘kaanapusi’) and the final loss is that the child’s education suffers.

Few teachers said they would manage once or twice a year (and not every year) to make a plan and go out somewhere together with other colleagues—a picnic or a meal, or a day of roaming the city and outskirts; but, this was rare.

Two teachers who were good friends and colleagues joined us on a protest march to mark the murder of young Inder Meghwal that we had organised as teachers and children on 5 September, i.e., Teacher’s Day. After marching and lighting candles at the vigil we had set up on the highway that borders our industrial neighbourhood, while walking back, they told me that it was one of the nicest experiences they had ever been a part of. *“We’ve never been a part of something like this”*, they both said, and one of them added, *“You may not believe me, but this is the first time I have walked on the Birgaon main road without a scarf covering my face. I even wear one to go to the medical store!”*

One school head said, *“There is much more competition and jealousy among females”* and *“If I gave my chair to my wife [who was a teacher at his school], everything will be a mess”*. When asked why, he explained that it was because *“females can’t handle [manage] other females”*. While maintaining his anonymity, we shared this with all teachers we interviewed and asked them what they thought of it. Interestingly, all teachers except for the two who worked at his school disagreed with his reasoning. *“Women do all the work anyway!”* or *“Of course they will manage”* were the kind of expressions teachers used, with the exception of one teacher who said that while she did not agree and felt women could do it, that this is just an idea emerging from our “patriarchal [purush pradhan]” society, she did feel that women often had their priorities wrong—that they would leave their teaching and office work and keep getting “involved” with other things. The two teachers at his school, however, had interesting explanations. One said it is because women tend to save money and “adjust” and make decisions to save expenditure wherever they could.

And, that they would do it even in situations where it was not necessary, and so they may not be as bold as the role requires them to be. The other teacher felt they would tend to behave with other teachers as though it were their “friend’s circle” and not be as professional or leader-like as the role demanded, and that they would not be able to handle parents the same way as “Sir” does. She also said that women had the tendency to get upset sooner and speak to each other rudely. Men made better “impressions”, she said. However, teachers at this school too handled a lot of the planning work and sorted out scheduling problems and conflicts among themselves. The only difference was that this was one school where the principal had a very active presence and took group meetings often. He prided himself on his leadership and made sure he had a large presence in school. What such responses seemed to suggest then is that there is often a difference between how roles and relationships are thought of notionally and how they are in actual practice. This reiterated our need to have far more school and out of school observations stretched over a longer duration to genuinely get a grounded sense of relationships between teachers

Teachers and School Management

The relationship between teachers and the management, while shaped by the wage and working conditions, varied across schools, given different school cultures, histories and leadership, but prominently, also varied across individual teachers, influenced as it was by a number of social and cultural factors. Both similarities and differences, however, offer insights into various aspects of teachers’ labouring lives.

Discipline, Control and the Ideology of Professionalism

While what constituted teacher discipline was fairly common across schools, how it was enforced varied to some extent, albeit not too greatly. As reported earlier, measures such as salaries being cut for leaves were common to all schools, enforced with varying degrees of strictness and frequency; in the worst of cases, some teachers reported having been laid off for taking leaves without permission. Being chastised for being late or imposing a penalty too was common. But, measures of discipline enforced through the wage are limited in a situation where wages are horrifically low. Also, apart from work hours and holidays, discipline was enforced with regard to work—the completion of the syllabus and student achievement—as well as with regard to behaviour and appearance. The discipline with regard to teachers’ work resulted from how control over teachers’ work was mediated through the state curriculum and the hegemony of examinations and repeated testing under the 40-minute regime, which has already been described in the first section on teachers’ work. However, discipline and control also operated in terms of control over teachers’ appearance (sexuality³²), behaviour and time. It is to these aspects of discipline and control that we turn our attention in this section.

“No. No one needs to tell us how to present ourselves. We know what is appropriate. Everyone here dresses quite simply, no one really dresses up. And anyway, there are some things we know that Sir doesn’t like. His wife is a teacher here too and so we know from her. The one thing he simply detests is lipstick. And so, we don’t wear any. I mean, if we know he doesn’t like it, then why should we?” said one teacher. As we saw in the section on wages as well, in many ways it is not really the wage and the organising of teaching tasks alone—or any of the imperatives of capitalism—but notions of womanhood shaped by caste-patriarchy that dominate the context in which teachers work, that serve to discipline in myriad ways.

³² It must be noted that the control of women’s sexuality is the central anxiety around which the caste order functions.

These notions seem to be woven not only into the structural context of caste-society in which the school is located and relationships are shaped, but also into teacher education programmes. Teachers who had done B.Ed said they had already learnt what is appropriate and not, and so they never came decked-up to school, because they were taught that it would be a bad influence on children. They had also learnt that the sari is the most suitable attire because it is associated with notions of motherhood and nurturing that are good for children at the school.

At one of the only schools owned and run by Brahmin school owners, where there seemed to be a strict enforcement of discipline on appearance and teacher behaviour. *"We couldn't wear lipstick or nail polish, nothing even slightly big in our ears, we couldn't take a photograph together with the children, we couldn't even laugh really!"* said a teacher who worked there and had recently quit. We most certainly do not have enough evidence to argue there is a relationship between the caste location of the owners and the nature of how discipline is enforced, but this was definitely the only schools with a description of such a strong external enforcement of discipline.

All schools were reported as having a uniform for teachers. In most, it was a sari or a sari and a blazer and in one it was only a blazer. None of the male school heads wore a uniform and, in a few schools, female principals were allowed to wear any sari with a blazer, and in one case a salwar-suit of the same material and print. In the case where the director's wife was the principal, she did not wear a uniform. While some younger teachers and one married teacher from the ST community who said, *"I don't even wear a sari at my in-laws"*, complained about the discomfort they experienced with the sari—both in terms of mobility, being able to walk and go to the toilet, and in terms of the discomfort they felt about their waists being exposed. Most of all, however, they complained about the fact that it took a good half an hour more of their time to get ready for school. However, despite this, all teachers, every single one in the private schools, irrespective of age, marital status or social location, said that there definitely should be a uniform for teachers, even if it is a salwar-suit. The reasoning offered was multi-fold and revelatory. One of the main reasons offered was that, if there were no uniform, they would have to worry each day what to wear, and that there would always be the fear that they would be called out by the management for not draping a dupatta (a scarf covering the chest) properly, or that their kurta was too short, or that too much of their skin was exposed. It was better then, to simply have a uniform, so that they did not have to worry about being chastised by the management.

The other reason offered by almost all teachers was that the uniform gave them a sense of (professional) identity. *"Yes, we stand out. When we walk to school, people know we are teachers"*, said one teacher. Several others used the expression *"teacher ki pehchan [identity]"* to justify a uniform, adding that *"it feels good"*. The blazer itself (quite inappropriate for Raipur summers) reflects a certain attachment to professional identity, and distinguished teachers from other women workers (including shopgirls who often wear uniformed saris, albeit without blazers).³³ As one teacher said, *"It feels good. We get more respect while wearing a blazer. 'Yes, she's a teacher', that type"*. The following are other examples that indicate the presence of an ideology of professionalism. *"When I visit the principal at his home, it's a uncle-*

³³ One is reminded of Ginsburg's concern: "through their reliance on the ideology of professionalism, educators and other occupational groups 'have become harnessed to a much wider web of power and control in society' (Esland 1980: 213) such that 'symbiotic relations' have been established between at least some members of the professions and dominant economic and political classes (Klegon 1978: 271). ... Not only might occupational groups seeking to be recognized as professions adopt racist, sexist, classist, and nativist rhetoric to exclude lower status groups from their ranks (Collins 1979, Sykes 1989, Jarausch 1990), but they might also perform their duties in ways that help preserve institutional arrangements that primarily benefit elite groups" (Ginsburg, 1997, p. 7).

niece relationship, that type, but no, no, in school, he will call me Ma'am and I will call him sir, most certainly", said the same teacher who would go home to fetch her son in time from school during her work hours. Yet another teacher in another school, who was also the niece of the school head, said, *"He tells me to call him chacha even at school. But I don't. I call him Sir"*.

And so, in addition to caste-patriarchy, the ideology of professionalism—although observed in varying degrees across schools and often seemingly in complete contradiction with other aspects of workplace culture—too acts as another disciplining force, hiding real social structures that determine relationships and sometimes even extracting more labour and placing more demands on teachers' time. While the former works in ways that ensure stringent enforcement of disciplinary measures and control are not warranted, given how notions of ideal womanhood are internalised, the latter is contradicted by close supervision and increased control (Connell, 1985; Acker, 1995) in the very premise of how it is conceived, and thus, must be internalised through a variety of different measures. More often than not, this internalisation is not total and not nearly as dominant as Brahminical ideologies associated with caste-patriarchy, but they nonetheless operate in the working lives of teachers as a result of notions and discourse brought about in and through policy, school leadership and teacher education programmes.

There were also other smaller ways in which internal hierarchies served to discipline, with senior teachers feeling the burden of being example setters. *"I always used to be the first at school",* one teacher said, but now with increased reproductive labour after her grandmother was paralysed, she ends up being late by 5–10 minutes every other day. *"I also have a lot of tension to reach early. Because if I am late, then junior teachers too will start coming to school late",* she said.

Remarks from senior teachers about being able to handle larger classes, check copies faster, managing to squeeze in time to eat lunch within a few minutes, managing the impossible workload within the given time frames with ease and even taking on most of the planning and scheduling work speak to this extraction of work under the name of greater responsibility, skill and conception.

"They say women tell-tale and gossip a lot. But, during study [teaching] time, we get so lost in our work that there is no time to even say hello to anyone", said one teacher. *"When we do get time together, we only talk of our students, what happened in class and about work. We don't speak about anything personal",* she said with a hint of pride and with a wish to set the record straight against women being called gossips. Such expressions of resistance against allowing dominant patriarchal notions to devalue teachers' skill and labour often find a companion of sorts in the ideology of professionalism³⁴—as if to say that, like all good professionals, teachers take their work seriously, and do not bring their personal lives to the workplace, and that they use their time efficiently. This is reflective of how the construction of teachers' professional identity is "fraught, complex and ambiguous" given the liberal notions on which teacher professionalism is constructed. (Dillabough, 1999). Neutral as professionalism claims to be, it has never served to counter such patriarchal views of women and teaching as "women's work". This is because, as Ginsburg reminds us, "the process of professionalisation is inextricably linked to the kind of society in which it takes place—to its political form, its cultural norms, and its social structure", and also importantly, because

³⁴ Following Ginsburg, we refer to professionalism as an ideology: "professionalism should be recognized as an ideology—'not only an image which ... inspires collective or individual efforts, but a mystification which ... obscures [or at least provides a partial representation of] real social structures" (Ginsburg, 1997, p. 6).

professionalism as an ideology serves the interests of the ruling elite (Ginsburg, 1997; Apple, 1988). In fact, as Ginsburg shows, historically in most countries, professionalism has been accompanied by proletarianisation, which is a move in a direction opposite to professionalism, characterised by diminished remuneration, autonomy and status (Apple, 1988; Ginsburg, 1997; Ozga & Lawn 1988; Acker 1995). Apple even argues that professionalism has “historically been used to set up defences against proletarianism” (Apple, 1988 p 46). In India too, the rise in contractualised positions in the teacher workforce was gradually accompanied by an increasing concern for teacher professionalism articulated in and through policies such as more stringent norms on teacher qualification and recruitment (see, Ramachandran, 2020). And thus, feminisation of the teacher workforce, and “Bahujanisation” as described in the section above, which are “logical target(s) for proletarianizing efforts” (Acker 1995, p 110) coincide with a rise in measures to promote an ideology of teacher professionalism. And yet, even as measures such as compulsory teacher training in the form of B.Ed or D.El.Ed is in fact a *formal admission of skill* in teaching, the prevailing dominant conceptions of teaching as a “noble vocation” that is “neither skilled or unskilled” and of it being “women’s work” continue to persist, making teaching more akin to non-work. This contradiction finds life in the difference between what is *formally* required and what is *actually* required of teachers—thereby creating fertile ground for the proliferation of substandard (and meaningless) teacher training degrees (NCFTE, 2009) which teach you nothing of consequence and certainly do not impart the *skill* required of teachers to provide a meaningful education. Thus, the contradiction between how teachers work is socially (and legally) defined in India, and the formal definitions of teaching as a profession in policy, in fact, work in tandem to actually devalue teachers’ labour, since neither professionalism nor proletarianism (understood solely in terms of “deskilling” and other forms of a loss of control under the imperatives of capitalism alone) get to the heart of the social and material structures that devalue teachers’ work in a society where certain “grades of people” and not just certain “grades of work” are devalued. In such a society, the acquisition of experience and skill—in how it is admitted as skill and experience—is contingent less on training or work experience and more on what is socially acceptable to a particular person, given their position in the graded hierarchy.

As we struggled to understand the multiple forces that devalue teachers’ labour better, one of the most pressing needs was to unpack the notion of *seva* which seemed to have a variety of different connotations in different settings. *Seva* almost instantly conjures images of dutiful service to those socially above us (such as parents and husbands). As R. Srivatsan (2006) reminds us, the most common usage of the term evokes an image of pressing someone’s legs or feet to relieve suffering. It is also associated with the “polluting” task of cleaning the child that grandparents perform on the newborn. It is, thus, usually used in connection with a “menial, demeaning or polluting act of service which carries no taint in special contexts: in the family, in reparation for wrongs, for community repair, as ethical obligation, establishing the priority of duty, as recognition by god and as the sanctification of an untouchable” (Srivatsan, 2006).

Drawing a history of how the notion of *seva* was transformed during the freedom movement and how it emerged in the context of modern India, changing from something that is menial to something that is valorised, Srivatsan provides us with some tools to understand this transformation: Vivekananda’s Karma Yoga, which insists on unselfishness as the greatest virtue since duty to community is the only practical route to salvation, even if acts of duty don’t have an actual effect on the world where inequalities remain, they bring freedom only from the cycle of rebirth. Against this backdrop, he argues that Gandhi,

in an attempt to defend self-respect under colonial assault, “spun together belief in varnashrama dharma, ascetic activism and committing one’s life to society and the well-being of all, neighbourly love in the Christian sense, guilt, self-sacrifice and mental self-flagellation” to answer the need of caste-Hindu emotions. Thus, in elevating *seva* as an ideal, the “*sevak*” was elevated to a superior position as well, finding “fullest expression” in the formation of the All India Anti Untouchability League in 1932, which eventually led to the Harijan Sevak Sangh (HSS). The HSS, Srivatsan argues was started with the objective of eliminating untouchability through religious organising that opened temples to untouchable devotees and challenged discriminatory practices like those surrounding drawing water from wells. What it was designed to do was to bring harijans into the Hindu fold. The crucial galvanising force for the crisis that Gandhi saw was the loss of the essence of varna and the sense of duty. He fervently sought to restore this “natural” (and to him socially equitable) order by prescribing caste duties such as the service to repair the community (which was anyway considered the duty of sudras since antiquity) (Ambedkar, 1970; Ambedkar & Moon, 1987). However, as Srivatsan importantly points out, “The act of service-expiation, was the duty, and in reality ultimately the privilege, of the upper caste. The untouchable had no right to do what he thought was right for himself; he had to submit to the painfully masochistic ministrations of the *sevak*”. Nonetheless, as he rightly argues, the success of ‘*seva*’ fashioned thus lay in how it made its way into the discourse of nationalism and the subsequent imagination of India as a modern nation. The other crucial function Srivatsan points out that this discourse on *seva* performed was that it “achieved the reform of Hinduism by transforming the caste structure so that purity and pollution were no longer the determinants of the hierarchy in the new national culture ... However, *seva* opened out the communicative link between the caste-Hindu and the lower castes by fashioning anew the ethics of Hinduism, orienting it to service, reconstruction and reparation” (Srivatsan, 2006).

Thus, traditionally prohibited activities and work opened up to certain castes, and were even considered “noble”. Thus, this made a large mass of non-upper castes who are now allowed to perform duties outside of those traditionally associated with their caste available to work and provide *seva* to the nation, albeit with little in way of financial remuneration. However, in preserving the social ethic of varna and caste-Hindu morality, in practice, your status as a *sevak* and what society owed to you continued to be dependent on your position in the graded hierarchy of caste: since, while the Brahmin is fulfilling a divinely ordained duty, *seva* itself is the prescribed duty for a Shudra. Thus, such a construction of *seva* facilitates a reconfiguration of Hindu ethics, while preserving caste Hindu dominance (Srivatsan, 2006). This historical refashioning of the notion of *seva* thus shows us how it has ramifications for how skill and experience are acquired and accumulated in terms of teaching. We attempt to elaborate upon and bring together some of these strands in the next chapter.

Surveillance and Supervision

As in the case of discipline and control, surveillance and supervision of teachers too occurred as a result of contesting disciplining forces of externally imposed measures by the management and the disciplining forces of caste-patriarchy and the ideology of professionalism, which were at odds with this. For example, there were instances where teachers saw supervision as something that helped get work done or as necessary to keep teachers in check. “*We sit in the office only after the children leave to finish all our register and daily diary work. We don’t sit in the staffroom. We do all our work in front of Ma’am with her watching. It helps in case we need to ask anything*”, said one teacher. While, another teacher justified the use of cameras in

the classroom as necessary because “*new teachers end up sitting on the chair the whole time and teaching*”. All schools reported having a camera except for two, out of which one of them had cameras only in the staffroom (the one with the reportedly most stringent rules for teachers). Irrespective of cameras, it was reported that in most schools, school heads—either the director or principal, or both—took regular rounds of the school, checking in on each of the classrooms and sometimes even sitting in and observing teachers teach. Many teachers talked of constantly being watched. For example, they’d be called up for getting to a particular class five minutes late while switching classes, or, as was reported by some teachers, if a child from a particular class is seen running down the corridor to the bathroom too many times, the principal would make a note and call a teacher up for that too. Supervisory duties, however, were often also left to senior teachers who had to perform a range of related tasks from taking demo classes, doing classroom observations on junior teachers, to reporting on particular teachers which, as a couple of teachers said, was one way in which the management obstructed the unity between teachers.

Treatment of Teachers

Teachers’ reactions to how they were treated by the management varied much across schools and even within schools depending on their relationship to the management, the number of years of service, their social locations, age, and marital status, among other things. As mentioned earlier, several teachers cited mistreatment and a lack of respect as the main cause for teacher exits. Descriptions ranged from “*They treat us like servants*” to “*Sir is very understanding. He says, ‘Despite being housewives you all give so much time to our school and so it’s probably definitely the case that there is some problem and that’s why you’re asking’, and so he grants us leave*”. Keeping aside the deeply problematic characterisation of working women teachers as “housewives” and the devaluation of their labour that it results in, what these responses speak to is not so much widely different work cultures but how teachers’ own locations make their experience of the workplace that is school very different. While some teachers spoke out strongly against being chastised and scolded as described in the section on leaving and lay-offs, others said things like “*If you make a mistake then you have to bear the consequence*” or “*I have a duty to listen [when being scolded]. If I make a mistake then obviously they would scold us. How else will I learn?*” Ironically, the same teacher said that she disliked scolding children. Teachers, however, also spoke strongly about wanting to be more respected by the management, and that how they were treated is what ultimately determined whether or not they would stick on, since the wage itself is so low. Word would spread through informal teacher networks on particular school heads who were notorious for being extremely rude and disrespectful, or others who made women feel uncomfortable. However, how you were treated was ultimately a function of many social forces that shaped the relationship between a particular teacher and school head. And, how it was experienced varied according to individual differences, but also to the degree to which you resisted or accepted subservience, which within the fold of caste is seen as service (Roy, 2020), and the degree to which you adhered to or deviated from Brahminical norms of ideal womanhood.

Negotiations

In the section on wages, we already described some of the wage negotiations attempted by teachers—both successfully and unsuccessfully. In another instance-, one teacher said she made a random estimate to point out to other teachers how badly they were being exploited.

I just made a wild guess based on the fact that there are 100 children in our class alone, and so they must be earning 10 lakhs or so a year just from my labour. And if you think about it, the salaries of all teachers

combined is only about ₹50 to ₹60 a month! I just made a guess, but word got to Principal Ma'am that I was making such claims. I have no issues. I told her directly too—yes Ma'am, this is what I've said. And then the argument got pretty heated—she started telling me all about how difficult it is to manage a school and that I didn't have a clue about it and what not.

There were also other instances of negotiations, not for the wage, but for uniforms. In at least three schools, unmarried teachers approached the management requesting that they be allowed to wear a salwar-suit of the same material as the sari. In one case, they were told the fabric would be too thin. In another case, the management agreed, but because other teachers did not agree and those who had made the demand for a salwar-suit were in the minority, they gave in and continued to wear a sari because *"it wouldn't look good"* if some were wearing saris and others suits.

Other negotiations involved choice of class to teach, as was described in the section on delegation and choice in work, but these were rare, given that notions of competence seemed to be woven around the silent expectation that teachers should be able to teach any class at any time, which simultaneously denied a place for skill and experience. However, negotiating for shifts was more common since they came up against the demands of reproductive labour at home. These were usually resolved between teachers with one of them making the compromise.

Safety and Fear

Perceptions of teaching as "women's work" are associated with notions that it is both a "convenient" and "safe" vocation for women. Parents and husbands express fewer anxieties about daughters and wives going to teach as opposed to them working several other jobs. The anxieties that families have are largely determined by social taboos and norms, which vary across communities, as a graded hierarchy determines how an ideology of ideal womanhood plays out differently in the lives of different women across caste, class and sexuality. Regardless, the view of teaching as a "safe" occupation dominates popular imagination. Teachers' experiences, however, warn against such simple generalisations.

"I used to think teaching was safe, until I actually became a teacher", said one young unmarried woman who had worked at the only school in the sample, and one of the only schools in Birgaon, that had male teachers. *"Senior teachers always waited for us, so that we could all leave school together and that no woman teacher was left behind alone at school. We'd been told to be careful, there had been some incidents earlier",* she said. Examples of school heads who made teachers feel uncomfortable too were expressed—one who ran an after school coaching centre on the school premises (which served as a major source of teacher recruitment to his school) was also known to many young women as someone who was unnecessarily overly friendly and, in some cases, even touched young college-going female students inappropriately. Different students and teachers had different stories to tell, given relative social locations and other forces that determined how they were treated by the school head, but there were also some school heads who were universally reported as being notorious for being inappropriate with women teachers. *"You see, many teachers leave that school because Sir's behaviour is—what should I say—it's that 'awkward' type, the dirty feeling, bad touch kind",* said one of the teachers. This was corroborated by many others, including those who had never worked there, but word had gotten around.

Another reason that made teachers feel unsafe or uncomfortable at school—particularly young unmarried teachers—was older male students in the higher grades, who were not that much younger than the teachers themselves. Often teachers expressed anxieties about lewd comments with sexual undertones both in and outside school. *“If we ever scold one of the older boys in class, there is always a fear that when we get out of school they don’t do anything to us. As girls, this is always a fear no?”* said one teacher. Walking to school too was often fraught with possibilities of being verbally harassed or teased not just by men in general, but also by older male students in particular. In fact, one of the justifications for the uniform, apart from teacher identity and fear of being chastised by the management, was the fear of being commented on or harassed by older male students. *“You never know which one of them will say what, when”,* one teacher said. The uniform was also a protection on the streets for some, as expressed by one teacher: *“I’ve never been teased or taunted when I’m walking on the street in my uniform. In normal clothes it’s almost a guarantee that you face some stray comment or the other any time you are out, but while in uniform I’ve never faced it”*.

The government teacher we spoke to told us about the boys outside her window who made it impossible to teach. *“They sit around here all day, smoking weed and cigarettes. Then they keep peeking into windows, laughing, commenting on something or the other. It’s impossible to do your job. You come and try teaching for one day. I bet you won’t be able to do it”,* she told me. *“The days gent [male] teachers are absent, they would come into the school premises and hurl insults, behave lewdly [ulladbaazi]. We had to finally even place a police complaint. It gets alright for 2-3 days and then it’s back to the same thing all over again”,* she said. As a single SC woman living alone on rent and working as a teacher, when she was first posted the challenges were enormous. As a Satnami woman, finding a room to rent was near impossible until she found someone from the same community who was willing to let out their room. But no running water meant great difficulty since the water opened in the morning when she had to leave for school. *“Every day is a challenge as a teacher. Teaching is a risky job if you are a single woman who has to walk to school every day. You have to be mentally prepared for it all. You have to face it strictly, otherwise you won’t survive”,* she said. As the only SC teacher in the survey, she spoke about the *thappa* or stamp that never goes away, as though it is branded onto your body.

Savarna people call reservation casteism and say we also want reservation and that everyone should face equal competition. I also am qualified, I also have fought competition to be here and yet my colleagues say, ‘You’re here because of reservation’. My marks can be higher than theirs and yet we are branded with the stamp of reservation. It never leaves.

The only teacher belonging to the ST community working at a private school had a similar story to tell. *“Yes, we face it at school too. Whenever the issue of reservation or anything else comes up during normal chitchat, they start to raise their voices about it and discrimination (‘bhedbhav’) begins”,* she said, and when asked how she handled it, she said, *“It’s not all that much because there’s one more SC teacher at the school where I am”*.

As mentioned earlier, the only young unmarried teacher, who had no immediate family in Birgaon and had moved there to work and study, said that often, women like her were discriminated against at the stage of recruitment and also shared experiences of her friends in the city who lived and worked out of hostels and paying guest accommodations who were treated differently or not hired if they let the fact that they were “alone” in the city slip, since it suddenly made their “character” questionable.

These admittedly very different experiences (and degrees) of discrimination, coupled with examples of different women teachers experiencing very different levels of threat and discomfort at being mistreated and disrespected, point to the fact that the question of “safety” is very different for different women, because in a system of graded inequality often the safety of one woman is contingent on violence and discrimination against another³⁵ (see Wadekar, 2021). Generalisations such as particular vocations being “safe” for “women” obfuscate this uncomfortable truth.

Festivals, Events and Programmes

A description of and glimpse into what festivals and events were celebrated in schools and how revealed much about the culture of the school as a workplace. When asked about this, every single teacher responded first with an “all”. “*We celebrate all festivals at school*”. However, the “all” referred only to caste-Hindu festivals with some like Basant Panchmi, Hareli, Nag Panchmi, Rakhi and Holi being more prominent than others. We happened to visit one of the largest schools during a celebration of Basant Panchmi. All the teachers were dressed in yellow saris, and children were not to be seen as they had probably been let off early. The entire cul-de-sac on which the school was situated had been blocked off with a pandal (tent) and there was an elaborate ritual being conducted at the local temple just across the school (which is likely to be supported by large donations from the school owner who is a fairly successful businessman). On Hareli³⁶, all children and teachers dressed up in green and performed pujas and dances. On Janmashtami, many schools had a “Krishna dress-up competition”. It was common for Holi to be celebrated in almost all schools along with Nag Panchmi in which many schools hosted a *nag* (snake) drawing competition. At the only two schools with Brahmin school owners, it was reported that there was some *maharaj* (Brahmin priest) who led all the pujas and ceremonies, but at all other schools it was the teachers and principal together with the male school head who took the lead in performing the pujas and rituals. Teachers seemed to be an active part of organising and conducting most festivals, which they shared with pride.

All schools reported conducting either the Saraswati puja on Thursdays or reciting the Saraswati Vandana at prayer time, or both.

As teachers and administrators of a school in the area, we are also part of the WhatsApp nodal group of all private schools that come under a particular government nodal jurisdiction. Apart from government orders relating to RTE portal requirements, holidays and schemes, the group is flooded with customised greetings carrying the photos of school heads (flanked by Saraswati, Krishna or Shiva) and forwards marking Hindu festivals, while “Jai Shri Ram” and “Radhe Radhe” are a common form of greeting or address used. Given this, when we tried to probe whether the fact that the celebration of Hindu festivals alone did not seem in keeping with the secular ideals of the constitution and was something that needed consideration, there did not seem to be any room for an imagination of this in any way. One English-medium school was reported to have celebrated Christmas by cutting a cake, decorating a tree and having a Santa Claus (which seemed to be a marker of a certain class aspiration associated with the promotion of the English language), and needless to say no school celebrated any Islamic festival or Guru

³⁵ In a brilliant commentary on the Tejpal judgement, Supreme Court lawyer Disha Wadekar (2021) draws our attention to the construction of ideal victimhood in the eyes of the court and how the notion of it is constructed out of how “Brahminical hegemony is maintained by preserving the ‘chastity and virtue’ of Dwij-Savarna (upper caste) women while sanctioning the violation of Bahujan women by DwijSavarna men.”

³⁶ With impetus from the Chhattisgarh government, which in the current atmosphere of patriotic fervour encouraged by the Hindu right, has decided to reclaim Hareli as Chhattisgarh's first (indigenous) festival. The imagination of what it means to be Chhattisgarhi is dominated by being identified with the largely OBC occupied plains areas of the central part of the state—historically a peasant population.

Ghasidas Jayanti, a major festival in Chhattisgarh marking the birth of Guru Ghasidas, leader of the anti-caste Satnami movement. In the schools that reported having the odd Muslim teacher—either in the past or currently, as was the case in one school—teachers casually said that they too take part. *“We include them too, we take everyone along”*, as some of them phrased it, reflecting an oft-used veil of tolerance used to hide the religiously sanctioned violence in caste-Hindu society. Speaking about a Muslim child, one teacher said, with a disturbing sense of achievement combined with resentment and pity, *“When we recently held a rakhi tying competition at school, there was a Muslim girl who also took part and so I asked her, ‘Oh, so you’re tying a rakhi here, do you celebrate this at home too?’ and she said, ‘No Ma’am, I really want to but it’s not allowed at home”, and so I said to her she could tie rakhis here at school and then I questioned her more, “Child, tell me this, on Diwali do you perform Lakshmi Puja or not?” and so she said, “No Ma’am”. So I said, “That means you don’t even light diyas”, and she again said, “No ma’am”. And so I asked her, how does it feel and she said, “It doesn’t feel nice”, and so I told her, “Tell me this, Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, and you all also have wealth, so why not pray to her?” So she said, “We celebrate in our own way” and she also said, “We also really feel like celebrating all this but they don’t believe in this at home and so we come and celebrate it here in school”*. How different children experience school when there is such a dominant and overbearing Hindu ethos is something that deserves attentive inquiry.³⁷

Other events that were celebrated across schools, apart from Independence Day and Republic Day, were annual functions, some art competitions, Teachers’ Day on 5 September and Children’s Day on 14 November. A group of teachers from one school described a typical Teachers’ Day celebration at their school. Children were let off early and the older children were expected to organise a day of fun for the teachers, with games and dancing. Teachers of the younger grades said to us with much delight, *“It’s all a surprise for us. The kids do it all. They even pool in their own money and buy us gifts”*. Shattering their illusions of a surprise, the senior teacher present revealed to them, *“The children actually are too young—even the ones in Class 8. So, we do everything. We collect the money from them and organise the whole thing”*. This almost ritualised and customary reverence for teachers seemed at odds with the devaluation of their labour.

Food was rarely part of any of the celebrations barring *boondi-sev* and other *prasad*. However, speaking about food also gave a glimpse into the conception of workplace culture and environment of schools. Except for one school in which teachers (together with the school head) had made a plan to cook biryani (that fell through), all other schools were reported as being spaces where non-vegetarian food was not allowed. While this may not have been a written rule, it was a silently assumed code. *“No. No. No one gets non-veg to school. Non-veg isn’t allowed in any school as far as I know”*, said a teacher who had worked in three schools in the area. *“School is a temple. It’s a holy place [pavitr was the word she used, which is also associated with ideas of purity]. Bringing non-veg would be wrong. I mean we’re all taught that you can’t touch books after touching meat, so how can we take non-veg to school?”* she added. It must be noted, however, that she eats and cooks meat at home.

The prevalence of such notions, which have their roots in oppressive notions of purity and pollution central to the caste-order and untouchability, when woven into the imagination of school and educational culture,

³⁷ Kancha Ilaiah’s poignant descriptions of all the weapon-wielding unfamiliar gods and goddesses he was introduced to for the first time in school are a reminder of why such inquiries are important (Ilaiah, 2019).

would, needless to say, have devastating implications for Bahujan teachers and children alike who live with the deep contradiction between their everyday practices at home and an ideology that regards those practices as impure—even as it comes to define the ideal to which one must forever aspire but can never reach—that governs their labour. Some aspects of these contradictions and how they define how teachers labour is (de)valued are discussed in the next chapter.

School Leadership and Involvement in Caste Associations

Most of the school heads were reported as being actively involved in their caste-associations. As mentioned in the section on recruitment, in some cases it was through these associations that school heads were informed by other members of the association of the young women in their families who could be prospective teachers. On one of our school visits, in fact, the school head was out. The principal, who was a senior teacher, said that one would have to speak to “Sir” first before speaking to anyone else. When “Sir” arrived, he had a pile of textbooks in his hand that he was going to drop off at the office, and a freshly applied prominent *teeka* [religious mark] on his forehead. He was almost running, and seemed to be in an extreme rush. “*I have no time now. I am very late*”, he said, “*I have to send off a baraat³⁸ immediately. They’re all waiting for me*”. Matchmaking and organising weddings are one of the main activities of caste associations, and it is the duty of active (and relatively affluent) members such as this school head to play an active role in conducting them successfully.

The introduction section, which carried a paragraph on the demographic of school owners revealed that almost half the schools in our sample (7 out of 15) were owned either by Dewangan or Sahu castes. Two more schools were run by someone from another OBC caste, but the school premises were owned by Dewangans from whom it was being rented; in one of these, it was reported that the Dewangan property owner even had a share in the school profit.

We asked teachers what they felt about school heads being involved in their caste associations. The responses were very telling. Most teachers from the OBC communities—in particular, those who belonged to Sahu or Dewanagan castes (as was revealed in the data section, school ownership is largely distributed among these two castes)—were in favour of such involvement. The teachers who were related to the school heads were unequivocal about their support, “*Definitely they should be (involved). Samaaj³⁹ is important*”, as one teacher said. Some appeared almost neutral, hinting at the inevitability of it, or that it was really the natural order of things for successful businessmen of the caste group to be active in their caste association. Some others, however, were very vocal about their support for such involvement, and expressed this strongly.

“*You see, Birgaon almost belongs to the Dewangans. And our Sir, along with his work at school, has a very good place in the caste association. Whenever there is a meeting of our association, Sir is always present*”, said one Dewangan teacher. “*In fact, he even handles the mic at the programmes and what not*”, she added, laughing with pride. “*I am very proud of this. It means that that person is worth such a big authority. That he has a rightful place there [‘hakdaar’]. His [school] leadership has improved greatly with his involvement in the caste association*”, she said. “*He has organised and managed all the events in a year for*

³⁸ Groom’s entourage in a wedding.

³⁹ Caste association in common parlance is referred to as samaaj.

the association so well. In fact, earlier these associations only had a place for men. But now, it isn't like that, they've made place for women too. And, he has organised programmes for the women. So, he has learnt much about management through his involvement".

In another part of the interview she had also mentioned how there was a time when his older brother was the main school head and he was a much better leader, that she sometimes wished it would be better for him to return, but he had started another school and was more active in running the coaching centre after school. Young women from the coaching centre had informally shared with us that there was a marked difference between the two brothers in how they were with women, and that the younger brother often made some of them uncomfortable. Putting the two together, and judging from the way in which she used the word "improvement" in leadership, and specifically mentioned his role in organising programmes for women at the association, it seemed to us that she was hinting that he had become better in his ways with women too, by virtue of his involvement in the caste association.

What was most telling however, was that when we asked the same question to another teacher from the same school who was neither Dewangan, nor a relative, but was in fact from the ST community, she said she definitely disapproved of school heads being involved in caste associations. *"No, I think this kind of involvement is very wrong. Because look what it breeds—all this Hindu–Muslim antagonism. Now if they are going to go on about their caste like this, then the Muslims too will do of their own",* she said. *"So no, I don't think school heads should be involved in caste associations. They should be more equal".* After a short pause, she laughed and almost snidely added, *"I mean, is the caste association more important, or are children more important?"*

She was the only non-caste-Hindu teacher from a private school that we spoke to. And, she was the only one who expressed a clear disagreement, so poignantly articulated at that.

The one young teacher who had moved to the city to study and teach, who had very strong views on teacher professionalism as described in the section of futures and dreams, when asked about her opinion of such involvement, said, *"Look, if it doesn't affect your professional life here at school, then you can do whatever you want in your personal life. It just shouldn't have a visible effect on school".*

This spoke to something we were witnessing across schools - something one would imagine to be very contradictory and in conflict with one another, and yet somehow the ideology of professionalism and that of Hindu caste morality seemed to peacefully coexist. It reminds us of CV Raman's ritual bath before a solar eclipse and his response when asked about it, "The Nobel Prize? That was science, a solar eclipse is personal"(as quoted in Roy, 2020). Rather than be amused by this or celebrate it as a diversity of beliefs, we feel a need to unpack this deeply disturbing phenomenon, because it allows for a certain violence perpetrated by the Hindu social order on the lives of those oppressed by it, even as India's "modernity" is uncritically celebrated. As Omvedt reminds us, "[T]he celebration of diversity and refusal to pose 'absolutes', can be simply a justification from relying on oppressive 'diverse' traditions or the continuation of existing inequalities of capitalist society" (Omvedt, 2016, p. 14).

Teachers' Lives

Not nearly enough studies look at the totality of teachers' lives, especially in the Indian context. Indumathi and Vijaysimha's (2010) paper points to the need for such studies, stressing that they must inform how policy regarding teachers' work and education is framed.

Working Lives Outside School

As social reproductive feminists have shown, the realms of production and reproduction are not quite separate as capital would have us believe. In fact, they are inextricably linked, and it is an understanding of the nature of their relationship that is crucial to an understanding of capitalism itself (see Chapter 2 for references and descriptions of literature in this area). As they have shown, there is an essential contradiction of social reproduction under capital—that it is what sustains capital accumulation in the first place because without the reproduction of life and labour power there would be no production at all and, at the same time, the imperative of increased accumulation means that it is also what must be thwarted and denied by forever reducing its costs (Fergusson, 2020). This contradiction is navigated by and through a socially differentiated workforce since the enduring legacies of various forms of systems of social oppression such as caste, patriarchy and racism make sure that those oppressed by these structures can take on reproductive labour at extremely low wages or even for free, thereby also ensuring that there are always those in such precarious situations who are forced to accept the extremely exploitative terms of wage labour they are offered (Jones, 1949; Ferguson, 2020). Thus, it is the imperatives of social reproduction that determine the terms of entry into the workforce as well, not only in the form of entries and exits as we saw in the section on leaving and lay-offs, but also in terms of who is offered what conditions of labour. How productive and reproductive work are organised then is inextricably linked even as they are in tension with one another (Stevano, 2021). What this means is that any understanding of teachers' labour at school must necessarily look at their labouring lives as a whole. Given the enormous share of reproductive labour performed by women (as of 2014, women were shown to have been performing nearly 10 times more unpaid care work than men in India (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2019)), and the enormity of reproductive labour performed by working-class Bahujan women in particular, irrespective of a gendered comparison, it is all the more necessary that any study of women teachers' working lives also takes into account the rest of their working day, which continues endlessly outside the school site.

Housework and Other Unpaid Care Work

All teachers except for one,⁴⁰ reported doing an enormous amount of housework. In the initial questionnaire handed out, one teacher didn't even bother to tick the choices listed under housework and instead wrote *sabhi* (all) (Figure 4.14).

"Women always have the double burden of working outside the home and doing all the work within the house too. We have to give our full attention to it", another teacher said, adding, "It's different for men. They work outside but when they return, at least then they have a 'free mind'".

But, for women, it was not as simple as just having to handle all the housework (which, in itself, is anything but simple). Often, teachers said they avoided bringing any schoolwork home—they preferred to stay a little

⁴⁰ The only participant from the General category said she did not do anything at home and her mother took care of everything. This is despite the fact that there was no other female member in the household and she said that she had joined teaching because of financial problems at home.

longer at school. Not because they felt there would be no time to do it or they wanted to be free of schoolwork at home, but because, as many of them reported, they would often be shouted at by mothers, in-laws or husbands for it. *“My mother starts to shout asking me why I have to bring work home and what I did in school if I had to bring it here anyway”,* one teacher said. Married teachers said that it ends up being a constant source of friction with their husbands: *“And then, I have to argue with him. I ask him what it is that is falling short—are you not getting your food on time? Is the house not clean? Are the children not taken care of? I ask him. If I’m doing everything you need me to do at home then why are you complaining? I tell him off directly”.*

	स्कूल के पठन सामग्री या सामान का लिस्टिंग/रख रखाव ☐ घर में ☐ स्कूल में (क्लास के बाद/पहले) अन्य काम... ..
घर में क्या क्या काम करना पड़ता है	☐ झाड़ु ☐ पोछा ☐ बर्तन ☐ पानी भरना ☐ खाना पकाना ☐ बच्चों का देखभाल करना ☐ अपने घर के बच्चों को पढ़ाना ☐ बाजार जाना सब्जी व रेशन के लिए ☐ अन्य काम
टीचर के काम का मूल्यांकन कैसे किया जाता है?	☐ बच्चों के रिसल्ट के आधार पर ☒ प्रिंसिपल के अवलोकन के कारण

Figure 4.14: The burden of housework | Source: Khemani et al., 2023

The view of teaching as women's work means that you can go to work, but you cannot be a working woman. The unspoken terms of your becoming a teacher is contingent on you continuing to be the ideal housewife (or the ideal daughter)—both notionally and in actual practice—which means *your experience as a working person is denied to you.*

The range of reproductive labour performed by the working class in particular is simply astonishing: from having to spend hours cleaning the state-subsidised rice provided by the public distribution system to the arduous task of filling water, it is quite literally true that for these women more than others, work never ends. Being surrounded by industries which constantly flout environmental norms of waste disposal and pollution means that the groundwater available is not always fit to drink. The water from the municipal supply line too has insects and worms and can often be yellowish-brown. Visits to the chief municipal officer assured us that the filtration plant through which water is supplied has now outlived its capacity and there is nothing that can be done about it until another filtration plant is set up. There are no guarantees when or even if that will be done. This means that people—mostly women—have to sometimes walk 1–2 km to fetch drinking water for the household. Not everyone has a source of water supply in their homes and most fill water at the common taps constructed in each lane. Waiting in long queues is common, making water-filling one of the most time-consuming and back-breaking activities of household work.

Married teachers, especially those with children, reported waking up at dawn to finish all the household work before setting off for the first shift, which they usually preferred so that they could return when their

children got home from school. They had to cook, clean, pack a lunch box for their husbands, most of whom worked at factories in the neighbourhood, get their children ready for school, and if they lived in a joint family, often also take care of the elderly. But, it was not only the mothers who had to labour long hours.

As one unmarried young teacher said to us: *"If you hear what all I have to do in a day you'll go mad (pagal)"*. She said she "handled everything" at home. Her mother was a mid-day meal cook at a government school and so she left home for work early. *"Papa goes to the shop and my younger sister doesn't keep well so I don't let her do too much work"*, she said. Her grandmother is also now paralysed and so she has to bathe, dress and feed her in addition to cook, clean, wash dishes and clothes and get ready in time to reach school by 7:20 a.m. every morning. *"It used to be 7:30. This year they've changed the time to 7:20. Those 10 minutes make a very big difference"*, she said.

So, for most of these women then, the workday began at dawn and ended around 11 p.m., once everyone was fed and tucked into bed, and everything was in order enough to pack in all the washing, cleaning and cooking in the morning hours of labour that they squeezed in before going to school.

For some, school was the respite from a life of drudgery as a housewife. As one teacher said to us, *"In teaching life, every minute of the day is accounted for. You eat on time, you bathe on time. Everything is done on time. I like that. When I was out of work the last few years, I didn't know what day of the week it was, or what date. I just had to go on doing the same work over and over again, day in, day out. I would keep falling ill. Now that I go to school, I feel good"*.

Other Paid Work

Every teacher working at the private schools, except for one,⁴¹ reported engaging in at least one other paid work activity, namely providing private tuition from home or tailoring. In some cases, teachers did both. For younger teachers, this was in addition to pursuing their own education. It is important to note that most teachers earned much more through tuition than they did at school.

We happened to visit one teacher just around the time her tuition students were arriving. She was furiously running her stitching machine to finish something before they arrived and talking to us at the same time. As the children arrived, she managed to engage two of them into helping her with cutting some cloth while also seating the others and answering the last few questions we wanted to clarify in the questionnaire.

Even some of the younger unmarried teachers had been giving home tuitions for almost a decade, since they would usually start giving tuitions while in Class 12 or just after, some even starting after Class 10. We wondered if this meant that they had built a solid base of students over the years that would help if they ever considered doing this full time or starting a coaching centre of their own someday. As it turns out, teachers said parents often preferred sending their children to tuition provided by the teachers who taught at the same school their children went to. Perhaps, they felt it meant a consistency in material taught or that the teacher would know how to prepare them for the exams in that school. However, high teacher turnover and frequent transitions in and out of various schools then meant that their student base kept changing too. Thus, they were unable to accumulate experience even through tuition work.

⁴¹ She had only recently stopped giving tuitions because of her mother's health and the increased burden of reproductive work at home, apart from the fact that she dedicated a fair amount of her time as a voluntary and devout gau sevak.

The need to engage in multiple paid work activities speaks to the fact that, despite localised markets being somewhat detached from larger global production networks, the lives of those working in these are still “shaped by the dynamics of global capitalism through extreme fragmentation of labour regimes, commodification of life and erosion of ability to rely on household production for social reproduction” (Stevano, 2021, p. 3).

Teachers reported very different income contributions to the household: from some who kept their earnings as “pocket money” for “cream-powder”, to others who supported their siblings’ education and put almost all their earnings into the running of the household. Most unmarried teachers reported financing their own education and that being one of the main reasons for joining a teaching job.

Only one teacher said she felt her role in the family had changed ever since she had begun teaching. “I’m more a part of decision-making now, I feel. When the whole family talks, now they listen to what I say”, she said. Another teacher said it seemed to make a difference to her children now that she was a teacher. “They go about telling everyone with pride, ‘My mother is a teacher’, they say it with a lot of joy”, she said. However, almost all other teachers did not share a similar experience. Either they felt it remained unchanged, or they spoke of the pressures they experienced from their families: unmarried teachers were pressured about marriage, and some were also told that they should appear for competitive exams so that they could get a government job instead. As one teacher expressed,

My mother keeps running after a government job. My whole family does. Every day they fight with me about it. They say ‘You’ve already done an M.Com [Master of Commerce], isn’t it high time you get a decent job?’ when in fact, they still haven’t put me through a B.Ed. They don’t even understand how much studying it requires to appear for and clear any of the SSC [Secondary School Certificate], UPSC [Union Public Service Commission] and Railway examinations. All they see is that ‘Oh, we’ve educated you so much and you’re still not getting a government job’.

Married teachers, it seemed, were not often pressured nor looking to appear for competitive exams or get a government job or necessarily any other job with a higher wage. There was only one married teacher who continued to appear for the TET and apply for government teaching posts until she cleared it. She said she would stay up till midnight studying. At our last meeting with her, she had just received news that she had cleared the TET and it was likely that she would be placed somewhere in her home district in Madhya Pradesh.

Comparison between Teaching and Other Work

One of the interviews we conducted was with a young woman who was no longer a teacher but worked an office job at a small company which re-sharpened plastic cutters. She was entrusted with handling all financial transactions and supervisory duties here—something, as she herself admitted, was rare for a woman to be doing. Her work hours were 9 to 5, mostly with an odd extra hour here and there and no office work to be done from home after workhours. While comparing this with teaching, she said that the hard work required in teaching was incomparable to this. As a teacher, she worked two shifts: one 7:30 a.m.–11:30 p.m. and the other 12:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. That meant at least nine hours of work each day,

sometimes even more. In addition, she said, *"Everyday at night I would spend time preparing for the next day's class. Teaching is a lot of mental labour"*. She said she would get paid ₹2,600 per month for this, while at the company she now worked, she was being paid ₹11,000, and was the primary breadwinner of the family, since her father had no financial sensibility and had squandered all the family's wealth by selling off their land in the village. She was the one who paid for her younger siblings' education and was saving up to buy a house for her parents. She said that as a teacher she barely got 20 minutes to herself a day—not even to think or pursue her studies. But, she said that in terms of personal growth she learnt a lot as a teacher—much more than at the office. When asked about what an ideal wage for teaching should be, given the amount of hard work she had described, she quoted ₹3,000–₹5,000. This was despite the fact that she was getting paid ₹11,000 at her current office. Her logic seems to have stemmed from the economics of a low-fee private school. But the fact that her imagination did not seek to challenge that, and somehow normalised such a dismal wage for so much work spoke to the deep contradictions that shape the devaluation of teachers' labour and diminish teachers' status.

Two teachers had worked at petrol pumps and two as nurses. The two who had left nursing both mentioned that working night shifts had become an issue with their families who were unhappy about it and did not want them to continue. However, both also said that the work was very degrading in terms of not only having to clean up after people and handling blood and guts, but also, as one of them said, being severely mistreated by doctors and other staff who would rudely shout at them and repeatedly call out their incompetence in front of patients.

While comparing teaching and other work, the young teacher who would do all the labour for the family *thela* said, *"Housework demands the most hard work"*, she said without hesitation. *"Sleep is the only break you get"*. She had also worked at a petrol pump where she had earned the most, but she said she got the most pleasure from teaching. However, her current circumstances meant she had too much to do at home to be able to get out.

Entering the World of School Teaching

Most teachers said their actual entry into the world of school teaching was either with and through friends and acquaintances. Almost all of them started out early on, after Class 12. They either heard of a job opening through a friend, or a couple of friends set out to different schools searching for a job together. Teaching was—and is—a means to finance one's way through college for most young women in the area. Most of them managed to pursue college while teaching full-time under the system of "open" or what is commonly called "private" college, which did not demand everyday attendance. For some it was not just their own, but their siblings' education that brought them into teaching, as one teacher said, *"Before I was married, when I was still at my mother's home, I felt I should help educate my younger sisters and brothers. And so, teaching seemed like the 'best method' to earn an income and be able to do this"*. She's someone who enjoys mathematics a lot, she said, but because of financial constraints, her parents couldn't afford for her to pursue a B.Sc in Mathematics. (Often, the science and mathematics streams are a little more expensive than the arts and commerce streams.) *"And then, I just kept at it, continued and continued teaching and so it became a sort of 'habit'. It was clear to me that I didn't want to go into any other field."* Another teacher said her first experience lasted a few months at a school in the neighbourhood where she landed up after Class 12 with another friend. She then began a course in nursing and soon dropped

out of teaching. After some time as a junior nurse, where she struggled a lot, she returned and asked a friend to find her a teaching job. She had been teaching at that school for the last 5 years and wanted to stay a teacher her whole life. She said, *"I have big dreams of starting my own school"*.

One teacher who, like many of her high school friends, started teaching after Class 12 said that she had decided very early on that she wanted to be a teacher. *"We used to watch our seniors who passed out of school and became teachers and we wanted to be just like them"*, she said. Since her first teaching job, she has transitioned in and out of schools two–three times for various reasons including marriage and then motherhood, with the latter being a long break. The first time we met her, she had not returned to teaching, but confessed that she longed to return. When we met her a couple of months later, after the summer break, there was a drastic change in her demeanour. She was energetic and joyful. She laughed when we remarked at the transformation and said, *"I had made up my mind—I would teach means I would definitely teach. Staying at home wasn't good for me. I would fall sick often. Now I'm back at school and am feeling very good"*. She had just got a job as a teacher a few weeks before. *"Think about this now. I had this terrible ear problem. It would hurt like mad. I'd been to every doctor in every corner of Birgaon, it just wouldn't get better. And I would have terrible headaches because of the stress [tension] or what ... I don't know. Ever since I've joined school, however, my earache has disappeared completely!"*

However, there were also a few teachers who said they never actually wanted to be teachers, as one teacher said, *"Looking at our teachers in school, I was sure I never wanted to be one. I wanted a job. But then I appeared for and cleared the Teacher Entrance Test [TET] on the first go and although I didn't get a government teaching position then I thought, maybe this is for me and so I started teaching and have been ever since"*.

Another teacher (the one who quit teaching to work at a supervisory company for a small plant) said she didn't think of ever teaching either. But when she would drop her sister off at school, the director there would pester her to join once she was done with Class 12. *"He said it so many times that it felt good. And so, I decided to join, and that's how I got into teaching"*, she said. She was clear that she had to earn well to support her family and stand on her feet. In any case, she was the main provider in the household already and was saving up to buy them a house. However, she was not seeking a government post like so many other young men and women in the *basti* who wanted to secure their futures. *"It's true government jobs have the most security—good pay, retirement benefits and all the rest. But I never aspired for one. Actually, it's because I don't have a caste certificate. You need records dating back five generations to get one made. My father only sold all his land and has no documents, forget five generations"*, she said.

One teacher very clearly said that she only joined school (also after quitting nursing) because it was a *"ghar ka school"* (family school) that it was owned by her uncle. He approached her and asked if she would like to join, *"and so I thought, alright, why not, what will I do sitting at home anyway"*. Another teacher spoke of beginning to teach as *"time pass"*, saying *"I would anyway be whiling away that time at home so I thought it better to go to school"*. This however, spoke less to her lack of interest and more to how young women as teachers are viewed. The term *"time pass"* was commonly used about women going to teach—what it actually signified is the fact that it was not really a remunerative activity. On multiple occasions, in response to why there were few male teachers at such private schools, both men and women, teachers and others used this term. As one government school teacher (who had previously worked at three private

schools in the area) told us, *"There comes a point where for [us] men our responsibilities increase, and so we can't afford to work at such low wages. But for women, I mean, they don't have that burden so they can go to such schools—it's like time pass"*. This identical use of the term in response to the same question was something we came up against time and again.

Two teachers, including the one government teacher we interviewed, said it was their fathers who inspired them.

My father is a teacher. First, I saw him. But, my mother was a teacher too. Meaning, at the anganwadi. When I was very young in fact I studied under her there. It was a government job, but her salary was so low and she had so much field work—she had to conduct surveys in the village, help take out birth certificates for children, help with this and that ... her whole time would go in this, and she wasn't in any way paid according to the work she did. So, she left. When I used to watch her, I also wanted to do what she did—I didn't know that I wanted to be a teacher per se, just do what she did. But as I grew older, I also would watch my father. I would help him with corrections and other work he brought home. I even went and taught a few classes at his school later on when I was in college. That's when I really knew I wanted to be a teacher. My father used to say, become a nurse or a doctor, but I was never interested. I wanted to teach because I have always taught even my own classmates.

This teacher has now recently quit her job to focus on clearing the TET and getting a government teaching position. At the time of writing this, we received news that she cleared it and has done very well.

The government school teacher too came from a family of teachers. Education, to them, was very important. And her father had told her early on that she should become a teacher. She did a B.Ed, a D.Ed, a graduation and cleared both the Central TET and the Chhattisgarh TET when the rule was suddenly introduced. *"I had the required qualifications, but I was then two marks short of the cut off for a Grade 2 teaching position in the Chhattisgarh TET, but had cleared it in the Central TET and so I was rejected and had to apply for a Grade 3 position. I filled 833 forms!"* she said, *"before landing a position at the government primary school in Birgaon"* miles away from her village. *"We somehow found our way to this place called Birgaon that we had never heard of. There was only a one-way road then, the highway was not as it is now. I began by staying with my sister and brother-in-law in Malhar, which is in Bilaspur district. It was a very arduous commute from there"*. She stayed there for a month. *"You know what happened to me on my first day?"* she said, smiling. *"The school timing was 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. I left home at 7 a.m. and by the time I reached Birgaon it was 4 p.m.!"* she laughed. *"The road was very bad then"*.

Of Futures and Dreams

In the initial questionnaire handed out, we had asked participants what they wanted to do in the future. Most teachers said they wanted to continue teaching. However, some of the young women we met were to be married within days and move to a different city or village, with no guarantee of being allowed to work once they were at their in-laws' home. Others who had left teaching on account of increased demands of reproductive labour, and were neither actively looking for a teaching job or seemed free from the demands that made them quit in the first place too said they wanted to continue teaching. In our in-depth interview with one such teacher, we asked her how she planned to continue teaching. *"I haven't*

given up on the dream [to be a teacher] yet. I want to pursue it. But, I know that will never be possible as long as I'm here. But, once I get married, there I will tell them I want to teach. If they grant me permission, I'll do it, if they don't then one can't, no?" she said. This and other similar articulations, however, did not seem to suggest that the realisation of dreams or imagined futures rested on financial constraints or external social forces of exclusion and discrimination in the world of work, but instead, on the control over their lives and persons under the caste-patriarchal family. This was apparent in the following articulations by married teachers as well.

"Yes, I've thought of applying for government teaching posts. But, imagine I get it. And, imagine I get my next posting somewhere away from here. What am I going to do then? I'm obviously not going to take my family along. Okay, maybe children can be shifted, but my husband, I can't expect him to shift now, can I?" said one teacher. *"And so, I decided that it's better for me to remain a teacher in a private school and tend to my family too. So, I haven't even tried, even though I have all the qualities needed".* When asked if she would take a higher paying job located in the area if it was a non-teaching job she said *"No, no. I won't. Because it would demand much more time from me. I have to give my family time. I'm a daughter-in-law ('Mai bahun hun'). I have to tend to the home, my husband, my in-laws. I have too much to do. My daughter, who is in Class 8, is a topper in studies. If I don't focus on her at this stage, she will fall behind".*

At the same time however, this same teacher spoke of a dream—and in fact a *plan*—of opening and running a private school. She was from a Dewangan family and her relatives ran the school she worked at. And, as mentioned in Chapter 1, people from the Dewangan community own a fair amount of land in the area, as is reflected in the oft repeated phrase "Birgaon belongs to the Dewangans". This is said with pride by Dewangans themselves and sometimes in mild resentment by those from other caste groups such as the Sahus, who along with the Dewangans dominate the plains areas in Chhattisgarh in terms of population, and also in the popular imagination of an assertion of Chhattisgarhi identity. In fact, they own most of the small and medium businesses in the area and the traders sangh of Birgaon is said to be exclusively Dewangan. *"If we had the place, then I'm sure my husband would say to me, you have all the qualities and all the degrees so a couple of people could together open a school. But, we don't have land and so it's remained a sort of dream only. But, my husband is keen. He has even started looking for land near Tilda. Let's see if it happens".*

Another young married Dewangan woman who worked at a different school also shared a similar plan. She had a nursing degree, but had left because her family did not want her to work the night shift, but also because she did not like the nature of work and said she still filled out some nursing job forms from time to time. When we asked her about what she would do about night shifts, she responded vaguely, almost suggesting that the chances of her getting a government nursing position were very slim. However, she said she wanted to do a B.Ed or D.El.Ed because, like her uncle who ran the school she worked at, her husband was interested in investing in a school too and that he would give her the "freedom" to handle it (*"Mujhe hi zyada choot de rahe hain"*.) She said, he had already been talking to prospective partners to co-invest.

However, another married teacher from a different community said, *"I mean, what can I say. I have children. Even if I want to think of doing something else, I cannot. So as long as this can continue like this [teaching and taking care of home], I'll continue"*, adding that there is always the chance that their family would have

to move to the husband's village since they lived in Birgaon on rent. *"And then, you know how it is in the village", she said. "Women have to mostly stay home. It's different there".*

In contrast, the only married teacher mentioned in the previous section who continued to appear and recently cleared the TET exam in hope of a government teaching position, was also the only one who said with ease that her husband would move with her to wherever she was posted because mostly *"boys get a job more easily anywhere"*. She was the only teacher in the study who belonged to the ST community, and they too lived in Birgaon on rent, something that was initially a huge struggle, she said. *"No one wants to rent their homes to someone from the ST or SC community. Even today, look around you. That feeling is very much there inside people"*, she said.

So, it was not marital status and motherhood as much as it was a caste-class location that seemed to shape the dreams of these families. For those who came from caste groups that traditionally had more landownership in the area, the dream of opening a school seemed far more within reach, than for those who came from caste groups that did not. Similarly, as we saw in the previous section, dreams of government jobs too were contingent on caste certificates which require five generations of documentary proof in order to be granted. Dreams, it seems, have everything to do with the social and economic locations of families. For the women teachers in these families, dreams were obviously not devoid of the collective futures of their families. But, they were also shaped by how control and ideology operated for each of them within the caste-patriarchal family set up.

Some of the unmarried women, however, said they would try their best to ensure they married into a family that would allow them to pursue their work as teachers. *"So many of them often say yes at the beginning, but then when it actually comes to it, they go back on their words. So, let's see. I hope I'm able to fight for it wherever I marry"*, said one teacher.

Several teachers said they had dreams of opening their own schools. When asked what their dream schools would be like, some teachers gave a detailed description of their dream schools that they wished to run, indicative of the fact that they had given the matter some careful thought. All of them said it would be an English-medium school as English is what has market value these days and that they wanted to give to children what they themselves had been denied. One teacher said, she will not look at training and qualification because anyway those with a B.Ed or a D.Ed knew nothing. She would look at the ability to handle children as the main consideration while hiring teachers. The first thing one of them said was, *"I will make sure none of the teachers at my school go through what I have been through"*. Elaborating on this, she said, *"I'll make sure they are all respected, and none of them ever have to feel disrespected. I've had to change so many schools because I have left and returned because of my own studies. Each time I come back, I'm a new and junior teacher all over again. It's not a nice feeling. Every time new management shouts at you or suspiciously asks why you left one school or the other, you lose complete confidence. You always start to wonder if there is something wrong with you"*. All teachers also said that, in their dream schools, they would pay their teachers better than they are paid and ensure a decent starting wage, subject to school profits and financial constraints.

One of them had even worked out the economics of it. She was—and is—one of the most active *gau sevaks*

(cow protection vigilantes) of Birgaon, and as she proudly says was one of the first female *gau sevaks*. She said, she had very big dreams and has had them for years, making her very different from all the other young women in the *basti*. It is a battle at home for her to be a *gau sevak*. Her mother disapproves of the fact that she runs out at any hour to save an injured cow and has to do so much public activity. *"I never had to fight to become a teacher, but for this, I have to constantly fight at home"*, she said. But, she said she hoped to marry someone who shared her dreams; that she would begin her own *gau-shala* (cow shelter) where she would burn cow dung cakes and treat wood with it—she would sell this produce which, according to her, was very lucrative in today's time and sold at a premium. She would then use these profits to run her school where she would cater to the poorest of children and educate them for free.

Another teacher too, had a very carefully reasoned out plan for her dream school, although it was quite different. She said her school would have very good facilities and she would take children from any socio-economic background. She had detailed plans of everything: from how the school WhatsApp group would be run to the letterboxes that she would install—one for students and another for teachers—so that they could put in anonymous complaints and give anonymous feedback to the management without feeling threatened. *"Everyone should have the freedom of expression"*, she said, and this was something she felt a terrible lack of in the school she worked at where, she said, there was simply no room for teachers to voice their thoughts and opinions. She had plans to conduct gender sensitisation and sexual harassment trainings and a whole vision of what her school environment would be like. One of the most extraordinary ideas she had that she would hand over management and principal duties to each teacher for a week or 15 days so that they truly come to know the difficulty of managing a school. *"They will not only learn, but they will understand how wrong it is to keep blaming principals because they too have so many problems and such a difficult task at hand"*, she said.

Both she and the teacher who is a *gau sevak* were ones who said that although they would [*"of course"*] have Saraswati Puja at their school, they would not waste too much time on pujas and festivals. The others, however, said they would celebrate all the Hindu festivals as is done in the schools they work at currently.

Dreams of running private schools, it seems, were not at odds with dreams for a government job. As they had witnessed in some schools around, families of those in government teaching posts would also start private schools. In one school in our sample, too, the male school "head" was in fact a government teacher who oversaw the running of this school while his wife, as principal, did all the work of running it. When asked who would be the principal at her dream school, the teacher who had recently cleared her TET said, "Now look, if this works out by chance and I get a government post, then my husband will handle the school".

One teacher said while talking of dreams and a future in teaching:

The worst thing is that any one from any profession or field does a B.Ed and becomes a teacher, whether or not that was their dream, because they think you get more holidays as a teacher. Some study engineering and then come, others study nursing and then come. This is the biggest mistake and the worst thing. They don't have a desire to teach. Only those who dream of becoming teachers—those who want to teach from their heart—only they should do teaching work and teaching should be open only to them.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

This chapter summarises the main arguments that we make based on our findings and suggests possible directions for future work.

Organisation of Teaching Tasks and Educational Quality

Given that teaching tasks are organised under the 40-minute regime, using a hegemonic curriculum and repeated testing of students, there is very little scope for any meaningful teaching and learning. Despite challenges, teachers evolve within these constraints. Teachers' hard work is evident in the time and effort they put in while explaining each chapter. There is no time for dialogue or discussion since most of the children's time is spent in copying question and answers and the teachers' time in checking copies. Teachers reported not having any time to speak with and share experiences with their peers. There seems to be no systematic academic support or a space to reflect on their practice, nor any growth path for their career. Further, the looming threat of work being reorganised because of rapid teacher turnover places them in a difficult situation. While on the surface one may find that teachers are "teaching" and children are engaged in some kind of reading and writing work, the fact is that the way in which work is structured and scheduled for teachers both by the curriculum as well as the organisation of teaching tasks makes it impossible for any real learning to occur.⁴² This certainly begs deeper inquiry and a carefully thought out set of parameters to assess learning outcomes different from the deeply problematic tools used by large-scale testing mechanisms.

Literature funded by transnational networks in the late 1990s and early 2000s strongly advocated for private schools, arguing that such schools made education of a "higher level" accessible to the "poor" in a much more cost-effective way than state-run schools (Tooley & Dixon, 2005). This view has received much criticism, with scholars pointing out that those with fewer socio-economic resources find it extremely difficult to access low-fee private schools in the first place, thereby challenging grand assertions such as "private schooling is good for the poor" (Nambissan & Ball, 2010). The rise of low-fee private schools has also had negative effects on equity, raising concerns about the "ghettoisation" of the poorest of the poor into government schools, which perpetuates social stratification. Overall, studies have convincingly shown that there is insufficient empirical evidence to suggest that low-fee private schools actually improve learning outcomes, either by themselves or by creating competition, offering greater school "choice" in such a way as to ensure better learning outcomes and that a higher quality of education is provided (Harma, 2009; Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Sarangapani & Winch, 2010).

However, the definition of "quality" itself stands to be questioned. Most of these studies look at whether or not teaching is happening, and "how much" of it is happening. To assume, however, that greater "teaching time" and a higher percentage of teachers "teaching" implies greater quality, without actually interrogating what is being taught and how teaching takes place, is an obvious point of contention as the findings from our field suggest. While some of the literature that critiques this work does question the quality of

⁴² While the focus of this study was not to measure learning outcomes or study educational quality itself, we have observed that many of the children who have either left these schools and joined ours or come to us for tuition classes, have trouble with basic reading, writing and number sense. Those who are able to read and write or "add" and "subtract" do so with complete lack of meaning.

education such schools provide (Nambissan, 2012), some others continue to sidestep the question of how teachers' work is organised and its crucial link to quality of education. For example, Samson, De, and Noronha (2002) argue that "the sheer abundance of teaching time whatever the competence of the teachers involved would definitely have some impact" (p. 3). As is evident from our findings, such arguments stand to be questioned when one takes a closer look at what learning possibilities exist when teaching tasks are structured the way they are. Further, such a framing centres the issue around teacher "competence" as something central to quality, rather than the organisation of teachers' work itself which, as our findings show, determine the nature of teaching-learning in crucial ways.

The deeper issue here is that of what kind of quality is acceptable for whom. While assumptions of low-quality learning have come to be associated with government schools across the country (Harma, 2009), we must pay attention to the conditions created to expand private provisioning of education and thus, normalising a stratified schooling system in India. As discussed in Chapter 2, Davies (2018) offers an alternative explanation for when and why private schools emerged in India, arguing that it was policy "drift" that resulted in creating conditions conducive to the entry and spread of private schools. Second, he places these rulings in the context in which they occurred: a rise in the use of Public Interest Litigations (PILs) and a certain wave of civil society legal activism that gained ground in the late 1970s. It was during this time that the minimum requirements to the right to life were being argued, which allowed for challenges to the "Right to Education" being admitted, allowing for the cases of Mohini Jain and Unni Krishnan in 1992 and 1993 which paved the way for what culminated in the eventual passage of the Right to Education Act in 2009. The passing of this central legislation codified and normalised private schools in Indian law in a bid to ensure universalisation of education and that education becomes a fundamental right. This is of importance because a closer look at such rights-based legal activism reveals that while it is always in the name of access "for all", certain compromises are deemed inevitable—making the "minimum" alright for "all"—minimum wages, minimum days of work, minimum years of schooling, minimum percentage of seats in school for the poor and so on, with the corollary being that only some are able to access much more than the bare minimum. What this reflects is an acceptance of the inevitability of stratification by allowing it to be codified into law and a lack of commitment to a deeper egalitarian vision, thereby ensuring that excellence is simply never an option for some. What it means in practice is that those at the very bottom have to settle for the minimum (and often continue to fight battles in the streets and courts to be guaranteed even this much).

Questions of "quality education for the poor" then remain tangled in uncritical parameters that measure and define quality; *at least*, it is argued, children are in school and are being "taught". The description of their own work by teachers and the struggles they face in doing what is demanded of them compel us to interrogate *how* and *what* is being taught and redefine how quality needs to be understood. We believe that detailed empirical studies into teachers' work through interviews and reflections as well as long-term classroom observations that pay attention to the organisation of teaching tasks, division of labour, how discipline and control operate to wages, conditions of work, terms of entry and exit from the workforce will provide valuable insights into developing an understanding of teachers' labour. Studying teachers' work and the conditions of their labour is indispensable for education policy, content and design of teacher education programs as well as educational quality itself, since given that their worksite is the school, the conditions of their labour are precisely the conditions under which children are being educated.

Social Reproduction as a Necessary Lens to Understand Teachers Labour

As the teachers' own descriptions of their lives revealed, the dynamic between waged and unwaged labour intimately governs the conditions of their work: from the terms of entry and exit to the wages, work hours and relationships at the worksite that define their working lives. Thus, centring social reproduction is crucial to understanding teachers' labour as it allows us to see the ways in which the organisation of productive and reproductive work is inextricably linked, even as they are in tension with one another.

Our findings show that the entire low-fee private school ecosystem can function only if it disregards the question reproduction, even as it is dependent on it. On the one hand, the low-fee private schools of our field site rest on teachers' labour in order to deliver education and ensure a steady stream of fee-paying students, while on the other, they are able to ensure the availability low-cost labour by maintaining extremely high teacher turnover (i.e., frequent exits and entries from the workforce). Thus, like the contradiction of social reproduction under capital, what we see is that the cheap reproduction of a devalued teacher labour force is simultaneously indispensable and an obstacle to the functioning of low-fee private schools. If the entire teaching force in any given school is constantly changing at the kind of rapid rates of flux observed, then student achievement will definitely be affected (given that teachers leave at crucial times just before exams). While in a larger macro sense, student achievement and learning are not real concerns to such low-fee private schools (since most of the children in our field site who graduate from such schools invariably end up as factory workers or the mass of unemployed youth necessary for capital to sustain itself), at the micro level it is precisely what affects admissions and hence, school profits. Thus, student achievement is a matter of concern only in this limited sense. If the syllabus is to be completed and students are to be prepared for examinations, the school cannot afford to have a workforce that is not reproduced at all, or that is constantly changing.

We observed that typically, in all schools, there are a handful of senior teachers who have been around for five years or more who handle non-teaching work such as planning, scheduling and mentoring new teachers. The rest of the workforce was a constantly shifting mass of teachers who frequently transitioned in and out of the workforce. In order for the school to function, they need both these groups. This differentiation is used to maintain a high level of precarity and extremely depressed wages. Thus, maintaining such precarity, which is in the interest of schools in order to keep costs low, makes it imperative for such schools to degrade the conditions of teachers' labour. We strongly believe that this is something that cannot be tackled by "regulation" of such schools, but by the prevention of low-cost private provisioning of education altogether.

With increasing workload, persistently depressed wages and little respect from management, it is important to ask: What has made teachers stay for as long five to ten years? As our findings reveal, this could only be explained by factors far beyond the wage.

Disciplining Forces of Teachers Labour: Factors Beyond the Wage

Differences in articulations about school environment were most starkly observed between senior and junior teachers, with senior teachers often more satisfied and comfortable with the work environment and working conditions. It was important to probe who stayed long enough to become a senior teacher and why. Although there were some instances and articulations of resistance, teachers who stuck with the job

were disciplined into coming on time, accepting a depressed wage without protest, worked extra and accepted a certain control over their appearance and sexuality. This appeared to be largely due to the fear of school management, or a sort of self-discipline imposed through Brahminical notions of womanhood, caste-patriarchy, Hindu caste morality and the ideology of professionalism. This did not operate only at an ideological level, but was governed by the material convenience the school offered to teachers to enable them to fulfil their duties towards the caste-patriarchal family.

One of the most forceful expressions of what it takes to remain a teacher was articulated by a young unmarried teacher whose family lived in the village while she had moved to the city to pursue higher education and work as a teacher.

The main thing is that you have the ability to quietly bear it all and not 'create opportunity' for yourself. That's one. Second, you have to be ready to bear insult, that you will shut up and listen when someone is scolding you, and third that you say nothing of wanting an increase in your salary and fourth, the biggest reason, is if you say nothing at all. Quietly do as you are told and you'll stick ('tik jaoge').

Frustrated by the stringent rules of school management, she had left her teaching job just days before we met her.

Differently, a senior teacher who spoke of being frustrated with her low wage said that she still chose to stick on at the current school because the school head had been very understanding, supported her through her B.Ed, and made concessions for her about timing and holidays because of the demands made of her by her family. Since the school felt like a "family", she would not trade such an environment for a higher wage. She also mentioned that she was related to the school head, first by caste, and more recently by a marriage in the family. However, feeling like family had important material benefits. This teacher was allowed to go home during work hours each day to get her son ready and fetch him to school. She also said that salaries were cut on leave but it didn't matter because she barely took any leave since she knew how difficult it is even when one teacher is absent. If they were to take leave however, she said that the school head was "very understanding" because he always tells teachers "despite being housewives you all give so much time here at school, it's a big deal being able to give so much time despite this and kids etc. So it must be something really important that you're asking for leave and so that's why he grants us leave", she said.

Another teacher who was the niece of a school head in a different school too said it was alright that she was getting under ₹5,000 a month for working a double shift, and that it was her "duty" to listen when she was scolded by the school head because it only happened when she made a mistake..

These diverse individual accounts of the school environment and teachers' experiences with management, despite the extreme homogeneity in terms of class and caste, do not necessarily indicate caste discrimination, as typically assumed. It is worth noting that the only instances of such discrimination, as mentioned in the previous chapter, involved the sole SC and ST teachers.

Explanations of who “sticks on” to become a senior teacher cannot be found in causal factors reduced to particular social identities and the differences between them. It is also not shaped by individual relationships between teachers and management that are created via family and caste associations and marital status. Sticking on in the school appears to be determined significantly by the extent to which a teacher adheres to or deviates from ideal norms of caste-Hindu womanhood; the extent to which a teacher is willing to accept the ways in which sexuality and labour are controlled, and the ways in which the school is able to provide support to teachers to fulfil their duties towards the caste-patriarchal family.

In the absence of stark demographic differences in social locations however, the ways in which caste operates is sidestepped or overlooked, as it does not present itself in the obvious forms of discriminatory practices. Findings reveal that caste informs every aspect of the context in which teachers labour - from recruitment, to “comfort” with the school environment, and the manner in which (mis)treatment is experienced by the teacher. From informal networks of recruitment to specific impositions such as wearing a sari, and a whole range of articulations about comfort, respect and (mis)treatment, caste is not a mere factor, but is in fact the cauldron in which teachers' working lives are contained.

While configurations of class and gender are generally accepted as being institutionalised, caste relations are often neglected in the analysis of teachers' work. We believe that our findings compel us to recognise the need to weave caste into a structural analysis of teachers' labour and interrogate the ways in which caste-relations too are institutionalised in teachers' work. Given this, and the complex ways in which caste-patriarchy serves to discipline teachers' labour, the work of anti-caste intellectuals and revolutionaries such as Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar and their scholarship on women's enslavement and mental slavery under the caste order, as well as the work of scholars such as Gail Omvedt that seek to flesh out the relationship of caste and class under capital are particularly pertinent in building a framework to understand teachers' labour.

Teaching as Non-Work: “Noble”, yet neither “Skilled or Unskilled”

While several teachers expressed a strong sense of exploitation and frustration with their depressed wages, the same teachers also said things such as *“It's alright what we're getting, since we've only passed Class 12”*, or *“We don't actually have to run the whole household so I guess this much is okay”*, or *“It would be better if we got what is our right, but yes I would still teach if I wasn't paid”*.

These seemingly contradictory expressions towards wage speaks to a deeper contradiction embedded in what ‘teaching’ entails in our society. The Supreme Court rulings on contract teachers in government schools codified a new kind of education labour law as they gradually turned away from upholding the labour rights of teachers (Gauri & Robinson, 2010). Although these cases pertained to contract teachers employed by the government, the broad interpretation of *where* the service is provided which were reflected in judgements such as those of Mohini Jain and Unni Krishnan normalised the conditions under which private schools could also choose to employ contract teachers at low wages (Davies, 2018).

With the devaluation of teachers' work on the one hand and notions of “noble vocation” on the other, it is important to recognise that in the Indian context, our understanding of teachers' work is informed by ideologies that are at once gendered and rooted in caste-Hindu morality. Conceptions such as teaching

being a noble vocation speak not of an association to maternal caring or any other gendered notions, but very strongly to the historical domination of education by the upper-castes.⁴³ Reading this together with articulations found in state project documents on the requirements for contract teachers as described in the 1988 DPEP report, which explicitly mention that these prospective teachers should have *seva bhava*, compel us to unpack where ideologies of *seva* come from and how these are linked to notions of teaching as a noble vocation, admittedly while being careful not to conflate the two.

Defining the nature of teachers' work as different from other work, as non-work in a sense where teachers are "neither skilled or unskilled", compelled us to turn our attention to two things: (a) The fictitious divide created between productive and reproductive work under capital, and how exploitative relations arise at the intersections of these, as social reproduction feminists have theorised (see for example of the work of Federici, Dalla Costa, Mezzadri etc.); and (b) the denial of experience of working people that this results in, which is central to determining teacher status.

In the Indian context, historically, extraction of surplus rests on the unpaid labour of the lower castes defined by traditional caste duties. Given the empirical reality of the distribution of workforce in waged work under capital even today, where the bulk of those belonging to the Shudra castes form the bulk of factory workers and Dalits form the bulk of the workforce in the most low-paying unskilled jobs (Attewell & Madheswaran, 2007; Deshpande, 2011; Omvedt, 1982; Parry, 2020), any understanding of the relationship between social reproduction and capital must be informed by the ways in which these relations were transformed. That caste still is "a material reality with a material base" (Omvedt, 1982, p. 14) is further reflected in more recent research which provide empirical evidence in wage and employment discrimination.

In the teaching profession as well, research indicates that the rise in contract-based teaching positions has led to an increase in the representation of both female teachers and men from lower castes (Samson & De, 2011). In their study on para teachers, Govinda and Josephine refer to a 1998 study conducted by DPEP, which revealed that a majority of para teachers were previously unemployed, engaged in odd jobs, or worked as casual labourers, aligning with the caste demographics identified by Samson's data. However, this practice is not limited to the 1990s when programmes promoting the recruitment of para teachers were introduced, nor is it confined to rural areas where local youth were often hired for schools in remote locations (Govinda & Josephine, 2004).

During our interactions at a government high school located in the industrial area of Urla in Raipur, we encountered and conversed with "man-sevi" or "man-dey" teachers, as they are interchangeably known. These are predominantly Bahujan, working-class men and women who had been employed on short-term contracts by the government school, receiving a monthly salary of approximately ₹3,000 for a full working day of teaching high school students.

Thus, it is not just feminisation in quantitative terms that has characterised the transformation of the teacher workforce in India, but there has also been a steady increase in the number of OBC, SC and ST teachers in the workforce. More empirical quantitative studies across regions, types of school (public and private) and levels of education are needed to make a case for a "Bahujanisation" of the teacher

⁴³ See for example (Ambedkar, 1970) and (Ambedkar & Moon, 1987) for a detailed treatise on ritual exclusion and restrictions of access to knowledge in the caste order.

workforce. However, just as studies concerning “feminisation” have gone beyond the question of numbers and explored multiple dimensions of such transformation of the teacher workforce (Kelleher et al., 2011), we would imagine that studying the myriad qualitative aspects of this demographic shift in terms of implications for teacher status or how teachers work is valued, or the changes in working conditions it has accompanied, is likely to provide valuable insights and help frame new approaches to understanding teachers’ labour.

We would like to include a word of caution of however: Studies around feminisation have been varied in nature, ranging from centring the devaluation of women’s work under patriarchal capitalism to those built around deeply sexist anxieties of a drop in educational quality because of the entry of women teachers (Acker, 1995b; Griffiths, 2006; Kelleher *et al.*, 2011). Thus, we would argue that similar inquiries into shifting caste compositions should ground themselves firmly in critical caste perspectives so as to avoid the inevitable casteist anxieties that may surround the possible “Bahujanisation”.

While it is true that much more theoretical work is required to flesh out the actual dynamics between caste and class under the current phase of capital before theorising teachers’ labour, it must be noted that any understanding of teachers’ labour, particularly Bahujan working-class women teachers’ labour, must be informed by an understanding of caste relations as part of the material base of society (Velaskar, 2016, p. 395). It does not suffice to look at teachers’ gendered identities alone in order to understand teachers’ labour and their labouring lives.

Turning to the second point regarding the denial of experience, teaching is viewed as an extension of women’s socially prescribed roles - you can go to work, but you cannot be a working woman, you are still a housewife. For an unmarried woman, it is the social anticipation of becoming the ideal housewife that governs this, under the assumption that she is biding time until she gets married, (teaching for “time pass”) since she must fulfil the demands of reproductive labour within the household as a priority. There were only very few exceptions to this where families supported the work of unmarried women teachers with the hope that they would get a government teaching position or build a career for themselves. The unspoken terms of becoming a teacher then seems contingent on continuing to be the ideal housewife (or the ideal daughter)—both notionally and in actual practice—which means your experience as a working person is denied to you.

When asked about what they thought of teaching being described as *seva* as it often is, almost all teachers said that it was both *seva* and a job. At various points they defended each of these definitions: *seva* is defended as an apt description because of how low the wage is, and job is defended because the wage is something they need. Thus, this contradiction between Brahminical notions of an ideal housewife and the reality of Bahujan working-class women as historically having always laboured outside the home whether in fields or factories, serve to further devalue teachers’ labour. Notionally, it is non-work, simply an extension of prescribed social roles of reproductive labour. In practice however, it is an important source of income for many, with the wage being indispensable to household income.

This denial of experience as working people, however, is not restricted to women teachers alone. It was found to be true for all contract teachers, hired from among unemployed youth or those working as casual

wage labourers. They are not seen as workers per se, but as enthusiastic semi-volunteers, expected to possess *seva bhava* and a “zeal for social service” and therefore deserve an “honorarium” and not a salary (Govinda & Josephine, 2005).⁴⁴

This social and legal denial of experience as a working person serves to severely devalue teachers' labour, relegating it to the status of non-work. If the identity of a teacher is either incidental to, or an extension of her/his identity as an ideal housewife or an unemployed local youth with *seva bhava* committed to service of the community, then acquiring either experience or skill must fit within the prescribed experience of their social position.⁴⁵ Skill as associated with social position is inevitably at odds with skill as associated with that of a profession. Devalued as teachers' labour is, under the weight of being a noble vocation that is neither “skilled or unskilled” and is “women's work”, means that , teaching is seen to be far more akin to non-work, with teachers denied their experience and rights as working people, rather than reflecting a tension between “profession” and “work”.

Erasure of Experience

The erasure of experience and skill is not restricted to notions that devalue teachers' labour. From our observations, the extremely high rates of transitions of teachers in and out of the workforce ensures that teachers in low-fee private schools have no accumulated experience that serves to raise their status or remuneration through their careers. Every year or two, most teachers either temporarily leave their jobs (on account of variations in demands of reproductive labour or mistreatment at school) or change schools. This means that every few years they are forced into being a new recruit. Our respondents spoke about the humiliation of this experience, which often add to a diminished sense of self and increased self-doubt. High rates of teacher turnover allow schools to structurally rely on this flux to maintain depressed wages and ensure a supply of low-cost labour by simultaneously eliminating the possibility of accumulating work experience.

Unfortunately, such periodic erasure of experience is characteristic of government schools as well, given how the system of promotions is structured where being promoted means being moved up grades or levels of schooling (from primary to middle school, then from middle school to high school, and so on). So, a teacher who has spent seven years acquiring the skill and craft needed to teach children at the primary level is suddenly rendered a novice (albeit with higher pay at the very least) in middle school given the completely different demands it places in terms of subject matter knowledge and classroom dynamics. To compare, a government subject teacher at the middle school level would have spent at least 5–7 years investing in their education and training which is equivalent to what a doctor with an MD degree invests. The reason why the question of expertise and skill is so fraught in the vocation of teaching is something that needs deeper inquiry.

Professionalism, Privatisation and the Problem of Teacher Status in India

In the cases of both low-fee private schools and government schools, the erasure of experience that is

⁴⁴ Terms like *shiksha karmi*, with their roots in voluntary service by locals in remote location schools, carry the full weight of these legacies that have consistently served to devalue teachers' work. The expectation of voluntary service from “members of the community” in exchange for meagre honorariums is characteristic of several areas of work that are tied to what are normally considered “reproductive” spheres such as health, sanitation and education. Under the grandeur of selfless and noble service to the nation and “community”, thousands of teachers, anganwadi workers and health workers (such as the *mitanins* of Chhattisgarh) continue to shoulder the bulk of the necessary reproductive work that all of production and life depends on, in exchange for dismal wages and precarious conditions of labour. Needless to say, given the demographic of the communities these workers are meant to serve, being from the community inevitably means that all these workers are typically themselves working class and Bahujan.

⁴⁵ As Rajat Roy (2020) argues in his poignant article “From Post-Colonial Irony to Dalit Truth: A Perspective on Experience”, such denial of experience in fact is a central feature of the caste order.

structurally woven into teachers' working lives, even though different from one another, actually began engagement with the question of what constitutes "skill" in teaching. In the first case of low-fee private schools, prior experience (and also training) is equivalent to no experience and no training, as is evident from the fact that there is no difference in terms of remuneration and delegation of teaching tasks in either case. Thus, the implication is that skill (or the lack of it) is not contingent on either training or experience. In the second case, experience in terms of the number of years of service counts towards higher remuneration, but the sudden change in the nature of tasks expected implies that there is an assumption that the skills required to teach at all levels of schooling are one and the same. When skill is viewed as such, what could professional development look like and what can it achieve?

We argue that in the case of teaching, professionalism as both practice and ideology can at best lend an illusion of empowerment that mystifies the real class situations of teachers (Ginsburg, 1997), especially for those for whom gender and caste oppression are significant determinants in their working lives.

There are three strands within this claim. One, our objection or claim does not come from a theoretical and ideological difference with the ideology of professionalism as much as it does from empirical evidence in the field. Our findings showed that the ideology of professionalism on the one hand, served to discipline teachers' labour in some instances, and on the other, made them want to set themselves apart from both- other young women workers in the area and their students who came from very similar social and economic locations as teachers' own families. The ideology of professionalism seemed to also seamlessly co-exist with the caste-Hindu morality that pervaded the school environment. Further, in no way did notions of professionalism actually raise teacher status as they continued to be seen as housewives or *ghar ki ladli* (pampered darling child of the house) who are teaching for "time pass". Status continued to be linked to their position in a graded hierarchy.

Two, it is important to note that the rise in contract teaching positions in India was gradually accompanied by an increasing concern for teacher professionalism articulated in and through policies such as more stringent norms on teacher qualification and recruitment. Ironically, it was precisely the stringency of norms and subsequently the strict monitoring measures to ensure the implementation of RTE norms that led to a more widespread hiring of contract teachers to meet stipulated teacher–pupil ratios and also the need for quickly obtaining sub-standard teaching certificates to prove qualification and training (see Ramachandran, 2020). There was a "proliferation of sub-standard teacher training institutes" (NCFTE, 2009) to grant such certificates, which was sustained by a stratified system of schooling. Perhaps this is not so ironic after all, if one accepts the fact that a stratified system of schooling necessarily means a stratified teacher workforce. If this stratification was structured by skills that could be acquired by anyone through training and experience, which is what "choice" and "freedom" under capital promise, then the possibilities to overcome stratification are many, making the resulting system of gradation rather flexible. However, in a society characterised by enduring structures of social stratification where labour and access to education are centrally tied to one's place in a graded hierarchy, the question of skill and experience are far more complex. In caste society, certain kinds of labour are attached to certain positions in the hierarchy as being "natural", with limits placed on who can stake claim to what skill and experience even when traditional caste-based prohibitions are lifted and occupational boundaries crossed. Further, while on the one hand requirements of having a B.Ed or D.El.Ed are a formal admission of skill, on the other, we have

a Supreme Court judgement that says teachers cannot be considered workers since they are neither skilled or unskilled. The contradiction between how teachers' work is socially and legally defined in India, and the formal definitions of teaching as a profession in policy, then, seem to work in tandem to actually devalue teachers' labour, since neither professionalism nor proletarianism (understood solely in terms of "deskilling" and other forms of a loss of control under the imperatives of capitalism alone) (Apple, 1988; Connell, 1985; Ozga & Lawn, 1988) get to the heart of the social and material structures that devalue teachers work in a society where certain "grades of people" and not just certain "grades of work" are devalued.

The third strand seeks to unravel the ideological formulations that govern teachers' work in India, caught as it is between being a "noble vocation" that is "neither skilled or unskilled" and "women's work" on the one hand, and a source of paid employment and "profession" on the other. For instance, one of the school heads we spoke to said, *"In ancient times, only Brahmins could be teachers. Only they had the right. Today, teachers must become Brahmins"*. Unable to comprehend what he meant, we asked him to elaborate.

Brahmins are those who are Brahmin in the way they live, not those who are Brahmin by caste. Those whose life is Brahmin. Meaning they live their life very simply: learn as much as they can, acquire as much knowledge as they can whether they are Shudras or Vaishyas, or even actual Brahmins, this is what it means to be a real Brahmin. And this is who a teacher should be.

He was one of the only school heads who was also the principal and would regularly invest a lot of time and energy in the workings of his school and coaching classes. He had also done a B.Ed and was well versed with education terminology and theories and was a great advocate of an atmosphere of professionalism at his school. Teachers at his school hailed him for his leadership qualities and many said they considered him their teacher, either because they had actually been former students at his coaching centre or because he had taught and supported them through their B.Ed and other courses they had pursued while they continued to teach at his school.

It would be very wrong of us to claim to have the ability to analyse this exchange in a way that does justice to the vast universe of issues it speaks to. However, there is something to be said of how it speaks to the way in which skill in teaching is viewed and also the contradiction at the heart of teacher status in India. In her paper titled "Myth and Reality of the History of Indian Education," Parimala V. Rao examines and exposes the ahistorical nature of the enduring myth that Brahmin teachers held absolute control over education. Rao identifies Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as the "first Indian to construct this myth" and highlights his dominance over the final three decades of India's 65-year-long anti-colonial struggle (Rao, 2019, p. 218). Gandhi utilised such ahistorical narratives to promote his Basic Education programme, which, as Rao astutely observes, "sanctified and spiritualised child labour" by prioritising labour over knowledge acquisition. This justification was rooted in the glorification of the caste system and Gandhi's belief that caste was not a human invention but an "immutable law of nature." Rao also notes that despite opposition from contemporary educationists who rejected Gandhi's rejection of modern education and defense of the caste hierarchy, the myth of the Brahmin teacher and submissive student "continues to dominate discussions in the history of Indian education" (p. 221). As our interaction with the school head reveals, this myth persists in popular imagination as well.

Unpacking the relationship between nobility and *seva* seems pertinent to understanding teachers' work and status. Drawing on historical usage of the notion of *seva* in various contexts, from Vivekananda's ideas of service to community to Gandhi's project to restore belief in *varnashrama* dharma in order to simultaneously restore self-respect among Hindus against the British, while also eliminating untouchability and bringing Harijans⁴⁶ into the Hindu fold, R. Srivatsan (2006), shows how *seva* was transformed into an ideal and the *sevak*, into a superior being central to freedom movement and the idea of modern India.

This preservation of caste-Hindu dominance also governs the accumulation of skill and experience, but ultimately it is linked more to what is religiously sanctioned and socially prescribed as one's duty in the caste hierarchy. In the case of teachers' work then, what we see is that as a non-Brahmin one is allowed to teach and even hailed as noble, but the respect one gets in return continues to be very different from what a Brahmin teacher performing his divinely ordained duty would get. This difference serves to further depress the remuneration received. Thus, we see that the enduring legacy of caste and its prescription of divinely ordained duties to particular positions in a graded hierarchy serve to determine the terms of entry and the conditions of work, especially in vocations such as teaching which were central to the reproduction of caste society.⁴⁷

Teaching then is an extension of one's role of performing *seva* in and to caste society, thereby denying it the status of real work through which one is allowed to accumulate real experience and acquire real skill as workers or professionals. It is precisely this then, that ensures that pleas to treat teachers as "professionals", without dismantling the real structures that shape teacher status, can only serve to obfuscate these structural determinants. The ideology of professionalism can persist in the wearing of blazers, distancing from other workers from similar social locations and extraction of more labour in less time, while keeping the structures that link teacher status to structures of social inequality intact, thereby never being able to actually raise teacher status or respect in practice. Even as the policy requirements of training is in fact a formal admission of skill in teaching, in actual practice, there is no real worth or value of such training because some teachers will never actually be considered full professionals.

This is something that was most explicitly evident in teachers' contradictory responses to the question of respect. Almost all teachers at some point or another said teachers are the most respected in society while also articulating strongly how they were disrespected by the management, by children's parents and often by family as well, and how they expressed that teachers have no "value" and are treated as utterly replaceable.

Much more work is needed to unpack the historical notions of *seva* and its ideological reformulations and implications for teaching. This is far beyond the scope of our study. However, why we stress the importance of this even with our limited insight is because for one, it speaks very loudly to the findings in our field, and two in order to open up space for an inquiry that we believe to be very pertinent to understanding teachers' labour in India. It is also important in that it reiterates a deep need to engage with anti-caste thought in order to unpack the issues surrounding the discourse around teacher status in India and how it is shaped, both as ideology and in empirical reality.

These various ideological formulations of *seva* and noble work in connection with professionalism

⁴⁶ A condescending term used by Gandhi for lower-castes that has been critiqued and rejected by the Dalit community.

⁴⁷ This bears a similarity to the way in which the African American abolitionists, feminists and socialists (see Chapter 2), pointed out how this was the terms of entry into waged work for Black men and women was tied to and characterised by notions of servitude given the lasting legacy of slavery (Davis, 1985; Jones, 1949).

and women's work, are characterised by several contradictions and connections. Notions of *seva* seem to negate the skill and status associated with professionalism, but are at odds with the fact that professionalism implies a source of remuneration that is related to skill while *seva* finds honour and nobility in unwaged volunteer service. Notions of nobility valorise the vocation of teaching and yet, Bahujan teachers (both men and women) simply do not get the respect that an honourable vocation should beget. At the same time, women teachers in the schools of our field site continue to be seen as "housewives" and are denied a "career" in teaching even as they hold on to certain aspects of a professional identity. We have in no way resolved these contradictions and connections, even as we are able to identify some of them in how they speak to the findings from the field. We only hope that the need to engage with the ways in which they operate to determine teacher status in India is shared by others and that future work in the area is informed by this shared need.

There is yet another aspect to the ideology of professionalism when it operates within a stratified system of education. On the one hand, the view of teaching as a profession implies that it is something that requires skill, and on the other, in a stratified system of schooling with a stratified workforce, some workers are brought into the system with admittedly less training, and thus a lower level of skill than others. Along with the fact that teachers have too heavy a workload to keep up with their field, this leads to the creation of a "need" for "experts" to help make up for the lack of skill (Apple, 1988). With a deep sense of frustration, the only government school teacher we interviewed said that government schools were simply treated as "laboratories" (*"Lab testing bana rakha hai humare schoolon ko"*).

Every few months you have this or that NGO and foundation coming and saying do this, do that. We'd be teaching peacefully for two months, and by the third some NGO has arrived with a new technique. One day we are told to bring 'fun of learning', at another something else. This year we have some new 72-page syllabus handed to us which we have to cover. And we also have been on strike so I don't know how we are going to cover it all.

What this points to is that when stratification of both schools and the workforce get codified into law, then ideologies that govern status and value in a society characterised by graded inequality come to shape who can lay claim to expertise and who becomes the "neither skilled or unskilled" teacher in need of guidance from the expert. This creates a stratification in the entire education workforce, with categories like the professor, the researcher, the consultant, the teacher-educator, the teacher, the contract teacher, the *anganwadi* worker, and so on.⁴⁸ Ultimately, this reiterates the fact that teacher status is inextricably linked to "who" the teacher in question is. Coupled with a system that sees moving from lower to higher grades as a "promotion" for teachers rather than what it actually is (namely a complete change), this is a question tied to the career paths of teachers, and what "expertise" means in teaching. This is something that we believe deserves serious and immediate attention in discourse in research, practice and policy and most importantly as a part of teacher reflections. If the "expert" is always someone other than the teacher, there will always be room for yet another rung of education workers above teachers who enjoy a higher status.

⁴⁸ This reminds us of a protest demonstration of *shikshakarmis* in Raipur, Chhattisgarh that we had attended in solidarity to support their demands for regularisation. We were the only private school teachers present. What we found at the protest site was astonishing to us: there were three separate protests all next to one another. As it turns out, the mid-day meal cooks and school sanitation workers were also on strike, demanding better wages and working conditions. Each *pandal* thus belonged to a different set of education workers! There was simply no connection or solidarity among them. The only reason they were all at the same site was because the city police and administration allowed protests there. The demographic in each was visibly different in terms of the social locations they appeared to come from.

The Kothari Commission of 1964, which had perhaps never imagined the spread of contractual workforce and judgments such as that in the case of A. Sundarambal, draws our attention to this in their recommendations for standardised wages for teachers under different managements:

The existing variations are purely historical in origin. The administrative authorities under the British did not wish to reduce the salaries of government servants; at the same time, they were anxious to keep salary costs down to a level which the economy could afford. Hence the salaries 'of teachers in local authority schools were deliberately fixed at a point lower than that for government teachers and those for teachers in private schools were fixed at a still lower point. This policy has had two unfortunate results: it has lowered the average wage for teachers in general, as teachers in government service were a very small minority; it has also introduced an undesirable 'caste' system among them. It is time to eliminate these relics of the past.... It is essential to adopt the principle of parity in remuneration, and simultaneously to prescribe the same qualifications for teachers in all types of schools and to introduce similar machinery for their recruitment.

Thus, while there may be obvious sociological objections to the use of the term “caste system”, by the report, there is still something of deep importance here that the report points to. For one, the recommendation for parity in wages should be a pressing demand even today. Secondly, although it seemed then in 1964 that the variations that existed among teachers were purely “historical”, today it seems to be an ominous vision for the future. While the Draft National Education Policy (NEP) released in 2019 called for the abolition of contract teachers (Draft National Education Policy [NEP] 2019), there is no explicit mention of this in the policy that was eventually released in 2020 (NEP, 2020). Both documents, however, were dangerously silent on the social structures and historical material realities that have resulted in such a massive expansion of a contractual and stratified workforce. If parity is the principal on which the future is to be imagined, inequalities that have shaped the past and continue to shape the present need to be annihilated. It is the responsibility of policy and research to address this. Given the partiality to private funding and provision that the policy professes, and the complete disregard for affirmative action,⁴⁹ the future may well be worse than the history that the Kothari Commission recalls in terms of disparity.

We are reminded once again of the compelling need for us to weave caste into a structural analysis of teachers' labour, not only because of the hierarchies that emerge in the educational workforce with caste-class locations informing terms of entry and exit into waged work, but also in how the contradictory and yet sometimes empirically compatible ideological formulations of professionalism, caste-Hindu notions of *seva*, and Brahminical notions of ideal womanhood govern how experience and skill are understood with respect to teaching and how teachers work comes to be (de)valued. It is, at once, also a call to engage with anti-caste thought more attentively in order to meaningfully unpack how teachers' labour needs to be understood in India. Given the emancipatory promise of anti-caste thought and action, it is not only an understanding that is promised, but also most importantly, a transformation in order to be able to build and sustain a practice of education for emancipation, and carve a radically different space for teachers' role in it.

⁴⁹ The Draft NEP 2019 mentioned the word reservation exactly once in order to clarify that private educational institutions do not need to implement reservations (Roy, 2019). The document released in 2020 doesn't carry the word at all. It advocates instead “a rigorous merit-based but equitable admission process” without any substantial elaboration of what equitable means (NEP, 2020).

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APPENDIX A

One of the outcomes of the study was a public webinar (see Figure A1) where we presented the initial findings of our study and teacher-researchers shared glimpses of their reflective writing. The webinar was organised by Bahujan Economists on 22 July 2022 in the form of a conversation between Silvia Federici and the Shaheed School teachers (i.e., the research team).



Figure A1: Webinar Poster: Silvia Federici in Conversation with Shaheed School Teachers

Source: Poster designed by Bahujan Economists

In 2018, we had translated Silvia Federici's *Wages against Housework* into Hindi and read it collectively at a workshop organised by us at Tilda, Chhattisgarh. The image from the poster is from an evening walk in the monsoon of 2019, after a long day of raging debates and arguments on the paper. In many ways, it was then that the seeds of this study were sown: The reading inspired us to do a survey of women's work, during which time we started meeting and speaking with a few teachers in private schools in the neighbourhood. These interactions significantly shaped the initial questions of our study.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ For a recording of the webinar, see Bahujan Econ (2022, July 24).

APPENDIX B

Other outcomes were in the form of solidarities enabled by the study. Two of these were enabled by exchanges that took place during online presentations by TESF projects.

The Water We Want

In a presentation made on the project creating water classrooms, we shared an experience related to water that one of our students had been confronted with. As a result, the project team shared a link to an online exhibition “The Water We Want”, held by UNESCO’s Global Network of Water Museums. It provided a platform for our student to express her experience through her art. Her artwork was chosen as one of six entries from India (see Figure B1; Bahujan Economists [@BahujanEcon]. (2022, June 28)). Here is a translation of the text she submitted along with the artwork:



Figure B1: The Fight for Water by Tripti Pathak | Source: Photograph of artwork from researcher’s personal repository

Water is one of the main sources of fights in our basti. On the one hand, being surrounded by factories means scarcity of access, and contamination of groundwater due to effluent and waste. On the other, as is the case in most working-class settlements, even the municipal supply line releases water that is untreated, full of insects and waste, and is not only undrinkable, but even bathing in it is difficult. Most people don’t have personal water connections in their homes and we all have to fill water from common taps. This often leads to many fights and arguments. Filling water is usually the work of girls and women. For clean drinking water, many women have to walk 2–3 km carrying large vessels of water. In all of this however, what I have had to battle most with respect to water, is caste discrimination. Recently, this resulted in a fight that risked my being put

in juvenile jail. This drawing is a depiction of that incident, and also a vision of the fight for water being a fight against caste. (Living Waters Museum, 2022)

Library Support from Bookworm Goa

We were very fortunate for the support that emerged from an interaction during a feedback session of the TEF project presentation “Facing Caste”. What began as email exchanges led to support to the library team at Shaheed School in the form of online sessions and a visit by members of the Bookworm team. We are very grateful for their generous support and hope that we are able to sustain it in a way that is mutually meaningful.

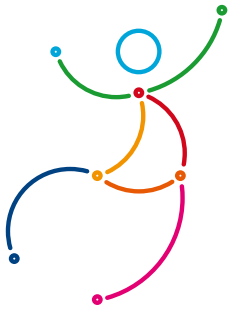
Justice for Inder Meghwal

On the 5 September 2022, as most schools around us celebrated Teachers’ Day, the students and teachers of Shaheed School along with students from Mazdoor Nagar and Mahila Mukti Morcha activists organised a rally and candlelight vigil to demand justice for Inder Meghwal, a 9-year-old boy from Jalore, Rajasthan who was beaten to death by his school headmaster for allegedly drinking water out of his pot (Jangid, 2022).



Figure B2: Protest Rally Demanding Justice for Inder Meghwal | Source: Photographs taken by researcher

Shaheed School students also put up a small *nukkad natak* (street play). Two teachers who had participated in the study also joined us, saying it was the first time they had ever been a part of a rally. For one of them, it was even the very first time she was walking on the main road in Birgaon without a scarf over her face. It was a beautiful moment of solidarity for us all to come together to demand justice for Inder Meghwal.



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