

University of Massachusetts Boston

ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

Graduate Doctoral Dissertations

Doctoral Dissertations and Masters Theses

8-30-2022

Caged Animals: The Reproduction of Social and Educational Inequalities in Indian Secondary Schools

Vishakha Agarwal

University of Massachusetts Boston

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/doctoral_dissertations



Part of the [Education Commons](#), [Education Policy Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Agarwal, Vishakha, "Caged Animals: The Reproduction of Social and Educational Inequalities in Indian Secondary Schools" (2022). *Graduate Doctoral Dissertations*. 769.

https://scholarworks.umb.edu/doctoral_dissertations/769

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Doctoral Dissertations and Masters Theses at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact library.uasc@umb.edu.

“CAGED ANIMALS”: THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL
INEQUALITIES IN INDIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Presented

by

VISHAKHA AGARWAL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts,
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2022

Public Policy Ph.D. Program

© 2022 by Vishakha Agarwal
All Rights Reserved

“CAGED ANIMALS”: THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL
INEQUALITIES IN INDIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Presented

by

VISHAKHA AGARWAL

Approved as to style and content by:

Mark R. Warren, Professor
Chairperson of Committee

Heather MacIndoe, Associate Professor
Member

Zeena Zakharia, Assistant Professor
Member

Heather MacIndoe, Program Director
Public Policy Program

Christian Weller, Chair
Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs

ABSTRACT

“CAGED ANIMALS”: THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN INDIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

AUGUST 2022

Vishakha Agarwal, B.Sc., Shiv Nadar University
M.S., University of Massachusetts Boston
Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Professor Mark R. Warren

There is a continued crisis in public schooling in India’s low-income and socially disadvantaged communities. Schools are supposed to provide a safe and healthy environment conducive to learning that ultimately helps to disrupt the transmission of intergenerational poverty and leads to social and economic mobility among low-income and socially disadvantaged students. In practice, however, schools have served to disproportionately exclude marginalized populations from attaining quality education. Previous research has revealed that less affluent students attend under-resourced schools in buildings with poor infrastructural facilities and fewer or unqualified teachers (India Infrastructure Report, 2012),

where they face hidden normative barriers that negatively affect their schooling experiences and result in their exclusion (Kabeer, 2000; Sayed et al., 2007). In this study, I examine the role of schooling practices and processes in reproducing social and educational inequalities in Indian secondary schools. Through an ethnographic study of two secondary schools in Sitapur district, I reveal the factors that shape students' everyday classroom experiences in their schools. I examine the interplay between teacher-student interactions, peer interactions, student engagement, students' perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. I employed multiple methods of data collection – self-administered surveys, participant observations, in-depth interviews with students and teachers, and informal discussions with students and teachers.

Evidence from this study suggests that several factors define students' experiences in their schools, including the dilapidated and under-resourced physical infrastructure with inadequate facilities, teachers' deficit views of students from low-income and lower caste backgrounds, and caste-based discrimination by both teachers and peers. Findings also suggest the persistent use of violent disciplinary practices by teachers to punish and reprimand poor and lower caste students. Furthermore, the study's results indicate that students exercise their agency in response to violent discipline and resist harsh, toxic, and humiliating experiences at school. Students skip school and disengage from school to avoid violence and humiliation and to save face and preserve their dignity, which ultimately contributes to their exclusion from access to education. In conclusion, teachers' lack of care and deficit thinking creates an exclusionary cycle of learning and inadvertently pushes

students out of school, and perpetuates the long-standing social and educational inequalities creating an inequitable school system.

This dissertation contributes to the research literature on the “black box” of secondary schooling by gathering detailed insights into marginalized students’ schooling experiences of social discrimination in large-scale research, whose voices are rarely heard. It supports the need for a bottom-up approach to policymaking, and through an examination of students’ classroom experiences in the two different schools provides a grounded picture of educational processes and practices in secondary schools – in fact, it exposes the disconnect between policy and practice. The findings suggest the need for concepts of self-reflexivity, culturally responsive practices, and Human Rights Education (HRE) to be introduced in teacher training to counter the deficit views and stereotype threats teachers hold and for teacher transformation. Once teacher transformation occurs, several benefits follow, as teachers now become allies to the students and try to focus on the root of the problem rather than using corporal punishment when students make mistakes. In doing so, this study responds to the crucial need to dismantle the systemic inequalities that emerge from unequal access to the good quality education provided in Indian schools. This dissertation contributes to the research literature on the “black box” of secondary schooling, by gathering detailed insights of marginalized students’ schooling experiences of social discrimination, in the large-scale research, whose voices are rarely heard. It supports the need for a bottom-up approach to policymaking, and through an examination of the students’ classroom experiences in the two different schools provides a grounded picture of educational processes and practices in secondary schools – in fact, it exposes the disconnect between policy and

practice. The findings suggest the need for concepts of self-reflexivity, culturally responsive practices, and Human Rights Education (HRE) to be introduced in teacher training to counter the deficit views and stereotype threats held by teachers, and for teacher's transformation. Once teacher transformation occurs, several benefits follow, as teachers now become allies to the students, and try to focus on the root of the problem rather than using corporal punishment when students make mistakes. In doing so, this study responds to the crucial need to dismantle the systemic inequalities that emerge from unequal access to good quality education provided in Indian schools.

DEDICATION

To all the students who feel like “caged wild animals” in their schools and need to “break free” from the shackles of a harsh school system that serves to humiliate and dehumanize them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Life of a PhD can be isolating. It most certainly is challenging both mentally and emotionally. I was fortunate to have the moral and emotional support from many. I am immensely grateful to all the people from the different corners of the world who kept me going, and motivated me when I was at my lowest.

I am grateful to my advisor and dissertation chair, Professor Mark Warren, for his guidance, support, and patience throughout the dissertation research process – its design, data collection period, analyses, and the writing. You were the best source of support throughout this process. Your rigorous advice and constructive criticism helped shape my thinking of this project and led it to fruition. In addition, I am thankful to Professor Heather MacIndoe, who served on my committee, for her guidance and her structured feedback that brought clarity to the presentation of the material and my writing. Professor Zeena Zakharia, thank you for serving on my committee and for your unfailing encouragement. Over the past few years, you generously offered me support, shown interest in my work, and patiently listened to my ideas. Our countless discussions on issues impacting education and your expertise in international education studies helped me in strengthening the arguments in this dissertation. I am eternally grateful for having you as a mentor. You inspire me.

“Caged Animals” would have never come to life without the support of the students who shared the everyday experiences of their life at school and at home. This dissertation would not have existed without the cooperation of the students, teachers and the principals at

the two schools in Sitapur district. Thank you for placing your trust in me and spending hours over days and months with me to share your stories, experiences, and insights. You welcomed me and made me a part of your respective schools for the limited amount of time I was there; I am indebted to you all.

At the Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs at UMass Boston, where I was housed for the last six years, I would like to thank all the faculty members who equipped me with the research tools and analytical skills that helped me in shaping this project. Without the rigorous training and skillsets I gained throughout the coursework in the first three years in the program, I would not have achieved this excellence level. In addition, Melissa Quashie, I would like to thank you for all the support you provided to me as an international student. Without you, I would be lost in the administrative process. Also, I am thankful to the University of Massachusetts Boston, which provided me several research grants and supported the field research and writing for this dissertation. These included the International Seed Funding and the Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant. Dr. Susan Crandall, thank you for being my mentor and for making me a part of the Center for Social Policy. You saw a potential in me that I had yet to see in myself, you encouraged me and helped me grow as an individual and as a researcher and I will be forever grateful for that.

I also want to thank the many friends, colleagues, and individuals who were a source of support for this dissertation. To my friends in Boston — Namesh Killemsetty, Bianca Ortiz-Wythe, Tian Wang, Matt Bond, Felipe Herrera, Jason Wright, Patricio Belloy, Kundan Mishra, Trevor Mattos, Osahon Amiuwu, Tolan Thornton, and Ryan Duncan — thank you for welcoming me in your lives and being great friends; you all have given me so much

laughter and support. To Brian Beauregard and Sokha Eng, working alongside you both has been a treat. You both have been my support system in this last couple years, I would not have made it to the end if not for your support and the boost of confidence you gave me. To Caitlin and Juan, you have been my home away from home. You both have welcomed me with open arms in your family and given me so much love, my gratitude to you. To Namesh, who was always a call or a text away at all hours of the day. You provided me with the mental strength needed during the long year of COVID. You helped me cope with everything going on in my personal and professional life. Thank you also for proofreading my manuscripts and for being a sounding board when I needed it. Our daily banter was the best part of my days.

My deepest gratitude to my family for their support and encouragement. Last but certainly not the least, my closest confidante, Malin Höglund, where would I be without you? No words would do justice in expressing how grateful I am to you. Despite being a thousand miles away, you were always there for me in the worst of times. You not only lent me your shoulder, but also motivated me and provided me with boundless support and wisdom. You inspire me, my friend!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IX
LIST OF FIGURES	XVI
LIST OF TABLES	XVII
PROLOGUE: “CAGED ANIMALS”	1
CHAPTER	Page
1. INTRODUCTION: A STUDY OF STUDENTS’ CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES	5
Inequality And Failure of The Education System.....	7
The Purpose of this Study	10
Education Policy in the Indian Context	12
Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009	13
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)	13
Caste system in India	15
Indian Education system: levels and types	19
Why Secondary Education?	20
Motivation behind Situating the Study in Sitapur.....	22
Significance of this Study	25
Plan of the Dissertation	26
2. THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW	29
Theoretical Framework—Social Exclusion	30
Literature review	33
Barriers to children’s education	33
What is happening inside schools	39
Gaps in the literature	49
Conceptual framework.....	50
3. RESEARCH METHODS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH	52
An interpretive and comparative ethnographic approach	54
Research setting and Sampling strategy	57
Access to research sites.....	58
Data collection strategies	60
Data Management and Analysis	73
Ensuring Rigor	77

CHAPTER	Page
Navigating ethical dilemmas.....	78
Informed consent and assent, confidentiality, and anonymity.....	79
Ethics of classroom observations.....	85
Use of corporal punishment and ethical dilemmas.....	86
Reciprocity.....	87
Researcher Positionality.....	88
Conclusion.....	91
4. SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS.....	93
The Schools—Village Secondary School (VSS) & City Secondary School (CSS) ...	96
Contextual background.....	96
Academic calendar and daily routine.....	101
The actors in the school system.....	103
The Students.....	103
The Teachers.....	108
The Physical Environment of Focal Schools.....	113
School and classroom infrastructure.....	113
The Two Grade IX Classrooms Observed.....	125
Classroom infrastructure.....	126
Class size.....	127
Furniture, facilities, and resources.....	128
The organization of desks and the seating arrangement.....	130
Why VSS or CSS?.....	132
Conclusion.....	135
5. “TEACHERS BEAT US WITH WORDS”: TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS & PEER INTERACTIONS MATTER.....	139
Everyday Pedagogical Practices at the Two Schools.....	143
“Write More, Explain Less”.....	145
Textbooks Supplementary to Notebooks.....	146
Students’ Learning Needs and Coping Mechanisms.....	148
Examinations and Cheating.....	150
“Students Do Not Want To Do Anything, Learn Anything, No Matter How Much We Try.”.....	154
“Children’s Education is Secondary for Parents.”.....	156
Violent Disciplinary Practices.....	158
Physical punishment.....	160
Verbal Aggression and Humiliation.....	165
Peer-to-Peer Interactions and Perceptions.....	175
Positive Teacher-Student Interactions.....	179
Students’ Responses to Violent Discipline.....	181
“I Do Not Feel Like Teaching Today.”.....	185

CHAPTER	Page
Conclusion	189
6. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND STUDENT RESISTANCE	192
Student engagement and disengagement	194
Practices that facilitated or hindered student engagement	196
Factors that Hindered Student Engagement.....	201
Pedagogical practices and violent disciplinary practices.....	202
Peer perceptions and relations	206
Caste-based discrimination at CSS	208
Caste-based discrimination at VSS.....	215
Teachers call out students for not paying fees	219
Home-related factors.....	220
“Time passes quickly at school.”	222
Student resistance or truancy as students exercising their agency.....	223
Conclusion	229
7. CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF INDIAN SCHOOLS IN REPRODUCING SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES.....	233
Impact of Violent Discipline and Abuse on Students – “A Teacher Beat A Boy So Much That He Fainted, and After That, He Did Not Attend School for the Entire School Year.”	239
Truancy As Students Exercising Their Agency	243
Social exclusion	246
Conceptual Framework (revised).....	248
Contribution to research practices in the Global South	250
Policy Implications	252
Limitations of the Study.....	257
Implications for future research	259
APPENDIX A: STUDENT PROFILES AT THE TWO SCHOOLS.....	262
APPENDIX B: TEACHER PROFILES AT THE TWO SCHOOLS.....	264
APPENDIX C.1: SEATING CHART GRADE IX-VSS.....	266
APPENDIX C.2: SEATING CHART GRADE IX-CSS.....	267
APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS AND RATIONALE	268
APPENDIX E: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	269
APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION GUIDE.....	273

CHAPTER	Page
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS	275
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS.....	278
APPENDIX I. ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR TEACHERS	280
APPENDIX J. ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR STUDENT’S PARENTS.....	281
APPENDIX K. ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR STUDENTS.....	282
APPENDIX L: FEE STRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS IN GRADE IX & X AT VSS.....	283
REFERENCES	284

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES	Page
1. A Diagrammatic Representation of the Caste System	16
2. Indian school system by means of level of education.....	19
3. Conceptual Framework.....	51
4. Location of the Two Schools	97
5. Boundary Wall: Village Secondary School	114
6. School Building: Village Secondary School.....	115
7. School Building: City Secondary School	119
8. Vicious cycle leading to exclusion from learning.....	141
9. Social Exclusion of Marginalized Students in Secondary Schools	249

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES	Page
1. School-level Characteristics of Focal Schools.....	97
2. Demographic characteristics of students in Grade IX at focal schools	105
3. Physical Characteristics of Focal Schools	122
4. What students like and dislike about their school.....	134
5. Similarities and Differences at VSS And CSS.	169
6. Teachers and School Management: Similarities and Differences	187
7. Girls' attitude towards peers from Dalit communities at CSS.....	211
8. Caste-Based Discrimination at the Two Schools	219
9. Fee Structure for Students in Grade IX and X at VSS.....	283

PROLOGUE: “CAGED ANIMALS”

All the students act like *caged wild animals* (emphasis added) when the school gets over. They try to run out of the school as soon as the bell rings. It looks as if the students were caged or tied and have now been released, so they are all running away. That is how the students behave. I dislike that.

— Chia, Grade IX, City Secondary School

Chia, a Grade IX student from City Secondary School (CSS), describes the students’ behavior, at her school, as that of *caged wild animals* who try to run away from their captors as they are released. Two crucial points need attention: (1) students act like *caged animals*, and (2) students run away after being released. “Caged animals” here are low-income and lower caste students who attend hierarchical school systems that reproduce social and educational inequalities by using discriminatory and exclusionary school processes and practices. The second point about students running away after being released explains students’ responses to the humiliating schooling experiences defined by infractions like violent school discipline by teachers. Peers copy the insensitivities of the teachers and mold their views towards these students based on teachers’ behavior and attitude. As a result, they

reinforce the degrading experiences of lower caste students. This dissertation examines these processes, revealing various school-level and home-related factors that shape students' experiences in secondary schools and the role of these factors in reproducing social and educational disparities faced by children.

Education promises economic and social mobility for low-income and socially disadvantaged communities (Jain & Prasad, 2017). For low-income and socially disadvantaged communities, schools are supposed to provide a safe and healthy environment conducive to learning that ultimately helps to level the playing field. However, schools have served to disproportionately exclude marginalized populations from attaining quality education. Moreover, secondary education is supposed to prepare students for higher education and provide vocational training for those students who will discontinue their education at this level (Majumdar, 2005; R. Singh & Mukherjee, 2015). But, equal access to good quality secondary education, especially for socially and economically disadvantaged students, is a critical concern in India. If these students get access to secondary schools, they face discriminatory practices based on caste, class, and gender (Chugh, 2011). Plus, they tend to attend schools that do not have adequate infrastructural facilities, trained and qualified teachers, face teacher shortages or absenteeism, and experience the negative attitude of teachers (Bandyopadhyay, 2017; Biswal, 2011).

As you will see in this dissertation, several factors define students' experiences in their schools, including the dilapidated and under-resourced physical infrastructure with inadequate facilities, violent school discipline by teachers, their deficit views of students from low-income and lower caste backgrounds, and caste-based discrimination by both peers

and teachers. Such negative experiences hinder student engagement, adversely affecting their learning outcomes and subjectivities – perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. The negative schooling experiences of social discrimination, violent discipline, and abuse by teachers, which the peers then reinforce, make students feel alienated and excluded and diminish their sense of school belonging. Students internalize this discourse of discrimination and violence against them and justify teachers' use of violence as "for their own good." These schooling processes and practices serve to discipline and punish students and push them out of school and into a life of limited opportunities and restrict their social and economic mobility.

Using "Caged Animals" as the title of this dissertation captures students' lived experiences in their schools. It signifies the atrocities and abuse by the teachers and peers that make students feel "caged" or "stuck" in their school and life. Students try to break free and exclude themselves from the humiliating hierarchical school system by skipping school and remaining absent. By responding to violent discipline by skipping school, students exercise their agency and resist the harsh, toxic, and humiliating experiences at school. School absenteeism is traditionally seen through a negative lens and labeled as truancy or unexplained absences; however, in this study, I show that by responding to violent abuse by remaining absent, students are protecting their dignity. Students are trying to break free from a system that is meant to uplift them but ends up restricting them in terms of their educational outcomes, aspirations, and future opportunities. Nevertheless, by responding and resisting in the ways they do, students end up participating in their own exclusion from educational

opportunities. In this manner, schools reinforce the social order and lead to the social and educational exclusion of poor and lower caste students.

In short, this dissertation reveals the experiences of poor and lower caste students enmeshed in schools that further their disadvantage and tells the story of how some of them “break free” from their “cage” only to face future restrictions and limitations in life. In writing this dissertation, I hope to provoke readers into action against the use of violent disciplinary practices in schools and in support of transforming Indian schooling towards its promise of quality education for all children.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A STUDY OF STUDENTS' CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

Life at school matters. Students from low-income and Dalit communities beat all odds to attend secondary schools in hopes of a better future. Education provides a route to greater social mobility and a way out of poverty for the marginalized (UNESCO, 2010, p. 135) and can be an equalizer of opportunity and life chances (Velaskar, 2013). However, issues of educational inequality in terms of access and quality education continue to plague the Indian educational system (Ramachandran, 2018), and more so at the secondary level (Agrawal, 2014). Secondary education prepares students for higher education and entering the formal labor market. Consequently, completing secondary schooling becomes crucial in disrupting the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty (Bandyopadhyay & Chugh, 2020). Yet, access to secondary education is out of reach to a large proportion of the population.

In contemporary India, Dalit communities face discrimination and stigmatization based on their ascribed hereditary status of “untouchable,” despite the constitutional and legislative prohibitions of discrimination on the grounds of caste (Waughray, 2010). Dalits

belong to the lowest strata in the hierarchical caste system. The data indicates the persistence of graded inequality among Dalit communities on education, health, employment, occupations, income, and overall well-being (Simon & Thorat, 2020). Most Dalits live lives of poverty and economic hardship and face exclusion from mainstream participation in Indian society and economy. Furthermore, caste identities intersect with other significant structural factors such as gender, poverty, and rural residence to limit individual's access to formal education and economic opportunities. One might hope that school would be a place where low-income and Dalit students are supported and encouraged to succeed and receive guidance on achieving their goals and aspirations. Yet, the opposite is true for many low-income and socially disadvantaged students.

Unfortunately, the struggles, stereotypes, and patterns of failure that low-income and Dalit students experience often begin in school. Children from low-income and socially disadvantaged families have unequal access to good quality secondary schools in India (Biswal, 2011; Stewart, 2009). Most of the students in rural areas tend to attend government schools, as the growth of government schools is stagnating while the number of private schools is increasing (Chanana, 2014). The schools that these students attend have inadequate infrastructural facilities, a high teacher-to-student ratio, and overcrowded classrooms (Chanana, 2014; Majumdar & Mukherjee, 2020; Tilak, 2020).

What is clear is that children from low-income families living in rural areas face a greater disadvantage. This disadvantageous situation becomes worse if the child is from socially disadvantaged communities such as Dalits or Scheduled Tribes and if the child is a girl (Ramachandran, 2018). Therefore, when addressing the issue of social equity in

education, factors like identity (gender, caste, cultural, religious, occupational), location (rural, urban, tribal, etc.), socioeconomic status of the family, and type of school attended, become important. These factors interlace and influence not only the formal access to school but also how children are treated inside these schools, the social relationships they have with teachers and peers, their participation in school activities, the type of school facilities provided, the teaching and learning practices used, and the support students receive or not at home (ibid.).

In this dissertation, I examine the schooling experiences of students from low-income and socially disadvantaged communities aged 13-16 years. I bring the students' voices to light to better understand the lived everyday experiences of these students inside their schools. At the same time, I investigate how interactions between teachers and students and among peers might differ based on the ascribed characteristics (caste, gender, and class) and the impact on students' educational outcomes and subjectivities – perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. In the end, I examine how these schooling practices and processes may or may not aid in the reproduction of social and educational inequalities in Indian secondary schools.

Inequality And Failure of The Education System

Despite India's immense progress over the past two decades in universalizing education, there continue to be sharp inequalities in educational outcomes along social, economic, and cultural lines (Nambissan & Rao, 2013). Poor and socially disadvantaged households face structural barriers to accessing schooling, both in elementary and secondary education. These barriers include the cost of schooling, physical distance to school, and

access to school through safe roads or infrastructure inside schools (toilet facilities, drinking water) (Ramanaik et al., 2018). Along with structural barriers inside schools, students face hidden barriers to education, like preferential treatment of children from higher socioeconomic and cultural groups, regressive pedagogical approaches, and corporal punishment and verbal harassment (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011; Nambissan, 2009).

In addition, in its efforts to expand educational opportunities, the government has inadvertently reproduced the existing social and economic inequalities among communities (Ramachandran, 2018). Across the country, government schools primarily cater to the poor, creating social segregation from the rich, who send their children to good quality, fee-paying private schools. The schools attended by students from affluent families have better resources and facilities with state-of-the-art equipment and textbooks and qualified teachers; meanwhile, less affluent students attend under-resourced schools in buildings with poor infrastructural facilities and fewer or unqualified teachers (India Infrastructure Report, 2012). Furthermore, research shows that inside schools, students from low-income and socially disadvantaged communities tend to attend schools where they face hidden normative barriers that negatively affect their schooling experiences and result in their exclusion (Kabeer, 2000; Sayed et al., 2007).

The educational outcomes among low-income and socially disadvantaged communities are distressing. Data from Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) shows that the transition rate from elementary to secondary education among students nationally has dropped from 91.6 percent in 2014-15 to 89.2 percent in 2017-2018. In addition, in 2017-2018, only about 65 percent of the students completed secondary

education at the national level. Moreover, the dropout rate among Dalit students at the secondary level has increased from 18.7 percent in 2014-15 to 21.6 percent in 2017-2018 (U-DISE) nationwide. Furthermore, the learning levels of students in rural India have been low. According to ASER 2016, 27% of children in Grade VIII are unable to read a Grade II level text, and 57% are unable to do simple division taught in Grade IV (ASER, 2018). These statistics indicate that students in rural areas are not receiving proper education. Inadequate levels of learning at the end of the elementary level cause a serious challenge to secondary education (Ramanujan & Deshpande, 2018). It poses two threats: (1) low transition rates from elementary to secondary education and (2) low retention and completion rates at the secondary level.

There is a continued crisis in public schooling in India's low-income and socially disadvantaged communities. The problems of public education in India are embedded in unequal power relations and social and economic inequality in the larger society (Rao, 2019). Government schools in rural areas have a persistent problem of teacher absenteeism, and teachers have a negative attitude towards students (Bandyopadhyay, 2017). Throughout India, low-income and Dalit students are more likely to be labeled as "stupid" and "uneducable" (Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003), made to sit separately in class, stigmatized (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019), and punished (V. Morrow & Singh, 2014). In addition, they face covert and overt forms of discrimination where teachers call them derogatory names (Thorat & Newman, 2010) and force the students to do menial chores (Nambissan, 2009). Such discriminatory practices inhibit students' ability to learn in classrooms and attain better educational outcomes.

The lack of equal opportunity in quality education has denied low-income and socially disadvantaged communities the access and opportunity to social and economic benefits that other Indian citizens enjoy. There is a crucial need to dismantle the systemic inequalities that emerge from unequal access to good quality education provided in schools. This requires analytical attention to the way in which systemic inequalities emerge in schools, and the social mechanisms that may be reproducing these inequalities. In this dissertation, I articulate the need for equity in quality education and call attention to the various factors that undermine and impede efforts to make it an attainable goal.

The Purpose of this Study

While the broad outlines of the inequitable educational outcomes for low-income and lower caste children and some of its causes are known, we lack detailed research on the processes that occur in the schools serving these students. Poor quality of education can reinforce the inequalities faced by low income and socially disadvantaged children. Though the expansion of the secondary education system has improved access to education for low income and socially disadvantaged children living in rural areas, there is little evidence on what is happening inside these secondary schools, whether children are learning, and children's experiences of schooling. This ethnographic study seeks to understand the factors that shape students' everyday classroom experiences in secondary schools and how these factors impact student engagement and learning outcomes, students' perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. In doing so, it investigates how schools may or may not aid in reproducing educational and social inequalities.

In examining the schooling experiences of students and how teacher-student interactions and peer interaction might shape these experiences, the study employs an ethnographic approach using qualitative methods to address the following research questions: (1) To what extent do teachers treat Dalit students differently than higher caste students and how do they do so? (2) Are peer relationships among students in classrooms influenced by caste differences among them and, if so, how? (3) How do teacher-student interactions and peer interactions shape Dalit student's perceptions of self and their sense of school belonging? (4) How do teacher-student interactions and peer interactions affect the educational outcomes and life experiences (future outcomes) of Dalit students either directly or through their impact on student's perceptions of self and sense of school belonging? Together, these questions are intended to complement each other to build a complete picture of the discriminatory practices that maybe taking place in schools and the impact these practices might have on the students.

This dissertation draws upon seven consecutive months of fieldwork from September 2019 to first-week March 2020. During this period, I spent the core of my time in two schools in the Sitapur district in Uttar Pradesh, India. Of the two schools, one is located in a rural area and the other in an urban area. For this ethnographic study, I collected data using multiple methods —participation observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, informal conversations, and a self-administered student survey. Since, this is a study about students' experiences, the core of the study centers upon the experiences of Grade IX students at the two schools. The students who attend these schools belong to low-income and socially disadvantaged communities, majority of whom live in rural areas.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the comparative and international education research by casting a light on teachers' lack of care and deficit thinking that creates an exclusionary cycle from learning for disadvantaged students and inadvertently pushes them out of schools and perpetuates the long-standing social and educational inequalities creating an inequitable school system.

Education Policy in the Indian Context

Education policies and initiatives have prioritized on issues of school access and participation rates, focusing on inputs rather than outputs. To improve access and participation at the elementary level, the Government of India passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (GOI, 2009), which included a legal mandate to provide free and compulsory education to every child at the age group of 6–14 years. This provision led to an increasing number of children enrolling and completing elementary education, creating a demand for the expansion of secondary education. To meet this demand, the central government launched the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) in 2009 to make secondary education of good quality available, accessible, and affordable to all young persons in the age group 15-16 years (MHRD, 2009). But the question is how well have these policies been adopted by schools and what is happening at the ground-level. How well do these policies translate into real-life schooling practices?

The fieldwork for this dissertation reveals the ways in which the educational policies launched by the Government of India are practiced in the two schools. Through this dissertation, I emphasize on the contradictions in the policy design and policy implementation on certain aspects of the two policy frameworks. The data collected in this dissertation

through the field visits, observations, and informal conversations and interviews with teachers and students, shows the disconnect between what is stated in the policy documents versus how policy is practiced and implemented in Indian schools.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009

To achieve educational rights and the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) embodied in international declarations and guaranteed by the Constitution of India, the Government of India (GOI) enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, also known as, the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009. The Act reinforces the government's constitutional obligation to provide a free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6-14 years. The Act sets norms and standards related to school infrastructure, curriculum, inclusive and equitable education, quality and quantity of teachers, retention policy, discrimination and harassment, and holistic development of the child (GOI, 2009).

An important provision enlisted in the RTE Act that is of particular relevance to this dissertation is Section 17 clause (1) which states that “no child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment,” banning the use of corporal punishment in schools. In this dissertation I am concerned with is the implementation of this clause in schools.

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)

The second policy framework that this dissertation looks at is the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) launched in 2009 by the central government to achieve Universal Secondary Education (USE) in India. The scheme was initiated with “the vision of making secondary education of good quality available, accessible, and affordable to

all young persons in the age group 15-16 years. The objective of the scheme is to enhance access and improve quality of education at secondary stage, while ensuring equity” (MHRD, 2009). The scheme envisioned improving the enrollment for Grades IX-X by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of every habitation, improving quality of education imparted at secondary level through making all secondary schools conform to prescribed norms, removal of gender, socioeconomic and disability barriers.

RMSA also aims at maintaining standard in secondary education by making schools conform to the prescribed norms related to physical facilities, staff, and academic matters (MHRD, 2009). The developmental strategies of the RMSA focus on improving access, quality, equity, and school effectiveness (Biswal, 2011). It stresses on the provision of required infrastructure (especially library, science and mathematics laboratories, computer lab); providing teachers in all the subjects - especially mathematics and science; and remedial courses to enable students to reach Grade IX level (Bandyopadhyay, 2017; Jain & Prasad, 2017). The RMSA framework also calls for the need to reform the examination system to move away from rote learning, adolescent education programme, school-level counselling and sensitization of the school head and teachers.

As noted earlier in this dissertation, several communities such as the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Muslims and other minority groups, and families below the poverty line experience discrimination and marginalization within the education system due to the intersectionality of their economic, social, and cultural identities (Gowda, 2020). The Indian education system, perpetuates economic, social, and cultural inequities and hence, it is essential to trace how the education

policies in India address issues of discrimination and social and economic equity. By focusing on these aspects of the education policies, I hope to interrogate how these are implemented at schools at the local level.

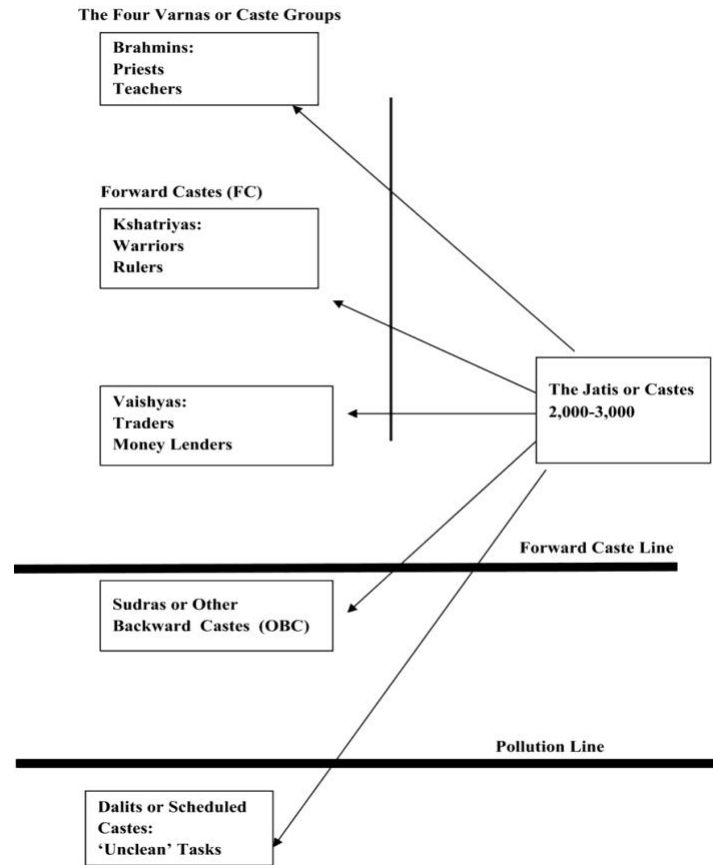
Caste system in India

The caste system in India stratifies the Hindus into mutually exclusive caste groups, a rigid social order in which membership is defined at birth. The four groups of the caste system are: *Brahmins* (priests, teachers), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaisyas* (farmers, traders, merchants), and the *Sudras* (laborers) (Deshpande, 2000; Waughray, 2010). Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas are considered ‘high caste’ Hindus, and the Sudras constitute the ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBCs) (see Figure 1 for a diagrammatic representation). A fifth group was created, and regarded as ‘impure and polluting,’ therefore ‘untouchable’ and unfit for social interaction with anyone outside their caste (Simon & Thorat, 2020). They have been associated with manual scavenging, leather workers, street sweepers and cobblers—tasks considered too menial or degrading to be performed by members of other caste groups (Thorat & Newman, 2010). This group was referred to as Untouchables (now Ex-Untouchables)¹ came to be called Dalits² (“oppressed” in English). The term *Dalit* incorporates a diverse set of people who are by no means a homogeneous group, likely to be divided on the basis of languages, religion, region of residence, gender, social class, and political affiliation(Still, 2014).

¹ The use of the term Untouchables is not appropriate as the practice of Untouchability has been legally proscribed.

² The members of this community do not use the term Dalit to self-describe themselves. They hardly unite under a single political banner (Still, 2014).

Figure 1: A Diagrammatic Representation of the Caste System



Source: Borooah et al. (2015, p. 7)

There are two key features of the caste system: (1) the rights of each caste group are fixed in advance and made hereditary by birth. The caste at the top has most rights and privileges and these reduce gradually in descending order. (2) Each caste is isolated and separated through endogamy (marriage within one's caste); thus, restricting social relations between castes. Traditionally, the Dalits had no right to property, education, and civic rights,

except obligatory services to the four castes above them in hierarchy (Simon & Thorat, 2020). Other prominent features include, hereditary passing down of occupations, norms of purity and pollution, spatial segregation of residence, eating in the same utensil that had previously been used by a Dalit, eating food cooked by a Dalit, and reliance on caste-based (social) networks for coping.

These features of the caste system makes it exclusionary and especially difficult for Dalits to break the vicious cycle of exclusion and move up the social and economic ladder (World Bank, 2011). The results of such social exclusion and discrimination have been widespread deprivation and poverty for the Dalits, who have traditionally been placed at the bottom rung of the hierarchical caste system. This inequality implicates the historic exclusion and discrimination of certain groups and castes, in particular the Dalits, in all societal relations—social, economic, political, and cultural (Thorat, 2009).

In 1950 the Indian Constitution written for a newly independent India, in Article 17 declared the practice of untouchability as illegal and initiated several measures of general empowerment to combat the disadvantages faced by these socially marginalized and deprived groups. This move was in response to the social stigma and economic backwardness borne by individuals belonging to this group (Borooah et al., 2014). Article 341 and Article 342 of the Indian Constitution includes a list of *castes* and *tribes* entitled to special provision and benefits and all groups included in this list are referred to as “Scheduled Castes” (SCs)³ and “Scheduled Tribes” (STs), respectively. The term, “Scheduled Castes,” is synonymous

³ The term “Scheduled Castes (SC)” comes from the Constitutional Order passed by the Government of India (GoI) in 1950, which consists of the names of castes that are earmarked for special treatment, such as reservations in legislation, public sector employment and government-run educational institutions (World Bank, 2011). In this study, the terms Scheduled Castes and Dalits have been used interchangeably.

with the former “untouchable” castes or Dalits. In post-Independence India, based on the legal categorizations, the castes have been divided into four groups: Forward Castes (FC), SC, ST, and OBC. OBCs are educationally and economically backward. They became an important category after the decision of the government to implement the Mandal Commission Report (GOI, 1980) in the 1990s. The National Backward Commission for Backward Castes releases a list of OBCs for every state; each state government also releases their own list (Goel & Husain, 2018).

According to the Census of India (2011), the total population of SCs have risen from 166.6 million (2001) to 201.4 million (2011) —a growth rate of 21%. Nationally, the share of SCs in the population has gone up marginally to 18.5% (rural) and 12.6% (urban). Population of STs has increased by 24% to 104.3 million in 2011. The population share of STs is 11.3% in rural areas and 2.8% in urban areas (Census of India, 2011).

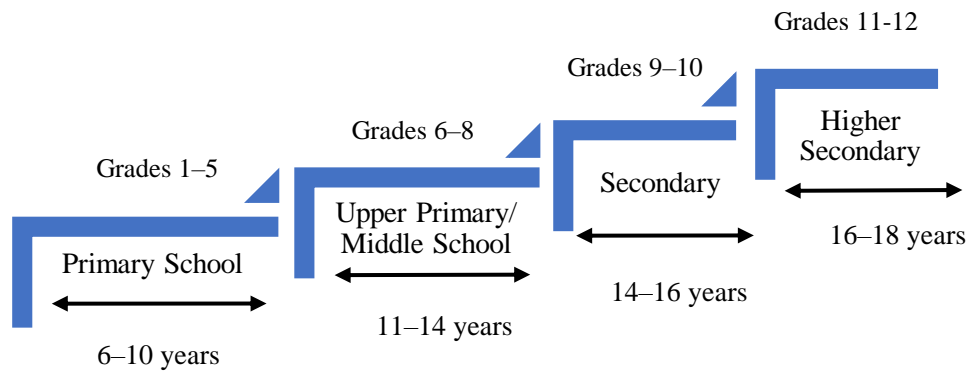
In contemporary India, despite constitutional and legislative prohibitions of Untouchability and discrimination on grounds of caste, Dalit populations experience discrimination, stigmatization, disadvantage, and violence on grounds of their ascribed hereditary status as “Untouchable” (GOI, 1980). “The lived-reality of the people who belong to this erstwhile category continues to remain subordinate and shamefully stigmatized” (Still, 2014). In addition, caste limits the economic outcomes of many people in India. Many people who are poor have a “double jeopardy: they are at the bottom of the income ladder and social hierarchy” (Borooah et al., 2014). The way of India’s poor is blocked due to the discriminatory attitudes and social stigma they face due to their caste identities and religious superiority (ibid.). Studying discrimination on the basis of untouchability is of immense

importance both for documenting how discriminatory practices change over time and for correcting the misconception that exists in some circles that untouchability is no longer a problem in modern India (Coffey et al., 2018). Further, the blockages that occur due to these discriminatory attitudes need to be cleared before India’s poor can be marched out of poverty (Borooah et al., 2014).

Indian Education system: levels and types

The education system in all the states and Union Territories of India follows a 5+3+2+2 patten, and is divided into four distinct levels: five years of primary (grades 1–5)⁴, three years if upper primary or middle school (grades 6–8), two years of secondary (grades 9–10) with two additional secondary years, known as higher secondary, (grades 11–12) completed in a school or college (as shown in figure 1) (Goodnight & Bobde, 2018).

Figure 2: Indian school system by means of level of education



There are three types of schools in India: government, private aided, and private unaided (recognized and unrecognized). **Government schools** are schools that are

⁴ Grades are commonly referred to as *Standards*, in the Indian school system: Grade 5 is equivalent to Standard (Std.) V (Goodnight & Bobde, 2018).

established, financed, and managed by the central, state, or local governments. **Government aided schools** are those that are managed privately but receive grants-in-aid for teacher salaries from the central and state governments or local bodies. These schools are subject to follow the central and state rules and regulations and are required to admit all eligible students irrespective of their religion, language, caste, or ability. Schools that are run and managed by a private entity through the school fees and funds that these schools raise are referred to as **private unaided schools**. These schools do not receive any grants-in-aid from the government. Such schools have an autonomy over the academic curriculum, medium of instruction, type of students enrolled, student-to-teacher ratio, and tuition costs charged. The government mandates that all schools be recognized by the state based on compliance to defined norms. However, there are numerous private schools that do not meet these norms and are considered unrecognized schools⁵. Unrecognized schools are typically private schools that charge a low-fee and serve poor and socially disadvantaged populations (Goodnight & Bobde, 2018).

Why Secondary Education?

This dissertation will focus on government or private-aided schools at the secondary level. Though secondary education is not constitutionally compulsory it is critical because it is a bridge between primary and higher education and also prepares individuals for the labor market (Chanana, 2014). It is vital for employment and for breaking out of the vicious cycle

⁵ 'A recognized school is that in which the course(s) of study followed is/are prescribed or recognized by the government (Central/State) or a University or a Board constituted by law' (National Council of Educational Research and Training 2009, 9). Thus, 'recognized schools have met the regulatory requirements of the state, while unrecognized schools have either not applied for, or have not succeeded in gaining, recognition' (Goyal & Pandey, 2012, p. 6).

of poverty. The reason behind choosing government or private-aided schools as opposed to the other types (discussed above), is that these schools are mandated to follow the policies set by the central and state governments. Additionally, socially disadvantaged children from poor households tend to attend government or private-aided secondary schools (Nambissan, 2012), as secondary education in India is not free of cost and parents have to incur out of pocket costs to send their children to secondary schools. The cost of private unaided schools is relatively much higher than government or private-aided schools, and therefore, sending children to private (unaided) schools might be economically out-of-reach for parents from low socioeconomic and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Within the secondary school system, this research will focus on students attending Grade IX, and all teachers that teach this grade. The reason for choosing Grade IX students is because these students have been in school long enough to reflect the cumulative effects of their schooling experience; and would be able to clearly express their feelings—likes and dislikes—, and their perceptions of ‘self’ and others. Children at Grade X through XII have not been chosen for analysis because both at Grade X and XII, children are required to take national level examinations⁶; and therefore, they might not be as willing to participate in the research due to the time constraints they may face. Moreover, the secondary (lower and higher) space is the weakest and most neglected so far in the education sector, despite being the key link between education and economic development.

⁶ National level examinations are commonly referred to as Board examinations and are administered at the end of each of the following phases: secondary level and higher secondary level, i.e., Grade X and Grade XII. These exams act as qualifiers for the completion of secondary and higher secondary levels of schooling; and, are important for gaining admissions in institutions for higher education.

Motivation behind Situating the Study in Sitapur

I based this ethnographic study in Sitapur district⁷ in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India. Sitapur district is home to more than 4.4 million residents (Census of India, 2011), of which about 88 percent live in rural areas and 12 percent live in urban areas. About 32 percent of the population in the district belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC). Of the total SC population, the majority lives in rural Sitapur (96 percent), as per the 2011 Census. I chose Sitapur as the site for this research study because Sitapur is my hometown, where I spent the first ten to eleven years of my life and attained primary education (pre-K to 5). Being a local resident allowed certain conveniences in terms of resources and the connections to people available. Over the past decade, I had built a network and made connections with local government officials and non-government organizations, and situating my study of schools in Sitapur allowed me utilize these connections to people. This proved useful in terms of gaining access to the schools and their Principals.

So, who am I and why do I care about the education system in Sitapur? I am a female student, in my twenty-somethings, who belongs to a middle class and upper caste family in Sitapur. I had a personal reason to care about the school systems in Sitapur. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, after completing primary education in a private school in Sitapur, my parents opted to send me to a private residential school for middle school and high school in hopes of a better education and thereby increased future opportunities. This was possible because of the financial resources available to them. The inadequate facilities and resources

⁷ A district is an equivalent (roughly) to a U.S. county, in that they are administrative divisions of states which largely receive their sources and authority from state governments. There are 686 districts in India, as of 2016.

available at school and the lack of opportunities for growth as a student and as an individual influenced this choice made by my parents. There are many families within the city who made a decision to send their children away in hopes of a better education and future life. However, the same financial privileges are not available to all and certainly not to the group of students who are featured in this dissertation.

In addition, I had come across parents, especially mothers, from low income families working as domestic help or home cleaners, who were frustrated by the school system in the Sitapur city. These mothers often complained that their children were attending government schools that lacked teachers, had high teacher absenteeism rates, and that the schools did not care about children's education but that there was nothing they could do about it. The mothers explained that they send their children to school in hopes of a better future but with such low quality public schools their hopes were shattered.

Given this background, when framing this research study, I looked at myself as an outsider to my study context. I had very little or nothing in common with the students whose experiences I was trying to understand. I had little practical knowledge of the realities of high schools that my participants attended. Unlike my study participants, I lived in the city and knew very little about the life in the villages where the participants lived except for the prior knowledge from a reading of the literature and the stories from other people I had met throughout my life. In addition, there was a clear visible hierarchy between the students and me, where I was placed at a rung higher than the students in the hierarchical social ladder. Although this hierarchy was not established by me, it was a part of the larger structural factors at play. Similarly, there was a structural hierarchy between the teachers and me,

where the teachers were on a rung higher than me (refer to Chapter 3 for a more detailed account of researcher positionality). But irrespective of my position in the hierarchy, I treated my study participants (teachers and students) with respect and I was treated with respect by all.

Beyond my familiarity, personal roots, and experiences with the city, another reason for choosing Sitapur district as the research site for this study is its low literacy level (61 percent) when compared to the state and national average of 68 percent at both levels. Sitapur district ranks at the 59th position (out of 71) in literacy in the state. In addition, the female literacy rate is only about 51 percent in the district, which is also below the state average (57 percent), as per the most recent 2011 Census of India. The literacy rates among females living in rural areas (48 percent) is significantly lower than females in urban areas (67 percent). Scheduled Castes have a low literacy rate in the district, at approximately 55 percent, where the gap in the male and female literacy rate among SCs is 22 percentage points (only 43 percent of Scheduled Caste females as compared to 65 percent of SC males are literate). These stories and incidents of families directly impacted by the low quality public schools, my personal experiences, and the district statistics for low literacy rates motivated me to design this study.

I designed this study to understand students' lived experiences in their classroom at two secondary schools varying in terms of location (rural versus urban areas) and the caste composition of students (majority Scheduled Castes versus minority Scheduled Castes). I chose two schools in two locations because I wanted to explore and examine how the experiences of students who lived in rural areas and attended school in rural areas compared

with those who lived in rural areas but attended school in the city. In addition, I was interested in understanding the similarities and differences in the schooling practices and processes across these locations. I utilized my connections in Sitapur to gain access to these schools (see chapter 3 for more details on sampling strategy). For this reason, I chose Village Secondary School (VSS) – located in rural Sitapur with majority of the Grade IX students belonging to Scheduled Caste communities – and City Secondary School (CSS) – located in an urban area with a small proportion of Grade IX students in the Scheduled Caste communities.

Significance of this Study

The dissertation highlights the inequalities in the secondary education system in India. I study this topic not because it is new but rather because it is persistent. The Indian education system is riddled with steep hierarchies and deep inequalities along social, cultural, and economic lines. Undoubtedly, in the last two decades, significant positive developments have been made in the field of education, which has facilitated wider educational participation in India. Yet there remains a wide gap between the quality of education offered to the rich and the poor. As a result, social divisions and disparities continue to exist. Such persistent gaps in the educational system prompted me to focus on the broader question of the reproduction of social and educational inequalities in the Indian school system. Through this dissertation, I contribute to the educational discourse that focuses on social justice and equity.

As I conducted the research for this dissertation, I heard story after story about the students' experiences of violent discipline and discrimination at schools. Students made

statements like “teachers beat us with their words,” “every teacher beats if the work is incomplete,” or “so what if I did not finish the homework, I will just have to endure the teacher’s beating.” The personal stories I gathered and the experiences I witnessed serve to document the systemic processes and school practices that routinely pushed students out of the school system and exacerbated the social, educational, and economic disparities faced by poor and lower caste students. I wanted the voices of those most impacted by social injustice and inequity to center this dissertation.

Honestly, I was traumatized by hearing these stories and witnessing the brutality and deficit views of teachers toward students from low-income and socially disadvantaged communities and their families repeatedly over the seven months of my research. Some days I did not want to return to the school as I was emotionally wounded and it pained me to witness the infractions and atrocities that many students faced. But if students could return to school the next day after sustaining the beatings, I could too, especially since I was able to return to my privileged life each day. Unfortunately, however, most students did not get that reprieve from violence as some of them experienced more physical abuse at home. I hope that through this dissertation, readers will gain an appreciation for the traumatic experiences and educational inequalities faced by students and the entrenched and long-lasting impact of violence and injustice on their lives.

Plan of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters. **Chapter 2** presents the theoretical framework and reviews the key literature that informs this research. This literature review serves as a means to inform my conceptual framework and research questions, indicate the

gap in the literature, and justify the need for this research study. **Chapter 3** justifies the research design and the methodological approach, site selection, sample size, the rationale for using an ethnographic approach, and taking a comparative and interpretive epistemological stance for understanding students' everyday classroom experiences at their schools.

In the chapters that follow, I trace how the reproduction of social and educational inequalities in Indian schools occurs. I examine the key school practices and processes that define students' experiences in their classrooms and schools and discuss the impact on students' learning outcomes, student engagement, perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging.

Chapter 4 describes the physical structure of the two secondary schools, VSS and CSS. It presents the readers with the infrastructure of the school and the classroom, the facilities, and resources available or not to the teachers and students and introduces the students and the teachers at these schools. The chapter examines the relationship between schools' physical environment and students' learning and subjectivities. **Chapter 5** examines the nature of teacher-student and peer-to-peer interactions and the factors that influence these interactions. I show how teachers use violent disciplinary practices to punish and reprimand poor and lower caste students. The normalized use of these practices leads the students to internalize this discourse. The chapter ends with a discussion of the impact of teacher-student interactions and peer interactions on student engagement, perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. **Chapter 6** identifies the factors that facilitated or hindered student engagement in the classroom and the potential impact of engaging and disengaging on students' educational outcomes and subjectivities. The chapter highlights the systemic and

insidious ways in which caste-based discrimination occurs in the classrooms. I also discuss students' responses to teachers' actions and behavior.

The concluding chapter summarizes and integrates the findings presented in the last three chapters to answer the question of how the reproduction of social and educational inequalities in school occurs. The chapter discusses the limitations of the study, its generalizability, and directions for future research. I end with a discussion of the policy implications based on the disconnect between what is stated in policies versus how policy is practiced when it comes to opening the 'black box' of secondary schooling in India.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation examines children's schooling experiences and explores how students' ascribed characteristics (caste designations, gender identities, and class) might influence their classroom experiences. Further, it investigates how schools might reinforce social and educational inequalities by adopting discriminatory and exclusionary practices toward children. The first part of this chapter presents the theory of social exclusion that I use to describe the experiences of students in schools and how exclusionary practices in schools reinforce the social and educational inequalities among students from low-income and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The second part of this chapter reviews the key literature establishing barriers to education faced by children based on their social, cultural, and economic identities and documents what happens inside the schools. In reviewing the literature on educational inequities and disparities in India, I suggest ways in which this study extends the previous research. I draw from the theoretical aspects and the literature review to establish a conceptual framework for understanding this research study.

Theoretical Framework—Social Exclusion

I use social exclusion as the theoretical framework for this study. In context of the Indian society, the concept of social exclusion needs to be incorporated as a way to not only focus on issues related to poverty, and distribution of material goods as it is in western societies (Sen, 2000), but to put added emphasis on social discrimination based on caste and gender and the perpetuation of social discrimination in institutional structures like schools. I examine the multiple deprivations, disadvantages, and inequities that children from Dalit communities suffer and experience in their everyday lives at schools, by using the social exclusion lens.

“Social exclusion” has been defined in numerous ways (Burchardt et al., 1999; Gordon et al., 2000; Kabeer, 2006; Levitas et al., 2007; Popay et al., 2008) and incorporates numerous economic, social, political, and cultural connotations and dimensions (Silver, 1994). In this dissertation, I use the working definition by (Levitas et al., 2007),

Social exclusion is a complex process operating across several dimensions or domains. It involves both the lack, or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole. (Levitas et al., 2007)

I use this definition for two specific reasons: First, this definition highlights not only what social exclusion is, but what it gives rise to— its consequences in both the short-run and over the long-run for individuals and for society. Second, Levitas et al. (2007) emphasize both the state of being excluded (that is, social exclusion as an outcome) and the processes that leads to exclusion (that is, social exclusion as a process). The definition helps to

incorporate these elements in the framework to analyze and understand the processes of exclusion within schools in rural India. The key element of the definition is the focus it provides on the experiences of marginalized groups, and on social relationships, between teachers and students as well as among peers, that have the power to impact life experiences, opportunities, and future outcomes of these socially disadvantaged groups.

In this dissertation, I focus on students which allows me to deeply and systematically investigate students' experiences and how the exclusionary practices at schools might shape their subjectivities – perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. It is at the schools where I examine the processes through which discrimination may take place and how the interactions among diverse actors (teachers, Dalit youth, and their peers) may lead to discrimination against some students. In addition, I investigate how exclusion from schools could lead to exclusion from the mainstream Indian society.

Conceptualizing social exclusion in relation to education in the Indian context

Indian debates on exclusion and inclusion revolve around social relations and institutions that exclude, discriminate, or deprive certain social groups based on caste, class, and gender, that is, ascribed rather than achieved characteristics (Kabeer, 2006; Sayed et al., 2007; Soudien, 2007). Being on the lowest rung of the social ladder of the caste system, is burdensome not only because of the attached social stigma and stereotype, but also due to the consequences, disadvantages, and deprivation that this stigma and stereotype leads to. Moreover, institutions like schools are embedded within wider societal processes and relationships, therefore, the social functioning of the community is reflected in the social functioning of the school. Social exclusion is, then, seen as a way of analyzing how and why

Dalit students and Dalit communities fail to have access to or benefit from the possibilities and opportunities offered by institutions such as schools.

Social exclusion introduces the notion of ‘processes’ and ‘outcomes’ and their covert/overt manifestations, which are rooted in the economic as well as social and cultural dimensions, and the way these dimensions intersect and reinforce each other in various contexts (Sayed et al., 2007). As mentioned earlier, I treat social exclusion as an outcome and a process in this research project. As an outcome, exclusion refers to the state of being excluded; while, as a process, it refers to the discriminatory practices that may lead to the reproduction of social, economic and educational inequalities and exclusion. Following this, one can argue that social exclusion in classrooms can lead to social isolation and marginalization of students.

Dalit students face multiple disadvantages, resulting in severe negative consequences. Dalit students and communities not only face economic deprivations but also social and cultural disadvantages, which limits their ability to fully participate in the society. Exclusion from multiple and overlapping dimensions can result in “deep exclusion” (Miliband, 2006); which could lead to severe negative consequences in terms of quality of life, well-being, and future life outcomes (Levitas et al., 2007). The brunt of this discrimination and stereotype heavily disadvantages Dalit communities because of the unequal power relations and the lack of freedom and agency to overturn their social and cultural position. This study examines the drivers of social exclusion, through the idea of “deep exclusion” to identify and address the multiple deprivations faced by Dalit youth to attain equal opportunity of education without

having to suffer the social stigma, and discrimination by teachers and peers and other school authorities.

I use the social exclusion lens in this research to identify the key aspects of *who* is excluded, *exclusion from what*, *excluded by whom*, and excluded *how*. Subsequently, I explain the links between the outcome (social exclusion) and the processes that lead to this outcome. Specifically, I explain how Dalit children may face discrimination in their classrooms; and, how the discriminatory practices may act as drivers of social exclusion. I identify the excluded group in this study based on their social identity— caste, gender, and class— which, I assume will lead to exclusion. This basis of defining excluded groups is promising analytically because “identities associated with such attributes are socially constructed, and the ways in which identities are constructed are integral to processes of exclusion” (Rodgers et al., 1995, p. 32).

Using the theory of social exclusion, I aim to investigate how schools may or may not aid in the reproduction of educational and social inequalities among children based on their class, caste, and gender through discriminatory practices by teachers and peers, in particular through teacher-student interactions and peer interactions.

Literature review

Barriers to children’s education

Public school systems mirror larger society and social norms (Bourdieu, 1977) and tend to influence what happens inside schools and the attitude and behavior of teachers. This section reviews the empirical research literature establishing the existence of caste- and gender-based discrimination in schools. It presents past research that documents the factors

that act as barriers to children's education – structural, social, and cultural, financial, and hidden (generally related to what is happening inside schools) barriers. In addition, it discusses the impact of these barriers on children's educational outcomes and future opportunities. This review highlights who goes to what schools and what happens inside these schools and how certain populations are marginalized inside these schools due to inequitable access to quality education. Lastly, this literature review informs my conceptual framework and research questions, indicates the gap in the literature, and justifies the need for this research study.

Caste-based discrimination. Stratification based on caste, class, and gender is a characteristic of the Indian social fabric resulting in unequal educational opportunities (Kaul, 2001). Research scholars have captured the extent of exclusion and discriminatory practices against Dalit children in schools (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Kalapura, 2016). The most prominent processes of overt discrimination and exclusion in schools against Dalit children reported are: equitable access to education for Dalits, discriminatory teacher attitudes against Dalit children, denigration of Dalit students—calling them by derogatory caste names (Thorat & Newman, 2010), assigning them with menial tasks in schools such as sweeping the playground and cleaning toilets used by teachers and their peers, prohibiting the use of school facilities like drinking water from taps or stored containers, mid-day meals, forcing Dalit students to sit on the ground, while their peers from upper castes sit on benches, as well as caste-based peer relations (Kalapura, 2016; W. Kumar, 2017; Nambissan, 1996, 2009; Sedwal & Kamat, 2008; V. Singh, 2014; Subrahmanian, 2003).

Discrimination against Dalit students can be covert in nature and is reflected in teachers' expectations, attitudes, and perceptions of students, where teachers hold deficit notions of the educational potential of Dalit children (Nambissan, 2009; Sayed, 2009; Thorat & Newman, 2010). Another indicator of discrimination by teachers is favoritism (Holzwarth et al., 2006), where teachers favor children from dominant castes and grade them higher on homework and exams. Studies have also reported that teachers hold low expectations of Dalit children and see them as unfit or rightfully fit for classroom leadership roles and positions (Nambissan, 2009). The formal school system does not practice equity in education as these studies have shown, this has impinged upon the learning opportunities for Dalit students (Nambissan, 1996).

Gender norms. A wide range of social, cultural, and economic determinants act as barriers to education among girls (Somani, 2017). Despite the substantial progress in expanding universal access to primary education, gender disparities persist and widen in secondary schooling (Ramanaik et al., 2018). India is a patriarchal society, and gender discrimination is present in all aspects of life. Gender-related norms intersect with poverty, caste, rural residence, and social and family norms and limit women's access to education and economic opportunities (ibid.). Compared to boys, girls are disproportionately assigned household chores and take on caregiving responsibilities of siblings and sick elders at home (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016; Nambissan, 2005; Qureshi, 2012). Studies have highlighted that families facing poverty do not value girls' education partly due to the lack of potential for economic returns. Sons are given more preference than daughters — a phenomenon termed 'son preference'— as parents view investment in their daughter's education as not

prudent given the practice of patrilocal exogamy (Prakash et al., 2018), and the informal social contract that obliges sons to provide for their parents' economic security in their old age (Halim et al., 2016).

In addition, parental educational aspirations for their daughters matters. Parents with weak or no educational aspirations for their daughters place more value on social norms of 'correct' gender practices, marriage after menarche, and reputational fears of being seen with a boy. Socially disadvantaged families conform to the normative societal expectations and social norms by limiting girls' movement outside the house, which creates a pathway for dropping out of school among girls (Ramanaik et al., 2018). In addition, girls often internalize the mobility restrictions and end up endorsing these practices as being 'for their own good.' Researchers have also cited marriage (often, child marriage – for girls below the age 18), as a as a contributing factor for discontinuing education before completing secondary education among girls (R. Singh & Mukherjee, 2017). Such gender norms reinforce the gender inequalities in the society and limit girls' education, especially at the secondary level.

In addition to the sociocultural factors, school-level factors also impact the reasons for school entry and retention among girls. The most evident and damaging experiences are those of sexual and gendered violence (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016), and 'eve-teasing'⁸ in schools by boys and other peers results in girls dropping out of school (Talboys et al., 2017). Furthermore, the lack of proper school facilities such as toilets, the absence of female

⁸ As described by the Indian government, eve teasing occurs "when a man by words either spoken or by signs and/or by visible representation or by gesture does any act in public space, or signs, recites or utters any indecent words or song or ballad in any public place to the annoyance of any woman." (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014).

teachers in schools, and the travelling physical distance between schools and homes considered too far and unsafe (Shah, 2016), prevents parents from enrolling girls in schools. In addition, school absenteeism or truancy among children, both boys and girls, from low-income families and socially disadvantaged backgrounds is a contributing factor to discontinuation of education, as children are pulled into work (domestic chores and paid work) (R. Singh & Mukherjee, 2017).

Interpersonal factors also act as barriers to education among adolescent girls from rural areas. The influence of peers or the lack thereof is a significant determinant for going to school or dropping out. Research indicates that adolescent girls did not aspire to participate in secondary schooling or attain higher education due to a lack of positive role models (presence of other girls who had attended secondary schools or obtained higher education) (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016). Another major obstacle to girls' equal access to and participation in education is the stigmas and norms attached to menstruation (Sanyal & Muthukrishnan, 2017; Schylander, 2017). The issue of menstruation hygiene also ties back to not having proper toilet facilities for girls in schools and running water in these toilets. Such a gender-insensitive environment in schools leads to high levels of absenteeism among girls, poor performance, and eventually dropouts from the education system (Sanyal & Muthukrishnan, 2017).

Financial costs. The costs of children's education often affect parental decisions to send their children to school. Families facing financial constraints find it challenging to meet the direct and indirect costs of education, often leading to high dropout rates among poor students (Lewin, 2011; Ramanujan & Deshpande, 2018). Parents bear a significant amount of

out-of-pocket costs for books, transportation, exam fees, and other school-related fees for primary education, which are supposed to be free (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). This cost burden for households increases throughout elementary education and in the transition to and within secondary education in India.

Secondary education in India is not free, so families have to incur out-of-pocket costs related to tuition fees, school uniforms, and stationery to send their children to school (Lewin, 2011). These school costs are significant for low-income families. In addition, there is a high opportunity cost attached to sending children to school for low-income families since many children at this age, especially boys in rural areas, tend to help their parents with paid or unpaid work, mostly related to agriculture and farming. For females, Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, & Usinger (1995) report that the level of support from the family in terms of the interest, setting of expectations, and choices about educational futures is low if the family suffers from poverty.

Family dynamics and economic circumstances. While schools are a natural focus for policy efforts, factors external to the schools, including social and economic circumstances and dynamics at home, are likely to have important effects on academic achievement (Stevens & Schaller, 2014). Family background has an influential role on children's educational achievement. Children with more educated and wealthier parents tend to perform better in schools on average (Harbison & Hanushek, 1992). Children's ability and household wealth play a significant role in parental decision of sending children to school. Bacolod & Ranjan (2008) find evidence that high-ability children from poor households are more likely to attend school than poor households with low-ability children. Alcott & Rose

(2017) in their investigation of how disparities in learning change over primary school cycle report that the learning trajectories between boys and girls widen among children from poorer households.

What is happening inside schools

Indian schools are highly inequitable and discriminatory towards children from low-income families, especially those who lie at the intersection of class, caste, and gender relations (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Jenkins & Barr, 2006). The schools attended by these children are segregated along the same social and cultural characteristics. So far, I have discussed how several factors like caste- and gender-identities and the intersection with poverty, social and cultural norms, and area of residence act as barriers to children's education and limit their future outcomes. In this section, I review key literature on what happens inside schools and how school-level factors might influence children's educational outcomes and shape students' experiences in school.

Physical structure and environment. Studies in the Global North show the relationship between poor physical environment and academic achievement. There is extensive research that shows that poorly ventilated buildings result in poor air quality and build up noxious odors and fumes which lead to student listlessness and school absenteeism, which results in poor academic outcomes (G. I. Earthman, 2004). Without a good physical environment, students tend to feel uncomfortable, disengaged, or bored in the classroom (Barret et al., 2019). Research has shown that the condition of a school building influences student achievement, and can also influence teacher's effectiveness and their work (Earthman, 2002).

The investments in school infrastructure and physical conditions for learning is not a luxury rather a need. It is an equity concern since it is ‘hard-to-reach’ and socioeconomically disadvantaged students attending school in rural areas who tend to be enrolled in schools with poor physical conditions, and underqualified and inexperienced teachers (Kumar, 1983; Nambissan, 2009). Inadequate school facilities tend to limit the opportunities for students to learn and engage in the classroom.

Learning outcomes. Some of the important school-level factors that have been associated with educational outcomes are: inadequate infrastructural facilities in schools, along with the curriculum and pedagogical facilities, high pupil-to-teacher ratio, large class sizes, outdated textbooks, teacher absenteeism, and untrained teachers (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013a). Teachers give more emphasis to rote-memorization and syllabus completion than ensuring that students engage with and understand the material taught (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011; Sayed et al., 2007). Past studies suggest that disengagement and boredom, ultimately, leads to student absenteeism and school dropout (Harbison & Hanushek, 1992; PROBE Team, 1999), which results in the reproduction of the social inequalities that schools aim to prevent.

Research on student learning achievement across various levels of education in India presents a distressing picture. Despite massive investments in primary education in India, many children are not acquiring the basic reading and arithmetic skills (Bhattacharjea et al., 2011). In a study by ASER, found that of the 22 million children enrolled in Grade VIII in 2016, less than half could solve a Grade IV division problem and about 74.6% could read Grade II level text (ASER, 2018). Some studies on learning achievements have used

experiments to study how societal discrimination based on an individual's social class, caste, and gender positions affects individual achievement (Hoff & Pandey, 2006, 2014); while, others have used randomized experiments to study the impact of educational interventions (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2015). In addition, labelling and stigmatization by teachers and peers can have deleterious effects on children's well-being and future educational outcomes (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019).

Teachers and teaching quality. Teacher quality has been stressed to be the most influential factor contributing to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017; R. Singh & Sarkar, 2015). Moreover, for children from disadvantaged families lacking cultural capital, it is the teachers who prepare them to take advantage of the opportunities available at school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lareau, 1987). Harbison & Hanushek (1992) highlight the importance of having good teachers for student achievement and that increasing the proportion of highly skilled teachers, brings about revolutionary changes in students' academic performance.

However, in Indian schools located in rural areas, the opposite is happening. The primary and upper primary schools are flooded with para-teachers (student teachers) appointed on a contract basis with much lower salaries than regular teachers (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). The para-teacher initiative leads to a pattern where poorly qualified, low-paid para-teachers teach deprived children. At the same time, those from privileged households attend schools with well-trained teachers with higher qualifications.

A related strain of research in the United States shows how racial and class reproduction occurs through teacher-based processes. Research indicates that teachers tend to

(a) be less favorable towards African American students, giving them low ratings on such measures as personality, behavior, motivation to learn, and classroom performance, (b) hold lower academic expectations for African American students and students from more deprived areas (Gershenson et al., 2016; McKown & Weinstein, 2008), (c) favorably treat White students than non-White students (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018), (d) hold deficit views about students from low-income families and first generation students from minority groups such as Latino students, (e) assume that Latino and African American parents do not value education and have expectations that these children should leave school to help support the family and contribute to the family's income (Valencia & Black, 2002), (f) remediate or “dumb down” the curriculum for students of color (Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2007; Valencia & Black, 2002), and (g) hold stereotypical beliefs and/or perceptions about Black students' behavior which might interfere with their educational opportunities (Wilson, 2017).

Although less studied, some research shows that teachers in India hold similar deficit notions of Dalit children as those held by teachers in the United States for students of color. For example, Sayed (2009), in his study of India, found that teachers' perception of the educational potential of marginalized and indigenous peoples was extremely deficit-oriented. His study reports that as per teachers from upper-caste backgrounds, Dalit, and Adivasi (tribal) children were “not able to be educated,’ ‘were not good at learning’ and that they came from homes where education was not valued” (28). The effect of this line of thinking was that Dalit and Adivasi children internalized these perceptions and considered themselves as not good learners. Additionally, teachers taught in ways that did not enhance or challenge

the learning experiences of the marginalized children, thus creating a vicious cycle of exclusion from learning. Similar findings were reported by The PROBE Team (1999), asserting that upper caste teachers considered Dalit students ‘dull’ and ‘uneducable.’

Research shows that both objective (for instance, students’ past achievement) and subjective (teacher’s biases and prejudices) information forms the basis of teachers expectations (Speybroeck et al., 2012). This study is concerned with how these objective and subjective characteristics form the basis of teachers’ interactions and their expectations of students, which is a little researched phenomenon in the Indian context.

In the United States, however, there is a vast literature that estimate the effect of the quality of interactions between teachers and students on children’s development and learning (Downer et al., 2010; Hamre & Pianta, 2005, 2007); and, its link to children’s perceptions of self (Colwell & Lindsey, 2003). Studies of observational research use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) framework to organize teacher-child interactions in three factors – Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support -- and measure how they either independently or in combination foster social and academic development in children (Hafen et al., 2015; Hamre et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2012). Researchers have identified proximal and distal factors to predict the quality of interactions between teachers and children. Proximal correlates include teachers’ and children’s individual features, like biological factors, and predispositions, beliefs, and individual attributes; while distal factors include family, classroom, and sociocultural contexts (Downer et al., 2010). Together, researchers argue that these influences shape the dynamic system in which these interactions are embedded.

Corporal punishment in schools. Despite the ban of corporal punishment under the RTE Act (2009), it is a commonly used method to discipline and punish students in Indian schools. Past research has documented the continued use of corporal punishment (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019; Pasupathi & Ghosh, 2016; Tiwari, 2019), its relationship to gender (Paik, 2009; Proctor, 2015), and its impact on mental health (Deb et al., 2017). Humphreys (2008) highlights that corporal punishment is gendered in nature and that female and male teachers and students relate to and experience it differently. Many studies have attempted to understand teachers' perspectives of the ban on corporal punishment (Cheruvath & Tripathi, 2015; Tiwari, 2019). Findings in these studies suggest that teachers viewed corporal punishment as a way to command students' respect and compliance. However, there is a dearth of literature on students' experiences of corporal punishment and its impact on student engagement. This dissertation fills this gap by documenting students' experiences of violent discipline in schools.

Peer interactions and relationships. The quality of teacher-student interactions determines the child's social functioning in the classroom (Colwell & Lindsey, 2003). Some research shows that the influence of teacher's expectation are reinforced as peers notice and perceive the cues from teachers about other students, and when these cues are negative, the peers begin to treat these students (Dalits in this case) poorly as well, affecting peer and social interactions (McCane, 2008). This thread informs the literature in this subsection.

In this dissertation I examine whether and how caste identities of teachers and students could influence teacher-student interactions and peer interactions, which in turn may lead to social exclusion in classrooms. Social interaction among children in school or what I

refer to as peer interactions and relationships are “a neglected sphere of school life but one that is extremely critical for academic and interpersonal relations and their interface” (Nambissan, 2009). These social relationships and networks among children are of utmost importance for academic and emotional support systems. Delving into the complexities of how peer relations can be improved is crucial since for Dalit children who come from families with no education, these support systems could be invaluable.

Among a plethora of dimensions of peer interactions, the effect of classroom peers on one’s own academic achievement has been at the core of the diverse debates on educational reform. Nonetheless, the existence and nature of academic interactions among students remains ambiguous (Kang, 2006). While some studies find no significant (or small) peer effects (Hanushek, 1992), other studies report significantly positive effects of peer quality on academic achievements (Hanushek et al., 2003). These studies use empirical data analysis methods to capture the peer effects by controlling for numerous observable factors like family and school influences, peer characteristics like achievement, race, socioeconomic status, yielding important results on student achievement (Bramoullé et al., 2009; Hanushek et al., 2003).

Children’s relationships with classmates is one of the most potential sources of support in classrooms. Ladd (1990) investigated the potential role that children’s classroom peer relations play in their school adjustment. Findings from his study indicate that “making new friends in the classroom was associated with gains in school performance, and early peer rejection forecasted less favorable school perceptions, higher levels of school avoidance, and lower performance levels over the school year” (1996). Peers are also a source of

companionship and emotional support in the classrooms (Juvonen et al., 2012; Ladd et al., 1997; Nambissan, 2009).

Peer status and children's social position among classmates also holds importance. In addition, studies have highlighted the importance of positive peer relationships. Jelas, Azman, Zulnaidi, & Ahmad (2016) assert that positive peer relationships are a vital component of the socialization and education process, apart from a students' relationships with their parents and teachers. Studies have concluded that friendships and peer affiliations with engaged classmates generally facilitate a sense of belonging in schools, thereby, promoting positive peer effects (Juvonen et al., 2012). However, not all friendships and peer interactions are beneficial. Often, "negative social experiences with classmates may make rejected youth seek the company of other students who misbehave and encourage bullied students to avoid school," write Juvonen et al. (2012).

In the Indian case of caste-based discrimination, interactions with peers is often limited to school. Children from dominant castes do not interact with Dalit children outside school (Holzwarth et al., 2006); and even within the intra-Dalit hierarchies, Dalit students largely interact with members of their own sub-caste (Nambissan, 2009). The quality of these interactions along with those of teachers are expected to have implications on children's perceptions of self, and the next subsection reviews literature on that context.

Children's subjectivities—Perceptions of 'Self,' and place in community. The quality of interpersonal relationships in classrooms have been found to have an impact on children's self-perceptions. The two important relationships with implications for children's self-concept are that between teacher and child; and, peers and child. Researchers have

elucidated how three types of significant social relationships (that is, with mother, teacher, and peers) jointly contribute to young children's self-perceptions (Verschueren et al., 2012). In this study, the relationship between teacher and child and between peers and child has been accounted for by the interactions that take place between them. This dissertation aims to establish the pathways through which significant social relationships shape the formation of children's perceptions of self.

Results from experiments show that individuals who suffer from longstanding discrimination tend to also suffer from diminished self-image; because social identities of these individuals are largely influenced by negative stereotypes, they have internalized these stereotypes and tend to conform to them (Bros, 2014). Using a survey to capture Dalit children's psychological development due to caste- and class-based stereotypes and discrimination, Kalapura (2016) finds that Dalit children self-reported themselves as being shy, lacking self-confidence, facing issues in expressing themselves, and some even believed that they were not good enough or not intelligent enough, and therefore disliked themselves. These feelings of inferiority and powerlessness negatively affected children's performance in schools and some children ended up dropping out of school.

Bros (2014) in examining the effect of caste membership on perceived social rank, reports that caste membership is still a major determinant of perceived social rank in India. Furthermore, members of low castes seem to have internalized the fact that they should remain at the bottom of the social ladder, no matter what their other attributes are (ibid.). The present study aims to examine children's perceptions of self in relation to the teacher-student and peer interactions.

Student's response to interactions with teachers and peers. This section reviews literature that focuses on how students respond to the strict disciplinary practices and discrimination they face at schools. Various scholars in the Global North have researched on the low academic achievement among working class students and how it tends to lead to resistant behavior (Chiang, 2019; Willis, 1978). However, there is a dearth in the literature in the Global South concerning student resistance and agency. For instance, Chiang (2019) in their study on working class students in Taiwan found that in an oppressive classroom environment where authority is at the core, underachieving students initiate resistant behavior by making noise, arriving late, and distracting others in class. The aim of students' resistant behavior, the author argues, is not to challenge teacher's authority but to showcase that these underachieving working class students are "masters of their souls" (p. 38). Darmody et al. (2008) examine truancy in relationship with social class and educational outcomes among Irish students in secondary schools. The authors argue that individual and institutional habitus are useful conceptual tools to study the processes that shape truancy patterns. The study's findings suggest that students who experienced disruptive and less supportive school environment were more like to truant.

Students' resistance or response can take many forms: avoiding class, truancy, disengagement from classroom activities, failure to do homework, refusing to learn, or dropouts (Smyth, 2006). Children from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds, and children from minority ethnic groups, are at a higher risk of being stigmatized, and are thus, more prone to truancy and to lower levels of educational achievements and attainments than other groups (Aber et al., 2002). Not only that, but children who perceive that they are

stigmatized, stereotyped, dehumanized, or treated unfairly are at high risk of excluding themselves from schools through truancy and school drop-out (Birioukov, 2016; Darmody et al., 2008; Smyth, 2006). Darmody et al. (2008) view “students as active agents in their engagement with school life and, from this perspective, truancy may serve as a form of resistance to school” (p. 369).

In this dissertation, I aim to address how students respond to the discriminatory practices that occur in schools, if at all. In responding to these exclusionary and discriminatory practices, how do students exercise their agency and resist the hierarchical school system?

Gaps in the literature

Overall, this literature review presents evidence to establish that caste-based discrimination in classrooms and schools exists; it also presents how participants in schools, teachers, and other students, discriminate, and to some extent, even the question of why these participants discriminate, has been answered. However, the manner in which stigmatization of Dalits’ social identities shapes the social relations, that is, interactions between teachers and students, and among peers within classrooms and schools, and the way Dalit students respond to these interactions and stigma, along with the impact of this discrimination on their subjectivities, is yet to be the focus of research studies. It is precisely this gap, that this dissertation strives to address.

More specifically, this dissertation aims to study the factors— teacher-student interactions and peer interactions— that impact Dalit children’s participation in the learning processes, response of Dalit children (if any) to these interactions, and how these interactions

shape children's perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. It is concerned with the experiences of children in classrooms and how social, cultural, and economic differences may result in the social exclusion of some children from active engagement in classrooms, and/or from other educational and social opportunities.

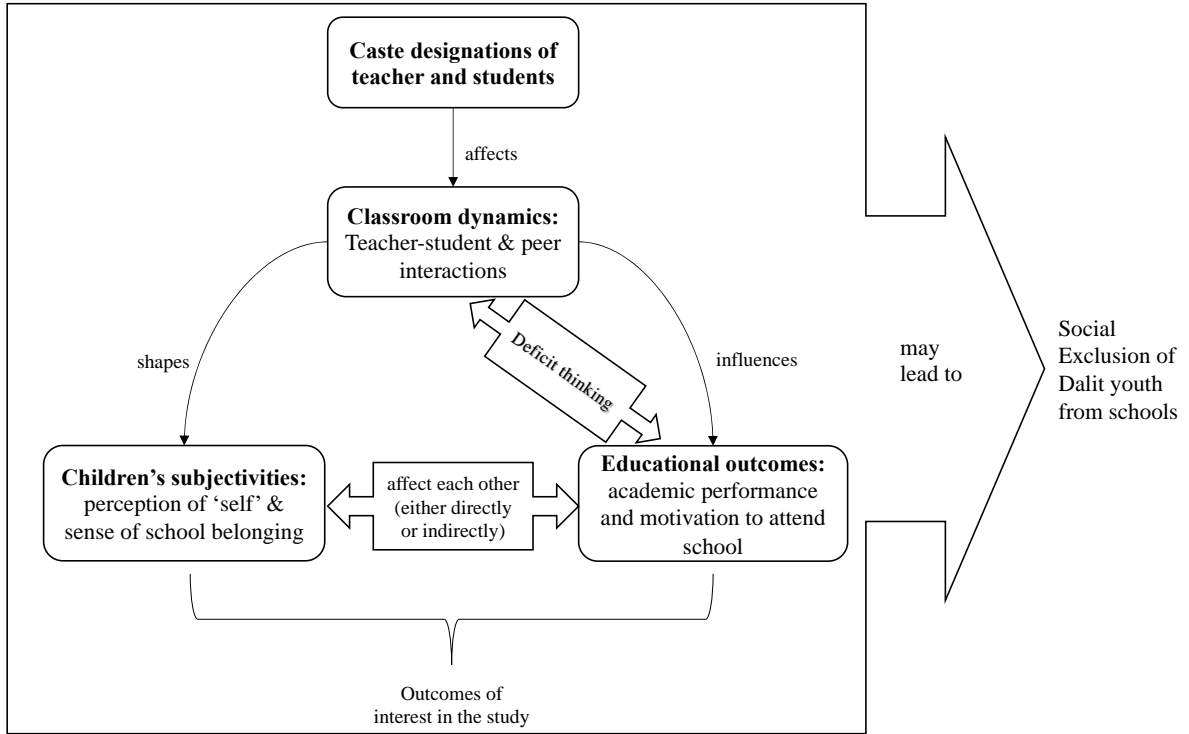
Lafleur & Srivastava (2019) call for a "broad-scale, long-term research on the normative interactions within schools and classrooms between teachers and students and amongst students" to address equity concerns in education for children from marginalized backgrounds. By taking an ethnographic approach to examine students' schooling experiences in their classrooms, this study aims to fill the gap in the comparative and international education literature.

Conceptual framework

My understanding of the literature has informed the conceptual framework for this dissertation (figure 3). The conceptual framework presented below serves as a lens through which we can understand the qualitative inquiry presented in this thesis. I constructed this framework to study the linkages between students' ascribed characteristics (caste, gender, and class) and teachers' behavior and attitudes towards students from diverse backgrounds; and, to examine the factors that might affect students' experiences in their classroom. It shows how the caste designations of students and teachers might affect teacher-student interactions and peer interactions, which might, in turn influence students' educational outcomes and their subjectivities. Thereby, this conceptual framework aids in answering the overarching research concern of this dissertation: how schools may or may not lead to the

social exclusion of Dalit children and, thereby, aid in reproducing educational and social inequalities.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

This research study concerns with the everyday lives of students belonging to ‘hard to reach’ populations in the classroom and at school. I want to understand how the interactions in the classroom between teachers and students and among peers impact the classroom experiences of the students and, in turn, inform their subjectivity. In this dissertation, I seek to explore how the socio-demographic characteristics and dispositions of the students such as gender, caste, and socioeconomic status, might define these experiences in the classroom. To meet the conceptual and analytical lens of this research study, an approach to fieldwork is necessitated that is adept at exploring subjective experiences of students as well as the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which these experiences occur. An ethnographic approach is agreed to be suitable for research investigations into the web of complex relational, individual, social, and contextual factors that affect the everyday lives of people in school settings (Bray et al., 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Sarangapani, 2003).

Since this ethnographic study is about the classroom and school processes, I spent most of my time in schools in Sitapur. I want to understand the juxtaposition of rural versus urban school settings for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Hence, I opt to study two schools in Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh in India. I spend 7 months ‘in the field’ starting from September 2019 to first week of March 2020. I immerse myself into the respective schools in this duration and spend time on participant observations—inside and outside of the classroom, informal conversations and in-depth interviews with Grade IX students and teachers. The reason for choosing Grade IX is because these students would have been in school long enough to reflect the cumulative effects of their schooling experience; and would be able to clearly express their feelings and their perceptions of ‘self’ and others. As part of my methods, I also undertake a self-administered survey with Grade IX students at the two schools.

I designed this project with the intention to study and conceptualize the classroom experiences of the students and how these experiences shape the student’s perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. This chapter describes the methodological approach and the fieldwork strategies utilized to meet the aim of this ethnographic research. The first section discusses the epistemological stance that guided my fieldwork and the writing process. The second section describes the site selection and sampling techniques, timeframe of the study, and data collection strategies employed. I discuss the data management and analysis techniques in section three. Section four includes an account of the measures taken to ensure rigor during the research process, while section five provides a reflexive account of research

ethics and positionality. The last section, section six, discusses the methodological limitations and the limitations of the study.

An interpretive and comparative ethnographic approach

An ethnographic research seeks to explore and understand a social phenomenon and the everyday lived experiences of individuals in their natural setting, in an attempt to capture the meanings that participants' attribute to their own situations (Hammersley, 2006; Spradley, 1979). Ethnography involves sustained interaction with a local community and draws upon methods such as participant observations, in-depth interviews, that are designed to understand the culture, people's perspectives, and practices in their local contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The goal of this dissertation was to gain an interpretive, empathetic understanding (Bray et al., 2007) of the everyday experiences of students at school, with the aim to capture the meanings that students attributed to these experiences. By understanding the classroom experiences of the students, the interactions (or lack thereof) between students and teachers, and among students, the significance and meaning of the impact on student's subjectivities could be uncovered.

Ethnography, here, referred both to the research process and the product (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The data collection strategies and epistemological underpinnings that guided my fieldwork defined the ethnographic research process. The interpretive orientation allowed for an open-ended, flexible, iterative, recursive, abductive, and adaptive character (Bray et al., 2007; Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012) was needed for this type of ethnographic work; this orientation rippled through the entire research design process. From this epistemological perspective, data through fieldwork was not discovered rather generated or

produced (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), as sense-making by the researcher was dependent on the sense-making by the research participants of their lived experiences. My role in the coproduction of data with students meant practicing reflexivity and considering how my own experiences, assumptions, ideas informed the study design, the questions I asked (or refrained from asking), the methods I used, and the conclusions I drew.

The hallmark of this interpretive ethnographic approach is its focus on meaning-making and contextuality (Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012). The objective of embedding meaning in context provided a direct methodological rationale for “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) that I view as a key characteristic of this interpretive ethnographic writing. This written account with its rich and detailed descriptions of themes that I draw from active and prolonged involvement and interactions with the students in two local schools, is an attempt to produce an ethnographic text.

In addition to an interpretive ethnographic account, this research project takes a comparative perspective as well. My interest in understanding how the institutional context of a school in a rural area might differ from a school in an urban setting, defines the comparative ethnographic approach. The goal of this comparative interpretive ethnographic approach is to provide decentered explanations that can plausibly speak to general themes (Boswell et al., 2019). To decenter is “to unpack practices as the contingent beliefs and actions of individuals as the basis for explanation” (ibid 2019, p. 10). I unlock the comparative dimension of the approach when I explore questions on how and why experiences are similar or different. Undoubtedly, comparison is at the heart of this research study, where I compare the individual accounts of students about their experiences with the

teachers and peers at school to identify patterns and explain similarities and differences between the students' experiences and their situations within the school based on the social identities of students, their caste and gender.

A second layer of comparison based on the location of the schools—rural versus urban areas— was added to this research. Comparison based on location held importance to me because I am interested in understanding the similarities and differences in the schooling practices and processes across these locations. Furthermore, I want to explore and examine how the experiences of students who live in rural areas and attend school in rural areas compare with those who live in rural areas but attend school in the city. The comparison between schools based on location also provides me with an avenue to explore and explain the similarities and differences in teachers' motivation, expectations, biases, and behavior towards students in the two schools. Undertaking a comparative research invokes different patterns depending on the web of beliefs and practices that are the focus of attention; yet I create each pattern from common or shared experiences of students.

The aim of this comparative interpretive ethnographic approach is to explain the students' understandings of their everyday experiences at school (Boswell et al., 2019; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006) through abductive reasoning (Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012). Abductive reasoning is defined as a “puzzling out process [in which] the researcher tacks continually, constantly, back, and forth in an iterative-recursive fashion between what is puzzling and possible explanations for it” (Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 27). An abductive logic of inquiry involves an iterative interaction between theory and practice as the project evolves. Abductive nature of this interpretive research requires me to apply different

strategies for different phases of the project, as the expectation that drives this research is confronted by the field realities and requires me to refocus plans spelled out prior to data generation. The case selection strategy as well as the data collection process adopts this logic of abduction and reflects the open-ended, iterative, and adaptive nature of this project.

To achieve the aim of this research, I draw from multiple methods of data collection—participation observations, in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and a self-administered survey. Before going into details of how data was collected and what constituted the ethnographic fieldwork, I provide a brief discussion of how the schools were selected, and access was gained.

Research setting and Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was used for the selection of secondary schools. With purposive sample, “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97).

Purposive sampling as opposed to random or stratified sampling was most appropriate in this case, as it allowed me to select a secondary school based on specific characteristics that were important to this study, including the level of education—primary, middle school, or secondary school—as well as the type of school—government, government-aided, or private. As discussed earlier, I wanted to understand the classroom experiences of students attending Grade IX, therefore, I selected a secondary school. Furthermore, I chose a government-aided secondary school, Village Secondary School (VSS), as my first site of study for this project as I was not able to gain access to the government school in the region. Government-aided (also known as private aided) schools are those that are managed privately

but receive grants-in-aid from the central, state government or local bodies and follow the same rules and regulations as that of the government schools.

Access to research sites

To gain access to schools, I had made use of my connections in Sitapur. My personal connections with the block *pramukh* (president) of the rural local government (Panchayati Samiti)⁹ got me access to a list of schools within Sitapur district. The list provided to me contained names of 377 upper primary and secondary schools. From this list, I shortlisted schools, a total of five, within Parsendi block of Sitapur district, because of the influence my contact held in this region and also for reasons of safety. Being a 20-something woman moving around in the interior of the villages was considered a risk to physical safety. So, researching in areas known to my contact was recommended to me.

Of the five schools in Parsendi, I further shortlisted 3 schools based on their type—government-aided and government schools. Next, I made school visits to the three schools and introduced myself and the research study. Two out of the three Principals seemed enthusiastic and welcomed me, while one was skeptical about the study and expressed his unwillingness to let me talk to the students and the teachers, which then limited my sample to two schools. Of the two, I chose one school over the other because of its size, reputation, and the distance from my place of stay. Basically, I wanted to choose a school with a large school size, which had a good reputation among the local residents, and was comparatively closer to

⁹ Panchayati Samiti are rural local governments (panchayats) at the intermediate level in panchayat raj institutions (PRI). Panchayat means a group of ‘Five persons’; and is a council of elders representing a village. Panchayati samiti has been said to be the “panchayat of panchayats.” It works for the development and welfare of the villages (Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India).

<http://minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/Government%20Mechanism.pdf>

my place of stay. Therefore I chose a school, which I will refer to as Village Secondary School (VSS) for the course of this study to maintain anonymity, located in a rural area, catered to students from Grade VI to Grade X, consisting of 357 students, across all levels. The school was well-known to my contact and held a good reputation in the surrounding region. Furthermore, the ease of access in terms of distance, 25-30 miles as opposed to 40 miles to the other school, influenced my decision. Furthermore, I took advice from knowledgeable experts on what constituted a typical village and whether the selected sample represented the same, to avoid selection of an extreme case.

At the time of conception of this study, I had proposed to preselect two schools in rural areas varying based on the caste demographics of the students that attended the schools. However, instead of preselecting both schools before doing fieldwork; I chose to select and start fieldwork in the first school and subsequently, choose a second school based on the preliminary analysis of data collected at the first school. I let the data to guide my choice for the comparison case. Several teachers at VSS drew comparisons between a school in a rural area versus a school in an urban area and talked about their past experiences teaching at schools in an urban area. In addition, a comparison between government and private schools was made by the teachers when describing the facilities and the resources available to the students in private schools. A third factor that determined the case selection was the caste demographics of the students in VSS. At VSS, approximately 40 percent of the students in Grade IX belonged to Scheduled Caste communities. To contrast the experiences of students based on their caste demographics, I decided to select a school with a minority Scheduled Caste population. Hence, I changed the design and refocused the study objectives and case

selection to explore and examine the school processes and practices of a low-fee private school in the city of Sitapur catering to students from low socioeconomic status families.

The second school site, which I will call City Secondary School (CSS) to maintain anonymity, was then selected based on its location, its type of school management, and the population demographics of the students. CSS, located in the city, was a low-fee private school but adhered to government rules and regulations as it was in the process of applying to gain a government-aided school status. As opposed to VSS, CSS catered to a minority of Scheduled Caste population. The decision to compare cases based on these characteristics, allowed me to study different aspects of the same phenomena—teacher-student and peer-to-peer interactions and how it informed student’s subjectivities—across sites (schools) (Boswell et al., 2019).

Data collection strategies

The ethnographic fieldwork for this study was primarily carried out in the two schools. I carried out a total of 7 consecutive months of ethnographic fieldwork beginning in September 2019 to first week of March 2020. The first few months, starting September 2019 to mid-January 2020, I spent at school A. Beginning mid-January 2020 to first week of March 2020, I carried out fieldwork at CSS, after which the schools closed due to the threat of COVID-19. No data collection activity took place in December 2019, due to the winter break at schools. In the month of December, I spent time on sifting through the data collected so far through classroom observations and informal conversations with the students. I also transcribed interviews with students and teachers in this month, which allowed me to go through the first round of data analysis. This section describes the strategies used for data

collection during these 7 months. Appendix D summarizes the rationales for various data collection strategies used.

Participant Observations: For most of the first four to five weeks at each school, I was engaged in detailed and focused participant observations. This chiefly involved classroom observations and playground observations, where I focused on students in Grade IX. I also participated in sports activities, attended school events like civic ceremonies and festival celebrations. Primarily, my fieldwork entailed sitting in classroom lectures at the two schools, or observing students, mainly boys, playing cricket during lunch hour and sometimes playing with them or having lunch with the teachers in the staffroom or joining students for lunch in their classrooms when invited or simply chatting with students about them and indulging them in details of my life. In most of these activities, I was an active participant and not a passive bystander. The conversations that took place during these activities, were informal in nature but provided me with important meaningful insights into children's as well as teachers' lives.

Participant observation was based on the establishment of trust and rapport between my research participants and me. I had hoped that continuous and sustained social contact with students and teachers would help produce insights on the local and institutional context. Furthermore, attending school and sitting in the classroom on a daily basis allowed me to become a familiar presence at school and in the classrooms as well as gain familiarity with the school system. Spending time in the classroom helped me to establish familiarity with the students and the teachers; and, it also gave the students and teachers the opportunity to

establish familiarity with me. Each passing day, I could sense students' and myself becoming more comfortable in each other's presence.

When attending classes with students, I always sat at a desk with them instead of the teacher's desk. Initially, the students and the teachers found this amusing. I would often be asked by the teacher to come sit next to them while they taught but I politely refused. I only sat at the teacher's desk, next to the teacher, on one occasion at CSS, when a certain teacher was substituting for another teacher and wanted to talk to me about my role and the reason I was at the school. The amusement of the students turned into excitement, and each day I would be asked by a different student to sit with them, I complied. This allowed me to focus not only on the specific student I sat with and their neighbors, but also, gave me a chance to sometimes sit in the front, or the back, or in the middle section of the class. Sometimes, I sat with girls while other days I sat with boys. This rotation exercise provided me with a holistic understanding of the classroom practices and into students' lives in the classroom, especially about friendships, peer relationships and the 'gossip' between friends and their views on peers.

Participant observations helped me to understand how the actors interacted with each other and among themselves. The relationships—between teachers, between students, and teachers and students—that existed or did not, held importance for this research. Through observations, I gathered data on the physical setting of the school and the classrooms, the actors—teachers and students—within the school system, and the interactions that took place (or did not) between and among the actors. Classroom observations helped me to get a better

understanding of the daily routine followed in the classroom and classroom processes and practices.

To capture the insights on schooling process, the nature of the school ethos, and the everyday lives of those within the school system, I organized the semi-structured observation guide¹⁰. The observation guide was divided into four sections—general observations, infrastructural set-up, observations with focus on students, and observations with focus on teachers. The data generated through observations was organized per these themes, where the observations within each of these themes were organized in a manner that helped me separate what happened inside the classroom from what happened outside the classroom. The data generated from observations were recorded as fieldnotes. Fieldnotes were produced either during or immediately after the events, classroom lectures observed. It is in the fieldnotes that the “thick descriptions” of the research sites, events, observed interactions, and conversations were recorded. Fieldnotes are central to research practices, as they “record the meaning-making and contexts that enable claims of constitutive causality, why humans act as they do due to their own understandings of their worlds” (Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 90).

Reflexive fieldnotes were generated to document both verbal and non-verbal communication, but also to check researcher bias. Key issues or incidents that emerged during observations were followed-up later in in-depth interviews with students or in-depth interviews with teachers. This enabled me to corroborate and triangulate the data collected, to ensure that the inferences derived from observations were not selective and provided a

¹⁰ See Appendix F for the semi-structured observation guide.

holistic understanding of the participants' behaviors and the phenomena being studied (Cohen et al., 2018; Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012).

Unlike other observation protocols for classroom research (see for instance, (Hafen et al., 2015; Hamre et al., 2013; La Paro et al., 2004; Pianta et al., 2012), this observation guide was put together to facilitate an understanding of the classroom and the actors within the classroom—students and teachers. The idea was not to build a structured, systematic observational tool that generated numerical data, for example, like the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) framework (Hamre & Pianta, 2007), a measurement tool for observing teacher-student relations and interactions. The epistemological view that drove this dissertation research was that of interpretivism. Hence, using an observational tool that assessed and measured 'the social climate of the classroom' (Leff et al., 2011) would stand against the core principles of this dissertation research. Moreover, most of the observational tools are designed and developed by researchers in the Global North and researchers researching in the Global South need to be cautioned about using such tools as they do not always fit so neatly into the context of the Global South. This observational guide can, thus, be used as a guiding tool for other researchers or ethnographers in the Global South who aim to understand school-level and classroom-level nuances by taking a qualitative approach.

Participant observations were more detailed and focused in the first four to six weeks of my ethnographic fieldwork. After spending about four to six weeks with students and teachers inside and outside their classrooms, I shifted my focus from participant observations to interviews with students and teachers. I would still, however, sit in the classroom on days

or part of days when I did not have any interviews scheduled. But, overtime, these observations became monotonous and dull, and I felt I had a good understanding of classroom dynamics and was not learning anything substantively new, therefore, I decided to focus more of my energy in facilitating conversations with either students or teachers.

Informal Conversations with Students and Teachers: The purpose for informal discussions with students and teachers (separately) was to gain trust, build rapport with the participants, form empathetic, non-hierarchical, set of relationships, and to ‘get to know’ the students and the teachers, and to understand what is important to them (Swain & Spire, 2020). These conversations were used as an ongoing means of generating data that were free of distractions like digital recording and made the process more natural, and relaxed.

Informal discussions were beneficial because of their lack of structure, which allowed for flexibility in the nature of the discussion (Turner III, 2010). The conversations helped the students and teachers become familiar with me and the purpose of my visit along with the purpose of my study. Such conversations were helpful to me as well, in that it provided me with a space to interact with the students and teachers, to understand their daily routine at school, and the school environment. Informal conversations, like participant observations, took place throughout the course of the study.

These discussions, sometimes, took place in the classroom, other times outside the classroom setting (during lunch break or after school when going back home) and as per student’s and teacher’s convenience and availability to talk. Some of these conversations were a chance encounter with a teacher on the stairs to a classroom or in the corridors or on the playground, sometimes in the staffroom during or after lunch. The data generated from

informal conversations were recorded as detailed field notes (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). The notes, however, were not verbatim, but were written up afterwards, as close to the event as possible. These notes complemented the data collected through interviews and participant observations.

In-depth Group Interviews with Students: The aim of in-depth interviews with students was to obtain rich and thick descriptions that depicted their lived experiences in the classroom and school. In addition to investigating into the classroom experiences of the students, in-depth interviewing allowed me to probe into how these experiences shapes student's subjectivities. The open-ended format of such interviews made it possible for me to explore how individual accounts fit together as parts of a meaningful whole (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Face-to-face interviews allowed me to collect rich narrative descriptions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In-depth interviews with students allowed them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts of their school experiences and the impact of these experiences on their lives (Eder & Fingerson, 2001).

A semi-structured interview guide engaged students in detailed conversations that included parental attitudes about education and schools, behavior of teachers in the classroom and at school, relationship with teachers and peers, future aspirations of students and prevalent sociocultural norms and practices. Questions were designed to probe the full range of experiences about their direct (experienced by them) and indirect (observed in other student's lives) encounters with teachers in the classrooms.¹¹

¹¹ See Appendix G for the semi-structured interview guide for students.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews I conducted with students were all group interviews, where I let the students form small groups with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 6 students. Group interviews as opposed to one-on-one interviews were held because of students' discomfort in talking alone with me; they expressed to me that they wanted someone else, their friends, to come accompany them during the interview. The students formed groups based on friendships and comfort level of the students with one another. I did, however, avoid having mixed-gender groups—no group had both boys and girls.

There were several advantages of conducting group interviews with students. (Eder & Fingerson, 2001) argue that group interview is more 'natural' context for researching with children and adolescents as they "acquire social knowledge through interaction with others as they construct meanings through a shared process" (p. 182). Consequently, group interviews, helped me create a safe environment for the students, where the students appeared more relaxed in the company of their friends. Group interviews, "grow directly out of peer culture, as children construct their meanings collectively with their peers," emphasize Eder & Fingerson (2001). Therefore, group interviews allowed me to explore processes by which students produce shared meaning and understandings of their experiences at school. Conducting interviews in groups also helped in avoiding the power imbalances that existed between an 'adult' researcher and 'child' participants in one-on-one interviews (Adler et al., 2019; Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Heath et al., 2009).

There are various disadvantages to group interviews with children including difficulty in assembling the group, or potential effects of social desirability, like unwillingness to disagree with another participant in the group (Adler et al., 2019). In this research study, a

drawback of conducting group interviews over numerous days was the student's unavailability, particularly the same group of students on these days. Often, the same groups of students were not available to interview—someone or the other was absent from school. In such cases, I split the group or dropped a student out of the next round of interviews. Another drawback I faced during group interviews was that in some groups, particular students kept quiet and did not actively participate in the discussion. In such cases, I made note of the participant and tried to talk to them outside of the interview, through informal conversations.

I conducted interviews during school time in empty classrooms or on the open ground far from others. I looked out for periods where a teacher was absent or busy with other work and was not teaching the class. I avoided pulling the students out of class when the teacher was teaching. The interviews were conducted over multiple rounds. The length of the interviews was dependent on the time available with the students, and the timespan in which the students could concentrate on the interview. Sometimes, the students would not budge and go on talking for 45-60 minutes straight. At other times, I had to stop the interview and continue on a different day, because the students would have classes to attend or were tired of talking and were losing focus. All the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Interviews were conducted in Hindi.

Identifying and selecting students for interviews involved reflexivity from my end. I needed to recognize how my own assumptions and dispositions, might be influencing my choice on who to interview. I was inclined to select students who I had easily connected with or were outspoken or with those who seemed more confident in the schooling context. Through purposive sampling, I ended up with a heterogenous group of Grade IX students at

both the schools, which collectively comprised a group that varied across caste identities, gender, and personality traits (shy, confident, outspoken, etc.).

In total, I interviewed 27 students at VSS; of which 15 were girls and 12 were boys. At CSS, I interviewed a total of 22 students of which 6 were boys, and 16 were girls. At VSS, students across various Grades showed interest in the interview process. They insisted on giving interviews and showed much interest in talking with me. I did not want to refuse them; so, I conducted a round of interviews with these students. Turned out, they had a lot to tell me about the school and their experiences.

In-depth Interviews with Teachers: With teachers at both the schools, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews with teachers helped me in understanding the role of teachers in shaping the experiences of students in classrooms and the views that teachers held on students. In addition, I probed to gain insights on what motivated the teachers to become teachers and the issues that teachers faced in the school along with their experience at the school.

These interviews were conducted within the school setting and during school hours. It proved extremely difficult to get a hold of teachers outside of school because of the various familial and other personal commitments that the teachers had. Therefore, I tried to schedule interviews with teachers during free periods to avoid pulling teachers out of their scheduled teaching time. In both schools, there was a week when examinations took place and teachers would have no teaching duties or reduced teaching duties and were available for longer durations. So, I tried to take advantage of that and conducted interviews with several teachers

during the exam week. Similar to the student interviews, interviews with teachers were conducted on multiple occasions due to the limited time availability of the teachers.

The motivation to teach students varied among teachers, and to capture this variation, I decided to interview all teachers who taught Grade IX at the two schools, depending on their consent to participate in the interview process. However, due to time and unavailability of a few teachers, I could not interview all of them. Of the 7 teachers including the Principal, who taught Grade IX at VSS, I interviewed 6 teachers—5 male and 1 female—which also included the Principal. At CSS, of the 8 teachers, 6 teachers including the Principal who was also the English teacher, all female, were interviewed. I interviewed an additional teacher at CSS who had previously (in Grade VIII) taught Math to the Grade IX students. Only females were employed as teachers in school B.

A semi-structured interview guide¹² setting out the key topics and issues including teacher's perspectives and behavior towards students, the problems and limitations teachers faced when teaching students, was created, and used for the interview process (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Though each interview varied in length; on average, an interview was 60 minutes long. The teachers were interviewed in Hindi and these interviews were audio-recorded and later translated and transcribed.

Self-administered Student Survey: I conducted self-administered surveys with Grade IX students at both the schools. The rationale behind administering such a survey was to retrieve cross-school, self-reported data from informants (students) from different socio-cultural schooling contexts for comparison. The survey included questions on demographic

¹² See Appendix H for the semi-structured interview guide for teachers.

characteristics of the students like age, gender, parental education; participation in school and classroom activities; behavior of teachers and peers towards these students; subjects taught (favorite subjects); aspirations of the students, and on peer networks.¹³

The sample size for the survey was supposed to be all the students in Grade IX in VSS and CSS. Hence, all Grade IX students in a sampled school were invited to participate in the surveys. However, some students refused to take part in the survey, and some refused to be a part of the study. Another factor that affected the sample size was student absenteeism. At no point in the 2-3 months of data collection at VSS and CSS, did I see all students present in school. There is a group of students who I had not met in the 2-3 months duration at each school. Therefore, the sample size for the survey now included all the students who were present at school during my visits and who agreed to be a part of the survey.

At VSS, I distributed the surveys, after 2-3 weeks of school visits and informal interactions with the students. While in CSS, the survey was distributed towards the end of the data collection process. This change in strategy was a result of an incident that took place in VSS. A girl, the class monitor, asked her peers—girls—who had initially checked ‘yes’ on the consent forms to change their response to ‘no.’ The decision to ask their peers to not participate could be numerous, but my doubts are that the girls were uncomfortable or skeptical about what may happen when they filled out the surveys.¹⁴ To avoid this issue at CSS, I decided to conduct surveys towards the end of the data collection period.

¹³ See Appendix E for sample survey questionnaire.

¹⁴ Refer to Research Ethics section for details on how the situation was handled and the ethical considerations relating to this incident.

To best increase the response rates, I consulted with the school administration on how the survey administration could be conducted. As per the recommendation of the school administration, the surveys were conducted in the classroom during lunch break or in class hours when a teacher was absent. I personally administered the surveys to each group of students and supervised the process and answered questions at all the participating schools.

In total I distributed 32 assent forms to students in Grade IX at VSS. Of which, 9 students declined, while 23 students gave their assent to participate in the survey. The 9 students who refused to participate in the survey are all girls. Of the 23 students who gave their assent to participate in the survey, 8 are girls and 15 boys. Surveys were then distributed to these 23 students, which is also the sample size. 22 of the students filled the survey, resulting in a response rate of 96 percent. At CSS, I distributed 31 assent forms in Grade IX. All the students gave their assent to participate in the survey. However, only 20 students ended up taking the survey, of which 5 were boys and 15 were girls. I was unable to distribute the survey to 11 students who gave their assent because of school closure due to COVID-19. The survey administration with these students was planned for the second week of March 2020.

The survey questionnaires were provided in Hindi and the translations were piloted in advance to ensure appropriate terminology and internal reliability of the questions. The data generated through surveys was descriptive data. To corroborate the accuracy of survey respondents' answers, the survey was combined with other forms of data collection strategies, such as interviews, participant observations, and informal conversations through triangulation.

Together, these different strategies for data collection formed the core of this comparative interpretive ethnographic approach. In this ethnographic research, multiple methods and sources of data served “as sources of confirmation or corroboration for each other” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 131). Furthermore, the multiple methods used for data collection complemented each other and helped me not only broaden the range of aspects but also added depth to my understanding of the students’ lives at school (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Management and Analysis

Data collection, management and analysis took place in iterative cycles throughout the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I typed, catalogued, and organized, the fieldnotes from school visits, classroom observations, informal conversations, and interviews, daily. I reviewed and indexed these notes as per the arising recurrent items or themes from the data, at the end of each week. Additionally, I maintained coding memos to record notions of emergent themes, patterns and relationships, and discrepant evidence.

I transcribed the data through interviews using NVivo (Nudist Vivo), a software designed to facilitate qualitative data analysis. I used NVivo, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel to manage the coding, within an encrypted password protected computer. Further, I coded, formatted, and entered data from surveys into excel spreadsheets. I analyzed survey data using STATA to generate descriptive statistics about the sample, to obtain basic correlations or trends between data variables, and to identify patterns and relationships.

To maintain anonymity, I asked students to pick a pseudonym for themselves before the interview started. During the interviews, I referred to the students using these

pseudonyms. Furthermore, I used these pseudonyms as reference to any text/excerpt that I pulled from transcripts of interviews or informal conversations with students throughout this dissertation; and I will use the same pseudonyms if I reproduce any text/excerpt in research reports or articles. To maintain anonymity in the surveys, I assigned unique IDs to each student.

The objective of the project as highlighted above, was to uncover the processes and practices in the classroom that shaped students' subjectivities. The focus on schooling practices and processes was meaningful due to its ability to be used as a vehicle in uncovering the dilemma of how the classroom experiences shaped student's subjectivities in the context of the two schools that I chose to study. I undertook the analysis of the generated data with the view to understand the meanings and beliefs that the students attached to these processes and practices across the two school contexts, to draw out the patterns of similarities and differences throughout the analytical process.

Data analysis for this comparative interpretive research was an on-going process and was inter-twined with data generation. The blurry lines between data generation and analysis arose due to the cyclical, interactive, and recursive nature of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013) that characterized this comparative interpretive ethnographic inquiry. To this end, I did a preliminary analyses when 'in the field,'—simultaneously while collecting data—at the end of each fieldwork trip (Maxwell, 2013), by writing detailed reports and analytical memos on the day's activities and observations and identifying emerging findings, which, in turn, helped in updating and refocusing the research plan for fieldwork. I proceeded to methodically analyze the data collected at the end of the

formal fieldwork. The analyses drew from the formal fieldnotes, interviews, survey data, and from the informal conversations and observations that were part of this rich ethnographic fieldwork. I believe it is important to highlight that the period of data analysis and writing commenced with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I applied thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kawulich, 2017) to identify and develop themes from student's accounts of their experiences with teachers and peers in the classrooms. Thematic analysis as a method for data analyses was beneficial as it provided a dynamic and flexible research tool, that provided a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By reading and re-reading the data line by line from all sources, I looked for similarities and differences in students' accounts within one school and across the two schools. I used a bottom-up approach of "open-coding" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to identify categories, patterns, and themes from the data. To make sense of the meanings in the data and further the inquiry, I put the categories and themes developed from the data in conversation with the relevant theoretical explanations and literature to produce narratives and interpretations of students' understanding of their schooling experiences and the impact of these experiences on their subjectivities. The iterative-recursiveness that is characteristic of the comparative and interpretive approach applied to the analytical process as well and added depth and breadth to the interpretations of students' narratives.

The analysis of fieldnotes from classroom observations (both inside and outside) and school visits generated codes like: corporal punishment, verbal aggression, seating arrangement, pedagogical practices, teacher's body language, teacher and student absenteeism, classroom activities (or lack thereof), sports, poor school infrastructure,

facilities and resources at schools, positive and negative interactions. My analysis of interviews and informal conversations generated these codes: teacher's views, caste-based discrimination, reasons for skipping school, gendered household responsibilities, "time does not pass quickly at home," "I like school a lot," student's perceptions of self, students' aspirations, teacher's views about student's parents, teachers beat or scold, problems teachers face at school, teacher's roles and responsibilities, "make us write a lot," verbal aggression and humiliation, student's likes and dislikes at school, afraid of teachers, favorite vs. non-favorite teacher.

In this interpretive research, I aimed to explore and explain complex specificity in context and not generalize. I sought to answer questions about the schooling experiences of the students within their school and across the two schools; and, I situated the meanings students attached to their experience within the context of their school and in the sociocultural context in which the schools were situated. Adopting the terminology provided by (Boswell et al., 2019), this comparative interpretive research, then, made "plausible conjectures." Plausible conjectures can be defined as "general statements which are plausible because they rest on good reasons and the reasons are good because they are inferred from relevant information" (ibid, p. 29). The use of abductive reasoning aided to make these plausible conjectures by moving back and forth between literature and findings to identify patterns of broader analytical interests (Boswell et al., 2019; Schwartz-shea & Yanow, 2012). In this sense, plausible conjectures provided me with an avenue to make general statements on larger issues about the schooling processes and how it reproduced social and educational inequalities between students.

Ensuring Rigor

Maintaining the quality of the ethnographic research study and ensuring rigor required me to collect data that engaged and uncovered the everyday lived experiences of the participants and connected it to the sociocultural processes and practices rooted in societies (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). To maintain the quality of the research process, I practiced reflexivity, acknowledged my positionality and how it might affect the data collected (S. L. Morrow, 2005; Sprague, 2018), and established quality control checks, while also managing ethical dilemmas (Golafshani, 2003; LeCompte & Schensul, 2015; Maxwell, 2013).

Multiple methods used for collecting data enabled me to obtain distinct, independent, and diverse views of the schooling practices and served as a form of ensuring rigor for this ethnographic research. Engaging in the practice of triangulation allowed for different sources of data to be pieced together to flesh out findings and to identify the disconnection between beliefs and practices (Boswell et al., 2019; Maxwell, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Throughout the research process, when data from interviews contradicted my observations, I asked the research participants, be it teachers or students or sometimes both, about these discrepancies and explored the possible explanations with them. This coproduction of the data with the research participants helped in adding layers of nuance and introduced rigor into my ethnographic research.

Furthermore, an interpretivist approach required a continuous engagement in reflection and self-reflection, by recognizing one's own identity (S. L. Morrow, 2005; Sprague, 2018). Throughout the research process, I adhered to the practice of reflexivity both on self and methods. I maintained a reflexive journal that captured my identity and

positionality as a researcher, and also my assumptions and biases and how it might have affected the research process. To establish trust with the students and teachers, I honed my skills and abilities by taking several measures along the way: I was mindful of my body language, my words, my tone of voice, listening skills, and drew on a reservoir of empathy to bridge the perceived gap of caste, class, and education, and to enter the local world of my participants.

Navigating ethical dilemmas

Along with maintaining data quality, conducting an ethically sound study is equally important if not more. This section discusses research ethics and the ethical dilemmas that were faced by the researcher during the research process including not only the data collection period but also analysis, interpretation, and writing. So, what is “research ethics?” In this study, ethics in research was taken to mean, “the application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful, and to be fair” (V. Morrow & Richards, 1996; Sieber, 1993, p. 14).

Ethics approval for the study was received from the University of Massachusetts Boston (2019128). However, the guidelines to ethical research provided by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) were inadequate for the young people in this study. The university ethical frameworks directed towards researchers wanting to research with children and young people proved to be ‘ethnocentric in practice’ (Skelton, 2008). I did not treat the ethical issues as a ‘once-and-for-all’ matter which could be predetermined when the proposal was put to ethical committees or when the study was designed (Cohen et al., 2018; Delamont & Atkinson, 2018). Rather, as (Heimer, 2013) points out, actual ethics emerged ‘on the

ground' and were diverse with different layers and dimensions, calling these 'wicked ethics'; making it essential to see ethics as situational, context specific, and responsive (Cohen et al., 2018; Heath et al., 2009; V. Morrow, 2008; V. Morrow & Richards, 1996).

The objective of this research is to examine children's experiences in schools and classrooms. Thus, children's participation in this educational research was necessitated to meet the study's aims. Consequently, children's protection, both of themselves and of their rights, was at the center throughout the research process. I aimed to take a deontological view of ethics and treated my research participants as I would like them to treat me; with extended ethical considerations to the core principles of ethical research: non-maleficence; beneficence; justice; respect for persons; honesty; and gratification (Brooks et al., 2014; Pillay, 2014). Throughout this discussion on ethical dilemmas, I highlight how these core principles were upheld during the research process through my own experiences.

Informed consent and assent, confidentiality, and anonymity

Informed consent from the Principal and teachers: A challenge requiring active, careful management was the process of obtaining consent which required negotiation with the adult gatekeepers before children could be approached to ask for their informed consent. Permission to conduct research was taken from the Principal at each of the two schools. Consent was sought from the Principal by clearly communicating the research objectives, its aims, ideas, and methodology. By stating the purpose, nature, and the intended outcomes of the research, I avoided deception. A printout of the consent letter¹⁵ was also handed out to the

¹⁵ A sample of the oral consent script for teachers, students' parents, students is attached in Appendix I, J, K, respectively.

Principals of the two schools. The letter also described the tasks that the students and teachers would be asked to undertake, and explained that by participating in this research, they would be sharing with me their experiences, views, and opinions. I assured the Principals about confidentiality and anonymity of the school in my research and explained to them that participating in this research study was voluntary.

I went through a similar process to the one taken with the Principals to gain informed consent from the teachers. However, additional steps were necessitated to reassure the teachers about confidentiality and anonymity of the data produced through interviews. This was because, some teachers were afraid of the repercussions or penalties in case of a breach in confidentiality. Teachers in CSS expressed greater concern about the repercussions as compared to those in VSS. This concern might be due to the gender dynamics of the teachers at the two schools. Of the 7 teachers in VSS, 5 were male and while all the 8 teachers in CSS who taught Grade IX were female.

Highlighting the gender dynamics between teachers at the two schools here seemed essential because, when talking to the teachers at VSS about anonymity and confidentiality, the teachers dismissed the issue with a wave of hand and said that it did not matter if I shared the details and used their actual names in the interview. On the contrary, the teachers in CSS were quite concerned, validly so, about issues around confidentiality and anonymity. Most commonly gender issues in the workplace (schools in this case) focus on discriminatory practices against women, like unequal pay. An under the radar discriminatory practice against women is the ‘gender punishment gap’: gender differences in the punishment of similar undesirable activities (Egan et al., 2017). Research, mainly in financial industry,

shows that women are given less leniency for mistakes/missteps than their male counterparts (Egan et al., 2017; Gelfand & Virginia, 2019; Jemielity, 2017; Kennedy et al., 2016; Parajuli, 2019; Ward, 2018). Such gender disparities could potentially be existing at the schools as well; a consequence of which might be that some female teachers lacked confidence as opposed to their male counterparts.

Several concerns were raised by teachers at CSS, regarding the interview process. Teachers expressed skepticism about whether consent was gained from the Principal about audio-recording of interviews. I assured the teachers that consent was gained from the Principal but of foremost importance to me was the teacher's individual consent to audio-record the interview. One of the teachers wanted to confirm for herself if consent to audio-record was gained and I respected that decision. So, we first visited the Principal and I let the teacher discuss the issue with the Principal. Once the teacher was satisfied with all the information and required permissions to audio-record, we started the interview process, which on the teacher's consent was audio-recorded.

Teachers were concerned about how the data would be used; who would have access to the data; whether I had to report to the principal about the findings and will names be revealed when stating the results; and what might happen if their identity was revealed due to a breach in confidentiality. Before starting the interviews, I assured the teachers that any information or experiences they shared with me, will not be discussed with their colleagues or the Principal, and only the researcher, I, will have access to all the data produced. Furthermore, I reassured the teachers that only I would listen to the recording of our conversation and made a promise to them that I will not tell anybody what we had talked

about. I explained to them that I would write about their experiences but that I would change their names to pseudonyms or make general statements without naming names. I also informed the teachers that they could use a pseudonym for the interview process, which seemed to relieve them.

Sometimes, sensitive/controversial information was shared during the interview by the teachers. In the middle of the interview, when talking about sensitive issues or issues that could be viewed as controversial, teachers would ask me to pause or switch off my recorder for brief periods. I respected such requests from the teachers and did as requested. Only when the teacher indicated that I could restart the audio-recorder would I resume to audio-record. For sections, that were not audio-recorded, I would make rigorous notes once the interview process was over.

Informed assent from students: The next step after gaining consent from the Principal and the teachers at the schools was to gain informed assent from the students in a culturally appropriate manner. I approached the Principal and sought their opinion on the matter. At both the schools, the Principals insisted that their consent was adequate and that the parents trusted the school authorities with such decisions. True as that might be, this was unsettling; but since I was depending on the goodwill of the school, I was in no position to insist. In the words of (V. Morrow, 2008), I tried to take a “common-sense viewpoint,” and argued that gaining the children’s assent was key for my research.

To gain informed assent from the students, I explained to them the objectives of the study, informing them of the various data collection strategies, and the tasks they would have to undertake to participate in the study. I described to them that participation in the study was

voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to them. I also explained to the students that by taking part in the study, they would be expressing their views and opinions and relating their experiences to me. I thought it important to also assure them that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I posed to them. A handout stating the same was provided to the students to take home. Most of the students in both VSS and CSS who took the assent forms, checked the appropriate box, and returned the forms to me on the spot. The students said, they did not need to show the letters to their parents and would tell them verbally.¹⁶ There were a handful of students who took the assent letters home to show it to their guardians or elder siblings or parents before giving me their assent.

Assent for surveys and interviews with students were taken separately and in different ways. For surveys, an assent letter was given to the students to show to their parents and get their permission to participate (even though the Principal insisted that his/her consent was adequate, I wanted to leave it up to the students to decide whether they wanted to get their parent's assent to participate or not). At the end of the assent letter, a yes or no question was asked to the students and their parents about participating. The students or their parents were required to check the appropriate box to answer. The assent letter did not require a signature, as per the IRB's suggestion. While written consent may be the norm in the context of the United States and the Global North, the practice of getting official documents with signatures

¹⁶ There could be numerous reasons behind not taking the letters home. (1) The parents of most of the students are not educated and so might be unable to read. (2) Not all parents have time to inquire about what is going on at school and hence students have the autonomy to decide what they want to do at school. (3) A small number of these students, mostly boys, are decision makers in their family, due to a non-present father or father away from home due to work, and in cases of some students, their father had passed away.

(written consents) are tended to be viewed with suspicion in the Indian context. Employing an oral consent diminished participant discomfort and was viewed as a culturally sensitive practice. For interviews, oral assents were sought by the students, which were audio recorded. By gaining informed assent without putting any pressure on the participants, I showed respect for persons and maintained the core principle of the study.

Assent was seen as an on-going process (V. Morrow, 2008; Swain & Spire, 2020). I gave students time to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study and told them that it was acceptable to me if they changed their minds about participation at any time during the study. For example, in VSS, a few girls marked “no” on the assent letter, refusing to fill the survey. However, at a later point they came back to me asking if they could still fill the survey. I gave them new assent forms and a survey to fill. In the same school, there were students who had refused to even take the assent letter initially. These students came back to me at a later point asking if they could still be a part of the study or if it was too late. These students were also included to be a part of the study. Yet, other students, who agreed earlier, did not want to be a part of the study anymore. Respecting the decisions of these students, I let them withdraw from the study. A small number of students did not want to participate in some of the tasks, like filling the survey, but were interested in doing an interview. With these students, I tried to discuss the questions on the survey during the interview or through informal conversations.

I assured the students of anonymity and confidentiality. In relation to confidentiality and anonymity, the students were assured that any information or experiences they shared with me, will not be discussed with their peers, teachers, or parents, and only the researcher,

I, will have access to all the data produced. In addition, before each interview, I reassured the children that only I would listen to the recording of our conversation and made a promise to them that I will not tell anybody what we had talked about, neither their peers nor their teachers. I explained to them that I would write about their experiences but that I would change their names to the pseudonyms (see data management section for details) they chose for themselves before the interview or make general statements without naming names. To maintain anonymity in the surveys, the assent letters and surveys for each student were labelled with unique IDs.

Ethics of classroom observations

To observe classrooms, I took permission from each teacher before sitting in their classroom for observations. During classroom observations, sometimes I was put on the spot by the teacher. The teacher remarked to the students, “study properly, or this lady here will report what is happening at the school to higher authorities. Look, she is taking notes,” (Hindi Teacher, VSS). Such a statement put me in an awkward situation, and I did not know what to do or how to react, the first time this happened. From that the day onwards, I refrained from taking notes in the Hindi teacher’s classroom, unless very important.

In addition, I would often notice teachers looking for validation from me or for my reactions to the teacher’s actions or reactions to student(s) actions. For instance, if the students were unable to answer the teacher’s questions, the teacher would use harsh words such as “no matter how much I scold you or beat you, there is no impact on you all. You all refuse to learn.” After or when scolding the students, teachers would look at me and study me

and my reactions. In such situations, I tried to either avoid meeting the teacher's eyes or kept a straight/poker face, devoid of any reactions.

Use of corporal punishment and ethical dilemmas

In addition, formidable questions about research ethics surfaced when I became a witness to the use of corporal punishment at school by teachers and leading to an inquiry about children's experiences with corporal punishment at schools. The use of physical and verbal violence confronted me with an acute ethical dilemma. Indeed, as a researcher, it is my responsibility to report instances of violence, but with no clear alternative for reporting that would not lead to retaliation towards the students from the school authorities, my primary concern was to not leave students feeling distress. India has abundant policies that ban corporal punishment in schools, including the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (2009) and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. Even with legislation that bans the use of corporal punishment at schools in India, the implementation is ineffective and limited.

With ambiguity on how to conduct an ethical research study, I thought best to focus on the students themselves, as suggested by other researchers in their encounters of similar issues (see (Bahou & Zakharia, 2019; Morrow & Singh, 2016)). Like, Bahou & Zakharia (2019), to avoid leaving students in distress, I made it a point to listen and acknowledge the difficulties students experienced at school and home. Students had to cope with everything happening around them on their own. Therefore, much like other researchers, I strived to raise awareness by writing about children's experiences of corporal punishment either as a witness or as someone who sustained beatings; and, about the impact of corporal punishment

on students. In letting the situation determine my behavior, I took a “bottom-up” approach to situational ethics (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 114).

Research involving children necessitated additional safeguards and protection. I arranged for a clinical psychologist and a psychologist, in case any student showed signs of distress, and to prevent harm to children or “non-maleficence.” The clinical psychologist worked at the District Hospital in Sitapur and was willing to meet with students individually, if needed. The psychologist, however, runs her own private organization in Lucknow, but had agreed to speak to the students on the phone in case a need arose. She agreed to do this free of charge, which was much appreciated. The same held true in the case of teachers. Fortunately, no students showed signs of distress or trauma that may have required referrals to the psychologist or clinical psychologist.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was another aspect that made for an ethical research practice (Heath et al., 2009; Mertens, 2018). During the course of the research, I had decided to reciprocate the time spent by my study participants on this research project by providing them with books, study guides, or stationary, towards the end of the study. However, I was soon forced to change my decision. On the completion of the survey, I thanked students by giving out stationary, as opposed to financial incentives, which is a common practice among social science researchers. As soon as I explained to them that it was my way of saying “thank you,” a few students refused and said, “you should keep this, we can afford our own stationary.” This reflected to me that the students were offended by my actions, even though

I meant no harm. So, I needed to be mindful about how my actions could have unintended consequences, irrespective of how well I meant for my study participants.

Instead, as a means of increasing the reciprocal nature of the research, I offered my time to the students by sharing my experiences and helping them with Math and English concepts. As a token of appreciation for giving me access and for their cooperation in the research process, I invested a nominal sum in the school infrastructural facilities. This decision was made after discussing with the Principals of the two schools about what would help the schools the most. I had not decided or discussed about reciprocity towards the school until the very end of the fieldwork. I was conscious of how this decision to reciprocate or compensate the school for their cooperation might have influenced a school's decision to give me access.

Researcher Positionality

As mentioned earlier, recognizing one's positionality is of utmost important to conducting a trustworthy and rigorous ethnographic study. Here, I reflect on my positionality and how it might have affected the data collected. The students and the teachers looked upon my position as a doctoral candidate in the US as prestigious; perhaps, for this reason, the headmasters and teachers, were so keen to receive me as a researcher and a guest. It was assumed by students that I had studied and lived in the US my whole life. The students were surprised to hear that I had family here in the city and that I was born and brought up in Sitapur. The students would respond with, "Really?" or "Tell us the truth, do you really have a house in the city?" Some students perceived me to be a government employee, who was at school to report the status of the school.

I looked at myself as an outsider to my study context. I had very little or nothing in common with the students whose experiences I was trying to understand. I am a female student studying in the US and belong to a higher socioeconomic class and upper caste than most of the students at the two schools. I went to a private residential school for my middle school and high school education (Grades VI-XII). And hence I had little practical knowledge of the realities of middle schools and high schools that my participants attended. Unlike my study participants, I lived in the city and knew very little about the life in the villages where the participants lived except for the prior knowledge from a reading of the literature and the stories from other people I had met throughout my life.

As a woman, I had assumed, that there would be an immediate bond between the female students and me ideal for research. However, the assumption was challenged in that female students looked at me skeptically and it took me a long time to create a meaningful bond with them. Throughout the research process, students had autonomy over when and where the interviews would be held, who or which students would be part of the group for group interviews, who could listen in on the interviews, if at all, and what information was shared with me. Even for the surveys, students dictated the terms about when they wanted to fill the survey.

At both the research sites, it took the students, the teachers, and me about ten to fifteen days to adjust to the new environment. The environment was new to the students and teachers because of my presence. The teachers appeared to be amazed when they saw me sitting among the students. They would, often, remark, “Why are you sitting there? Come sit here, we can arrange an extra chair. Come, sit next to me.” The teacher and the students were

always conscious of my presence. The students would turn back to look at my reactions to what the teacher was teaching or saying to them. Often, the teacher would look at me after saying something or scolding the students to see my reaction. The teachers also, sometimes, justified their actions to me in class. For instance, once, the Hindi teacher remarked,

Just look at how the students are. They do not study, now what can the teacher do? As teachers we can only scold them. They know that all the teacher can really do is scold. She will scold for a while and then she will go. It is the teacher's job to scold. The students hear from one ear and it goes out from the other ear. (Hindi Teacher, CSS)

I was as much the observed, as the observer. All the actors in the room, the students, teachers, and me, played both the roles—the observed as well as the observer. This was true in the staffroom as well as on the playground. The observations on the playground, however, were limited because of limited sports activities at the two schools. Even though the last period everyday was split between physical education and moral science, there was no physical education given to the students. This was mainly because of the absence of a sports/game teacher. In the field, I was determined to not draw unnecessary amounts of attention towards me if possible.

I noted that the students remembered minute details about me, such as what I carried to school with me, what I wore the previous day and the type of clothes I wore, how I tied my hair, the kind of mobile phone I used, and how I commuted to school. Though, this was problematic, per say, but I did not think it productive for the focus of the regular discussion to be about the material aspects of my life. Therefore, I tried to keep a low profile. I wore simple, traditional clothes that women in the community wore, tied my hair neatly into a ponytail. I carried with me a small bag with a water bottle, stationery, a notebook for my

notes, and lunch, very much similar to a school bag. I avoided using my mobile phone during school hours. Due to the distance between my place of stay and the school, I commuted in a car, where I had someone drive me back and forth. I needed someone to drive me around both to avoid exhaustion of the drive and for safety purposes.

There was a clear visible hierarchy between the students and me. This hierarchy was not established by me. It was a part of the larger structural factors at play. The hierarchy was visible in the following manner: each time I would enter a classroom, whether in the presence of a teacher or in the absence, the students would stand up and greet me as they would a teacher. But this was not necessarily done for all outsiders. Say, if a parent entered a class, and no one knew who they were, the students would not stand and greet them. Or if there was a member of the office staff who came in for an official work, then too the students would not stand. They would stand for the teacher and for someone who accompanied the teacher.

Similarly, there was a structural hierarchy between the teachers and me, where the teachers were on a rung higher than me. But this differed with age of the teacher and their experience as a teacher. For instance, both in VSS and CSS, there were student teachers, meaning they were training to be a teacher as part of their B.Ed. training programs, and I was treated as a peer among them. But with more seasoned teachers, I was treated as a student or a junior. But irrespective of my hierarchical position, I was treated with respect by all.

Conclusion

An overview of the ethnographic approach I took to explore children's schooling experiences was provided in this chapter. It also provided the rationale for using ethnographic approach and taking a comparative and interpretive epistemological stance for

exploring children's subjectivities. This chapter described the several ways through which I elicited children's understanding of their experiences at schools. It discusses research ethics and the ethical dilemmas that were faced by the researcher during the research process including not only the data collection period but also analysis, interpretation, and writing. It raised important concerns and issues related to 'official ethics' versus 'ethics on the ground' and the gap that exists. It strongly emphasized that in educational research involving children, children and their rights should be protected throughout the research process. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to reflect on my subjective position as a researcher, and how it affected the research process. A set of limitations that this study suffered from have been described in the chapter as well.

The chapter that follows entails a rich description of the institutional context of the two schools – VSS and CSS. It examines the quality of the physical environment at both schools and discusses the impact on students' learning outcomes, sense of school belonging and perceptions of self.

CHAPTER 4

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS

This chapter examines the quality of the physical environment at the two secondary schools, Village Secondary School (VSS) and City Secondary School (CSS). In addition, the chapter considers how the physical environment, such as the school infrastructure, facilities, and resources available (or not) in the classroom, might impact students' experiences, engagement, and learning in their classroom. It is within the school's physical environment where learning is encouraged, and relationships are developed. For most students from low-income and socially disadvantaged families, like those who are a part of this study, academic learning often transpires when at school. Therefore, it is crucial to gain insights into the relationship between school and classroom physical environment and student academic learning and engagement.

Earthman (2004) defines "poor" buildings as those that lack appropriate HVAC systems, have poor lighting, are old, are noisy, lack functional furniture, or have some variation or combination of these qualities" (p. 8). I examine the two schools' physical environments and the school buildings on a combination of these qualities as applicable to

the study's context. The questions that this chapter tries to answer are: What factors affect the physical environment of the school and classroom? How does the physical environment of the school and classroom affect students' experiences and learning? I use the field visits, classroom observations, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews with students and teachers to generate the findings for this chapter.

I explore how the quality of the physical environment might influence teacher-student relations and interactions, affect student engagement, and shape students' sense of school belonging. The chapter serves three purposes: (1) to compare the two schools and emphasize the similarities and differences between them; (2) to discuss the relationship between school environment and students' learning and their subjectivity – a sense of school belonging and perceptions of self; and (3) to provide contextual material for the subsequent chapters on the interactions between teachers and students and among peers, and student engagement.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: Section 1 presents the contextual background of the two schools and the actors—teachers and students—within the two schools. Village Secondary School (VSS) is a government-aided school located in a rural area with 94 students enrolled in Grade IX and 6 teachers teaching these students. While, City Secondary school (CSS) is a private school located in an urban area with 37 students enrolled in Grade IX and 8 teachers teaching this grade. The students who attend VSS and CSS come from low-income families and lower caste groups, while the teachers belonged to upper caste groups. Along with teaching responsibilities, the teachers at both schools have administrative roles and responsibilities, which tends to affect their teaching. Though the

tuition cost charged by both schools differed and was low, the amount was too high for parents of some students who attended these schools.

Section 2 focuses on the physical environment of the two schools and the classrooms and the impact on students' learning outcomes. The school buildings at VSS were dilapidated, and classrooms were poorly lit with no fans. There was a shortage of desks and benches at VSS. Further, a lack of proper toilet facilities created an unhealthy, unsanitary, and unsafe school environment. CSS provided students with adequate infrastructure, proper lighting and fans, and school resources like access to drinking water, toilets, and furniture in the classroom than VSS. These differences in the infrastructural facilities and resources at the two schools occurred due to financial constraints, lack of competition and incentive, or deficit thinking on the part of school authorities.

Finally, a discussion on the findings and concluding remarks comprises section 3. An overcrowded Grade IX classroom at VSS negatively impacted teaching and learning, as teachers were not familiar with the students, their learning levels, and their needs. Conversely, Grade IX-CSS had a smaller class size and teachers were able to focus on most if not all students in class. Moreover, teachers seemed familiar with students and their academic performance in class. In comparison to CSS, Grade IX-VSS classroom had a poor learning environment due to improper infrastructure, a shortage of furniture, large class size, and deficit views of teachers about back-bencher students with poor academic performance.

The Schools¹⁷—Village Secondary School (VSS) & City Secondary School (CSS)

This section on schools provides the readers with the contextual background of the two schools, discussing their locations, management type, academic calendar, daily routine followed, and the schools' progress over the years.

Contextual background

Village Secondary School (VSS) is a government-aided secondary school located in a rural area, Parsendi, in the Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh, India. It is a coeducational school and caters to students in Grade VI-X. A total of 357 students (as of December 2019) are enrolled in VSS across all grades, of which 173 students are enrolled in middle school (Grades VI-VIII) and 184 at the secondary level, where 94 students are in Grade IX and 90 in Grade X. The school constituted six teachers and a Principal (who did not teach), of which four teachers were male, two were females, and the Principal was male (as of December 2019). Some of the teachers at the school came from the city, while others lived in the neighboring villages. These six teachers taught across all five grades (Grades VI-X). The school required each student to wear the school uniform during school hours. The Grade IX-X students were responsible for purchasing their uniforms. For Grades VI to VIII students, the uniform was paid for and provided by the government under the regulations of the RTE Act (2009). However, on Wednesdays, students could wear home dress/casuals if they liked;

¹⁷ To maintain anonymity, I will refer to the school in the rural area as Village Secondary School (VSS) and the school in the city as City Secondary School (CSS). Both schools are located within the Sitapur district but in different areas of the district. VSS was situated in a rural area in Parsendi towards the south of the district, while CSS was situated in Sitapur city towards the district's east side.

they were excused from wearing the school uniform since most students owned only one set.

Table 1 summarizes the school-level characteristics of the two focal schools.

Figure 4: Location of the Two Schools

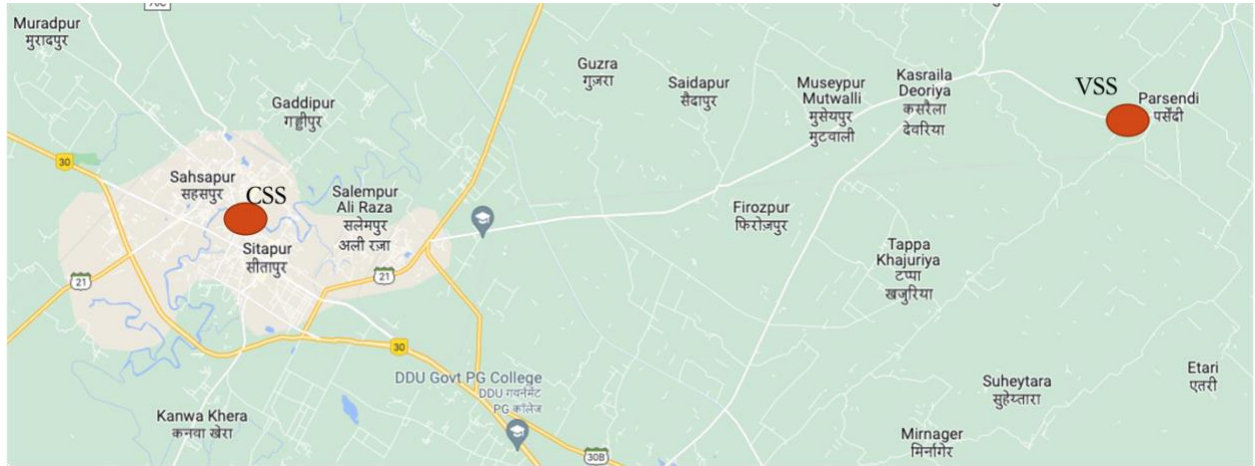


Table 1: School-level Characteristics of Focal Schools

	Village Secondary School (VSS)	City Secondary School (CSS)
<i>School Category</i>	Upper primary with secondary school (Grades VI-X)	Primary with Upper Primary and Higher Secondary (Grades I-XII)
<i>School Management</i>	Government-aided ¹⁸ (across all grades)	Private (unaided) (Grades I-V; IX-XII); Government-aided (Grades VI-VIII)
<i>Board of Affiliation</i>	Uttar Pradesh Board of Education (state board)	Uttar Pradesh Board of Education (state board)
<i>Language of Instruction</i>	Hindi	Hindi
<i>Tuition costs for Grade IX and X</i>	Low (Rs. 450 per AY)	Low (Rs. 4050 per AY)
<i>Location (Rural/ Urban)</i>	Rural	Urban

¹⁸ **Government aided schools** are those that are managed privately but receive grants-in-aid for teacher salaries from the central and state governments or local bodies. Schools that are run and managed by a private entity through the school fees and funds that these schools raise are referred to as **private unaided schools**. (See Chapter 1 for more details.)

City Secondary School (CSS) was located in Sitapur city in the Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh, India (Figure 4 shows the location of the two schools on a map). The school provided education to students from the primary to higher secondary levels (Grades I-XII). Approximately 600 students were enrolled at the school across all grades (as of March 2020). Of the total, 510 students were enrolled in primary and middle school (Grades I–VIII), 67 at the secondary level (Grades IX (37) and X (30)), and high secondary school (Grades XI and XII) consisted of 23 students. The school was coeducational till Grade X; in Grades XI-XII, only girls enrolled because the school did not offer Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology) as a subject choice. The only subject choice available to the students in Grades XI-XII was Arts & Humanities (Economics, Sociology, and Education), which are not considered professional subjects, unlike Sciences. Since Science was considered a professional subject and the school did not offer the subject at the higher secondary level (Grade XI-XII), boys or parents of boys chose not to enroll at the school. Same as VSS, students were required to wear the school uniform every day without excuse. The burden of purchasing the uniform was on the students and their parents.

About twenty-eight teachers taught at CSS. Eight of them taught Grade IX. Of the eight teachers, except three teachers, all taught across a mix of primary, middle, and secondary levels of education provided at the school. The school hired only three teachers to teach students at the secondary level specifically. All the teachers at the school resided in Sitapur city. The senior staff decided to only hire female teachers for reasons concerning

girls' safety at school. Also, the school was initially a girls' school, and over the years, the administration decided to open the doors for boys as well.¹⁹

I have my concerns about hiring male teachers. There is a separate issue that needs to be thought about with girls: sexual misconduct or harassment. [...] Moreover, if a girl's name gets associated with a male teacher or a male student, the girl's entire life would be ruined in our society and culture. We live in such a close-knitted society where news spreads like wildfire. Moreover, our community is unforgiving, especially to a girl. (English teacher and Principal, CSS)

In conclusion, in comparison to VSS, CSS had a larger school size as it catered to students from Grades I to XII. In addition, CSS had a small class size in Grade IX, and hence, the student-to-teacher ratio was also small (37:1) as opposed to VSS (94:1).

Despite the differences in the location and school management type, both schools held similarities in their board of affiliation, medium of instruction, and curriculum. Both schools were affiliated to the state board, Uttar Pradesh Board of Education, and complied with the prescribed courses and textbooks issued by the Board authorities. The official language of instruction at the schools was Hindi, in line with the State Board's requirements. Both schools offered the following subjects at the secondary level: English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Home Science, Social Science, Art/Drawing, and Science. The students had a subject choice and could opt for either English or Sanskrit among these subjects.

Additionally, Mathematics was an optional subject for girls but a compulsory one for boys. Therefore, girls could choose between Mathematics and Home Science. None of the girls at VSS had opted for Math, while 10 (of 25) girls at CSS took Math as a subject. An

¹⁹ The decision to open the doors for boys was to generate more revenue in tuition fees.

additional subject, Moral Science & Physical Education, was taught at CSS; however, the students did not have to take an exam for this subject.

The tuition cost at the two schools differed and would be considered low when seen against the educational system of the whole of Sitapur. For students in Grades IX–X, VSS charged a fee of about Rs. 450 per academic year (AY). On the other hand, the school fee for Grade IX and X students at CSS was ten times higher than that at VSS. The tuition fee for Grade IX and X students in CSS was Rs. 450 per month (Rs. 4,050 per AY). The difference in the tuition cost between the two schools existed due to the type of school management and the schools' location. For instance, since CSS was a private school, the tuition fee charged there was higher than that at VSS, a government-aided school. The fees at private schools are higher because such schools incur the cost of teachers' salaries, whereas the government bears teachers' salaries at government-aided schools. However, compared to other private schools in the city, the tuition cost at CSS is considered low, whereas its counterparts charge tuition fees as high as Rs. 4,000–Rs. 5,000 per month.

Though the tuition fee charged was considerably low at the two schools than in their counterparts, the amount was too high for parents of some students who attended these schools. A handful of students at both schools could not afford the tuition cost and would default on fee payments. When students could not pay fees, some would drop out of school, while others continued at school and would pay the fees later when they had some money. Several teachers remarked, “For some [students], we [the teachers] keep asking them, but they do not pay. For others, we do not even have to ask; they pay the fees on time.” (Informal conversations, teachers, CSS). It was the class teacher's responsibility to collect school fees.

VSS maintained a fund called the “poor boys fund,” collected by the school from the students during the admission process for students who could not pay the tuition fees. The money from this fund would cover the losses incurred when students were unable to pay the school fees (Informal conversations, Principal, VSS). At CSS, I found out from the Grade IX class teacher that the school went into loss every year due to pending fees from the students. The school would incur a loss of Rupees 1-2 lakhs (\$1400- \$2800) per academic year.

Academic calendar and daily routine

For the academic year 2019-2020, the school year started in April 2019 and ended in March 2020, just after the final examinations. The academic year at both schools included a series of examinations and seemed to revolve around these exams. Schools administered internal exams in August, October, and December and a final exam in early March. These exams tested students in each subject, and their scores on these exams showcased their academic performance in that school year. In addition, the school broke off for five to six weeks between May and June for a summer break, for three to four weeks between December and January for a winter break, and a two-week break occurred after the final exams in March. The school also observed various regional, national, and religious holidays throughout the school year.

For Grade X and XII students, in addition to the internal exams held by the school, an external national-level examination is administered each year from February to March, determining students’ and schools’ performance. The national-level examinations’ results compared schools against other schools, subject teachers against other subject teachers, and students against other students. Schools and students were ranked on their performance;

lower scores by students often resulted in blame towards the teachers. At both schools, the teaching and learning practices at the secondary and higher secondary levels revolved around preparation for the internal examinations and the external national-level examinations. The student's performance on the internal exams decided whether they could move up to the next grade.

The instruction schedule in each classroom was organized using a timetable. It laid down the number of periods, each lasting 30-35 minutes, dedicated to teaching a subject or other activities. The same timetable was followed each day, without any change. In total, students spent about four and a half to five hours in the classroom. Teachers went from one classroom to the other to teach the subject assigned to them in each grade. Students stayed in their classrooms all day long. Some students ate lunch in the open ground at their school, while others ate lunch in the classroom. There was no separate lunch area at either school.

The timetable for Grade IX at the two schools was as follows:

<i>Timings</i>	<i>Village Secondary School (VSS)</i>	<i>Timings</i>	<i>City Secondary School (CSS)</i>
7:30-8:00	Morning assembly	9:00-9:30	Morning assembly
8:00-8:30	English/Sanskrit	9:30-10:00	Social Studies (Geography, History & Civics)
8:30-9:00	Social Studies (Geography, History & Civics)	10:00-10:30	Mathematics
9:00-9:30	Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)	10:30-11:00	Biology/Chemistry
9:30-10:00	Mathematics/Home Science	11:00-11:30	Hindi
10:00-10:30	Hindi	11:30-12:00	[Lunch Break]
10:30-11:15	[Lunch Break]	12:00-12:30	Art
11:15-11:45	Art	12:30-1:00	English
11:45-12:15	Math/Home Science	1:00-1:30	Physics
12:15-12:45	Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)	1:30-2:00	Physical Education & Moral Science

In the 30-35-minute teaching block, the first 5-10 minutes went by in waiting for the teacher to arrive and for students to settle down. Then, the teachers allocated the remaining 20-25 minutes of teaching time towards dictating questions and answers or writing these questions and answers on the blackboard for the students to copy into their notebooks. Occasionally, teachers would start explaining and then simultaneously write on the blackboard for students to copy. It left little time for a discussion or exchange of ideas or math problems to be practiced and corrected or for students to ask questions on the topic/chapter taught. Often, teachers filled the blackboard with too much content that students would be copying it down even after the class was over and it was time for the next period. Teachers spent most of the class time dictating, copying, and reciting answers.

The actors in the school system

Teachers and students are the core participants in the schooling process. Here, I discuss the profiles of the Grade IX students and the teachers who taught these grades at the two focal schools.

The Students²⁰

The total number of Grade IX students at VSS was 94 (42 were boys and 52 were girls), and at CSS were 37 (25 girls and 12 boys), as shown in Table 2. About 43 percent of the students (50 percent boys and 37 percent girls) belonged to the Scheduled Caste

²⁰ Appendix A provides the profiles of students who I either interviewed, observed closely, or had an informal conversations with. It provides some details on student's personalities, their overall conceptualization of their lives at school, their interests, likes and dislikes. This table has been adapted from (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019).

categories, and 39 percent (24 percent boys and 52 percent girls) belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBC), making the former the majority group in Grade IX–VSS classroom. Whereas 41 percent of Grade IX–CSS students (42 percent boys and 40 percent girls) belonged to the Scheduled Castes group and 49 percent (50 percent boys and 48 percent girls) belonged to the Other Backward Classes category. Students from the Scheduled Castes group were in the minority compared to those from Other Backward Classes. This comparison based on caste categories matters because the dissertation focuses on how classroom experiences for students may differ based on their caste designations. In Grade IX–CSS, 81 percent (30) of students resided in rural areas, while 19 percent (7) resided in urban areas. In contrast, 100 percent of the Grade IX students at VSS lived in rural areas neighboring the school.

The ages of students in grade IX–VSS ranged from 13 to 18 years, with an average age of 14.4.²¹ In Grade IX–CSS, the age range for students was 11 to 17 years, with an average age of 13.7 years. As per the age-related grade policy followed by the Indian education system, students in secondary school (Grades IX and X) should be 14 to 16 years old. Students attending grade IX in AY2019-2020 should be between the ages of 13 to 15 years unless they started schooling early (or late), were promoted to a higher grade, or were retained in the same grade. About 87.2 percent and 78.4 percent of students were in the appropriate age-related grade in VSS and CSS, respectively.

²¹ Age was calculated by subtracting the students date of birth from April 1, 2019 and then dividing the difference by 365.25. I used April 1, 2019 as the base date because the school academic year starts in April and ends in March. Data about students' date of birth was obtained from the class attendance register maintained by the class teacher.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of students in Grade IX at focal schools

	Village Secondary School (VSS)			City Secondary School (CSS)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
<i>General</i> ²²	3	1	4	0	1	1
<i>Minority</i>	8	5	13	1	0	1
<i>Other Backward Classes (OBC)</i>	10	27	37	6	12	18
<i>Scheduled Castes</i>	21	19	40	5	10	15
<i>Scheduled Tribes</i>	0	0	0	0	2	2
<i>Total</i>	42 (45%)	52 (55%)	94	12 (32%)	25 (68%)	37

Family background

Most students from both schools reported living in multi-generational households with grandparents, parents, siblings, and paternal uncles and their families. Students had large family sizes with the number of siblings between 2 to 10. Eighty (85 percent) out of 94 students from Grade IX–VSS were Hindu, whereas fourteen (15 percent) were Muslim. In Grade IX–CSS, the majority of the students, 97.3 percent, reported that they were Hindu. Only one student out of 37 was Muslim. At both schools, all students reported that they spoke Hindi at home.

The students who attended Grade IX–VSS came from low-income families. An indicator of the socioeconomic status of the students was parental occupation. The main

²² Indians are divided into four broad –Scheduled Caste (SC) or Dalits (lower castes), scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC), and General Category (GC), which includes the ‘upper’ castes (see Figure 1 in chapter 1). Minority communities include Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Sikhs, Parsis and Jain.

occupation for the fathers was agriculture, which was also the predominant source of income for the residents in the area. The mothers of most students were not involved in paid work and looked after the household, except in families where mothers were the head of the household due to their husband's death. In such cases, the mothers worked as cooks or tailors to support the family. Students in Grade IX–CSS came from a mix of low-income and lower-middle-class families. Agriculture was a source of income for most families of Grade IX–CSS students who lived in the villages. Other occupations for fathers of some students (both in the city and in the villages) included manual laborers, employees at shops or mills, or owners of small shops. Like Grade IX–VSS, students' mothers were either housewives or worked as cooks or tailors to support their families.

Parental education

Parents of students from both grades had low levels of formal education. Fathers had a slightly higher level of education than mothers. Of the 22 students who took the survey in Grade IX–VSS²³, 41 percent (9) reported that their father had attained education at the lower secondary level (Grade X), and 22.8 percent (5) of students' fathers had attained primary education (Grade V). Only 2 students (9 percent) said that their fathers had attended college; fathers of 13.7 percent (5) students had no formal education. In terms of mother's educational attainment, 45 percent (10) of the students said their mothers had no education, while 55 percent (12) students reported that their mothers had at least primary level education. In Grade IX–CSS, a total of 20 students took the survey, of which 70 percent of students' fathers had attained at least a primary level of education, of whom 10 percent graduated

²³ Refer to the methods chapter for details on the survey administered and sample sizes.

higher secondary school (Grade XII) and 20 percent completed secondary school (Grade X). 15 percent students reported that their fathers had attained a bachelor's degree. 55 percent (11) of the students stated that their mother had a primary level of education, while 15 percent (3) of mothers had attained education at the upper primary level. 15 percent of the students said that their mother had no education.

Financial constraints faced by the students and their families

The low socioeconomic background of the students put them at a structural disadvantage. The agricultural background and the low economic status of the families required students to stay at home during months of cultivation and harvest. Families could not afford to hire manual laborers to help with farming activities, and hence, parents relied on their children for help. To help with farm-related work or at shops, students often had to skip school, which negatively affected their performance in class and overall educational attainment. I discuss the causes and consequences of skipping school²⁴ in more detail in chapters 5 and 6.

An example of the financial constraints faced by the students and their families was their inability to pay school fees. Though the tuition fees charged were considerably low at the two schools compared to their counterparts, the amount was too high for parents of students who attended these schools. At both schools, a handful of students could not afford the tuition cost and would default. As mentioned earlier, some students dropped out due to their inability to pay school fees, and others continued attending school and paid fees when they had money. Sometimes, teachers would let students attend school even if the students

²⁴ Schools did keep a record of student absenteeism.

could not afford to pay school fees. Moreover, for parents, tuition fee was not the only cost associated with sending the children to school; books, notebooks, stationery, art supplies, school uniform, school bags, and other related expenses added to the families' financial costs as well. Schools did not provide any instructional materials to the Grade IX students.

Students' low socioeconomic background tended to affect their educational performance negatively. Many students could not afford school supplies like notebooks, textbooks, and other stationery, which hindered their learning. The Hindi teacher at VSS commented that,

The students who I [the teacher] consider as good students in the 60 percent, even in that half the students do not have books, notebooks, or study guides. Now, naturally, when they do not have such things, that makes a difference [in their learning].

The Teachers²⁵

Here, I present the profiles of the fourteen teachers (6 from Grade IX–VSS and 8 from Grade IX–CSS)²⁶ whose classrooms I observed in this study. I discuss the teachers' educational qualifications, teaching experience, and classroom roles.

Three of the seven teachers at VSS were private hires, while the remaining four teachers, including the Principal, were government hired and on a government salary. At VSS, the Principal decided to hire private teachers. There was a stark difference in the salary of government hired versus privately hired teachers. Privately hired teachers earn a salary

²⁵ Appendix B provides the profiles of teachers who I either interviewed or observed. It provides details about teacher's educational qualifications and teaching experience.

²⁶ From here onwards, I use the labels grade IX–VSS and IX–CSS to designate grades IX from the school in rural area and the school in the city, respectively. That is, the number IX indicates the grade and the abbreviations (VSS and CSS) indicate the schools.

that is as low as Rs. 2,000- Rs. 2,500 per month, whereas teachers on government salaries receive Rs. 50,000- Rs. 60,000 per month. “The salary for the privately hired teachers comes through a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fund, which we obtain through a contribution of the students,” said the Principal for VSS. Since CSS is a private school at the secondary level, all the teachers are privately hired. However, the salary of CSS teachers is higher than the salaries that privately hired teachers at VSS earn. The salaries for teachers at CSS range from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 12,000 per month, based on the teacher’s teaching experiences and qualifications.

Government-aided schools are forced to hire private teachers due to a shortage of teachers at school. The shortage occurs because of delayed appointments of teachers by the government or a halt placed in the appointment process. In the last 5 years, the state government did not appoint new teachers to schools across the state. Thus, school authorities take it upon themselves to hire teachers to fill the vacancies. Unfortunately, these teachers often lack proper teacher training, are unqualified to teach, and are paid low salaries.

Educational qualifications

At VSS, the educational qualifications of teachers varied greatly. The privately-hired teachers tended to have the lowest levels of education compared to the government-hired teachers. In addition, the teaching experience of the privately hired teachers was low. For instance, among the three privately hired teachers, only two had completed their bachelor’s degree, of which only one had finished a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)²⁷, whereas the other

²⁷ Bachelor of Education, popularly referred as B.Ed., is a two-year full-time degree course that is essential for candidates who are interested in pursuing a career in teaching and other related fields. B.Ed. is mandatory for all those who want to teach in primary and secondary schools. <https://ncte.gov.in/Website/NCTEACT12.aspx>.

teacher was in the first semester of her Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.)²⁸ program. The third teacher was in the final year of their bachelor's degree and had no teacher training. On the contrary, all the government-hired teachers had bachelor's and master's degrees and had attained a B.Ed. degree. The years of teaching experience among the government-hired teachers ranged from 10 to 34 years, while the private teachers were just starting their teaching careers.

Compared to teachers in VSS, most teachers who taught Grade IX–CSS had bachelor's and master's degrees.²⁹ Four of the five teachers for whom I had information on educational qualifications and training held a B.Ed., and one had attained a Diploma in Elementary Education. With a D.El.Ed., a teacher is eligible to teach primary classes; however, in private schools, due to a shortage of teachers, these regulations are not followed as strictly. The years of teaching experience among teachers teaching Grade IX ranged from 4 to 11 years. A few teachers started their teaching careers at CSS, while others had taught elsewhere before joining here.

Roles and responsibilities

Apart from teaching responsibilities, teachers had administrative roles and responsibilities as well. Teachers had to maintain registers for attendance, tuition fees, and updating students' marks on several tests and exams conducted during the year.³⁰ Teachers were also responsible for cultural activities and events that the school organized, like,

²⁸ Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) is a 2-year diploma course which prepares teachers for the elementary stage of education, i.e., Grades I– VIII.

<https://ncte.gov.in/website/PDF/regulation/regulation2014/english/appendix2.pdf>

²⁹ Of the eight teachers teaching Grade IX at CSS, I could not get access to information on the educational qualifications and training and teaching experience for three teachers.

³⁰ The marks from all these tests and exams were aggregated to make up the final grade.

Independence Day or Republic Day celebrations. Teachers helped students prepare dances, songs, and performances like dramas on social issues or rights to celebrate such occasions. Teachers at VSS were also responsible for hosting sports events or activities; CSS did not organize any sports events for its students. At VSS, the Hindi teacher was put in charge of conducting field and track events for boys and would sometimes need to escort students to the city for competitions. The English teacher at VSS was assigned to accompany students for boy scout training, which was usually a three to four-day camp.

All administrative and extra-curricular roles and responsibilities assigned to the teachers turned out to be a burden and bit into the teaching time available to them. For instance, during field visits, I observed that teachers used teaching hours, the time when they were supposed to be in class teaching, to complete the register work. In another instance, I noticed that preparation for events took precedence over teaching; both teachers and students who participated in cultural or sports events would be pulled out of the classroom to prepare until the day of the event. Sometimes, that meant losing about a week's worth of classes. For example, for the duration of the sports event at VSS, the Hindi teacher who was supervising the events did not teach his class; boys who participated in the events did not attend classes for the duration either. Below are excerpts from teachers that serve as typical examples.

Yes, it affects my teaching. For instance, right now, I am working on the fee schedule for my class, where I am the class teacher. But this is not my work. Now, I cannot go teach my classes, and I need to finish the course in some grades. So now, I am trying to finish this so that I can teach in the second half. (English teacher, CSS)

At the time, when the English teacher and I had to handle most of the administrative work, then we surely did have problems. We would have to skip classes and not teach. (Math teacher, VSS)

At VSS, teacher absenteeism was high, and when teachers skipped classes, students were on their own. In addition, no other teacher came to the class to substitute because of a shortage of teachers at the school. However, at CSS, sometimes, other subject teachers came to class as substitutes and taught their subjects. Whether the teacher taught depended on her mood and the status of the syllabus. Meaning that if they were behind schedule, teachers would teach. Otherwise, they would ask students to complete their work or learn while the teacher sat in the class doing her own work.

In summary, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in VSS and CSS were taught by teachers who were either underqualified for the job or lacked proper training. Though some teachers had the qualifications and the training for teaching, their training was decades old, or they simply failed to acknowledge and meet the diverse needs of the students from diverse socio-economic and cultural groups. The quality of teachers mattered, especially for students in Grade IX at CSS and VSS, because of their low basic literacy skills. Having inexperienced teachers negatively impacted the teaching and learning processes and the ability of the teachers to engage students in the class. Plus, the physical environment of the school and the classroom did not help teachers or the students; it only hindered their teaching and learning. In the second half of this chapter, I focus on the quality of the physical environment of the schools attended by these students and link it to students' learning and subjectivities. To do so, I compare the two schools based on their physical characteristics, facilities, and resources.

The Physical Environment of Focal Schools

This section describes the school infrastructure, the buildings, and the classrooms at VSS and CSS. Then, I narrowed down the focus to the two Grade IX classrooms, one in each school, that I observed as part of data collection, describing the physical environment inside these classrooms, and linking it to students' learning and their subjectivity.

School and classroom infrastructure

School buildings at Village Secondary School (VSS)

In terms of school infrastructure, VSS comprised three school buildings that contained classrooms, a staffroom, and offices. The entrance to the school was through a creaky iron gate, welded on top of which was a metal board with the school's name on it. The iron gate was fixed to a white-washed, brick-and-mortar boundary wall about 3-4 feet high, surrounding the school on two sides, while barbed wires marked the other two sides (figure 5). The students all had complaints against the semi-permanent boundary wall at the school. Ansh, in Grade IX at VSS, commented, "I do not like the boundary wall at this school. The Principal should get the boundary wall constructed properly. Because it is not stable, it falls off if someone bumps into it even lightly." The iron gate opened to a large uneven, half-dirt, open ground which served as the playground for the students. To the left of the ground were the three school buildings.

The first building was a single-storied brick-and-mortar structure with three rooms. While one room was used as a cooking space for the mid-day meal (MDM)³¹ for students in

³¹ Mid-day meal is a school meal programme by the Government of India that provides free lunches to students in primary and upper primary classes that attend government or government aided schools. http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/.

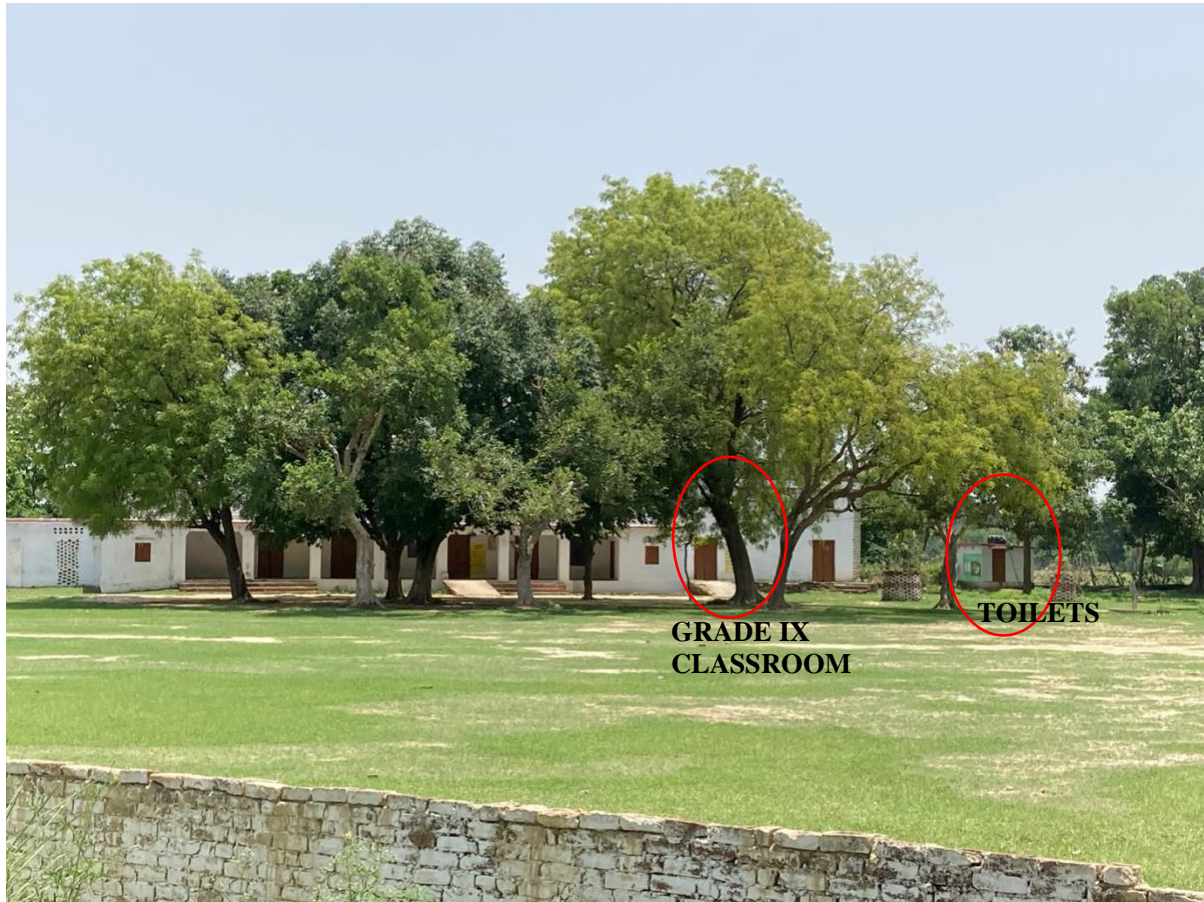
Grades VI-VIII, the other two rooms served as classrooms for Grades VI and VII. Attached to this structure was a slightly elevated two-story building with a small closet-like room for the Principal, and opposite the Principal's office was the clerk's office.³² Adjacent to the clerk's office were two classrooms for Grades X and VIII and a staffroom connected to the Principal's office on one end. The second floor comprised the terrace with a small room that served as the attic.

Figure 5: Boundary Wall: Village Secondary School



³² When I started fieldwork at VSS, no clerk had been hired, so the office was empty. However, around November, the school hired a clerk, who then did the administrative work that the teachers were doing.

Figure 6: School Building: Village Secondary School



Adjacent to this two-story building was another large classroom for Grade IX students. Slightly behind Grade IX's classroom was the toilet for girls (Figure 6), which was mostly locked and remained unused by the school members. During field visits, I observed that the girls would form groups of 2-3 and go towards the far end of the school boundary and soon disappear into the thick of the bushes, where the students' told me was a small pond. On further questioning, I found out that the students used the area around the pond to relieve themselves when at school. Later, in an interview with Sumaira from Grade X-VSS, I learned that the girls felt scared and unsafe using the toilet complex built for them.

The toilet complex is built like this: it has a gallery, and then there are three bathrooms next to each other. And there is only one main door. The toilets inside do not have a door attached to them. We have a strange fear that what if someone shuts/locks the main door from outside. If there were separate doors, we would not even have this fear. That is why two to three people go together. ... Sometimes, we get water. But we usually carry the water ourselves but do feel shy/embarrassed.

In a group interview with Grade VII girls at VSS, around 11-12 years old, they remarked,

I do not like it [the toilet]. There is no water tank attached to the bathroom. It is so dirty. Behind the school, there is a small pond. We go to the other side of the pond. ... Once, my leg slipped, and I fell into the pond. Now, I am scared of going there [near the pond]. We even told our parents. So, my mother said that whenever you want to use the bathroom, get the teacher's permission, and come home. So now, whenever we do feel like it, we go home.

The school lacked proper facilities like drinking water and adequate toilets for both boys and girls, leading to an unsafe and unhealthy environment for the teachers and students at the school. Without proper toilet facilities, students were forced to relieve themselves in the open. In informal conversations with girls, I found that they left school early sometimes to use the toilet at home. Or, to avoid using the toilets at school, the girls did not drink water when at school. Moreover, during their menstrual cycles, girls refrained from attending school, leading to absenteeism which affected their performance at school.

The section of the open ground opposite the school buildings had three old trees that provided some shade to that portion of the ground and was used as a classroom for students. A metal stump was attached to the ground, on which hung a small gong that served as a school bell to mark the start and end of the school day and the change of period. Not too far from the metal stump was a handpump that provided groundwater which the students used to wash their hands and drink. The school staff also used the water from the handpump to cook

the mid-day meal and wash utensils. However, the water was unfiltered and harmful to students' health. Unless students brought drinking water from home, that was the only source of water at school. The teachers brought filtered drinking water from their homes and avoided drinking the water acquired from the handpump. The school infrastructure at VSS was outdated; where a section of it could not withstand the weather conditions and was prone to flooding by heavy rains, and the roofs would be swept away by high winds. All in all, the school building looked like it had seen better days.

At VSS, there were five classrooms in total, and each was poorly lit with no fans. The temperatures ranged between 100°F and 120°F in the summer months in the area. With no fans in the classrooms, children from all classes, at various points, were taught outside on the open ground under the shade of trees in the hope of catching a cool breeze. The school provided students with tattered tarpaulin sheets to use as a spread to sit on to avoid getting dirt on the students' uniforms. On days when the number of students present at school was high, not all the students would fit on the two tarpaulin sheets provided to the students. In such cases, the teachers would ask the boys to sit on their haunches and study while the girls would squeeze together and occupy the tarpaulin sheets.

During winter, it was too dark and cold in the classrooms, making it hard for the students to see what was written on the blackboard and, sometimes, even in their books and notebooks. As a solution to both the cold and the darkness, teachers would ask students to sit outside on the open ground in the sun. Unfortunately, the back and forth between the classroom and the ground led to several disruptions. It took away teaching time as students would loiter around and take time to settle down for the next class. Additionally, the students

sat close together on the open ground, leaving little space for the teacher to move around and check on the students. Students would easily become distracted by everything happening around them and would lose focus when sitting outside. Plus, it was uncomfortable to sit on the ground, cross-legged, or on haunches.

Grades VI and VII classrooms at VSS were one-story buildings covered with corrugated zinc; each student sat on the ground since there were no benches and wrote with their notebooks on their lap. In a group interview with five girls from Grade VII at VSS, the girls described the condition of their classroom as:

We have to sit on the ground. Our school uniform gets dirty, and we have to wash it daily. Also, ants keep biting us and insects that fall from the roof. [...] [in the winter] we feel very cold. There is no fan or bulb. It does get dark sometimes. It becomes difficult to see. In the summer, we sit outside, but it is very hot. We sit on a tarpaulin sheet under the tree. We sit to eat lunch there, but ants keep falling. [...] Then we go to the class and eat, but it is so hot in the class. Plus, there is a tin sheet as the roof, so it gets heated up. [Group interview, Grade VII, VSS]

The classrooms for Grades VIII-X at VSS had long tables that served as desks and benches for students to sit on. Along with the furniture, there was also a shortage of basic resources like chalk and dusters at VSS. In the middle of the period, teachers would have to ask the students to get a duster or chalk from a different classroom. There were no dustbins present in any of the classrooms in VSS, due to which students would either throw trash on the floor or the open space behind the Grade IX classroom. Even the teachers did the same. Poor lighting and ventilation inside the classrooms and lack of proper waste disposal in the school was a health concern. Plus, if schools lead to holistic development and growth of the child, VSS failed at it by failing to teach good habits to the students.

School buildings at City Secondary School (CSS)

Contrary to the rural landscape in which VSS was set up, CSS was situated in a residential area in Sitapur city. Due to its location, the school was accessible to students both from the city and from surrounding villages, about 3-6 km away from the school. A double door aluminum gate, fixed to a brick-and-mortar boundary wall, six to eight feet high, formed the entrance to CSS. The school gate opened to a quadrangle, which led to the main school building (figure 7). The school building was a two-story, inverted L-shaped, brick and mortar structure, once painted in yellow which had now faded off. The first floor of the school building had classrooms for students in Grades I–V and a projector room, while the second floor consisted of classrooms for students in Grades VI–VIII and a staffroom-cum-library for middle and secondary school teachers.

Figure 7: School Building: City Secondary School



The primary school teachers did not have a designated staffroom and would sit outside in a corner opposite the Principal's office. No staffroom for teachers resulted in

uncomfortable conditions for the teachers, as they did not have a space to relax or rejuvenate between classes or during lunch break. The lack of personal space often led to frustration among teachers, which adversely affected their teaching and their attitudes and behavior in the classroom. Adjacent to the building was the Principal's office, followed by the clerk's office. The quadrangle which faced the school building was used for conducting morning assemblies and other cultural programs like Republic Day celebrations or Independence Day celebrations.

The main school building also consisted of toilets for the students—both boys and girls. However, the Grade IX girls remarked that the toilets at the school were “very dirty” and that “[we] never use the toilets at school. We directly go home when we return from school. The toilets stink so bad. They [the school authorities] do not get it cleaned. We [the students] would die of the stink; we drink less water because of that.” Again, for a school with 600 students, four toilets were insufficient. Plus, unclean toilets raised hygiene and health concerns.

There was a smaller structure on one end of the school building with one room and a small porch that served as the kitchen and distribution space for the mid-day meals served to students in Grades VI-VIII. To the other end of the school building was another two-story building that housed classrooms for students in secondary school, with Grades IX and X occupying the first floor and Grades XI–XII occupying the second floor. Outside the classrooms was another large uneven, half-dirt, open ground that also connected to the paved ground. These grounds served as playgrounds for kids in the primary school as they had swings (a seesaw and a merry-go-around) and for other students to play sports such as

cricket, hide and seek, tag, or kho-kho³³. Like VSS, a small gong served as a school bell to mark the start and end of the school day and the change of period as CSS.

In contrast to VSS, all the classrooms at CSS had an adequate infrastructure and were well-ventilated with proper light bulbs and fans. Proper facilities ensured that students were comfortable in the classroom and did not have to face similar challenges as their counterparts at VSS. Each classroom in CSS had proper desks and benches for the students to sit on. Some classrooms had long, wooden tables that served as desks and benches, while others had wooden desks and chairs (seating one student), and yet others had metal desks and benches (seating two students). There was no shortage of furniture in any of the classrooms at CSS. It also had an adequate supply of dusters and chalks for each classroom. Each classroom in CSS had a dustbin, and both teachers and students used it to dispose of their trash. Both schools lacked cleanliness; all classroom floors were poorly maintained and lined with trash. The classroom walls were covered in cobwebs. A layer of dirt often lined the desks and benches, which dirtied the students' uniforms. Each morning, students had to clean their benches before sitting and starting the school day.

Such was the state of the buildings at the two focal schools. Of the two schools, CSS fared better in terms of the conditions of the school building and facilities provided. What was lacking at both schools was the presence of a computer lab, a functional library, and science labs. Table 3 summarizes the school infrastructure and resources at the two schools.

³³ Kho-kho is a popular traditional tag game invented in Maharashtra, India. It is played by teams of 12 nominated players out of fifteen, of which nine enter the field who sit on their knees (chasing team), and 3 extra (defending team) who try to avoid being touched by members of the opposing team.

Table 3: Physical Characteristics of Focal Schools

	Village Secondary School (VSS)	City Secondary School (CSS)
<i>Building</i>	2 <i>semi-pucca</i> classrooms with corrugated zinc roofs (Grades VI & VII) and 3 <i>pucca</i> classrooms (Grades VIII–X)	<i>Pucca</i> ³⁴ building
<i>Drinking water</i>	Handpump (groundwater); not filtered.	Handpump as well as two other drinking water tanks; not filtered.
<i>Toilets</i>	Toilets present for girls but no running water. No toilets for boys. No toilets for teachers or the Principal.	Toilets present for boys and girls with running water. Toilet present for teachers. The principal has a separate toilet attached to her office.
<i>Staffroom; Library</i>	Staffroom present; but no library.	No staffroom for primary school teachers; teachers teaching upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary school shared a staffroom. The library at school had been converted into a staffroom.
<i>Playground</i>	Large open ground but not well maintained; tracks for athletics being drawn up.	Large open ground not well maintained; has swings for primary school students.
<i>Desks & chairs</i>	Wooden desks and benches (Grades VIII–X); no desks & chairs in (Grades VI & VII).	Desks and benches in all grades.
<i>Electricity</i>	Electric connection present.	Electric connection present.
<i>Fans & bulbs; CCTV cameras</i>	No fans present; one bulb in each classroom; CCTV cameras in each of the 3 <i>pucca</i> classrooms.	Fans and bulbs present in all classrooms; CCTV cameras in secondary and higher secondary classrooms.

³⁴ Pucca house/building is a building which has walls and roof made of the following material, burnt bricks, stones (packed with lime or cement), cement concrete, timber, etc.. While a semi-pucca house/building is a house/building that has fixed walls made up of pucca material, but roof is made up of the material other than those used for pucca house. Roof materials for semi-pucca buildings can be tiles, GCI (Galvanised Corrugated Iron) sheets, asbestos cement sheet, RBC, (Reinforced Brick Concrete), RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) and timber etc. See, http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/Statistical_year_book_india_chapters/HOUSING-WRITEUP_0.pdf

Reasons for differences in the infrastructural facilities and resources

The differences in the infrastructural facilities and resources at the two schools could be due to numerous reasons, including financial constraints, lack of competition and incentive, or deficit thinking on the part of school authorities.

A key factor that explained the reasons for poor infrastructure and lack of facilities and resources at VSS was the lack of financial resources. Though school authorities at both schools stated that they faced financial constraints, the level of investment seemed to vary across the schools. At VSS, the breakdown of the tuition fees³⁵ showed that the school charged students for science equipment, fans, library facilities, and audio/visual equipment. Still, none of these facilities were available at the school. Despite charging fees for these facilities, why the school administration did not offer the services to the students was unclear. Though I could not get access to the breakdown of the fee structure for CSS, I noted that a large amount of the fees collected at CSS was directed towards teachers' salaries.

To meet the financial requirements for the development of the school, the school management for CSS rented out the school premises to community members, who would then use the space for marriage ceremonies and dinner parties. These members took control of the property a day ahead of the event to make the preparations while the school ran as scheduled for the day. Sitting in the Grade IX classroom on one such occasion, I could hear the thumping of a hammer against a nail and metal poles being erected, and people shouting at each other. Then came the smell of hot oil used for cooking deep-fried food, and I felt my mouth salivate, and then came the hunger. Snapping out of my thoughts, I realized I was in a

³⁵ See Table 9 in Appendix L for details on the fee structure at VSS for Grades IX and X.

classroom. Looking at how easily I was distracted made me wonder how distracted the students might have been by the noise, especially the smell! The entire arrangement was distracting and disruptive to the students and the teachers. The excerpt below indicates the teachers' views about the arrangement:

It is disturbing; how can it not be disturbing. It is so noisy and dangerous for the students, especially when they are setting the tents up. Today (Feb 4, 2020) itself, for instance, 2-3 poles fell when they tried to fix them. What if a student was standing there? Plus, they cook food out in the open; all the smell goes into the classrooms. Also, the entire process goes on for 2-3 days, and it disturbs us when we are teaching since all the noise goes in the class. (informal conversations, CSS)

The location of the schools may have determined the motivation of the school authorities to invest in the school's infrastructure. CSS, located in an urban setting, competed with many private schools in the city at the secondary level with similar stature. There is a large supply in schools in the city, and parents are aware of that. To attract more students and their parents and keep a steady admission rate, the school needed to have adequate basic infrastructural facilities and resources for the students. If not, parents would likely enroll their child in a different school with a similar fee structure. However, there is a shortage in the supply of secondary schools in rural areas. The secondary schools located in rural areas were either private schools with relatively high tuition costs or government schools that lacked teachers. There is not a lot of competition among schools in rural areas, and the school authorities are aware of this. This lack of competition may have contributed to the lack of incentive to improve or even provide basic infrastructure and other facilities to the students and teachers at VSS.

Furthermore, deficit thinking among school authorities was another factor that explained the lack of proper infrastructure at VSS. The Principal at VSS used students' low socioeconomic background as an excuse for not providing them with basic toilet facilities. The Principal claimed that "students did not have toilet facilities at their home, so it did not matter if there was no toilet at the school; the students were used to urinating and defecating in the open." Below is an excerpt from the conversation

... in the rural areas, some students from their childhood learn to go outside in the open and relieve themselves. Irrespective of how hard we try and ask them to use the toilet, they still will not use it. Now, since the girls use it [toilets], I have refrained from making the boys use the toilets. The reason why I have not made the boys use the toilets is that it is difficult to know who is inside, and if by mistake a boy goes in, that will not be an ideal situation. (Principal, VSS)

Even though the Principal claims that some girls used toilets at school, I had never seen anyone use them. Moreover, when I asked the students about having toilets at home, all (23) students, except for one or two, stated that they had toilets at home and used them. Therefore, irrespective of students' habits, basic issues around hygiene and sanitation are needed to be taught at school to learn and develop.

The Two Grade IX Classrooms Observed

I conducted classroom-based participant observation in Grade IX at the two schools.³⁶ A large amount of students' time is spent in the classroom. Thus, it is essential that the classroom environment be conducive to student learning. In this section, I focus on the physical environment of the two classrooms observed in each school and its impact on the

³⁶ From here onwards, I use the labels grade IX–VSS and IX–CSS to designate grades IX from the school in rural area and the school in the city, respectively. That is, the number IX indicates the grade and the abbreviations (VSS and CSS) indicate the schools.

student's learning, engagement, and sense of belonging. In this study, I refer to the physical environment as the physical aspects of a classroom, including classroom infrastructure, furniture and resources, organization of desks, seating arrangement, the condition of the classrooms in terms of its cleanliness, and class size. The subsequent few paragraphs describe indicators of the physical environment and discuss how these affected the teaching and learning in the classroom.

Classroom infrastructure

With 94:1 as the pupil-to-teacher ratio, the Grade IX classroom at VSS could be considered as overcrowded. An overcrowded classroom seemed to have a direct negative impact on teaching and learning. Just like any other classroom, the learners in grade IX-VSS had diverse needs and were at different learning levels. However, the teachers could not provide individual students with the attention and academic support they needed. Teachers were not familiar with the students, their learning levels, and their needs. Often, when teachers saw incomplete work or bad performance from these students, they labeled the students as “disengaged” or “not wanting to learn.”

The teachers did not see the genuine reasons behind students' poor performance or incomplete schoolwork or homework. Newer, inexperienced, and untrained teachers found it difficult to control the class and resorted to the use of corporal punishment to discipline students and maintain order. Other experienced teachers were able to command the class with authority; however, they failed to keep the students engaged in the class. Additionally, a large class size reduced the interaction between the teachers and students down to a minimum.

Class size

The large class size at VSS was an attribute of the financial constraints faced by the school. In October 2019, grade IX was split into two sections, where Grade IX-A and Grade IX-B would consist of boys and girls, respectively. However, this division of grade IX was only on paper, as even after the split, the students sat in the same classroom and were taught together. The two prominent factors that made it implausible to have two separate classrooms for the two sections were: a lack of empty classrooms and a shortage of teachers. Ironically, the school maintained a large class size to overcome the financial constraints faced because only students at the secondary level were charged tuition fees, making it the only source of revenue for the school.

Conversely, Grade IX's class size at CSS was one-third the class size of Grade IX at VSS, with a pupil-to-teacher ratio of 37:1. With a smaller class size, the teachers were able to focus on most if not all students in class. Teachers seemed familiar with students and their academic performance in class. Teachers were able to discipline and control the class with relative ease at CSS. The students were more interactive with teachers at CSS when compared to their counterparts at VSS. In other words, students in Grade IX-CSS were more responsive to teachers and participated in the classroom by asking questions, making prompts, and answering teachers' questions. Other reasons why students at VSS did not interact with teachers will be discussed in the next two findings chapters.

Grade IX-CSS classroom had proper infrastructure with fans, bulbs, and adequate space to accommodate the students in the class. The metal desks and benches in the class were arranged in four columns, where each column was evenly spaced out across the room.

Girls occupied about two and a half of these columns, and boys occupied the remaining ones. Each bench seated two students giving each student enough space to move around in their seats. Boys sat with boys and girls with girls; boys or girls did not hesitate to sit in the same column as the other if their column of desks was filled, unlike in VSS. The seats were comfortable to sit on. Plus, the teacher was audible to all students irrespective of where the students sat in the class. Students had the autonomy to decide where they want to sit in the class, they did not have fixed seats. Both Grade IX–VSS and IX–CSS had a table and chair for the teacher. Grade IX–CSS classroom had a comfortable and healthy learning environment with proper infrastructural facilities and furniture for its students.

Furniture, facilities, and resources

Improper infrastructure and a shortage of furniture added to the poor learning environment in the Grade IX-VSS classroom. The classroom was lined with wooden semi-furnished long desks for children to keep their books and benches to sit on. The desks were positioned in several horizontal rows against the left, right, and back sides of the classroom and were bifurcated into two columns, with a small corridor-like space in between to walk.³⁷ There was no space in between rows, making it congested and difficult for the students or teachers to move around without disturbing other students behind them. Boys and girls occupied one column each and did not intermingle. Meaning that girls would not sit in the column for boys and vice versa.

On average 7 students sat on one bench, but each bench was built for 4 students. There were not enough benches for the 94 students in the class; some were broken, and

³⁷ Refer to Appendix C.1 & C.2 for a blueprint of the classroom set-up for VSS and CSS, respectively.

students had to make do with them. Students were crammed into one another which made it difficult to write. The benches were uncomfortable to sit on and some creaked with movement. We had to remain still in our seats to avoid making a noise as it disturbed the teacher and other students. With no fans, overcrowded classrooms and a sweltering Indian summer, the students seemed uncomfortable, restless, and disengaged in class.

Additionally, due to a large classroom, teachers were not always audible at the back and students had to strain to hear what the teacher was teaching. The school was situated close to a railway line and a highway. The disturbance and the noise from the traffic outside the school also made it difficult for students, especially those in the back, to hear the teacher. Often, the students at the back tended to disengage from the class and continued to daydream or do something else while the teacher taught. Though students were present physically in their classroom, they disengaged mentally. Vivek and Ansh, two boys from VSS, during their interview mentioned,

We face problems in sitting at the back. Because when the teacher makes us write, or if she writes on the board, then we cannot see. If the students in the front disturb a little, move from side to side, and if we sit in the corner at the back, the heads of the students block the blackboard. And Sir usually stands in the front and speak. So, we can hear some words and some words are not audible. That is why we try to sit in the front, even if I have to fight for it. I sit in the front mostly.

Consequently, the overcrowded classrooms and the seating arrangement affected teacher-student relationships and interactions. Teachers perceived students in the back and in extreme corners as “academically weak,” “unmotivated” or “uninterested in learning.” The teachers tended to neglect students in the back which negatively affected students’ learning as they disengaged from the class mentally and did not listen to or write what the teacher

dictated. For instance, during classroom observations at VSS I saw some students in the back put their heads down on the desk and go off to sleep. Or others would complete their pending schoolwork.

The organization of desks and the seating arrangement

The organization of desks and the seating arrangement in class also affected the classroom environment and influenced students' motivation and engagement in class. Students in both classrooms could choose where to sit in the class. Teachers did not assign seats to the students; except in Grade IX–VSS, where the class teacher had instructed the class monitors to always sit in the front row. I observed that students tended to gravitate towards sitting with friends. At both schools, there were certain students who chose to sit in the back even if they reached school before their peers. At VSS, these students would stick to the back benches and towards the walls on each end, whereas at CSS, these students would stick to the left most column and towards the back.

In Grade IX–VSS classroom, due to a lack of space in between rows, the teacher could only reach students sitting towards the aisle. During participant observations I noticed that students took advantage of this arrangement and chose to sit away from the teacher and their grasp. For instance, if a student had incomplete work or wanted to avoid the teacher for not preparing for an oral test in class, which could possibly lead to corporal punishment, they would sit close to the walls on either end where they were inaccessible to the teacher. Such behavior did not go unnoticed by the teachers. The Hindi teacher at VSS in his interview stated,

sometimes what happens is that in Grade IX, when we sit in the room, then I do not get space to reach the child only. And the boys/girls who are weak, try to hide

and sit near the wall so that the teacher cannot reach them. So, then we cannot reach the child.

Willingly sitting in the back or hiding from the teacher, not only influenced teachers' perceptions about these students but also their peers' perceptions.³⁸ The students in grade IX–CSS could not hide from the teacher for two reasons: small class size and a proper desk arrangement. The grade IX–CSS teachers could easily walk around the classroom and check on students. Plus, all the students were clearly visible from the teacher's desk at CSS, so there was no way to hide from the teacher.

Furthermore, the arrangement of desks and the placement of the blackboard in grade IX–VSS made it difficult for all students except those sitting in the front three to four rows to see the blackboard clearly. The blackboard was not placed in the middle of the room; it was placed towards one end (right-side) of the wall, and only inches away from the floor. The heads of students in the front obstructed the view; forcing the students in the back to stand to see what was written on the blackboard. This led to a lot of disruption in the class and disturbed everyone sitting around. In grade IX–CSS classroom the blackboard was positioned in the center of the wall, both in terms of the distance from the ground and the room. Students had clear visibility of the blackboard and did not need to stand or strain their eyes to see what was written on it. Plus, proper lighting in the classroom, made the content on the blackboard clearly visible to all the students.

The white-washed walls of grade IX–VSS classroom were devoid of any charts or artwork made by the students or the teachers. If not for the two blackboards mounted on

³⁸ How teachers' and peers' perceptions about students are formed has been discussed in detail in chapter 5 and 6.

opposite walls and the desks and benches, one would mistake the room for a storage space. Though grade IX–CSS classroom too lacked any display of students’ work and only had a map of India hung on one of its white-washed walls, it did give the appearance of a classroom due to the proper infrastructural facilities in place.

Why VSS or CSS?

Why would students choose to study at schools with poor infrastructure, facilities, and resources, like VSS? Typical examples of the response I received from students when asked “why VSS?” was,

I had heard that this school is good. And that they really do teach here. Fees is also less. That is why my father enrolled me here. I also wanted to come to school here. Our elder brothers and sisters have graduated from here. So, they told us that the school is very good, and the teachers are also good (Abhijeet, Grade IX, VSS)

There are [other schools near my house], but a few of my sisters from the neighborhood used to study here. So, my parents said that since we know of this school, you should study here. (Sumaira, Grade X, VSS)

The reasons why students from low income families living in rural areas attended a private school in the city, like CSS, was,

... a lot of people from my village study in this school. ... And my father’s sister also studied here. My father’s younger brother and everybody have studied here. (Rinki, Grade IX, CSS)

This is near to our house. Fees at other schools is more than here. (Gudiya, Grade IX, CSS)

I have come to study at this school because it is near to my house. I do not face problem in coming to school and going back home. Also, the studies are good. (Srishti, Grade IX, CSS)

The reputation of the school among neighbors and family mattered for parents when considering sending their child to a new school. Parents of most of the students at both schools decided to send their child to the school because they knew someone who had previously studied at the school. Elder siblings or cousins or parents of most students had graduated from the school. Moreover, VSS held a good reputation among the residents of the neighboring villages. For parents, the school reputation mattered also because the students travelled long distances to attend the school and a good reputation among neighbors was an indicator of safety for their child.

Plus, there was a limited number of secondary schools in the surrounding areas. In addition to reputation, other factors that mattered to students and their families when deciding on a school was the tuition costs, availability of teachers in schools who really did teach the students, and the distance from home. Students did not seem to consider school infrastructure and the facilities provided as a reason for acquiring admission at either of the schools. Conversations with the students indicated that students at VSS did not have a comparison point in terms of what a “good” school could look like and the type of facilities and resources that “better” schools provide to their students and teachers.

What students like and dislike about their school

I asked student about what they liked and disliked at their school and the typical answers I received from the students are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: What students like and dislike about their school

	Village Secondary School (VSS)	City Secondary School (CSS)
Students' likes	<p>"I like everything at the school."</p> <p>"Our friendship is very good. So, if we stay at home, we miss each other. So, that is why I come to school every day."</p>	<p>"we really like it in our class. "</p> <p>"I like everything except the days when my friends do not come to school."</p> <p>"I like the studies in this school. I have seen schools, a few people in the neighborhood study there, they tell me that today there is a holiday and they do not even study."</p>
Students' dislikes	<p>"There is one thing that I do not like about school is the boundary wall. It is made of mud. I do not like it because, say, I take my bike out and I bang into it even slightly by mistake, the wall will fall."</p> <p>"we do not like it when going to the toilet. (others laugh) Because it is very dirty."</p> <p>"when a lot of friends do not come to school or when a lot of girls do not come to school, then I do not like it at school. Or sometimes when the teachers do not come and not a lot is taught. On those days, I do not like it in school."</p>	<p>"I do not like getting scolded."</p> <p>"The school should be cleaned (swept) properly. Every day we have to go call the sweeper, that please come clean the class. This should not happen."</p> <p>"We do miss having a games teacher. We would want to have a games teacher."</p>
Changes students would like to be made at school	<p>"The floor is very dirty, we would get it cleaned. We would get better flooring. And also the tin sheet that forms the roof, we would get that removed."</p> <p>"I would remove the tarpaulin sheet and put benches for the students to sit on. And also put a fan in class. I would fix the roof first, the dirt floor is not that important."</p> <p>"The boundary of the school should be better. There is the pond on that end, so dirty water comes in the tap. So, the school should get that fixed as well and get it clean. They should even out the ground by adding dirt. There is a stink in the water because of the pond."</p>	<p>"I would change the gate of the school. I would put a better gate."</p> <p>"The ground in the back, it is empty. there is so much land here, they can get something constructed. They can construct a lab for the students here."</p> <p>"The changes I would like to make is: Sometimes, when we have a free period, teachers do not come. I would want a teacher to come to class in such periods. Then, the bell does not ring at the right time sometimes. I would want that to change. The worst is when class is going on, the janitor comes and asks if she can come and sweep the classroom. We would prefer that classes should be swept after the school ends or before the school starts."</p>

Conclusion

This chapter discussed how the physical environment at the two schools played a role in influencing students' classroom and school experiences. The chapter described the demographic characteristics of Grade IX students and their teachers at the two schools. Most children attending these schools belonged to low-income families and lower caste groups. Parents of most students were illiterate or had low levels of formal education. The teachers who taught these students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in VSS and CSS were either underqualified for the job or lacked proper training. Though some teachers had the qualifications and the training for teaching, their training was decades old. Moreover, they failed to acknowledge and meet the needs of the students from diverse socio-economic and cultural groups.

Moreover, the student's home environment is often not conducive to academic learning. Students have household-related responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings or elders, cooking, washing utensils or helping fathers in farm-related activities or paid work. Unlike most children from affluent families, children from low-income families must juggle time between work (paid or unpaid) and education. Additionally, some parents of students at VSS and CSS had no formal education or had only attained primary education (Grade I-V). Therefore, they were not able to help their children with schoolwork and homework, making students and their parents dependent on schools for academic learning.

In this chapter we saw that students from poor families who live in rural areas and attend schools in rural areas tend to be enrolled in schools with dilapidated, obsolete buildings, and unhealthy facilities that posed substantive obstacles to learning and overall

student well-being. Whereas the students from low-income families who live in rural areas and attend schools in the city attend a school that has proper school buildings with proper lighting and fans for its students.

Of the two schools, CSS fared better in terms of the conditions of the school building and facilities provided. Being a private school in an urban area demands investment in school infrastructure due to a large supply of other private schools and high market competition. Thus, to attract more students and their parents and keep a steady admission rate, CSS needed to have adequate basic infrastructural facilities and resources to the students. However, when compared to other private schools in the city, with more funds and charging similar or slightly higher tuition fees from students than CSS, CSS lacked in some infrastructural facilities and resources provided for both teachers and students, like staffroom for all teachers, clean toilets for both boys and girls, or availability of science and computer laboratories for high school students. On the other hand, in rural areas, there was a shortage of secondary schools which reduced the competition and may have contributed to a lack in incentive among school authorities at VSS to invest in school infrastructure.

The physical environment at the two schools varied. CSS provided students with adequate infrastructural facilities and school resources like access to drinking water, toilets, and furniture in the classroom than VSS. Small class size, with sufficient desks and benches to accommodate all students and adequate spacing between the desks, helped in creating a positive environment that facilitated student learning. Students at CSS were more engaged than their counterparts at VSS. Small class size at CSS helped teachers to focus on and

provide academic support to individual students when needed. The small class size also made it easier for teachers to maintain order in class and prevent disruptive behaviors.

Conversely, the school buildings at VSS were dilapidated, and classrooms were poorly lit with no fans. Moreover, a lack of proper toilet facilities created an unhealthy, unsanitary, and unsafe school environment. Without proper toilets students, especially girls, were forced to leave school early or remain absent when on their menstrual cycle. Furthermore, the overcrowded classrooms with insufficient furniture forced students to squeeze up and sit, reducing their mobility. Such poor physical conditions in the classroom seemed discomforting for students at VSS, possibly making it difficult for them to concentrate in class, thereby, hindering their learning.

Overcrowded classrooms at VSS also affected teaching processes and led to frustration among teachers, reduced motivation to teach and increased teacher absenteeism. Teachers without proper training and experience had difficulties maintaining discipline and order in the classroom due to a large class size. Teacher-student relations were negatively impacted at VSS due to overcrowded classrooms. Students took advantage of a lack of space, and large class size in classroom and sat in the back and in extreme corners of the class to avoid or hide from teachers when their work was incomplete. Teacher viewed these students as ‘academically weak,’ ‘unmotivated’ or ‘uninterested in learning’ and thus neglected them making these students feel isolated and unworthy. Such low perceptions of self also led to student disengagement.

Moreover, students at both schools disliked certain aspects of their school, like students at VSS disliked the boundary wall and wanted the school to change that. Girls at

VSS and CSS wanted proper toilet facilities. However, despite the shortcomings at both schools, some students liked coming to school because of the peer relationships and friendships they had formed.

The physical environment of the school matters and defines student's experiences at school either positively or negatively. Indeed, student disengagement from the class and lack of focus due to improper classroom environment affected teachers behavior towards students. Therefore, it is imperative to provide students with a school physical environment that helps facilitate their academic learning, reduces absenteeism and school dropouts, and makes them feel connected to the school, peers, and teachers.

However, physical environment in the classroom is not the only factor that affects the learning environment and shapes students' experiences. The pedagogical practices adopted by the teachers, teacher-student relations and interactions also influence these experiences and affect students' learning and engagement in the classroom and helps shape their subjectivity. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards students, and how it impacts the interactions between teachers and students and among students will be the subject of the next chapter. There, I argue that the nature of teacher-student interactions and peer-to-peer interactions impacts student engagement, and shapes students' perceptions of self, and sense of belonging in the classroom and school.

CHAPTER 5

“TEACHERS BEAT US WITH WORDS”: TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS & PEER INTERACTIONS MATTER

This study concerns the everyday lives of students in the classroom and at school. What factors impact students' classroom experiences and how these influence students' educational performance and inform their subjectivity form the basis of the research. This chapter examines the nature of teacher-student interactions and the factors that influence these interactions. In addition, it considers how students perceive and react to their interactions with teachers and the effects of these interactions on them. By examining students' perceptions of their interactions with teachers, the chapter discusses the impact of interactions on student engagement, students' perceptions of self, and their sense of belonging in the classroom and school. Thus, the chapter is an interplay between teacher-student interactions, student learning, and subjectivities.

The questions that this chapter tries to answer are: What kinds of interactions occur within the school environment? How do these interactions impact students' educational outcomes and their subjectivities? I draw from the data collected through participant

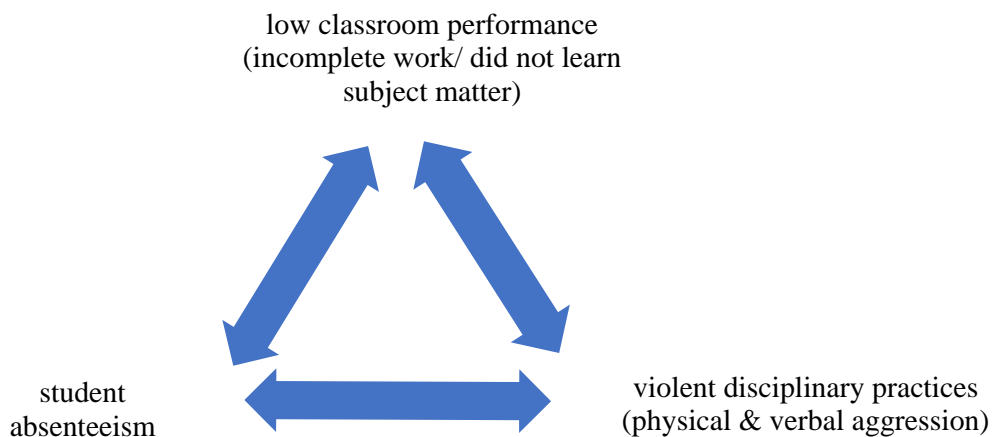
observations, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews with teachers and students to answer these questions. Teacher-student interaction is a central process in the classroom and at school. Teachers interact with students in formal and informal ways, and interactions may occur inside and outside the classrooms. The setting in which I examine teacher-student interactions is the Grade IX classroom at the two schools — Village Secondary School (VSS) and City Secondary School (CSS). Throughout the school day, the students interacted with several teachers, and the nature of the interaction varied from teacher to teacher. Consequently, the teacher-student interactions were both positive and negative in nature.

Throughout this chapter, an overarching theme that emerges in both schools is the vicious cycle of low students' classroom performance, violent disciplinary practices, and student absenteeism (figure 8). In this dissertation, I use the definition by Bahou & Zakharia (2019). They define the term violent discipline to include “the physical, as well as the verbal or emotional dimensions of discipline, including the use of humiliation, name-calling, and insults” (p. 2). Despite the relatively better physical environment at CSS compared to VSS, the level of verbal aggression and physical violence by teachers is quite similar at the two schools.

Interviews with students and classroom observations indicated that, at both schools, students were scared of their teachers because of their use of violent discipline. For instance, students were afraid that teachers would beat, scold, insult, or humiliate them if they answered incorrectly or attended school with incomplete work. Students had lost confidence in themselves and in what they had learned or studied because of this fear. To avoid the teacher's wrath, they did not respond or forgot the answer out of fear, or skipped school,

which led to the same consequence they tried to avoid. These processes turned into a vicious cycle where incomplete work/ not learning the subject matter led to violent disciplinary practices by teachers, which led the students to skip school, which further led to incomplete schoolwork and low performance in the class. How teachers react to students and their classroom performance is vital because teachers' violent disciplinary practices limit students' learning. Throughout the chapter, I portray how teachers' reactions, behavior, or treatment of students leads to this vicious cycle.

Figure 8: Vicious cycle leading to exclusion from learning



Section 1 describes the pedagogical practices followed by teachers and students in the classrooms. The top-down approach to teaching adopted by the teachers and the lack of engagement with the course material made the classrooms a dull learning environment for students. Teachers treated students as passive learners and reduced education to exam preparation. To students, learning then meant completing work and rote memorizing the

material in their notebooks. Furthermore, teachers' held deficit views about the students and their familial backgrounds, affecting their behavior and attitudes towards students.

Section 2 focuses on how teachers' beliefs and attitudes affect their behavior and interactions with students. For instance, classroom observations and student interviews suggested that most teachers at both schools used violent disciplinary practices, like physical violence, verbal aggression, and humiliation, to cope with student behaviors and attitudes towards education, maintain discipline and facilitate teaching. In addition, teachers labeled students 'weak' or 'bright' based on their academic performance in class. The negative labels teachers assigned to students were detrimental to their learning and perceptions of self as they internalized these evaluations. It also affected peer relations. However, students mentioned teachers who were respectful, caring, and listened to their problems, making them feel good and increasing their sense of school belonging.

Section 3 discusses students' responses to the impact of violent disciplinary practices. Students described several consequences of such harmful practices, including contempt for the teachers, peers, and the school. Students described feeling humiliated, less confident, and diminished their sense of belonging. Furthermore, findings indicated that constant shouting and beating by the teachers for the minor mistakes students made did not encourage students to study; instead, it limited students' learning and created a hostile learning atmosphere in the classroom. The teachers attributed the educational failure of students to their students' inadequacies and not to their own inadequacies as teachers, epitomizing the 'blaming the victim' syndrome. The teachers' motivation and interest in teaching varied within and across the two schools. The teachers often remarked that they did not feel like teaching that day.

Section 4 describes this variation in teachers' motivation and interest in teaching, while Section 5 concludes.

Everyday Pedagogical Practices at the Two Schools

This section investigates students' classroom experiences in Grade IX at VSS and CSS by discussing teachers' and students' daily routines and pedagogical practices. A large majority of my classroom observations suggest that teaching is a rather tedious activity undertaken without much enthusiasm or interactions. Consider, for example, this observation of the teaching processes at VSS.

September 16, 2019. I reached VSS for the day's field visit in time for the Science lesson. The bell rang, indicating the class had begun. The Science teacher walked into the Grade IX classroom and asked the students to bring out their biology notebooks. She announced that she was going to dictate definitions for students to write in their notebooks. The teacher then sat on the teacher's chair, opened her book, and started dictating. She picked up a piece of chalk on the table and began doodling on the desk while dictating in her monotone voice. The students around me struggled to keep up with her pace and the spelling of difficult words but were scared to ask her to slow down or spell the words. Five to ten minutes into the dictation, the teacher looked at me and said, "I do not feel like teaching today," and laughed awkwardly but continued dictating the material. Finally, twenty-five minutes later, when the bell rang again, the teacher finished the sentence she was dictating, stood up, and left the classroom. In comes the Social Studies teacher, two minutes later, empty-handed. The teacher announced, "today, I will teach you [the students] about the types of soil," and began classifying the soil types. While teaching, the teacher did not make eye contact with the students and stared out of the classroom. The teacher was not audible in the back, where I was sitting. After a few minutes, he stated, "I will not teach in detail; I want to finish the syllabus. Open your notebooks and copy what I am writing on the blackboard." ... In the Math period, the teacher was solving problem sets from the chapter on Parallelogram when his phone rang. The teacher answered his phone in the middle of the class while the students waited for him to finish the call. After fifteen minutes, he ended his call and asked a boy to stand up and tell him which formula to use to solve the question. When the student could not answer, he picked another student. When it became apparent that the boys did not know the formula, he asked them to do 20 squats each. After the punishment, he solved the question on the blackboard while explaining which formula to use. But the students sat there with blank faces, nodding their heads, pretending they understood what the teacher was saying. The class ended, the teacher left, and it was time for the 40-minute lunch break. During the break,

several boys asked me to explain what the Math teacher had just taught, letting me know that he was going too fast and that they did not understand the calculations. The rest of the school day went on in a similar fashion where the teachers entered and dictated lessons or wrote questions and answers on the blackboard for students to copy into their notebooks. (Classroom observations, field notes, VSS)

After months of classroom observations at both schools, what stood out was the mundane and dull teaching and learning practices at the two schools. Observational data indicated that teachers at both schools adopted a top-down approach to teaching, where they put teaching before learning. As evident from the excerpt above, teachers would come to class, teach, and leave each day, but, among the students, nothing about the learning process brought any excitement. They merely narrated the content to the students without highlighting the significance of the narrated content. After a point, even I felt bored in class listening to the teachers dictate or write questions and answers on the blackboard for students to write or copy into their notebooks. Over time, it became apparent that the teachers' goal was to teach the lesson and complete the course. The student's goal was to learn the material taught to pass the looming examinations at the end of the year, which was in their self-interest.

Teachers taught pre-selected topics from a chapter and skipped those deemed unimportant to achieve this goal. On what criteria they decided that a topic was important versus not important depended on the teacher's subjective understanding of the course material. On several occasions, I heard teachers saying, "I will only teach important concepts or questions, and that will come in the exams." The teachers rushed through the teaching material. If they could not finish teaching the assigned syllabus for their subject, they would borrow periods from other teachers who had completed the syllabus for their respective

subjects. This borrowing and lending of class hours by teachers affected student learning. It did not allow students to reflect or engage with the course material of those subjects for which the teachers could complete the course in time. This kind of selective and rushed teaching style was unchallenging and restrictive for the students at the two schools. It also led most of the students to simply disengage from the learning process.

“Write More, Explain Less”

For teachers, the end goal of schooling was to test students’ acquired knowledge through memorization. Teachers tested students on questions and answers for chapters in the syllabus. They dictated or wrote questions and answers on the blackboard using study guides and emphasized how important it was for students to memorize these to perform well in tests or examinations. For teachers, completed work in students’ notebooks was synonymous with a completed syllabus. Moreover, teachers emphasized written work more than ensuring students understood the course material. For some teachers, written work held so much importance that they would forego teaching and give students an entire 30-minute block to finish their previous incomplete work.

Teachers wanted students to have proper learning material for the exams. So much so that students exclaimed that “teachers make us write more and explain less. We have to understand on our own.” Students tried to justify why teachers made them write so much. They explained, “it is not so much the teacher’s fault. They need to complete the course. Completing the course means that the work in the notebook is complete.” The teachers’ primary concern was whether students’ notebooks were “complete.” In other words, whether

the notebooks had answers to all questions for all chapters and other course material in all subjects taught on which teachers could test students.

Textbooks Supplementary to Notebooks

Most teachers at both schools taught students without textbooks. Some teachers carried study guides to dictate questions and answers, but they relied on memory or borrowed textbooks from students to explain chapters and concepts. To students, learning then meant rote memorization of material in their notebooks or study guides. For example, Satakshi at CSS explained that she has all the books but does not bring them to school. She said, “Ma’am does not even teach so much from the book. She uses the study guide. I bought the book, but it is kept like that. I do not even study from the book. I study, but I study from my copy [notebook]. I do not understand what is written in the book.”

Based on my observations of students who attended school regularly in Grade IX-VSS, many did not have textbooks and depended on study guides³⁹ and their notebooks to study. On the other hand, some students did not maintain notebooks at all and came to school empty-handed. In Grade IX-CSS, most students, from my observations, owned textbooks. However, most students’ textbooks at both schools were secondhand, passed down year after year by seniors, a reminder of students’ financial constraints. Irrespective of who owned textbooks, students mainly depended on their notebooks and study guides to prepare for tests and examinations. In this way, notebooks had assumed the function of textbooks: both

³⁹ Study guides contained answers to questions on the back of the chapter. Students do not have to buy study guides, but a lot of them buy these guides because they contain questions and answers from chapters in textbooks. Teachers use these study guides to dictate question and answers for students to write into their notebooks. The study guides basically include all the material student might need to take their subject exams.

teachers and students treated textbooks prescribed by the teaching board as supplementary to notebooks.

Nevertheless, notebooks for most students were incomplete, and students faced difficulty keeping up with the teacher and the material taught in class. One of the reasons the students struggled with the coursework was the varying proficiency levels (basic literacy and numeracy skills) among students in Grade IX classrooms at the two schools (within and across the two classrooms). During participant observations, I noticed that students in Grade IX-VSS, more so than those in Grade IX-CSS, would not write what the teacher was dictating in class. At both schools, some students did not know how to read or write; then, some students could read and write but with difficulty and found it hard to spell certain words when teachers dictated, and others could read and write with ease.

Students with low reading and writing abilities faced difficulty keeping pace with the teacher when they dictated or wrote on the blackboard for students to copy. Since students were copying the material without understanding what they were writing, the pace at which students wrote was slow. For instance, a group of Grade IX girls at CSS complained that they could not understand what the teacher wrote on the board; her handwriting was not legible. They said, “I cannot understand these three letters whether she wrote ‘r,’ ‘i,’ or ‘n.’ If she keeps a dot on top of ‘i,’ I will understand. And when she writes in speed, then we do not understand. And we cannot even write that fast; that is why we make mistakes.”

Another reason for incomplete work among students was the amount of written work given to them in each subject. Each teacher would make students tick questions and answers from the study guide to copy into their notebooks as homework. Unfortunately, students

could not spend time on homework due to home-related responsibilities and chores. Additionally, due to student absenteeism (a topic discussed in the next chapter in more detail), some students were so far behind on coursework, and they did not know where to begin writing or keep track of how much they had missed in each subject. Due to the emphasis given on written work, an unintended consequence of incomplete work for students was the lack of course content to learn for the exam, which negatively affected their performance on exams and tests. Moreover, in an attempt to complete their work, the students had little time left to understand and [rote]learn the material.

Students' Learning Needs and Coping Mechanisms

Despite being aware of students' learning needs, teachers refused to acknowledge why some students were not writing and failed to accommodate students' needs. Instead, teachers continued instruction per their teaching plan to complete the assigned syllabus for their subject. When teachers fell behind the set teaching plan, they were held accountable for it by the school management. However, how active the school management was varied by the school (as discussed in more detail later in the chapter).

Students hesitated in asking for teachers' help as they feared that the teachers might shout at them or embarrass them in front of their peers. For instance, when students asked teachers to slow down or spell a word or repeat, teachers shouted at them for not knowing how to write or not writing fast enough. Sometimes, teachers would stop dictating to see who asked them to slow down and would start checking the specific student's work. And they would call students out on their lack of reading and writing skills in front of the whole class. To avoid a confrontation with the teachers, students went with the flow and pretended they

were writing when they thought the teacher was looking at them. But the page on their notebook would be blank, as I presumed some of them felt. Students felt the need to pretend to write when the teacher was looking because they were afraid of being caught by the teacher. If caught not writing, students would either be scolded or beaten by the teacher.

How did students then cope with schoolwork or homework? To cope with incomplete work in subjects, students would borrow notebooks from peers or friends who they perceived as “better” at academics than themselves. Or students, especially boys, used social media applications like WhatsApp to share notes. For example, Abhijeet at VSS said, “if our work is incomplete, how will we study. So, we ask our friends to help us complete the work. For instance, if I have not written a question and they have written it; they click a photo and send it via WhatsApp or dictate it on the phone.” More boys than girls had access to mobile phones and would use them to call friends for updates on homework or schoolwork and other non-school-related matters. However, girls were not readily given access to mobile phones by their parents, as they feared that the girls would use the phones to call boys. Girls experienced such gendered stereotypes at home. As a result, girls borrowed notebooks from peers in class when they next attended school to cope with incomplete work.

Copying material from a peer’s notebook was preferable to students than asking teachers for help. So, a student who perceived themselves as “weak” or “not so good” went to their better-performing peer or friend and borrowed their notebook to complete their work. How students formed perceptions of self and peers will be discussed later in the chapter. Students assumed that whatever this better-performing peer had written was correct. But that was so often not the case. Even better-performing students had errors in their notebooks,

which got transferred to other students' notebooks. Plus, not all students got their notebooks corrected by the teacher. Sometimes, teachers did not ask students to submit notebooks for correction. Thus, these errors remained in the students' notebooks and never got corrected. Instead, the errors now appeared in most students' notebooks as students copied from one another. Ultimately, students learned what was in their notebooks and regurgitated the same on their exam papers.

Sometimes, students would refuse to lend notebooks to their peers to take home in the fear that their peers might lose the notebook or skip school the next day, and the student would not be able to get their notebook back. It left the students with limited hours at school with their peer's notebooks. Then, students would use the class hours to complete their work; they would sit in the back of the class and copy the material from the peer's notebook while the teacher was teaching. It affected the student's learning in that class as they missed what the teacher was teaching. Students feared the consequences of getting caught up with incomplete work by a teacher. Not that getting caught completing work in another subject during class hours had better outcomes. The students suffered the teacher's wrath either way, as getting caught completing work in another subject or getting caught with incomplete work resulted in punishment from the teacher.

Examinations and Cheating

Exam orientation was a pedagogical trait with rote-memorization as the primary objective. At both schools, pedagogical processes revolved around preparation for the

exams⁴⁰, and tests and examinations were the only modes of students' learning assessment. From the earlier discussion, it is evident that exams dominated the whole teaching and learning process. Teachers reduced education to exam preparation. Moreover, teachers used examinations in a summative capacity to assess students' ability to learn/memorize and not as meaningful learning exercises in themselves. Plus, they used exams to sort students into 'weak' or 'bright' categories based on their test scores. Ultimately, obtaining high test scores had become the sole objective of the learning process.

Though teachers viewed tests and examinations as dimensions of quality education, the actual practice lacked rigor. For instance, during classroom observations (Grade IX) at both schools, I noticed that teachers would announce the questions or main topics closer to the exams. Interviews with students corroborated these observations when they explained that "they [teachers] also tell us that these questions are important, so you will score higher if you learn it." At CSS, Chia described, "the Social Studies teacher tells us the important questions that will come in the exam. She looks those up on her phone and tells us a few questions so that we learn them (laughs). That is how they encourage us." At VSS, when I asked Sumaira about how the exam went, she said, "it was good. There was no reason for the exam not to be good because the teacher gave us [students] all the questions before the exam. And he also helped us learn the answers to these questions."

Not only that, but some of my classroom observations also coincided with tests and exams. In several instances, at both schools, I saw students cheating on the exam by peeking

⁴⁰ The schools conducted exams and test to evaluate student progress. These were course exams that took place every few months. Students were required to take these exams to pass the grade and move on to the next grade. The exams were administered in schools where students were handed a question paper and had to solve or answer these questions in a separate answer sheet. These exams were usually timed.

into peers' notebooks or blatantly asking friends for answers to questions. In addition, some students in the back would open their study guides or notebooks and copy from there.

Another student lifted her notebook vertically so that the students sitting behind her could look at the answers. Chia at CSS openly accepted cheating on the exam. She stated, "for the Sanskrit exam, I come dependent on other students, that they will tell me the answers to questions on the exam." Different teachers had different reactions to students cheating. Some teachers would scold the students and change their seats; others resorted to beating, while some teachers ignored the cheating. A teacher told me, "she tried to give students some leeway" during one such situation.

Furthermore, teachers at VSS openly talked about manipulating internally evaluated test scores for the state-level examinations for Grade X students.⁴¹ Teachers manipulated test scores to ensure that students passed the state-level examinations. This manipulation of test scores also helped schools maintain their reputation for quality education as state-level exams ranked students and schools based on the results.

The fear of failing the exams or losing marks was a primary motivation for students to study. Teachers instilled this fear by threatening to fail students in exams or retain them in the same class the following year. For example, on Grade IX-CSS students' poor performance on the Math test, the teacher threatened students by stating, "remember this, I will not let you reach Grade X if you perform poorly in your final exam. I will not let you

⁴¹ The state-level examinations for Grade X students are divided into two components: practical exams or project work which is internally evaluated by the schools and the external exams conducted at the state-level. The total marks on each component varies, where the practical exams carry a weightage of 30 marks and the external exams carry 70 marks. The sum of both components makes up the final exam score. Students need to score a minimum of 33% marks in these exams to pass Grade X. For the practical exams, the schools' principals submit practical or internal evaluation marks in online mode through the official government website at www.upmsp.edu.in.

spoil the Board results (state-level examination results) for Grade X next year. If you do not perform well, you will stay in this class for another year. For once, you need to take things seriously.” Or when the Hindi teacher at CSS warned the students that “if you all continue like this [not reciting answers], I will fail you all in the final exams. Then, you will have to study in the same class for two years. Only when you pay the fees again for the second time will you understand.”

Retention in the same class brought shame to the students, which supposedly pressured them into studying. However, the effectiveness of this method of motivation is debatable, as it pushed students into taking measures such as cheating to either pass or get good grades in the exams and tests. Exams and tests were the only method of assessing performance. The homework given to students was not graded. Also, even though students studied, they did not believe in themselves and had lost confidence in their abilities to perform well.

Thus, the classroom was not an interactive learning space where the flow of teaching and learning was bi-directional. Instead of interacting with students and engaging them with the course material, the teachers deposited information while the students received, memorized, and recited the taught material. Teachers treated students as passive learners and expected them to follow each command and directive without questioning their authority and defying their orders. By maintaining this teacher-student contradiction, the attitudes and practices followed by the teachers created a separation between teachers and students. Students learned to remain silent in class and became too scared to ask questions or approach teachers with problems.

“Students Do Not Want To Do Anything, Learn Anything, No Matter How Much We Try.”

After spending time with the teachers at both schools, I discerned that teachers’ beliefs about the school, in terms of the students enrolled and the school environment, influenced their motivation and interest in teaching and shaped their perceptions of students and behavior towards them. Although most teachers opted to teach at the respective schools, their attitude towards teaching and students made it seem like the decision to teach at the individual school was forced upon them. Often, I heard the teachers at VSS say, “this is how it is in schools in rural areas. The students do not try to learn, so what can we do.” Or, at CSS, teachers would say,

Children themselves do not finish work or study. No matter what we say, there is no effect on them. They think the teacher will scold or beat us today, and then she will forget. You can scold them regularly, but still, they will not change. (Math Teacher, CSS)

So many students in Grade IX are *nil* and do not know anything. The majority are weak, but some do not know anything. As a teacher, it gets frustrating sometimes when we keep repeating, but the student just does not learn. The student also needs to put in an effort, right! Some students just do not want to study and do not put effort into learning. And if you then shout or beat the student, they start crying. We as teachers also do not like to shout at the child or beat them or make them cry, but there is a limit to our patience. (Hindi Teacher, CSS)

Teachers held the notion that students did not want to learn or did not try to learn. Teachers attributed low performance by the students to the latter not working hard. However, this was a mislaid notion because students attended school and paid tuition fees there when they could be at home helping their parents with work and earning an income to put food on the table for their families. As discussed in the previous chapter, the cost of attending school was too high for some students and their families. Indeed, students’ efforts did not always

translate to achieving good marks on examinations or better performance in the classroom, but they tried hard and wanted to learn. Students' low literacy skills are a reason why their efforts did not lead to fruition.

It is true what the teachers say, "some of the students do not even know how to read or write." What is untrue about what the teachers say is that "students do not even want to learn." The reason students at VSS and CSS did not know how to read and write was the poor quality of primary and upper primary education (Grades I-VIII) received by them in the government schools they attended. The Math teacher at VSS explained,

These schools faced a shortage of teachers. There should be teachers in Grades 6-8 as per the subjects taught. And if that is not possible, there should be at least three teachers, but there are only 1-2 teachers in some schools. One of them is the headmaster, and the other is a teacher. So, there is then only one teacher for the three grades. [...] The base is weak for Grade 9 students, so I have to prepare their basics. I have to make them memorize the formulae and ask them to repeat and recite these formulae to me in class.

All students at both schools who attended government schools at the primary and upper primary levels faced the issue of teacher shortages⁴². Over the years, students learned to navigate their way around these pedagogical challenges. But unfortunately, the poor quality of education received by these students harmed their future learning opportunities and limited their growth. Despite being aware of the students' situations and constraints, teachers blamed them for their academic performance.

⁴² Teacher shortages in primary and upper primary occurred due to a delay by the government in appointing new teachers to schools and in recruiting new teachers (see Ramachandran et al. (2020)).

“Children’s Education is Secondary for Parents.”

Teachers at both schools believed that parents from low-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and rural areas did not value education. Teachers perceived that the parents did not care about their child’s education nor encouraged them to study and attend school. For instance, many teachers stated that “students cannot read and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, where parents are illiterate. There is also no support at home in education.” Or “the parents of students are also like that. They do not care for their child’s studies. For them, it is okay if their child studies, and it is okay if they do not,” teachers say. Others pointed out how some parents could not even pay the school fees. The Math teacher at VSS remarked

education is secondary for parents from these [rural] communities. Their primary concern is to be able to feed themselves and their family. So... you [the teachers] have to move forward with this assumption that if the children have to work in the present state, they will go to work. They study when they get time after work. In the city, since the guardian is capable (successful), the children do not have to worry about the present day; they have to only worry about their studies. Here, in the village, feeding themselves comes before education. Now, the problem is that some parents/guardians come and say that it is harvest season, the child[ren] is going to harvest the crop today, so they cannot come to school today. To such parents, we can only explain, but we cannot argue with them. Right?! Also, you cannot be too strict with the children either. It is a rule by the government, and it would not be right if there were punishment for not coming to school. Punishment is there to a limit. There can be no fine for this [absenteeism].

Teachers’ deficit views about the students and their familial backgrounds affected their behavior towards students. Teachers were quick to blame the parents and their low literacy levels. At both schools, teachers tended to blame students and their parents for their poor performance in the class. True, feeding their family came first for parents and students, but that did not imply that parents and students were not motivated to attain education. On the contrary, from student interviews, I discerned that parents supported their children the

best they could to achieve education. Parents asked and often scolded their children to attend school and supported them financially and emotionally to attain education.

Yes [they are happy]. My father says, “go to school every day. How much ever you want to study, we will make you study. We will help you do/become whatever you want to do/become when you grow up.” (Angel, VSS)

My mother tells me, “if you study, you will not do it for me. If you study, you will reap benefits. If you do not study, you will not be able to do anything except farming. If you do not study with your heart, you will never be able to study ever, no matter what you do.” (Taufeek, VSS)

Several students at both schools mentioned that if they struggled in any subjects, their parents hired a tuition teacher [private teacher] or sent them to private coaching. Most students’ parents had low education and therefore could not help with their children’s homework. But if students had elder siblings who had graduated from high school, their siblings helped them with homework. Indeed, parents of most children in both schools do not participate in school activities or parent-teacher meetings. The power dynamics and the lack of time were reasons why parents could not participate in their children’s school activities.

There was a power dynamic at play in the parent-teacher-student trio, where the teachers held the most power and the parents and students had less and sometimes no power. In the social hierarchy between teachers, parents, and students, the teachers are always on the top, and the position of the parents and students is interchangeable or regarded as equals. Parents and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have insurmountable respect for teachers. They believe that the teacher is always right and, thereby, do not question the teachers. Additionally, since parents lack education, they do not have the agency to refute the teachers and counter their judgment. Furthermore, parents cannot afford to leave their jobs or their farming responsibilities in the middle of the day to get to their child’s school.

Another consequence of the poor socioeconomic backgrounds of students was that they often had to miss school to help their parents with household-related or farm-related activities. In most cases, students would help their parents at the farm or home before school and then again after returning home from school. Students were, therefore, left with little time to finish homework and learn for the next day. Consequently, in such students' cases, violent discipline at school was linked to the conditions of poverty at home, as the teachers often punished students for incomplete work or inability to recite the answers.

The deficit views teachers held of their students shaped their behavior and attitudes towards students in the classroom. Such beliefs and low expectations of the students held by the teachers defined the pedagogical processes and practices (described above) used by the teachers in the class every day. Teachers' attitudes and behavior in the class shaped students' everyday experiences at school. The following section presents findings on how teachers and students interacted and the impact. Teachers used the mode of "discipline and punishment" for the smooth functioning of the classroom.

Violent Disciplinary Practices

On October 16, 2019, the Science teacher at VSS entered the Grade IX classroom, which was in complete chaos. Students were talking loudly, making noise, and moving around trying to gather Art supplies from their peers for the Art exam they were taking after this period. The teacher tried to control the class, but she walked out of the Grade IX classroom when she failed to do so. The teacher complained to Grade IX's class teacher about the students' behavior, who then came rushing into the class with a chhadi (wooden stick) in hand. At the sight of the class teacher, the students all settled down, and there was pin-drop silence in the class. Next, the class teacher berated the students on their behavior and demanded the class monitors to stand and give him the names of students making noise. The monitors hesitated but reluctantly gave out a few names to the teacher, a few of which included their closest friends. Next, the teacher went to each of these students and thrashed them with the chhadi (stick) on their palms. He used so much force that one could hear the swishing sound of the stick before the teacher struck the students.

He hit each student at least four to six times on the palms of their hands, with two to three strikes on each palm. I could hear the students flinch, both who sustained the beating and those who witnessed their friends getting hit. As the teacher left the class, I heard students sob from the pain. Students had put their heads on their desks, and I could hear them crying and sniffing under the desk. Right after this incident, the students had an Art exam to take. As the bell rang to indicate the change of period, the students silently picked up their belongings and walked out of the class, with their heads down, to the open ground where they were to take their Art exam. (field notes, VSS)

Prolonged engagement in both the schools enabled observations of violent disciplinary practices used in the classroom by male and female teachers. These practices were manifested by teachers through physical violence, verbal aggression, or emotional dimensions of discipline, like humiliation, labeling, using insults on students, or blaming students' familial background for their performance at school. All the teachers, except one or two, at both schools adopted violent disciplinary practices to cope with student behavior and attitude towards education, maintain discipline and order and enforce control in the classroom to facilitate teaching, make students realize their mistakes, and instill the value and importance of education.

Teachers' concern with preserving order was an essential aspect of teacher-student interactions in the classroom. Teachers brought about discipline and order or enforced control by constant directives and sanctions against 'deviance' and employed reactive rather than proactive approaches to interact with students. Consequently, students' behavior and attitude towards education, (dis)engagement, absenteeism from school, or the status of schoolwork—complete or incomplete—influenced the quality of interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. Sometimes, a teacher's mood also determines the quality of teacher-student interactions.

Physical punishment

The range of reasons for violent disciplinary measures taken by the teachers at both schools was similar. Students described several reasons for violent discipline: making noise, looking out the window, disturbing the teacher, getting low scores, making mistakes, coming late to school, not completing schoolwork or homework, not writing when the teacher dictated, and being unable to recite answers, completing work in another subject while the teacher was teaching, not wearing school uniform, absenteeism, and breaking school rules.

However, how teachers manifested violent disciplinary practices differed across the two schools. For instance, teachers at VSS predominantly used physical violence to discipline students; this is not to say that teachers did not verbally humiliate or insult students in class. In contrast, teachers at CSS refrained from physical aggression toward students because of the fear that students might complain about teachers to school authorities. But there were rare instances where I observed a teacher beat students at CSS. Still, the teachers substituted their inability to beat the students with verbal and emotional aggression, like humiliation, labeling, and threats of physical punishment. Violent discipline at both schools was detrimental to students' learning regardless of the form.

Nevertheless, even though classroom observations and students' accounts of their classroom experiences revealed incidences of physical violence at VSS, discussion with teachers nonetheless indicated it was a sensitive issue. There was a strong denial of its use at the school. For instance, when asked about how the school maintains discipline and control, the Principal at VSS stated, "in this school, we do not punish students that much. We do punish. We scold students, but we do not beat them." Some teachers acknowledged that

students do not learn when teachers beat them or verbally humiliate them, but they still practice corporal punishment. For example, the Science teacher at CSS exclaimed, “students do not pay attention, but we cannot even beat the students. If you beat them, they complain to the Principal.”

“If Someone Has Not Completed Their Work, Then Every Teacher Beats.”

Physical violence at VSS took various forms: beating students with sticks on the palm of their hands, their backs, or all over the body, slapping, pulling student’s ears or girl’s braids, using knuckles to hit on student’s heads, punching, and pinching, making students do squats, and making them stand with raised hands for long periods.

Teachers ask students to bring sticks from the nearby trees to use for hitting the students. The students get wet sticks as these do not break easily. Dry sticks break easily. Teachers keep at least 1-2 sticks in their hands while teaching. Beating is not the last resort; it is the most common method to discipline students. ... There is no teacher who does not beat. When they [the teachers] give a test, and we do not score well, they hit us four times with a stick. Once, the Social Studies teacher brought so many sticks in class, and they all broke. Then he asked us to throw it outside through the window, or else someone would see it. ... The Math teacher beats with a thick stick when he is angry or when the boys do not remember the formulae. ... The Hindi teacher beats with his knuckles on the head, which hurts a lot. ... Science teacher hits very hard. It feels like my hand will start swelling when she beats. When the work is not complete, then they will hit! (author’s field notes and informal conversations with Grade IX-VSS students)

On occasion, students would show me the bruising and swelling on their hands caused by the hits they sustained. Or I would see them blowing on their hands to ease the pain from the sting. Or the redness and scowl on the students’ faces were also a good indicator of having sustained physical punishment. In their accounts of classroom experiences, students were not short of examples of physical violence by teachers:

Once, I was writing on the blackboard, and I made a mistake in writing. The teacher first beat me on the palm, but I did not feel any pain. Then the teacher hit me on the bone in my palm near the wrist, which hurt a lot. That area got bruised and turned black. (Sumaira, VSS)

I used to be afraid of the Social Studies teacher when I joined here in Grade VI ... he used to beat us a lot then, with a stick on our hands, all over the body. There was a boy from my village who studied here. The teacher had beaten him a lot. The boy fainted. He did not come to school for a year. (Vivek, VSS)

The Social Studies teacher does not like noise when he teaches. Once when he was teaching, someone among the boys was fidgeting with the desk in the second row. Sir got angry. He said, "if you do not tell me who made noise with the desk, I will beat you all." He asked the boys who did it, but no one answered. So, he beat all the boys sitting on that bench with two sticks. He struck them hard. (Saman, VSS)

At CSS, I observed the Hindi teacher beat Grade IX students on one occasion when they could not recite answers to the teacher's questions. However, during interviews, a few students narrated past experiences of physical violence at CSS:

Even if we make a small mistake, the Home Science teacher would immediately beat everyone. She would hold the ear and slap the students right and left. (Gudiya, CSS)

The English teacher had slapped Sumit on the cheeks yesterday. His work was not complete. And ma'am, for the past so many days, had been telling him, "complete your work, complete your work." But he was not completing his work. So, he got it yesterday. (Rinki, CSS)

Once, there was a girl in our class. There was a teacher here; she has left the school now. The teacher had hit that girl so much that her elbow was bleeding. There was blood on her shirt, we saw. I do not remember the reason this was back in Grade IV. (Pihu, CSS)

Once, in Grade V, the teacher was going to make us play a game on regions or something and had asked students to bring a map to class. I did not get the map, I had forgotten, and I had not come to school the previous day. I told the teacher that I would bring the map the next day, but she made me do 100 squats. The next day, I could not get up from my bed. I did not come to school for a week. (Chia, CSS)

When asked whether students felt that the teachers hit them without reason, VSS students provided conflicting answers and sometimes contradicted themselves. Nevertheless, classroom observations indicated that teachers did beat students without reason. I speculate that students were initially scared of what may happen if teachers found out about their interviews and hence withheld information in the beginning. However, students were more forthcoming about their experiences and how teachers behaved with them with time. For instance, some students said that teachers do not beat them if students do not make a mistake, but then they described how teachers beat them without a valid reason.

Students mentioned that sometimes teachers beat them in anger and refused to listen to their reasonings for incomplete work or not learning the material. For example, in a group interview with Grade IX boys, they stated that the Art teacher beat several students for not drawing objects she had asked the class to draw as homework. Some of these students had missed school for 3-4 days because they were on scout training. The students tried explaining this to the teacher, but she refused to listen and beat them with a wooden stick on their hands, six strikes for each student. Another example is a narrative account provided by Vivek (VSS) where he described how the Math teacher beat him because of another student:

The Math teacher had asked me to bring one of the student's [Shivrung] Math notebook. So, I told him that he lives in another village, and I live in another village. So, then sir, said, "no, I am giving you this responsibility. You have to bring his [Shivrung's] notebook." I told the teacher, "I would not be able to bring his notebook; his village is far from mine. It is 9 km (6 miles) away from my village." Then, sir said, "no, I will get the notebook from you, and I do not know anything else." So, when I came [to school] the next day on Monday, sir asked me for the copy [notebook]. So, I said, "here, you can take this. This is my notebook; it is complete [the work]." Sir then punished me. He asked me to raise both my hands and to stand. And he kept a duster and chalk on the shoulders. If either of the things fell, then I would be beaten up. Then he made me stand like that for 15 mins, then the chalk fell. Then the teacher beat me ... punched me once.

In both these incidents, the teachers refused to listen to the students and their problems. Such behavior by teachers incited negative feelings within students. Vivek said, “I felt very bad that I got scolded because of someone else. If the teacher had scolded me because of my mistakes, I would be fine.” Students vouched not to attend the Art class again when beaten without reason by the Art teacher. Amit, a Grade IX student, was angry at the Art teacher due to the beating he endured even when he was not at fault and said to her, “no matter what, I will not finish the Artwork now.” However, such behavior by students, where they talked back to the teacher when beaten or scolded without reason, was rare. The next day, students’ anger would subside, or the fear of failing the subject would ensure that they complete their work in that subject.

“Teachers Beat Boys A Lot More Than Girls.”

When describing their experiences with physical punishment at school, several students mentioned that “teachers beat boys a lot more than girls,” indicating gendered differences in the punishment given. Observational notes from VSS supported this perception of students. Teachers, male and female, used physical punishment on boys and girls. But students felt that for the same mistakes, teachers were unjust towards boys in their punishment, as explained by Abhijeet (VSS):

The Art teacher was angry, so she beat us. And she beat us [boys] more. Meaning, we [the boys] got angry because the teacher hit the girls who had not drawn what the teacher had asked us to draw, 4-4 sticks, and if we [boys] had not drawn the sketch, she beat us 6-6 sticks. If she was going to beat us all, then she should have beaten all of us equally. That is why we tore our drawing books and threw them.

Students also described how teachers would beat or punish boys but not girls. For instance,

Once, the Social Studies teacher was teaching in High School, and we were in Grade VI, and we were making a lot of noise. The teacher saw, took a stick, and hit the entire class except the girls ... I felt very bad. He had hit very hard. He held our hands and then hit. (Nazeeb, VSS)

The teacher does not make the girls do squats. (Grade IX girls, VSS)

Verbal Aggression and Humiliation

During in-depth interviews, students described experiences of verbal humiliation and aggression by teachers. When students did not perform well or did not study, they recalled teachers stating,

You are illiterate, and you will remain illiterate. You will not be able to compete with good students ever ... All you do is roam around. They say a lot of things. They say, “your parents spend so much money so that you roam around? They put you in coaching for 2 hours and spend Rs. 300 (or \$4-5) there. The [tuition] fee is low, so they put you in coaching. And if you all study here [at school] properly, or do we not teach you?” (Vivek, VSS)

The Hindi teacher talks rubbish sometimes. He says, “you will never be able to study. Your dreams will not come true. Go, find a groom, put a garland around his neck, and get married.” There is no limit to what he says. He speaks so much nonsense. (Anjali, VSS)

Or, as per students, some teachers insulted them so that they realize their mistakes:

The Social Studies teacher does not beat us with a stick that easily. He beats us with his words. He says, “look at you all. You are so *badmash*, *batameez* (naughty and mischievous).” ... He beats us less, but he insults us more. I feel that he would rather beat us as much as he wants but not insult us in front of everyone in the class. Sir thinks that if I insult the students, they will think, “let me not make that mistake again.” (Amit, Abhijeet, VSS)

We feel insulted that we got scolded in front of everyone for such a little thing as long nails. (Girls, CSS)

Classroom observations at both schools also revealed instances of aggressive behavior by teachers towards students. Teachers passed stern, harsh, and sarcastic comments in their judgment of students’ ability to keep pace with the teacher, write when the teacher

dictated, or their ability to memorize or recite answers. Teachers reminded students of their academic shortcomings when they got a chance without worrying about how it might impact them. The teachers' sarcastic tone and harsh words put students in their place. Consider, for instance, the following observations from the two schools:

The Social Studies teacher wanted to dictate the material but instead started writing on the board. But before doing that, the teacher (in a sarcastic tone) remarked, "if I dictate, you will not be able to write, so I will write on the blackboard." (observations, VSS)

The math teacher asked students to recite algebra formulae in class. When students could not recite these formulae, he said, "why do you not do farming? You come here [to school] and waste everyone's time. You do not even understand what I am teaching." (observations, VSS)

The Hindi teacher called out students' names and asked them to recite answers to short questions. When the students said they did not learn these answers, she said, "this is your condition, no shame, and no fear. Do not study; nothing will happen to me (if you do not study). If I scold someone in front of someone else, they feel insulted, but it does not impact you all at all. ... I do not understand why you all do not study. I hit you all with a stick (*chaddi*) the other day, but that also did not have an impact on you. Now, hold your ears⁴³ and keep standing. You get scolded every day, but still, there is no impact on you. I will ask the same questions again tomorrow. And if you are still unable to answer, I will make you stand in front of the Principal's office the entire day, which will be your punishment. Plus, I will make the boys stand in a *murga* (hen) position."⁴⁴ (observations, CSS)

The Science teacher scolded the students for not being able to answer questions. She said, "Is your work not complete? Why have you all not learned these questions? You should be ashamed. If you sit like this [and not study], you will remain sitting all your life. You will not be able to do anything in life." (observations, CSS)

Teachers threatened to embarrass students in front of the entire school for incomplete work by making them stand during the morning assembly. Their threats did not stop there.

⁴³ Holding the ears and standing is a form of punishment used by the teachers to make the students stand in shame and think about their mistakes. This type of punishment is also used to make the students feel embarrassed in front of others, so that they do not repeat the same mistakes again.

⁴⁴ Another form of punishment which is supposed to be shameful and embarrassing for the student.

Teachers threatened to break students' bones or beat them until they turned black and blue if they did not answer their questions. The Art teacher at VSS once said, "if you do not draw properly, I will press your neck." When students could not recite an answer, the Science teacher at CSS said, "*chullu bhar pani mein doob maro*/go, drown yourself in shallow water (literal English translation for a Hindi idiom, which means, be ashamed of yourself). You all do not want even to try [to answer a question]. The girls are always daydreaming! Your parents will get you married if you do not study."

Labelling students based on academic performance

Teachers at both schools labeled students based on their academic performance in class. For instance, they referred to students as "very weak," "nil," "stupid," "donkey," "foolish," vs. "very good," or "bright." Students' perceptions about being "weak" or others being "good" directly translated from the teacher's perceptions about them. The negative labels teachers assigned to students were detrimental to their learning and perceptions of self as they internalized these evaluations. The subsequent findings chapter (chapter 6) discusses how students internalized teachers' evaluations but resisted the humiliating school practices and activated their agency by excluding themselves from the classrooms.

Additionally, during classroom observations of teachers at CSS, I noticed that, while teaching, teachers would face the right-hand side of the class. But when the teachers' wanted to assess whether the students had finished work or learned or understood the material taught, their attention would automatically go to the left-hand side of the class. After continued engagement with the students, I found that teachers considered students on the right at CSS to be "average or above average" in studies, while the students on the left as "below average"

or “weak.” And teachers’ behavior and expectations of students varied based on this seating arrangement (students decide their seats; see chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion). For instance, in my conversation with Sudha, Pihu, and Khushboo (CSS), the girls (all considered “average or above average”) mentioned that they did not like sitting on the left-hand side of the classroom. When probed further, they stated that

the teachers might think that the students sitting on the sides are not listening properly. But those who sit right in front of the teacher, the teachers think that, yes, these students are focusing, and if I ask them, they will be able to answer. And the students on the side (left-hand), even the teacher cannot see them properly. So, the teachers think, let me check how much attention these girls pay. So, the teachers ask them to recite answers to questions. That is why the teachers ask them more often. I do not like sitting in the left-most corner because I cannot see the teacher properly either. The teacher stands facing the right side. ... I can sit in the back in the middle columns, but I will not sit on the sides. I sometimes sit on the sides when I do not get a seat in the middle columns.

Interestingly, when I coded seating arrangements against the caste designations of students, I found that students on the left-hand side of the class belonged to the Dalit communities. While, students on the right were essentially from dominant or upper castes, like, Other Backward Classes (OBC) or General, respectively, and held a higher position in the caste hierarchy than Dalits. Like Dalits, OBCs were oppressed castes, but in the caste hierarchy, they held a higher position (refer to the introduction chapter for more detail). Additionally, during classroom observations, I rotated my seating position in the classroom frequently. When I sat on the left-hand side, I was able to see the teacher clearly; however, as mentioned by the students, the teacher was facing The students on the right-hand side. Furthermore, I also sat at the teacher’s desk (upon invitation by the teacher) and noticed that the teacher had a clear view of the entire class.

Table 5: Similarities and Differences at VSS And CSS.

	Village Secondary School	City Secondary School
<i>Violent discipline</i>		
Physical punishment	Persistent use (used sticks or hands to beat students, made them do squats)	occasional use (saw one teacher slap a student)
Verbal aggression and humiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> present (teachers labelled students as “stupid” or “donkey;” viewed them as “nil” or “not knowing anything”) threatened to embarrass students in front of the entire school 	
Deficit views	Teachers viewed students’ parents as uncaring of their child’s education and lacking awareness	
Class size	Large (94 students)	Small (37 students)
Effect of class size	teachers could not identify students based on their academic performance	teachers could identify “good” students from “academically weak” students
Teachers’ behavior based on academic performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers could not differentiate between students based on academic performance due to a large class size. Identified students who rarely came to school and picked on them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers at CSS behaved differently between “weak” and “bright/good” students. Teachers favored “academically bright” students
Teachers’ behavior based on seating arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewed backbencher students as not interested in studying Focused mostly on students sitting in the front 3-4 rows while teaching When testing to see who understood the material, often picked students sitting in the back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewed students sitting on the left-hand side and in the back as “academically weak” and not interested in studying. Faced away from students sitting on the left-hand side of the classroom while teaching. When testing to see who understood the material, often picked students sitting on the left-hand side of the classroom.

Students' accounts of teachers' behavior towards them revealed that teachers at CSS behaved differently between "weak" and "bright/good" students. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the CSS class size was smaller than at VSS. Therefore, the labeling by teachers based on students' performance was more prominent at CSS than at VSS. The small class size at CSS allowed teachers to focus on individual students, identify each student's literacy levels, and help them overcome their learning needs. Plus, teachers discussed students' performance and classroom behavior with other teachers in the staffroom. As a result, other teachers picked up labels attached to students by some teachers. With time, teachers' behavior toward students reinforced students' academic performance. Table 5 summarizes some similarities and differences at CSS and VSS.

Teachers' behavior toward "good" vs. "academically weak" students at CSS

Based on the students' academic performance on the exams, the teachers at CSS identified a handful of "good" students and set high expectations for these students. Teachers portrayed such students as examples to the other students asking the latter to be like them. But when the "good" students did not perform well, teachers would express their disappointment and sometimes be verbally and physically aggressive. For instance, regarding the Hindi teacher at CSS, Chia explained, "it is useless to be a good student in her class. Because if you are a good student, you will get scolded all the more. She will say, 'you are good students; if you do not finish your work, then what can I expect from the others?'"

However, teachers picked on "weak" students by calling them out in front of peers and shouting at them for not knowing how to read. Teachers would refer to these students as "not knowing anything" or "nil." For instance, the Social Studies teacher asked three girls

who she classified as “academically weak” to stand and recite answers. She refused to move on until they answered the teacher’s questions. When I asked the girls about their thoughts and feelings about this incident, they said:

Srishti: The teacher mostly pays attention to the students who sit in the back and the middle. For first-benchers, she knows they will pay attention to what I say. She knows how each student is at studies. She knows all these things. That is why she makes those students stand, who do not know.

Satakshi: We were sitting in the class silently, and ma’am asked us to stand and answer. It could have been that others did not understand, but ma’am asked the two of us to stand.

Swara: I thought, “Arre! She should just keep quiet.” Ma’am was asking me again and again to answer. When I finally answered, she asked me to sit.

Ultimately, such an approach did not have the intended effect on the students. One of the three students said she could learn the points, and the others said they could not remember them or had forgotten them soon after.

Below is another incident that illustrates the difference in the Hindi teacher’s behavior towards students. Two students had the same offense, but the teacher’s reaction differed.

The Hindi teacher entered the class and asked the students to get their notebooks out. She started taking rounds of the classroom. In a harsh tone, she asked Nishu, “why have you not been coming to school for so long? You do not know how to read, and on top of that, you sit at home. Have you learned how to read? Read this.” The student tried to read but with difficulty. The teacher then said to the student, “Go, stand in front of the class. You have grown so old, but you still do not know how to read. Go, stand in front of the whole class; only then will you understand.” Then she moves on to another student, Nuhi, and asks her politely, “why have you not been coming to school for so long?” Nuhi replies, “I was ill; I had a fever.” The teacher says, “okay. Did you study at home?” Nuhi says, “yes, ma’am, I did.” The teacher is satisfied with that, and she continues to check on other students. (observations, CSS)

Both these girls were absent from school for a prolonged period. The teacher humiliated one student and did not give her a chance to speak but treated the other student nicely. Indeed, both students had varying learning skills – one knows how to read and write Hindi well, and

the other can read but with difficulty. However, the teacher's deficit views of Nishu negatively affected her motivation to study and her sense of belongingness in the class. She felt humiliated in front of her peers, and her peers formed a negative image of her.

Furthermore, the teachers' expectations from "good" and "weak" students varied. Students were well aware of their academic standing in the class with each teacher, which influenced their self-image and their peers' image. When teachers made their expectations of students prominent to the entire class, it affected peer perceptions and relationships. For instance, in my interactions with students in Grade IX-CSS who were considered "academically good" by teachers and, thereby, their peers, they described to me:

Chia: I get scolded very little for incomplete work. The teachers do not get to know only. The teachers do not look at students they think are okay or average or above average in studies.

Pihu: The teachers do not even check the notebooks as such. Yes, the teachers do that (agrees with Chia). But these students [who teachers think to be average or above average] turn out to be insolent. (laughs)

Chia: teachers say that we can guess the student's intention and [academic] status from their face.

Mahi: What we do is we sit in the front, and even if we do not know the answer to a question, we still raise our hand. So, the teacher thinks that the students know the answer. We raise our hands even when we do not know the answer and the teacher does not ask us to answer. (laughs) She asks those who she thinks do not know the answer. The students in the back get trapped.

Elsewhere, Pihu remarked, "the Art teacher believes in us a lot, and if we make even a few mistakes, she overlooks them. I cannot say if she does that with other students, but she overlooks our mistakes." Classroom observations of the teacher's behavior with students revealed the same.

For Sumit, defined as an "academically weak" student by several teachers and his peers, the Art teacher crossed out his entire sketch and asked him to redraw it without pointing out his mistakes and helping him in places where he went wrong.

But for another student, the teacher redrew parts of the sketch, explaining where they went wrong, and then checked it. (observations, CSS)

At CSS, teachers favored a few “academically bright” students over other students. Such favoritism was not evident at VSS, as mentioned before due to the large class size. For instance, a group of girls at CSS described how teachers differentially treat students,

The students who are good at studying, the teachers focus more on those students. And they also focus on students who they like. For instance, the Home Science teacher focuses on Pihu and keeps talking and calling for Pihu all the time. If she has some important work, then she assigns it to Pihu. Every teacher I have been noticing has Pihu’s name on their tongue. The teachers say, “do not differentiate,” but then they differentiate. And if the teachers ask a question and we are unable to answer, the teachers will keep us standing. But if Pihu did the same thing and would laugh and say, “Ma’am, I do not remember the answer, please explain again.” Then the teachers will ask her to sit and explain the answer again. If we do something from our hard work, the teachers will not recognize that and say anything.

Another student who teachers favored was Narendra, who was from a Dalit community and performed well academically. Teachers considered him the best student in the class and often compared other students with him. The Hindi teacher at CSS remarked to the students, “there is no one like Narendra. No one has his qualities. All the teachers appreciate him.” The teachers did not tire of praising Narendra in class and outside of it. Even in informal conversations and interviews, teachers brought up Narendra repeatedly and talked about him and how he was such a “good” student. Teachers emphasized how he was good at academics, had good handwriting, and came forward to speak in the morning assembly. Teachers had high expectations of him and placed him on a higher pedestal than his peers.

Indeed, Narendra was confident and expressed more interest in academics and learning than his peers, but he was not very different from his peers. Like other students,

Narendra's work was often incomplete; he did not always know the answers to the teacher's questions; and occasionally, he skipped school. But teachers overlooked these factors when it came to him. Teachers' beliefs and expectations of Narendra – that he would be able to catch up, or since he performed well in previous tests, he would perform well in upcoming ones too, or teachers thought it was a one-off thing – could be the reasons why teachers ignored these “mistakes” by Narendra.

For instance, the Hindi teacher inquired about Narendra's work in her subject and found that it was incomplete. She said, “you are a good student; you should pay attention,” and left it. To other students, she said, “I get tired of telling you all to complete your work, but there is no effect on you. I feel insulted in telling you all again and again. You all should pay attention to what the teacher says and study.” The Social Studies teacher gave him a 20 on 20 on the exam without checking what he wrote. She said to the class, “he is such a good student, and look at how well he has written [handwriting]. I will not even need to read his answers. I will just check it like that.” The above example where the teacher assumed that Narendra would have written correct answers and gave him cent percent marks without reading his answer sheet was problematic.

Teachers' behavior towards Narendra was unfair to the other students in Grade IX-CSS. Each student had a unique ability and was good at something or the other. But they were all reduced to “not being as good as Narendra.” When teachers favored one student over the others, it affected their confidence and perceptions of self. Students questioned their abilities and skills and viewed themselves as not good enough, which ultimately affected

their performance in class. Some students even wanted to become like Narendra. These statements by Khushboo and Pihu reflect this thought,

I wish I were as intelligent as Narendra is in my studies. (Khushboo, CSS)

I keep thinking that Narendra's handwriting is so good; I wish I could write like that as well. His mind is so active. I wish I could be like him and focus like that on my studies and write as nicely as he could. He is so good. [...] I think that we will not become like him even if we study. (Pihu, CSS)

Peer-to-Peer Interactions and Perceptions

Teachers' behavior towards students influenced peers' perceptions of these students, positively and negatively. When teachers played favorites, it affected other students. And it also affected peer relations. Students expressed feelings of dislike towards their peers who received preferential treatment from the teachers. There was also a sense of competition among students when teachers compared them to others or gave more preference to specific students. However, such a sense of competitiveness only existed among students who considered themselves to be 'good,' 'average,' or 'above average' in studies. Moreover, teacher behavior and attitudes led to some students having contempt for others. For instance, when teachers at CSS gave preference to Pihu, the girls questioned,

What is it about Pihu that the teachers like so much? I do not understand. There are other students in class. Even we are kids. It is not like we are less than her in academics. ... If it were that she always came first in class, I would understand. But I do not understand which mountain Pihu has scaled that the teachers always take her name.

Or when teachers at CSS humiliated Nishu in class, it adversely influenced her peers' perceptions of her. In interviews, several students mentioned her poor reading skills and lack of interest in studying, along with several other students who shared similar academic

outcomes. Students often compared themselves with these ‘academically weak’ students. As Rinki described, “my English is weak. So, I was thinking, if I got fewer marks, then what would happen. Would I have to study Grade IX again like Nishu? She failed Grade IX once and is studying it again with us. But at least my English is better than her. She does not know how to read in Hindi. She does not study even in school.”

Or when the teachers at CSS and VSS made students stand in class to answer questions and were persistent in getting the answers, they felt intimidated by their teacher, became self-conscious, and worried about their peers’ image of them (“I feel embarrassed that I spoke incorrectly”). They feared that an incorrect response might lead to the teacher scolding or the peers teasing them (“if someone makes a mistake, the students start laughing and the teachers start scolding that student. It does not feel nice. If it were to happen with me, I would not feel good at all.”). Peers teased students when teachers scolded them, and they felt humiliated and lost confidence. Consequently, students tried to avoid such situations (“I do not ever feel like coming out and speaking during the assembly. I feel that if I make a mistake, the teacher will scold me again”). Another instance where students’ perceptions of their peers came to light was when a few Grade IX-CSS girls made snide remarks about test preparation and ‘weak’ students:

On February 6, 2020. During the lunch break, I sat with Grade IX students outside the classroom. The girls were preparing for an English test later that day. The girls, Mahi, Nuhi, and Aditi, had not studied for the test. Sudha joined the conversation and told them she had prepared a little for the test. On hearing this, Nuhi and Mahi commented, “well, now we are done for. If students like this have studied and students like us have not, then we are done for. Weak students have studied and come, while students who actually study have not studied.” Nuhi to Mahi, “I feel that everything is topsy-turvy. The students who do not study are studying, while those who study have stopped studying.” They both laughed at this. Sudha, on hearing these comments, got up and left.

Contrarily, teachers at VSS could not pick out “good” students from the crowd or have favorite students because of the large class size. In large classrooms like Grade IX-VSS, teachers identified students by faces, not names. Teachers and peers knew only those students who regularly attended school. The large class size made it difficult for teachers to focus on students who struggled with reading or writing, or understanding the course material. Irrespective, the teachers at VSS made little effort to help students who struggled in class. Teachers concentrated much more on the students who sat closer to them than those in the back. The teachers ignored the backbenchers while teaching and left them to their own devices. The backbenchers did not participate in the class and relied on the frontbenchers for their notebooks to complete their work. However, similar to teachers’ behavior at CSS with students on the left-hand side of the class, teachers at VSS often picked the backbenchers when assessing students’ classroom performance. Unsurprisingly, poor performance led to verbal and physical aggression by the teachers.

Although rare, there were a few students who VSS teachers picked on in the class because of their occasional presence. Student absenteeism was very high at VSS. Therefore, when students who were rarely present in the class attended school, they stood out, for instance, Shivrung. Whenever Shivrung attended school, the Math teacher constantly harassed him for incomplete work. I asked Raja about Shivrung and was told, “the Math teacher scolded him because his work was not complete. So he did not come to school from then. He is scared of the Math teacher. But because of him, Vivek and Ansh get beaten up because the teacher has given them the responsibility to bring him to school and to get him to finish his work. When they brought him to school, his work was incomplete. Then the

teacher punished Shivrung; he placed a duster and chalk on his shoulders and made him stand.”

I could not interview Shivrung because of high absenteeism. On the rare occasions when I saw him at school, I tried to approach him and talk with him, but he refused to talk. He seemed uncomfortable, so I let it go. To understand more about him, I asked some of his peers about him. A limitation to this was that the students’ views were skewed as they saw Shivrung as someone who did not study. This was also the case for other students who sat in the back. Due to chronic absenteeism among these students, they were very difficult to get a hold of. There was a high probability that the backbencher students belonged to Dalit communities, because a majority of students at VSS were from Dalit communities (as mentioned in the previous chapter). However, it was difficult to say since I rarely saw these students in class and did not know most of their names.

When Shivrung did attend school, he would sit quietly in a corner in the class and look at the blackboard. However, he had missed so many classes, he did not understand much, same as his peers who attended school regularly. The Math teacher would solve the problem sets on the blackboard but went through the calculations very fast. The students did not understand much, but they were too intimidated to ask questions. They kept quiet and copied everything he wrote and just nodded their heads. They all said they did not understand anything but were too afraid to ask questions when I asked later. Salmaan and Raja said,

If someone explains properly to me once, then I will be able to solve the questions. Sir explains quickly, so then I do not understand. The teacher goes through the questions very fast. His work is that. His duty is to explain, and the student should copy it quickly so that he can move on to the next one.

Moreover, the teachers' perceptions shaped the students' perceptions of their "backbencher" peers. Frontbenchers held negative perceptions about the backbenchers. The students internalized the insensitivity of their teachers. In their interview, Vivek and Ansh stated that,

Many students sit at the back and just look around when the teacher is making us write. When sir asks, they say, "sir, we did not write it and bring [the notebook] today. I had some work (household or farm-related) at home. I forgot this and forgot that." They make excuses and lie to the teacher. If sir makes them sit in the front and makes us sit at the back, then after 3-4 days, these students say, "we like sitting at the back. I will sit at the back, not in the front. Sir starts beating me in the front." And if we come late to school someday, our seat in the front is empty. The front seats are always empty. ...
When the teachers scold, the students in the front three to four rows feel shameful. But the students in the back start laughing as soon as the teacher leaves the classroom.

The thing is, we face problems in sitting at the back. Because when ma'am makes us write, or if she writes on the board, we cannot see. That is why we try to sit in the front, even if I have to fight for it. I sit in the front mostly.

VA (interviewer): The students who sit in the back daily, even they would have the same problem, right?

Yes, absolutely. Even the backbenchers would be disturbed and will not be able to hear the teachers. But the teachers told that them to sit in the front and asked us to sit in the back. But they chose to sit in the back.

However, students sat in the back because they were scared of the teachers. They said, "we will not come in the front and sit. Sir will beat us."

Positive Teacher-Student Interactions

Contrary to the aforementioned violent disciplinary practices used by the teachers, students at both schools mentioned specific teachers who were respectful, caring, and listened to them. To describe such teachers, students repeated words like, "helps us a lot," "believes in us," "solves our problems," "does not beat easily," "praise us," "speaks with so

much care,” “very friendly with the students,” “understands us,” and “takes an interest in us and our problems.” Such teachers were invested in the students and spent time understanding the students and their issues at school and home. For instance, in describing their English teacher at CSS, students explained:

When she talks, it feels as if someone from our family is speaking to us. If all our teachers were like this, it would be so much fun. (Aditi, CSS)

She understands us completely. She teaches very well. If we are facing a problem, then she understands and immediately asks about it. She wants to and tries to solve our problems. (Chia, CSS)

It feels good that someone is taking an interest in us and our problems. Even the Science teacher takes an interest in us. She mixes and is very friendly when she teaches us. She blends in with us. (Mahi, CSS)

If some student does not come to school, she will ask them, “why did you not come to school? If you sit at home, your result will spoil.” That is why everyone likes her. It feels good. I feel that if someone is thinking good about me. (Srishti, CSS)

Similarly, at VSS, in describing their experience with a Science teacher⁴⁵ who had previously taught them in middle school, students explained,

he was a very good teacher. He was the best among all the teachers. He would teach the same question so many times that you would learn it on the spot. He never beat us. And even when he would feel like beating, he would raise his hand and put it down. He would say, “I feel ashamed in beating you.” He used to believe in us a lot. I have never seen a teacher like him.

When teachers interacted positively with students, and were affectionate, tried to be encouraging, and took interest in them and their problems, it made students feel good, and

⁴⁵ The teacher passed away a few years prior to when I had started my fieldwork at the school. So, I did not personally get to interact with the teacher, but all the students mentioned him in their conversations with me. Whenever I asked them about a teacher they liked or their favorite teacher, students brought him up. Every student who spoke about this teacher spoke with endearment and had tears in their eyes when they mentioned him. He seemed to have left a long-lasting impact on the students.

encouraged and motivated them to do better at their studies. In addition, when teachers were caring and eager to teach them something, the students appreciated it and expressed their liking for such teachers. Moreover, positive interactions with the teacher also improved students' sense of school belonging, and, as a result, students took a particular interest in their courses. However, whether students ended up performing better on the tests was unclear. The reason being that though students' interest in the subject increased, their level of proficiency was low, and they had difficulties in grasping the curriculum.

Students' Responses to Violent Discipline

Students commented that violent disciplinary practices used by teachers resulted in their feeling too scared of the teachers and thereby, answering the teacher's questions. "Teachers say, do not be scared of us. But no matter how much the teacher says we are scared of them," says Sanjay at VSS. Students at both were afraid that teachers would beat or scold them if they answered incorrectly and had lost confidence in themselves and in what they had learned or studied because of this fear. For instance, several students mentioned that "even if I know something, I do not say it out aloud due to the fear that I may say something incorrect or that I may go wrong," and that "sometimes, I am unable to recite the answer even if I have learned it. I remember the answer, but I cannot recite it." In addition, students expressed that they felt flustered and nervous in front of the teachers ("the other day the Math teacher called me on to the blackboard, and I got scared. First, I wrote the correct answer, then erased it and wrote the wrong answer"). Another student said, "I feel so scared of the Home Science teacher that I do not even say a word when I am near her."

Constant shouting and beating by the teachers for the minor mistakes that students made did not encourage students to study; instead, it limited students' learning and created a hostile learning atmosphere in the classroom. As Sumaira stated, "we feel scared, but we come to school and pray that the teacher's period does not occur, or that she leaves class without teaching." Students do not want to answer incorrectly in front of the teacher for fear of being scolded, insulted, or humiliated. To avoid this, they do not respond or forget the answer out of fear, which leads to the same consequence they were trying to avoid. The students' fear of getting beaten or scolded by the teacher leads to a vicious cycle of low academic performance, violent disciplinary practices, and student absenteeism. It is a vicious cycle that needs to end for students to learn and engage in the classroom.

In response to how students felt about violent disciplinary practices and the impact, students described several consequences of such harmful practices, including contempt for the teachers, their peers, and the school. Students described feeling humiliated, less confident, and blamed themselves:

If we make a mistake, the teacher can scold us, but they should not say that "you will not be able to do anything in life." When teachers say these things, the student's confidence level goes low. ... If they explain with care, we will understand. The students feel frustrated and start disliking the teacher. Yes, I started disliking that teacher because she beat me. (Chia, CSS)

It does not feel good. I feel angry at myself, not the teacher. Maybe I am the spoilt/bad one: I am not able to learn, and I do not speak. Or, when the teacher is teaching, I do not listen properly. (Sheetal, CSS)

The Home Science teacher speaks way beyond the limit to the point that it feels insulting/humiliating. The students here do not respect her. (Mahi, CSS)

The teacher caught Prakhar (a boy) looking at Purvi (a girl). He slapped Prakhar hard on both his cheeks in front of the whole class. The teacher also slapped him

on the back. To this, Amit said, “if the teacher had beaten me like that, I would not come to school the next day.” (informal conversations, VSS)

Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from an interview with a group of Grade IX-CSS girls. The three girls performed better at academics than their counterparts, who they refer to in the description below. Here, they share their outlook on the Hindi teacher’s behavior towards students who could not read and write. They found teacher’s actions insulting and felt terrible for their peers, but these girls also showed contempt for these students:

Pihu: If students cannot read and write in Hindi in class, the teacher makes them read daily. Earlier, Satakshi, Aaki, Sumit, Pawan could not read, and now they have learned how to read. ... I do not know how those students felt, but I thought that look how the teacher is making them read in front of everyone. It does not look nice. So, I thought that these students should start reading a little bit on their own, so the teacher would not make them stand.

Sudha: I think they would feel bad [about the teacher making them stand and read in class].

Khushboo: We do not like when we are insulted or humiliated.

Teachers’ use of violent discipline invoked emotional responses among students (“I feel like crying;” “I do not like it when sir hits”). Students expressed feeling angry (“it makes me feel angry when the teachers hit very hard”) and questioned themselves (“we feel very bad. I think, what mistake did I make that ma’am would say this.”), and the teacher’s actions (“who hits like this for such little things!”). Moreover, when I asked students about how they felt when teachers made statements like, “no matter what I say, there is no effect on the students,” they said they felt terrible. Some said they felt guilty for not studying or doing the work:

If we do not learn and come and the teachers scold, it makes me feel that look sir does so much for us, and we cannot even learn two questions that he had asked us to learn. ... We think we did not learn and come. We were completing work in

another subject at home, but if we had learned this, the teacher would not have beaten us, nor would he have scolded us. If we learn and come, then the teacher scolds those sitting in the back. (Vivek, VSS)

It feels horrible. I think why I make mistakes that I get beaten. (Abhijeet, VSS)

We feel extremely guilty then. (Gungun, CSS)

Others thought it was unjust how teachers beat some students and not the others for not knowing answers. For instance, Saman at VSS was crying because the Science teacher had beaten her with a stick on the palms. Saman was unable to answer part of a question posed by the teacher. When I asked her how she felt about the teacher's actions, Saman said, "I was angry because ma'am [the teacher] did not beat the girls sitting at the back even when they did not know the answer to the questions. If she beat me, she should have beaten everyone else who did not know the answer, or she [the teacher] should not have beaten anyone at all."

Grade IX-VSS girls talked about their experience with physical violence and expressed concerns about how being beaten in front of boys made them feel embarrassed. Peers' perspectives mattered to these girls. Moreover, given the opportunity, students exercised their agency by opting out of situations that may lead to physical violence by skipping school and excluding themselves from the classroom (discussed in greater detail in the next chapter). Furthermore, the teacher's actions limited the girls' learning opportunities, which would affect their future opportunities.

In Grade VIII, although he taught well, the Math teacher also beat us when we did not know the answer. And we did not take Math in Grade IX because we did not want to get beaten up in front of the boys. We did not want to be embarrassed in front of them. They [the boys] would make fun of us by saying, "look, these girls do not even know Math." (Grade IX girls, VSS)

Students commented about her feelings when beaten or scolded in front of peers:

We do not get physically hurt, but we worry about getting insulted/humiliated in front of everyone. We think that look the teacher hit us in front of everyone. It might not hurt us that much at that point, but when everyone starts laughing at us, that makes me want to cry. That the teacher hit us, and these people are laughing at me. (Chia, CSS)

Violent discipline was so prevalent that students did not question it and had internalized its use as – “for their good.” Conversations with students also indicated that they regarded physical punishment as normal and even inevitable (discussed in further detail in the next chapter). Furthermore, students stated that “after they [the teachers] have beaten us, we can do nothing about it. Also, we are too scared to say anything to the teacher. If we say something to the teacher, they will beat us more.”

Students refrained from telling their parents about sustaining physical violence at school. They feared their parents would subject them to more violence at home (“if we told them our parents would hit us more”). Parents supported the use of corporal punishment at school. Often, they blamed their children for not studying and working hard. Several students stated, “I do not tell my parents about getting beaten at school. They say that if you cannot read/study, then you will get beaten up.” Or “if we tell our mother, then she says, ‘why do you make a mistake? Why get beaten up? If you do not make a mistake, you will not be beaten up.’”

“I Do Not Feel Like Teaching Today.”

In the previous sections, we discussed how teachers interacted with students and the various beliefs and perceptions they held of students and their parents. Teachers quickly blamed students’ poor performance in class on parents and their low socioeconomic backgrounds and low literacy levels. However, the teachers’ motivation and interest to teach

varied within and across the two schools. For a better understanding of who enters the teaching profession and why, refer to the previous chapter. Teachers' motivation to teach was reflected in their body language and attitude when in the classroom and time allocated for teaching activities outside of class hours. Below are a few examples of teachers' interests and attitudes towards teaching at the schools.

The Social Studies teacher at VSS would simply look out the door while teaching as if something much more interesting was happening outside of which he wanted to be a part. He was not audible to the students sitting at the far end of the class. But he disliked students looking out the classroom's window and whispering or writing while he spoke. Any noise from inside the classroom would flare up the teacher's anger, the consequence of which was a beating for the student. Another example would be the Science teacher at VSS, who would enter the class, ask students to open their notebooks, and start writing. She would sit on the teacher's desk and start dictating, all the while doodling on the desk with chalk. On multiple occasions in class, in front of the students, she admitted to me that "she did not feel like teaching" that day. She would dictate at her own pace without regard for whether the students could keep up or understand what was said. Students who found it challenging to write or spell would sit still and stare blankly. At CSS, the Art teacher would enter the class, walk around to check whether students had their Artbooks open, and then give them instructions to draw something from the book, never teaching students how to draw. The teacher would then sit at the teacher's desk and stare at the students or walk out of the class to talk to other teachers or just stand in the sun.

The teachers spent little time outside of school on activities that defined their role as a teacher. For instance, teachers did not spend time on lesson preparation or providing proper feedback to students on their written work outside of class or school. Some teachers corrected students' notebooks during class hours; of the very few teachers who corrected students' notebooks, the Hindi teacher at CSS spent time correcting notebooks outside of class in her free period. Home Science teacher at VSS spent days correcting notebooks during class hours, leaving students to complete their work in Home Science while she was checking someone else's notebook. Correcting notebooks, in her case, meant adding ticks in red ink on each page followed by her signature.

Table 6: Teachers and School Management: Similarities and Differences

	Village Secondary School	City Secondary School
Teachers' responsible?	Teachers often shirk away teaching responsibilities	Teachers could not shirk away teaching responsibilities
School Management active or lax?	school management not active, put the responsibility of school development on the Principal	school management active and held monthly meetings with teachers to get progress reports
Teacher absenteeism	high teacher absenteeism	low teacher absenteeism

When comparing the two schools, I found that teachers at VSS were much more likely to shirk away from their teaching responsibilities than at CSS (see Table 6 for a summary). The reason for this could be teachers' accountability by the school management. The school management at CSS played an active role in the functioning and development of the school. The manager held teachers accountable for the poor performance of the students in their subjects and their class. The manager held meetings with teachers to get progress reports and questioned teachers about the poor performance of the students in their subjects.

Teachers at CSS feared the manager and the consequences of not teaching or being in class; they could not be outside without a valid reason. At VSS, however, things were lax, the school management was not active, and the manager had shifted the burden of work on the Principal.

His [the manager's] role is to look after the school, the building, infrastructure, facilities, and repairs, wherever needed. But he has diverted these duties to me/put them on me. The managers who dive deep into the school activities and perform their duties do it because of their superior nature. Otherwise, the Principal has to look after the school on their behalf. (Principal, VSS)

At VSS, the Principal would sit all day and browse his mobile and overlook the laziness of the teachers. For instance, even when the timetable indicated that the teacher needed to be in class teaching, the Principal did not question teachers for being out of the classroom. The Math and Home Science teachers at VSS missed their classes the most or would come to class late. Most times, one could find them sitting outside, scrolling up and down on their mobiles, and using social media. At other times, even when the teacher was in the class, they would receive phone calls and walk out to talk on the phone or just keep solving a Math problem while on the phone. The Art teacher would sit in class for the entire class duration and be on the phone while correcting students' artwork.

The teachers attributed the failure of students to acquire education to their students' inadequacies and not to their inadequacies (as described above). It epitomized the 'blaming the victim' syndrome. Teachers failed to explain the intrinsic value of education to the students. They often remarked, "you need to study to get a good job; you can do something in life if you study." This is what the students adopted and adapted to as a learning practice. Students studied just enough to get good scores or to get enough marks that they would pass.

Though students were physically present, mentally, they were, often, disengaged from the classroom; learning was limited to completing work and memorizing what was in their notebooks. If the teachers overlooked even that by opting to skip their class or persistent absenteeism, it also forced the students to overlook the value of gaining education and learning. Moreover, teachers expected the students to adapt to the school's structures when the teachers should adapt to the student's needs.

Conclusion

Teachers' pedagogical practices at both schools with memorization as the core objective, and summative assessments used to evaluate students indicated poor educational quality. The teacher-centered pedagogical approaches at schools were quite ineffective for students. Passive learning and rote-memorization created passive minds and uncritical dispositions and inhibited children's growth, creativity, and curiosity. Though the level of training and teaching experience differed among teachers within the school and across the two schools, where teachers at CSS, on average, were more qualified and experienced (as described in chapter 4), the instructional approach at both schools was similar. The "one teaching style fits all" approach that teachers took disregarded students' needs and did not work for the diverse student population at the two schools.

An important aspect of classroom interaction at both schools was the teachers' concern with maintaining order and control to facilitate teaching. Overall, the situation at both schools were very similar in terms of how teachers behaved with students and student's educational outcomes and self-perceptions. Teachers used violent disciplinary practices to discipline students and make them realize their mistakes. The power asymmetry between

teachers and students where teachers held more power than students allowed the teachers to dominate, discipline, and control students in the classroom. Student accounts revolved around their experiences of corporal punishment and verbal aggression and humiliation by teachers and how those affected them as learners.

Such forms of punishment proved deleterious to students' learning. To avoid the teacher's wrath, students would skip school if they did not learn for a test or had incomplete work as they were scared of their teachers. Furthermore, this turned into a vicious cycle where incomplete work/ not learning the subject led the students to skip school out of their fear of the teacher, which further led to incomplete schoolwork and low performance in the class leading to violent discipline. Continued absenteeism often led to school dropouts. Some students at both schools did not attend school the entire school year and would only appear for the final exams, but what they wrote in the exam was anyone's guess.

Expectedly, violent discipline was not as effective as the teachers thought and simply led the students to internalize their teacher's perceptions about them. Their descriptions of violent discipline indicated how physical punishment had become a normalized practice at school. There were other consequences of violent discipline, like low self-confidence, diminishing sense of belonging at school, and low self-worth. Some of the feelings that students expressed experiencing upon facing violent discipline by the teachers were guilt, remorse, and anger at themselves.

The findings in this chapter also suggested that teachers' behavior towards some students defined how peers behaved with these students. Peer relations and perceptions were also affected when teachers interacted negatively with specific students and favored others.

In addition, students believed that their peers with high absenteeism lacked interest in attaining education and were not motivated to study. These beliefs by students resulted from the teachers' behavior and opinions about such students. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs tended to lead to the 'Pygmalion in the Classroom' phenomenon. The students were not learning well since their teachers thought them to be poor learners. Additionally, teacher and student accounts of the conditions of students' academic learning at both the schools also drew linkages between violent discipline and poverty.

Where the differences existed between the two schools was the level of disengagement between the teachers at the two schools. At VSS, as discussed earlier, the teachers were much more likely to shirk away from their teaching responsibilities than at CSS. Ultimately, this translated into poor students' educational outcomes like, fewer students grasped concepts, or performed well on the tests and exams. Plus, the large class size at VSS made the situation worse.

The next chapter focuses on the factors that facilitated or hindered student engagement in the classroom. The chapter is an interplay between school-based relationships with teachers and peers, students' sense of school belonging, and student engagement and disengagement.

CHAPTER 6

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND STUDENT RESISTANCE

In the previous chapters, I discussed the impact of the physical environment and teacher-student and peer-to-peer interactions on students' classroom experiences, self-perceptions, and sense of school belonging. This chapter identifies the factors that facilitated or hindered student engagement in the classroom and the potential impact of engaging and disengaging on students' educational outcomes and subjectivities. In doing so, the chapter discusses the interplay between school-based relationships with teachers and peers, students' sense of school belonging, and student engagement and disengagement. It compares the factors that impacted student engagement and disengagement at the two schools —VSS and CSS. Furthermore, I argue that by not attending school and excluding themselves from the classroom, students activated their agency and resisted the humiliating experiences in the school.

Students engage in their classroom by participating in classroom activities, paying attention, or attending school regularly. Overall, I found that a few students engaged while most disengaged from the classrooms. Sometimes, the students who engaged also tended to

disengage from the classrooms. The school-related factors that led students to disengage from the classrooms were low-quality pedagogical practices, violent disciplinary practices by teachers, peer rejection and stereotyping based on caste, and lack of peer support. When students were made to feel embarrassed and humiliated by teachers and peers, it created a space for fear, led to a disliking towards learning and loss of self-confidence, and discouraged them, hindering student engagement in the classroom. Additionally, peer rejection and caste-based stereotyping and discrimination negatively affected students' sense of school belonging, impacting their academic engagement.

Interviews with students revealed that they were more willing to engage in the classroom when teachers demonstrated caring and took an interest in their personal lives and the problems they faced or when they received support from their peers, both academic and emotional. Thus, it became increasingly clear that school-based relationships with teachers and peers mattered to students to feel supported, connected, and remain engaged at school. When students' fit in in their classroom and had close bonds with their peers and a positive relationship with their teachers, it facilitated student engagement.

I also found that when teachers subjected the students to violent discipline—verbal, physical, or emotional— or peers rejected some students and discriminated against them, students internalized these evaluations. When students internalized this discourse, it negatively impacted their academic learning and inhibited their sense of school belonging. Thus, to avoid violent discipline and humiliation at school, students stayed at home and frequently skipped school. By responding to violent discipline by skipping school, students exercised their agency and resisted the insulting and humiliating experiences at school.

This chapter includes the following sections: (1) defining student engagement and disengagement; (2) factors that facilitated or hindered student engagement; (3) internalization of the discourse and student resistance to the humiliation suffered at school; and (4) concluding remarks.

Student engagement and disengagement

What does it mean for students to be engaged or disengaged? In this study, I viewed student engagement as multifaceted encompassing student attendance, paying attention in class, participating in the classroom and extracurricular activities, being socially active, and seeking to create ties with peers and teachers. I defined student engagement in this manner to understand whether students were actively taking part in their classroom and school practices and processes. However, after continued conversations with students and their teachers and classroom observations, the complex nature of the factors that affected student engagement became clear. Student engagement was dependent on the individual (the student) and the social context of the classroom or the school.

Factors like the social relationships with peers and teachers, pedagogical practices, students' motivation, and willingness to learn, and the hidden curriculum in the classroom and school – “the norms, values, and messages that are communicated in school” (Nambissan & Rao, 2013) – influenced student engagement or disengagement. At times, students disengage from their classroom not due to their lack of motivation to learn but due to the poor treatment by teachers or peers or the lack of learning support they need to succeed. Therefore, if students struggled with any aspect of the social context of their classrooms or school, like negative interactions with their teachers or peers, or violent disciplinary

practices, it hindered their school engagement (discussed in greater detail later in the chapter).

Disengagement from school directly affected students' learning outcomes and sense of school belonging. In fact, the association between student engagement, learning outcomes, and a sense of belonging is reciprocal, possibly in a mutually reinforcing manner (Juvonen et al., 2012). That is, a reduced sense of school belonging or poor learning outcomes can lead to student disengagement; the less engaged students are, the lower their sense of belonging. Contrarily, a high sense of school belonging or good learning outcomes can lead to student engagement; and the more engaged students are, the more they feel they belong. In the following sections, I examine the factors that affected student engagement and the potential impact on students' learning outcomes, sense of school belonging, and perceptions of self.

For students to be engaged in the classroom, the most basic requirement would be to show up—be physically present. Once students have shown up, the next step would involve keeping these physically present students mentally present in the classroom. Though some students focused and participated in the classroom and other school activities and attended school regularly, many did not. Among the students who attended school, many checked out mentally and did not participate or pay attention in the classroom. Meaning they were disengaged mentally. For instance, during classroom observations, I noticed some students who sat at the back put their heads down on the desk while the teacher was teaching, while some stared blankly at the blackboard. In interviews, students at both schools mentioned feeling bored in their class and unable to understand what the teacher was teaching. Resultingly, students disengaged mentally from their classrooms.

Practices that facilitated or hindered student engagement

A complex web of interrelated school- or classroom-level factors facilitated or hindered student academic engagement, including teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, peer support, pedagogical practices, and violent disciplinary practices. This section focuses on the classroom practices that hindered or facilitated students' engagement.

As discussed in the previous chapters, teachers focused on only a small number of students in the classroom – front-benchers (at both schools) and those on the right-hand side (CSS). At CSS, I found that students viewed as “academically good or bright” by their teachers or considered teachers' favorite students were more engaged in their classrooms. Teachers also held high expectations of these students and included them in extracurricular activities for special events. Pihu at CSS validated my classroom observations by stating, “whichever student gets good marks, the teachers ask or pay attention to those students.” These students also had peer networks and social support. However, the peer network among girls was concentrated with other students who also performed well in class and were considered above average or average at academics by the teachers. Among boys at CSS, the peer network was a mix of all students, including those considered below average, average, or above average by their teachers.

At VSS, the students who sat in the front attended school regularly and had a good peer network were more engaged in the classrooms than their back-bencher peers who were not regular at school and consequently lacked peer support. Contrary to CSS, the teachers at VSS did not have favorite students. But a few teachers, like the Hindi teacher, identified a few students who attended school regularly as “average” students. However, if these students

could not answer the teachers' questions or had incomplete work, they would be beaten or scolded the same as other students. Thus, a teacher's attitude or behavior towards the students depends on their academic performance or status of work in that particular subject (as described in the previous chapter). But for students who were absent frequently, the teachers were always harsh towards these students; take, for example, Shivrung and the Math teacher's stern attitude towards him. I discuss Shivrung's case in greater detail in the upcoming section on student disengagement in the previous chapter.

Despite teachers' poor behavior towards students at VSS, some students were motivated to learn and came to school regularly. However, although these students engaged physically by attending school, they sometimes disengaged mentally by not paying attention in class. Why? Because in some classes like Math or Science, students did not understand what the teachers were teaching or could not keep pace with the teacher because they were rushing through the course material. Difficulty in keeping pace with the teachers made students feel blank and lost in the class, leading to students disengaging mentally.

Interviews with students revealed that students were more willing to engage physically in the classroom when teachers demonstrated caring and took an interest in students' personal lives and the problems they faced. For instance, several students at CSS remarked about the English teacher and her positive attitude towards students ("My favorite teacher is the English teacher. Her nature is very good. She talks to students in such a caring manner. It feels like someone in our family is talking to us. Whenever someone is absent from school, she will definitely ask them why they were absent. She cares for the students a lot and helps them with their problems.").

Teachers also selected “academically bright” students for extracurricular activities and special events like Independence Day celebrations. At CSS, for instance, for the Republic Day celebration, students from the right-hand side were chosen to participate in dance activities and singing competitions or speeches. Teachers considered these students academically good and believed they could cope with schoolwork relatively easily when they had to skip classes for practice. Plus, cross-checking with the school roll call register, I found that these students belonged to the Other Backwards Classes (OBC) and General categories⁴⁶. People from the OBC category had also faced oppression, but they have a higher position in the caste hierarchy than Dalits (discussed in greater detail in the introduction chapter). In addition, positive interactions with their teachers enabled students to attend school more regularly and participate at higher rates than their peers with whom teachers interacted negatively. Another example would be when, at VSS, the Hindi teacher chose a few boys and girls he perceived as “academically bright” for a district-level essay writing competition. Some of these students refused and said they did not want to participate, but the teacher said, “you are good students; if you do not participate, who will? Your participation will help us improve the name of the school.”

As a result, such students felt motivated and supported by their teachers and thus, were more engaged in the classroom. Moreover, students who received positive attention from the teachers paid attention to the course material, participated in the class when teachers

⁴⁶ To implement reservations in educational and government institutions for castes lower in hierarchy, the government of India categorized the various castes within Hindus as GC (General or Open category which included castes higher in hierarchy), BC (Backward classes which included castes lower than the caste Hindus), OBC (Other Backward classes, the most backward castes), SC (Scheduled caste) & ST (Scheduled tribe). (Geetha, 2021)

asked them questions, and were mentally present, unlike their peers who did not receive adequate attention from the teachers. Special attention from the teachers made students feel confident about themselves and their abilities. It also helped improve their sense of school belonging and thereby increased their school engagement. These students felt they were part of the school system and liked coming to school because of it.

However, positive interactions with the teacher might not be enough to keep the students academically engaged. Other aspects of students' school life mattered as well. Continued observations and conversations with students in their classrooms indicated that peers and friends were an essential aspect of being at school for most students at both schools. Friendships mattered to students. Repeatedly, they mentioned that "if the students [their friends] have not come to school, I feel unhappy. Or if I have come and none of my friends have come to school, then I do not like it in class." Conversely, students liked attending school because they got to see their friends at school and missed their friends if they stayed home, so they attended school every day. Others stated that "the school day felt long when their friends were not present, and the teachers kept coming to the class and teaching," indicating a lack of engagement in the classroom when peers were absent.

Furthermore, at both schools, most students who had strong peer networks or support attended school regularly and felt they belonged. At CSS, the students who received positive attention from the teachers were also the ones who had strong peer networks and support systems. These students primarily belonged to the OBC category, however among boys, caste did not play a role. The girls from Dalit communities were friends with each other but that was also due to the social exclusion from other girls in their class. Essentially, some girls

from OBC or other upper caste groups would not talk to the Dalit girls unless spoken to. Whereas at VSS, it mainly was the students in the front rows who had strong peer networks. However, at VSS how a teacher treated most of the students depended on the students' academic performance or their status of work in that particular subject.

Several students at VSS mentioned seeking help from their friends to complete schoolwork when they or their friends are absent from school. As Sanjay narrated, "say if I do not come to school then Saif, who lives in my village, comes to my home, and gives me his notebook. Then, in the evening, I write, and the next day, I bring his notebook with me [to school] and return it to him." Or how Abhijeet had given his notebooks to his friend Vivek to complete his work before missing school. Nazeeb, in his interview, declared, "I have Taufeeq's notebook. He does not come to school these days, so I complete his work." Students also took pride in having formed strong friendships in class. For instance, Abhijeet (VSS), during the interview, exclaimed,

in class, five of us are very good friends. We have been friends since Grade VI, the five of us. And we have never fought with anyone or amongst ourselves. If there is some work, then the five of us do it together. If only one of us has brought lunch, and others have not, then we share it amongst ourselves and eat. Today, two of us had brought lunch, and four of us were present, so we shared amongst ourselves and ate. And, by chance, if one of us does not come to school, we call each other on the phone and tell them what happened in school, what was covered in class that day, or click a photo and send it on WhatsApp. So, that the others who were absent could complete their work.

When asked about who students shared their problems with, some students stated,

we tell our friends. We do not tell our parents, but we do tell each other. For example, we tell each other about our studies. Or tell them that I did not eat food or drink tea before coming to school. Or that I came early to school because my mother scolded me. (Ayushi and Angel, VSS)

We share our dreams with our friends. We tell them about what we want to become when we grow up. For example, someone says I want to become a doctor, and another says I will pursue engineering. I say I will become a teacher or fulfill my family's dreams for me. When my friends tell me about their dreams, I feel happy about it. (Sumaira, VSS)

I tell them everything that happens at my home about my father and how he was earlier and now. I like it. Because they do not tell anything to anyone and keep my talks with themselves. (Rinki, CSS)

Rinki's father was an alcoholic and had an extramarital affair. He would beat his wife (Rinki's mother) when he was home. For Rinki, having this peer support was important. Friends were the social support that some students needed to cope with life at home and school.

Overall, I found that some students were more engaged in class when their teachers treated them well, had high expectations, had a good standing with their teachers and close friends, and were intrinsically motivated to learn. In addition, some students thrived in the school environment because of the bond they shared with their peers. When students maintained close ties with peers, it enabled them to attend school, participate in activities, thereby improving their sense of school belonging. School-based relationships with teachers and peers were critical for students to feel like they belonged at their school and stay engaged.

Factors that Hindered Student Engagement

From classroom observations and student interviews, I found that students disengaged from the classrooms due to one or a combination of the following interrelated factors at the school level: low-quality pedagogical practices, violent disciplinary practices by teachers, low peer perceptions, and lack of peer relations and support. Not all students had positive

peer relationships and peer support networks, or positive relations with their teachers at school. Teachers treated some students poorly due to their poor learning outcomes or performance in class. Some students rejected their peers due to attributes like their caste designations, appearance, continued absences from school, and academic performance. Students' behavior and attitudes towards their peers were primarily influenced by the teachers' behavior towards these students. In addition, some students felt bored at school because they did not understand what the teacher was teaching and could not keep up with the teachers' pace.

Moreover, there were students who disengaged from their classroom, despite having strong peer networks or positive treatment by the teachers. The home environment of the students also had an impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. However, in this study I did not get an in-depth understanding of students' life at home. There were a few exception cases, where students decided to share their home-related issues during the interview. This section elaborates how these interrelated, school- and home-related factors hindered student engagement in the classroom and the impact on students' educational outcomes, self-perceptions, and sense of school belonging.

Pedagogical practices and violent disciplinary practices

The pedagogical practices by teachers treated all students as passive learners and used summative assessments to evaluate student performance (as discussed in the previous chapter). Consequently, for students, learning was limited to completing work and memorizing what was in their notebooks to perform better on tests and exams. Moreover, since some students in Grade IX at both schools did not have the basic reading and writing

skills, they struggled to study independently at home. Students from rural areas had previously attended poor quality primary and upper primary schools that faced teacher shortages. Furthermore, most of these students were from low-income families, with parents who had low or no education, and therefore, could not help their children with education. Resultingly, these students had incomplete work and would perform poorly on the exams. In addition, during interviews, students at both schools mentioned feeling bored in their class, unable to understand what the teacher was teaching. Since they were bored, the students did not see the value in attending school regularly, and ultimately skipped school when they felt like it. This led to students disengaging both mentally and physically from their classrooms.

Despite being aware of why students had low proficiency in reading and writing, the teachers reprimanded them. Teachers held unreasonable expectations from these students where they wanted them to finish their schoolwork and homework, learn the course material, and perform well on the exams. Unsurprisingly, students were not able to meet teachers' expectations. Teachers were aggressive towards students and beat or scolded them for low classroom performance (as discussed in detail in the previous chapter). Students felt embarrassed and humiliated when their teachers behaved poorly with them ("we feel guilty. We feel a little embarrassed and insulted, and think that are we such bad students that the teacher had to say that there is no impact on you of my words."). Or, for example, consider this account of students' classroom experiences at CSS,

When the teachers make us stand in the class, it is very insulting. Everyone has a self-respect and when teachers make us stand, it hurts our self-respect. Plus, say one teacher punished and another teacher comes in class, then she will ask why are these students standing. Then we will have to explain it to that teacher. Then, that information passes on to other teachers as well, and it affects our reputation

with other teachers. Basically, the students' reputation gets spoilt in front of the teachers. It is the biggest insult for us.

Students expressed contempt for their teachers, peers, and the school. For instance, on various occasions students exclaimed,

The Home Science teacher does not know how to speak to students; she does not even ask students anything, just hits or slaps. She shouts all the time. I do not feel like coming to her to study. (Gudiya, CSS)

Once, they made us stand on one leg. And we had to close our eyes too. And the teacher said, if you fall or open your eyes, then I will beat you. The teacher made all the students who did not score well do this. We felt very bad. We were angry as well. But then we calmed down. When we start playing, then we forget everything. (Anaya, VSS)

The Art teacher crossed out my entire sketch once. I felt a little angry. First of all, I do not like Drawing so much. And I made that sketch with such difficulty but the teacher crossed out the entire thing. That made me a little angry and very sad. (Shubhi, CSS)

We dislike some teachers because they teach less but insult the students a lot. They insult us on small, small things. (Shivam, CSS)

Academically, students suffered as they hesitated to ask the teachers questions out of fear, and when teachers held low expectations, it led to self-fulfilling prophecies among the students.

When poor academic performance or being unable to answer questions in the class led to violent disciplinary practices by the teachers, students would stop responding to teachers' questions, become frazzled and fumble and answer incorrectly.

The Science teacher would take a surprise test and go around the class asking each student the same question. Anyone who did not know the answer or could not answer because they were scared of the teacher, was struck twice on their palm with a stick. (observations, VSS)

I forget the answer when the Math teacher or the Social Science teacher is in front of me. They say, "answer me," and I feel so scared of that instead of saying what I want, something else comes out of the mouth. (Amit, VSS)

What happens during the morning assembly is that I get nervous when teachers ask us to come speak in front of the entire school. I forget out of nervousness. A lot of students do this. They know the answer to the teachers' questions but they do not say it aloud. They will tell other students, or whoever is sitting near them, but they do not answer the teacher. The students feel nervous and do not want to get the answer wrong. We feel that other students might laugh at us if we answer incorrectly, that is why we do not answer. (Rohan, CSS)

In addition, students started skipping school due to the fear of the teachers and their behavior.

When teachers beat or scold either of two things happen—the students learn and come to school or they stop coming to school. (Salmaan, VSS)

There is this boy, Shivrung, who the Math teacher scolded and beat because his work was not complete. This kid did not come to school from then. (Raja, VSS)

Absenteeism would again lead to incomplete work and poor performance, leading to violent discipline; thus, creating a vicious cycle. As a result of violent disciplinary practices, students continually started disengaging, mentally and physically, from the classroom. They would come to school on a few days but skip school on other days. As mentioned in previous chapter, students skipped school to avoid teachers' wrath. However, some students would attend irrespective of getting beaten, while others were forced to attend by their parents ("if we do not go to school, then my parents scold us. My mother says, 'why can't you go to school, wait I am going to beat you up.'"). Students mentioned that they were beaten at home or scolded by their parents for not attending school ("I am scared of my father. He scolds me if I do not go to school."). In addition, some students came to school because their class teacher would call at home asking about the students' absence.

High student absenteeism at VSS and CSS resulted in teachers complaining. Several teachers mentioned that students do not come to school. When the principal called the

parents and asked them to send their children to school, they said they would. The students came to school for two to three days, but they would stop attending school after that.

Students' absenteeism confounded the teachers; it made them think that students were not interested in studying and did not want to study. However, teachers did not realize that their behavior towards students acted as a factor that discouraged them from attending school.

Peer perceptions and relations

Another factor that discouraged students from attending school was peer perceptions and relationships. As discussed in the previous chapter, teachers' perceptions of students influenced their peers' perceptions of them. Students held deficit views of their peers who were "academically weak" or sat on the left-hand side (at CSS) or in the back of the classroom (at VSS and CSS). Drawing on their teachers' behavior, the students also behaved poorly with their peers. The students tended to be rude and passed snide comments (verbally) about their peers who had low academic performance or were absent at a higher rate than others.

Interestingly, these students (particularly at CSS) who perceived themselves to be better at academics than their peers also skipped school and had incomplete work. They held double standards for themselves versus their peers. Meaning, when they skipped school or had not completed their schoolwork, they were okay with their behavior. However, if their peers who were considered "academically weak" by the teachers missed school, such behavior could not be excused by these students. When I probed these "academically good" students for reasons for skipping school or incomplete work, they mentioned, "I did not feel like coming to school;" "I had work at home." Or, "Teachers give a lot of work in Hindi and

History. We have pending work in these subjects.” What these students fail to recognize is that their peers who might have lower levels of proficiency that these students may also be facing similar issues.

Moreover, I found out that students would plan when to skip school and asked their friends to do the same on multiple occasions. During her interview Rinki mentioned, “today very few students have come to school because yesterday, the students planned to skip school. They asked me to skip school as well, but I like coming to school.” It was a “mass bunk,” and most students who participated in this ‘event’ were those students who teachers considered “academically good.” However, teachers did not know that it was a mass bunk when class attendance was low at times.

So, why did some “academically good” students behave negatively towards their peers? Several reasons explain students’ behavior: (1) the students copied the insensitivities of their teachers; (2) there was a sense of competition among students when teachers compared them to others, or praised one student more, or gave preferential treatment to some and not others. However, such a competitive streak existed only among students who considered themselves to be “average or above average at studies.” (3) the variation in students’ attributes like their caste and gender also impacted peer relationships. Reasons (1) and (2) were points of focus in the previous chapter; in this chapter, the focus is on how students’ caste and gender defined peer relationships and the impact on student (dis)engagement and their subjectivities.

Classroom observations, informal conversations, and interviews with students indicated that peer groups were, in some cases, formed based on caste designations and

gender. However, I observed this more prominently at CSS than at VSS, which is not to say that there was no influence of caste on the students at VSS, but it did not appear in my classroom observations and interactions with the students. A key point to note here is that a majority of Grade IX students at VSS belonged to Dalit communities (42.5%, see chapter 4 for more details) and their absenteeism rate was high. However, I cannot confirm whether the student absenteeism among Dalit students at VSS was due to caste-based discrimination.

Caste-based discrimination at CSS

In three group interviews, issues related to caste-based discrimination emerged at CSS. The first group interview was with Chia, Mahi, and Aditi, all of whom belonged to the either General or OBC categories. These three girls at CSS held strong opinions about their peers from Dalit communities. For example, when asked whether students in their class refuse to sit next to particular students, these girls commented,

we three refuse to sit with some students. (laughs) We do this, for instance, with Satakshi and all. We three sit together. So, if Satakshi sits next to me, I tell her, “either you move from here or I will move from here.”

In a similar vein, Pihu and Khushboo (participants of the second group interview) commented about their peers Barkha and her friends. Pihu and Khushboo belonged to two different caste groups, OBC and Dalit, respectively, but were best friends. However, Barkha and her friends were from the Dalit communities, and it was surprising to hear Khushboo’s remarks about her peers since she was from the same caste as Barkha. Therefore, I speculate a subcaste hierarchy existed between Khushboo and Barkha, or her best friend’s (Pihu) opinions influenced Khushboo’s views.

Pihu: discrimination happens with students. For instance, Barkha and all do not come to school. We stay away from them because they seem very dirty (laughs). We stay away

from her and cannot eat food with her. Sometimes, they are unclean, and there is a stink around them. They do not bathe and come to school. We stay away from them but other than that, we do not discriminate against anyone. We just stay away from someone who is unclean/dirty. Barkha wears dirty clothes and comes to school. Now, she is better. But in Grade VII and VIII, she would come to school looking so dirty and unpresentable. Because of that, she would sit all alone in the back of the class. Only her friends would sit with her. The girls who stayed with her would sit with her. We do not sit with her. We did not talk to her earlier. In Grade IX, she seems better, so we speak to her sometimes.

Khushboo: We feel disgusted with them because they are unclean/dirty. Even when the seat is dirty, they do not clean it, and they just sit like that on the seat.

Interestingly, when I asked Pihu and Khushboo about caste-based discrimination against peers, the students stated, “there is no discrimination based on caste. Caste does not matter.” Pihu further elaborated, “I think that no matter what happens, whoever it is, how does caste matter? The person should be nice. Our friend should be good. That is all that matters.” Classroom observations confirmed that Pihu did indeed discriminate against caste. However, her behavior with different students from Dalit communities differed. She shared her notebooks with some students from Dalit communities but not with all. As she put it, her disgust was reserved mainly for Satakshi, Barkha, and a few others. The reasons why she behaved negatively with a few Dalit students and not others is inconclusive. The inconsistent statements made by students could be due to their inconsistent understanding of caste discrimination, presence of hierarchies within the oppressed (OBC vs. Dalits), or internalized processes. Table 7 summarizes the attitudes and behavior of the girls in the two group interviews (discussed above) at CSS.

In response to questions about sharing food and eating with peers, the girls at CSS stated:

We never eat from someone else’s lunch box. We go and take food from each other’s tiffin (lunch) boxes. Sometimes we do not even ask. I mean, the three of

us eat together and from each other's boxes, but we do not eat from anyone else's. It is not as if we will go and eat from Satakshi's tiffin (laughs). (Chia, Mahi, and Aditi, CSS)

During my field visit, I witnessed a disagreement between Chia, Mahi, Aditi, and Satakshi. One day Satakshi asked me to explain a lesson in English class, but we could not finish the lesson because the period got over. After which, I had an interview scheduled with these girls. Satakshi and I decided to continue the lesson at a later point but did not set a time. I was interviewing the three girls when Satakshi stopped by to ask me to come and help her with English. While I was speaking with Satakshi, one of the girls from the group made an insensitive comment, and an argument broke out among the girls. When Satakshi left, Mahi commented with disdain,

Just look, because of the English teacher, such students are rising. Earlier, all the kids used to be so scared. No one had the guts to come and speak to us like that. Now all this has happened because of the English teacher (laughs). So, everyone has their own tantrums now.

Caste-based discrimination between peers, especially girls, occurred at CSS. The above descriptions about students being "dirty or stinking," or the teacher "being pure," and "students not sharing food" are coded ways in which caste-based discrimination occurred. Students seemed to have little respect for their peers from lower castes and talked with contempt about their physical characteristics and their academic performance in class.

Table 7: Girls' attitude towards peers from Dalit communities at CSS

	Group 1 (3 girls – Chia, Mahi, & Aditi)	Group 2 (2 girls – Pihu & Khushboo)
<i>Caste composition</i>	OBC or General Category	OBC and Dalit
<i>Group dynamics</i>	Best friends	Best friends
<i>Seating</i>	refuse to sit with Satakshi and other girls from lower castes	stay away from Barkha and her friends because they seem “very dirty” and “unclean;” do not sit with these girls in class
<i>Sharing food</i>	only share food amongst them; never eat from Satakshi's lunch	do not eat food with Barkha and her friends

Additionally, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the teachers consciously or unconsciously discriminated against students based on caste at CSS by facing towards the right-hand side of the class when teaching. Moreover, when asked whether teachers discriminated against students, Chia, Mahi, and Aditi stated that the Art teacher discriminated against Satakshi based on caste. The excerpt below presents the students' accounts of the teacher's behavior towards Satakshi. On the one hand, these three girls disapproved of the teacher's behavior but then justified it with disparaging remarks about Satakshi and her appearance.

The Art teacher is very pure. Once a pen fell on the ground, so she first washed it and then used it. If you do not appear clean or nice, she will ask you to stay away from her and show disgust. All of us are students here and are equal. Why would she behave like that? No matter how they come to school or how they appear but at least they come to school. Whoever has whatever means they manage in that. But she will write awkwardly with the pen and will keep the page far from her. She should not do that. It is just a page, and there is nothing that is stuck on the page. She is very pure. No one should be that pure. ... But what will the teacher do if some student is like that? Very weird. Satakshi comes to school in a weird manner that might make the teachers feel awkward. So, she comes like that to school [dirty], that is why teachers behave in that manner with her.

“Dirty or weird manner” here are codes that “upper caste” individuals often use to describe “lower caste” communities. These covert discriminatory practices by the teachers and students were systemic and insidious and came to light after prolonged engagement in the classroom.

What were the girls’ perspectives (from Dalit communities at CSS) of their peers’ behavior towards them? Informal conversations and student interviews with girls from the Dalit communities (participants of the third group interview) revealed that they did not like talking to a few girls at school. They mentioned that two to three girls in their class did not speak to them properly. These girls were too proud and arrogant and did not treat this group of girls well. They described their peers as “over smart,” “proud and arrogant,” and “snobbish.” When probed further, the girls explained,

Satakshi: Chia is too proud of herself and arrogant. She takes everything from us. Sometimes, they will not take, and they will not give. So, we do not give anything to them. Our nature is different. We do not like talking with someone who is too proud and arrogant.

Sheetal: She speaks to nice/good people but does not speak nicely to us. For instance, Chia speaks nicely to Pihu, Khushboo, Aditi, Mahi, and a few others. They only talk to people who know English⁴⁷. They (Chia and Mahi) do not speak too much to us. Satakshi adds: because we are weak in English.

Gudiya: [they speak to] all those who are good at studies/academics. ... Chia and Mahi think themselves to be special.

Nishu: only those girls who think themselves to be over-smart, I speak less with them. No, do not specifically speak to those who are good at studies. But those who are at their level. Meaning, for instance, I... At my house, there are no money problems. Money or even otherwise, there is no problem. Till now, as I have grown up, I have not had a problem. And their level, they are more affluent [than

⁴⁷ None of the students talk to each other in English. This statement “they only talk to people who know English” refers to students who might know some English that is taught at school during the English period.

me]. Her (Chia's) father is a lawyer, I think. So, she is arrogant and too proud about that. That is why she says, "no one is equivalent [in status] to me." They behave like that. But I do not really care. First of all, I do not even speak that much with them. If they talk, only then do I say something. I do not take the first step and initiate the conversation. All other students speak properly to me, except these two girls (Chia and Mahi).

Swara: They both are too proud, and I am not the one who will back off from them. That is why I do not even say anything to them, even when they are speaking to me. I do not even talk about them; otherwise, I seem bad.

Srishti (participant in the third group interview) who also belonged to a Dalit community further commented that,

These girls (Chia and Mahi) think that others should do what they ask them to do. When I had joined this school, I did not know how the children behaved here. So, my class teacher at the time asked me to sit in the first seat once. So, the second day, there was an empty seat in the front, so I thought I would sit in the front again. So, I sat in the empty seat. Then, Chia and Mahi came and asked me to get up from the seat. They insisted that they sit on that seat every day. So, I said, "okay, I will move, you can sit here. But I will complain about this to the teacher." I did not like them on the first day because of my experience with them in the first days of enrolment at this school. I speak to them, but not a lot.

In response to whether these (Dalit) girls felt their peers discriminated against them, the girls confirmed that "students did discriminate. Not all, but some did."

Srishti: I do not. Be it Hindu or Muslim or anyone or any other caste, no matter what it is, I do not do it. I do not like discriminating. What is the benefit, they are also humans, and we are also humans. There are a lot of students in my class who discriminate. Anything related to food and drinks, they do not eat. They only eat those items that they have brought from home. That is why we get to know that they are discriminating.

Satakshi: I have noticed that they do not even eat anything. They give their food, but do not eat [from ours]. So, why should I eat? When you are not going to eat food from my home, how can I eat food from yours?

Swara: Many students do this as well, in that they say, so and so person is from this particular *jati*, so do not eat their food. Do not go near them. Eat your own food.

Srishti: But in my opinion, we should not discriminate. Because when they discriminate, they only harm themselves, and then that person they discriminate against will not talk to them. If you do this with everyone, then no one will speak to you. You will be left all alone.

Caste-based discrimination at CSS was gendered

I found that caste-based discrimination at CSS was also gendered. Girls were more likely than boys to discriminate against other students who belonged to Dalit communities. For example, participant observations during lunch break indicated that all the boys would form a single group and eat together from the same lunch box(es), depending on the number of boys who brought lunch. In contrast, girls formed groups and shared food with other girls in their group, as indicated in the excerpts above. The same applied to seating; the boys would sit anywhere in their column where a seat was available. However, girls refrained from sitting on the left-hand side of the classroom or with other girls considered “academically weak” by teachers. As Shivam during his interview mentioned, “mostly girls sit with their friends. They sit according to the company they keep. ‘Good’ students sit with other ‘good’ students (referring to the girls at CSS).” Supporting these observations, the group interview with six boys at CSS (three were OBCs and three from Dalit communities) revealed that boys did not care about caste. They stated,

Caste-based discrimination takes place between girls. They quarrel, saying, you are from such and such castes, do not speak with me or come near me. Once, Chia fought with Satakshi when we were in Grade VIII on something related to caste. Among boys, we fight but never based on caste.

Why was caste-based discrimination at CSS gendered? Though I could not gather much information from students about this, I speculate that girls stayed home with their mothers and other family members, helping them with household chores. Therefore, they

observed their family's behavior and replicated it in social situations. In a few interviews, girls said that their parents believed in the caste system. For instance, Chia explained, "my parents ask whether I eat from someone else's tiffin. So, I say, yes, I have a friend circle, and we eat together." Then my mother looked at me and said, "hmm. Try to eat less from other's lunch boxes." Chia belonged to the highest caste group in the caste system, and her family was staunch believers of the caste system. Other students also gave examples of how they saw their family members practice caste-based discrimination against some people in their village.

Caste-based discrimination at VSS

At VSS, Sumaira mentioned, "at this school, caste-based discrimination does not occur because all the teachers are from different castes, some are from upper castes and some from lower castes." Sumaira further added, "the teachers do write which students belong to what caste – OBC, SC/ST, Minority or General category – in the roll call registers, but they have to write that. Otherwise, there has been no discrimination." During field visits at both schools, I asked to see the roll call registers for each class and found that teachers had noted down names of Dalit students in a different color ink than their peers from other caste designations. When I inquired about the reason why teachers wrote names in different ink, the teachers avoided directly answering me and mentioned something about a scholarship that Dalit students received. However, the students said they all received a scholarship from the government. Again, this type of discriminatory practice was systemic and often treated as a part of the process.

An episode of sharing food (or not) that related to caste at VSS was as follows:

The Home Science practical took place for Grade X students as part of the Home Science exam, where girls were divided into groups and had to prepare a dish from scratch. Once cooked, the teachers tasted the dish and awarded marks to the students based on a pre-determined criterion. When the practical exam was over, the students could eat the leftover food or distribute it to their friends or other teachers. A girl in one of the groups refused to eat the dish, even though she cooked it alongside her friends. When I asked why she would not eat, she replied, “I am a *Thakur*⁴⁸(emphasis added), that is why. I cannot eat this.” Her friends said, “we keep telling her that we are all friends and that it does not matter what caste you are from in school. You can do all this at home. But she does not listen to us.”

This episode seemed quite interesting to me in terms of how students grappled with their own identities and consulted with each other about what was an acceptable or unacceptable thing to do when in situations related to sharing or accepting food from their peers. Of the five girls in the group, one was a Muslim, another belonged to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, and three were from Dalit communities.

Other Grade IX students at VSS mentioned that caste-based discrimination did not happen in their class. “No one discriminates here. We are all from different castes, but we all share food and eat in one box. Also, since we have joined the school, any student could sit anywhere they wanted,” said Vivek and Ansh. Vivek belonged to a Dalit community, and Ansh was from a General category (upper castes), and the two were inseparable as friends. They lived in the same village, came to school together, played cricket, and sat next to each other in class. Students also said that “we come here to study. Caste is left at home,” or “what do we have to do with caste? We are what we are,” or “I do not think of anyone below me (lower) or above me (upper).” Another student proudly declared to me in the classroom, “I

⁴⁸ Thakurs belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category. They are known largely as landowners in this part of the state of UP.

am a *chamar* (a sub-caste of the Dalit communities).” Sometimes, to support their statements on the non-existence of caste-based discrimination, students also provided instances of how they shared food with teachers and peers, who readily accepted the food and ate it.

Among the students who attended regularly, I observed that students formed friendships at VSS irrespective of students’ caste designations. For instance, when students created groups for group interviews, I noticed that the students in these groups all belonged to different caste categories. Before interviews, I asked students to collect 3-4 friends with whom they would like to interview. Observations outside and inside the classrooms indicated that the interview participants were friends, played together, and sat together in class.

At VSS, some students continually described “back-benchers” as the “worst.” Consider, for instance, this description by Vivek and Ansh,

Vivek: In class, everyone in the first four benches is nice. The rest at the back are the worst. They do not study or concentrate. So, I do not like it with them. I do not even like playing with them. Sir makes us play together. But I do not like to play with them.

Ansh: They do not know how to play properly either (Vivek laughs at this statement but agrees). For instance, if we are forming a cricket team and the students who play well are not present, we have to take them in our team. But they do not know how to bat or field or bowl. They do not know anything.

Though I could not validate this statement through observations or student interviews, it still is indicative of the deficit views these “front-bencher” students held of their “back-bencher” peers. I noticed the irritation in these students’ voices when their “back-bencher” peers asked them for notebooks or came to them with questions regarding material taught by teachers on the days that these students were absent. Students would dismiss their peers by stating, “I do not know, go away,” or “I am busy, ask someone else.” Once, I heard a student scold their

peer who wanted help with schoolwork. The student said to their peer, “who asked you to be absent from school for these many days! Why should I give you my notebook? What if you do not come to school tomorrow? What will I do?” Undoubtedly, such reactions from peers would be detrimental to these students’ sense of school belonging and their school engagement. However, it is inconclusive whether this contempt for their “back-bencher” peers was due to the caste designations of students as it was at CSS.

Overall, caste-based discrimination did take place at both schools. However, caste-based discrimination was more prominent at CSS than at VSS (see Table 8). However, I could not ascertain the reasons for this difference. The reason could be that the teachers at VSS were all from different castes as opposed to the teachers at CSS, where only one teacher belonged to the Dalit communities. In my observations inside or outside the classroom at VSS, I did not witness any teacher discriminate overtly against students based on their caste. A plausible reason could be that students at VSS came from relatively lower-working class families, who lived in the same neighborhoods, and with families from similar caste affiliations. Therefore, the students from Dalit communities and other caste groups may have been more alike than different.

Table 8: Caste-Based Discrimination at the Two Schools

	Village Secondary School (VSS)	City Secondary School (CSS)
<i>Caste composition</i>	42.5% Dalits (majority in their class)	40.5% Dalits (minority in their class)
<i>Seating</i>	no discrimination	present (some girls from “upper castes” refused to sit with their “lower caste” peers)
<i>Sharing food (girls)</i>	one incident where a girl refused to eat food cooked by girls from “lower castes”	Do not share food with other girls from “lower castes”
<i>Sharing food (boys)</i>	share food irrespective of caste	share food irrespective of caste
<i>Friendships</i>	not based on caste (irrespective of student's gender)	boys did not base friendships on caste; girls based their friendships on caste (upper caste girls only friends with other upper caste girls)
<i>Seating arrangement</i>	mixed (both in the front rows and the back rows)	Dalit students (girls) sat on the left-hand side of the class

Teachers call out students for not paying fees

Students’ accounts of classroom experiences also revealed that teachers called out students’ names and announced the tuition fees due for each student. The boys at CSS brought up this issue.

The one thing that I dislike is when the teachers come to the class and announce the students’ names and ask them to pay the school fee. The teachers also disclose the amount due. They should not do that at all. They should call the parents and talk directly to them about these matters. They should not talk about the fees to the students because it pressurizes the students. The students get tensed about such things. The reason a student may not have submitted the fees is that they may be having financial issues. When teachers bring this up in class, it affects the students, and then they cannot concentrate in class because they keep thinking about it. Plus, it also does not look good when the teachers do that in front of other students in the class. It feels awful when the teachers do that.

Even at VSS, I observed teachers making announcements during class by calling out students' names and asking students to pay their fees. When teachers made such announcements, the students felt awful, negatively affecting their concentration in class. As a result, students tended to skip school because of the embarrassment they experienced in front of their peers.

Home-related factors

Some students had difficult lives at home that impacted their academics and their level of engagement at school. Some students spoke about sustaining physical violence at home by their parents or siblings. A student at VSS recalled running away from home for a day because he was beaten badly by his father.

My father beats a lot. He hits very hard. He had broken one of my hands, so in Grade VI, I did not go to school for a lot of days. When my father starts beating then... Once, I had run away. I went to Khairabad. I had my cycle, I rode that. I had Rs. 100 in my pocket. I ate and then I returned [home] again. I did not like it there. I went in the morning and I came back in the evening. They [parents] had said, we will not come look for you. I returned on my own. (Raja, VSS)

Rohan at CSS narrated the violent behavior by his father and how it affected his performance in class.

My father is very strict. He is very violent and when he gets angry, he destroys everything. This is my sixth school bag, he throws it or tears it. Once he tore my books. I was learning Hindi, we had an exam the next day. My father came from the shop and got angry when he saw me studying. He is like do not study the entire day but when I get home you start studying. He just tore my books. The next day I had to give the exam without studying. I wrote something, I knew some things. I would get passing marks. I do not tell the teachers when such things happen at home. I do not like to air my dirty laundry. You (referring to the interviewer, me) were in class the other day when the Hindi teacher was telling me that you are a good student so why did you not learn. I did not say anything to her, but this is what had happened.

Violence at home resulted in school absences and negatively affected students' learning outcomes. In addition, poor learning outcomes for students at CSS, such as Rohan, who performed well in class previously, but his performance dropped due to violence at home, and he faced embarrassment in class. Teachers were well aware of Rohan's proficiency levels and was considered a "good" student in his class. However, due to his poor performance in Grade IX, the Hindi repeatedly made statements like, "Rohan was a good student but he has stopped studying now. I do not know what has happened." Even his peers expressed similar sentiments during interviews. Like, Rinki mentioned, "Rohan used to study well; he used to get the first rank in class. Now, in Class IX, I do not know what has happened to Rohan. He does not study." Rohan's standing in class with both his peers and teachers was dropping because of his performance in class.

Students also struggled at school because of exhaustion, fatigue, and hunger. When asked about their daily routine at home before and after school, students mentioned that they were expected to work. Before and after school, boys worked with their fathers or elder siblings in the farm or with paid work and girls helped their mothers with household chores like cooking, washing utensils, sweeping, and taking care of younger siblings or ill family members. Resultingly, students were tired by the time they reached school. Often, students missed the second half of the school or skipped school altogether because they were needed at home or on the farm or at the shop (discussed in more detail later in the chapter). Taufeeq, sometimes, slept through the class because he drove a tractor late into the previous night. In addition, many had long walks to reach school. When they reached school they studied on an empty stomach. Some did not eat before coming to school, others did not bring lunch and did

not have the money to buy lunch from vendors. I was informed that, once, a girl fainted during the morning assembly because she had not eaten anything since the previous day.

“Time passes quickly at school.”

To understand students’ perspectives about attending school and its importance, I asked them why they liked and disliked being at school. Students stated that they liked it because “they could concentrate on their studies at school, but there were difficulties at home, and they could not study there.” Several students at both schools mentioned, “at school time passes by quickly. At home, we cannot pass the time.” When probed further about what they meant by “time passes quickly,” students explained, “at home, I keep thinking what I should study? Which subject should I study? Then, I lose focus and I do not feel like studying anymore. So, I get up and leave. But at school, teachers come one after the other and teach different subjects. So, it passes the time.” Others claimed that “time does not pass at all at home. And when at school, we do not get bored.”

Students’ descriptions of schooling as a way to pass the time were concerning. If time passed by quickly at home, would students not attend school? This notion of “time pass” raised questions regarding the intrinsic value of education to students and what attaining education meant to them. During classroom observations at both schools, I did not hear teachers talk to the students about the importance of attaining education.

Contrarily, some students expressed how they felt bored at school. Hence, they attended school for a few days only. For example, Swara exclaimed, “sometimes, I get bored in school. So, then I do not feel like coming to school, then I think let me not go today.” Or

as Satakshi put it, “I go every day [to school], so I was thinking, what will happen if I do not go one day. So, I skip school.”

Student resistance or truancy as students exercising their agency

This section discusses how students had internalized the negative evaluations of their teachers and peers and the impact of internalizing the discourse on students’ learning, perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. Furthermore, I argue that the violent disciplinary practices and rejection by peers that some students had experienced and internalized led them to resist these humiliating practices and exercise their agency by staying at home and skipping school.

From discussions in the previous chapter, we know that violent discipline—physical violence or verbal aggression and humiliation—was prevalent at both schools. Its prevalence resulted in students accepting it and internalizing its use as – “for their good.” Conversations with students also indicated that they regarded physical punishment as normal and even inevitable. In addition, the negative labels teachers assigned to students proved to be detrimental to their learning and perceptions of self as the students had internalized these evaluations. For instance, in their interview, the boys at CSS exclaimed,

When teachers scold us, we feel angry at ourselves. We think that how could we have behaved in a way that the teacher had to say something as insulting as “*chullu bhar pani mein doob maro*/go, drown yourself in shallow water (literal English translation for a Hindi idiom, which means, be ashamed of yourself).” We cannot say or do anything to the teacher, right? They say whatever they say for our good. When they say such things, they do not mean it literally. They say it to insult us. We think that we would have made some mistakes if the teacher had said something like this.

Some students even advocated for the need for violent discipline to learn at school (“how will we learn the next time if the teacher does not scold”⁴⁹). Students believed that without physical or verbal aggression, they would not behave at school or perform well:

I like it [when teachers scold] because this way, at least I can fix my mistakes. If the teachers beat us for our mistakes, then I feel good. Otherwise, I feel bad. (Anjali, VSS)

When the teacher is saying all this, there is an impact on us; I think I need to study, and I will study. (Pihu, CSS)

The day we get hit, the next day, our work gets complete. (Chia, CSS)

When Sir hits, we do feel angry [in that moment]. But later, we thought that since we made a mistake, the teacher would beat us. (Gauri, VSS)

I thought she [Art teacher] was elder to me, so she beat me. She might have been angry, or something might have happened. ... I thought she was beating me for my good future. She may be thinking that we will get in line moving forward in high school. (Abhijeet, VSS)

Another instance that stood out was when I asked students at VSS whether they had completed their homework. They said, “no, we have not. We will sustain the beating from the teachers. Anyways, whether we do the work or not, there will be some reason or the other for which we will be beaten or scolded.” Thus, violent discipline was normalized and internalized by students.

Indeed, the students did make mistakes, but none warranted such extreme disciplinary actions taken against them. Ankit at CSS explained succinctly why the students, in general, had incomplete work at school. He said, “we get a lot of work. All teachers think that students have work only in my subject. But it is not that only one teacher teaches us. There

⁴⁹ In general, throughout this dissertation, when students or I use the word “scold” it refers to verbal aggression.

are so many teachers who teach, and everyone gives us work to do. So which teacher's work shall we complete?"

Along with teachers' evaluations, students had also internalized their peers' evaluations of them. Unsurprisingly, when I inquired about how it made the girls from Dalit communities feel when their peers from upper castes behaved in such a manner, they expressed feeling bad, angry, embarrassed, and disliked their peers' behavior.

Satakshi: How does it matter to me! I do what I feel like; she (Chia) does what she feels like. So I say what I want to say and just leave.

Nishu: I feel embarrassed, which means, if they say anything to me when I am alone, then it is okay. But if other boys or girls are standing, I feel bad when they say anything (short pause). I am sure everyone would feel the way I feel if someone insults them. So... I do not like it at all. But we do not say anything to them because we are not like them. We think everyone to be equal. And we never speak like this to anyone. Apart from them, we talk to everyone.

Srishti: I do not pay much attention to what they say! Let them say what they want. I just walk off from there. If we have to answer loudly, we do that too. ... we all feel angry. As in, we should remember that when they [the one who discriminates] give something to us, we should remember and not take it. We should do the same with that person so that they realize. ... We do not tell them about how we felt about their behavior. When that person will not change for the better and will not bring a positive change in themselves, what can we say to those people? It makes sense to say something if that person brings a positive change in themselves. If they will always do the same thing, then there is no point in telling them. That is why I do not say anything to anyone.

Their peers isolated and alienated these girls by rejecting them and discriminating against them due to their caste designations and their academic performance. As a result, these girls felt insulted by their peers' behavior and disassociated themselves from others who discriminated against them. During observations, I noticed that these girls were always polite to others and only spoke to students who spoke to them. Furthermore, these girls did not feel comfortable voicing their opinions in class when teachers asked students about how

to proceed or what to test students on, and other classroom-related issues. In this way, they were pushed to exclude themselves from the classroom activities and discussions. The normalized exclusionary practices by teachers and students at the schools impeded students' learning and growth.

However, with time, I noticed that the students who suffered the brunt of the teachers' aggression or peers' rejection were skipping school frequently. For instance, consider the two instances (also discussed in detail in the previous chapter) where students were thrashed by teachers for incomplete work. (1) A boy was beaten so much, he fainted. He did not come to school for the entire year. The Principal had to call his parents and ask them to send him to school to take his final exams. (2) Another boy (Shivrung), with the fear of being beaten due to incomplete work in Math, did not attend school. The teacher asked two students to go to his house and bring his Math notebook. When the students went to the boy's home, his mother said, "he does not go to school no matter how much I ask him."

In the instances described above, the students had decided to not attend school when they were beaten and felt insulted by the teachers. In other words, the students responded to violent discipline and humiliation by staying at home. Plus, when peers narrated the story about the student who had fainted, they said, "it was the boy's fault, he was "misbehaving." Therefore, he did not tell the Principal about the severe punishment given by the teacher."

When students continually skipped school, teachers criticized and blamed them for not wanting to study. These absences were looked at as "unexcused," and "unexplained." But these absences were not unexplained. Students were skipping school to avoid getting beaten, scolded, or humiliated in the classroom in front of peers. Additionally, some students had

financial issues at home and could not afford the school fees. They decided to stay at home out of the fear that the teachers might ask them to deposit fees. The students were well aware that missing school by even a day would put them behind for that day's schoolwork and also learning. But they still chose to skip school. Why? Because who would want to suffer through the humiliation and embarrassment at school? The physical or emotional pain?

The violent disciplinary practices, labelling, low teacher expectations, deficit views, peer rejection based on students' caste designations and poor academic performance, were all exclusionary in nature. It negatively impacted students' self-respect and self-esteem, reduced their confidence level, and inhibited their sense of school belonging. Teachers' and peers' negative attitudes and behavior towards some students, made them feel isolated and alienated. Ultimately, pushing students out of the classroom and school. Continued student absenteeism, often, led to school drop outs.

I argue that by deciding to stay at home, these boys took matters in their own hands; they exercised what little power and agency they had. In other words, students resisted the humiliating school practices and the insult by their teachers and activated their agency by excluding themselves from the classrooms and staying at home. This became apparent also when other students in class commented,

If I were beaten like that, I would not come to school the next day. (Amit, VSS)

I felt very bad. I did not feel like going to the teacher to study. I thought that I should just drop out of school because she hit me. That I should leave this school and go to another school and study. (Gudiya, CSS)

Naturally, not all absences were a result of school-related factors. Students skipped school for reasons related to home and self. In informal conversations and interviews with

students, they discussed reasons for absenteeism. These statements reflect the need for students to stay back at home and help their parents. The reason for skipping school varies by gender and by the birth order of the students. Often, the eldest son in the family is given charge and is asked to take responsibility of running the household and taking care of the fields. Girls are expected to stay back at home to help their mothers with household chores.

I have to work in the fields. My father does not stay at home for a lot of days, so since I am the eldest, I hire laborers to work in the fields. And sometimes when the laborers are not there, then I have to miss school and work in the fields.
(Ansh, male and eldest, VSS)

If there is some work in the field. And it is an emergency, then my parents ask me to not go to school. Otherwise, she never asks me to stay at home or to not attend school. I stay back only if it is very important. (Raja, male, VSS)

Yes, they [parents] ask me to stay back sometimes. If there is a lot of work at home, then I do stay back. My parents do not let me work in the fields. My brother works in the field. I help in the house. For instance, I grind the wheat to make it into flour and other similar things. That is why we stay back at home.
(Umra, female, VSS)

Other reasons for skipping school are not related to home or school but are specific to students. In some instances, I heard students say that they were not feeling well, so they did not come to school. Other times, students state that they just did not feel like coming to school or they had cricket matches to play with friends from their village.

School absences, irrespective of the reason behind it, negatively affected students' educational outcomes. However, the student absences due to interactions with teachers and peers are my primary concern. Since, these absences are attributable to student resistance and exercising their agency. Additionally, exclusion from classroom had deleterious effects on students' academic learning, growth, and development. It not only had short run impact on students' growth but also long run impact on their future opportunities. Consequently,

schools aided in the reproduction of educational and social inequalities among children through discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the factors that affected student engagement/disengagement in the classroom and the potential impact of engaging and disengaging on students' educational outcomes and subjectivities—their perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. The findings in this chapter suggested that the school-related factors that led students to disengage from the classrooms were low-quality pedagogical practices, violent disciplinary practices by teachers, peer rejection, caste-based discrimination and stereotyping by peers and lack of support. Furthermore, I argued that by disengaging and excluding themselves from the classroom, the students resisted the humiliating school practices and exercised their agency. These findings held across the two schools.

The main difference between VSS and CSS was the presence of caste-based discrimination among peers and teachers. At CSS, students shared experiences where they recalled facing discriminatory practices by peers from OBC or General categories. However, at VSS, students portrayed a sense of community at school and stated that caste-based discrimination was non-existent. Although I did find some evidence of caste-based discrimination at VSS when a girl refused to eat the food she cooked with her peers for a Home Science practical exam. Classroom observations at both schools supported these claims by students. I speculate the reasons for this difference on such an important dimension as the location of the two schools, where VSS was located in a rural area and CSS in an urban area. Another reason could be the caste of the teachers, where the teachers at VSS all

belonged to different caste groups, while at CSS there was only one teacher in the upper primary school section who was Dalit. However, I cannot definitively point these factors as the sole drivers of caste-based discrimination at the schools. I explore this issue further in the discussion and the literature review chapters.

Classroom observations and conversations with students indicated that students who had strong peer networks or peer support had a higher level of school engagement. When students formed meaningful relations with their peers, it improved their sense of school belonging and enabled them to attend school. However, findings also indicated that students were socially excluded from classroom activities and faced discrimination, marginalization, and stigmatization due to their caste identities.

The teachers often faced away from the left-hand side students or from back-benchers while teaching in class. This led to students feeling bored in their classrooms as they sometimes did not understand what the teacher was teaching and were afraid to ask questions to the teacher. Most teachers consciously or unconsciously did not include these students while teaching in class but expected them to engage with the course material; it was unreasonable. Moreover, teachers complained about these students and their educational outcomes. In addition, most teachers at both schools had failed to take an interest in the students, resulting in the students feeling disconnected and unsupported.

Moreover, students from lower castes at CSS were held to different standards by their peers from upper castes. The students from General or OBC categories had double standards for themselves and their peers. Just because teachers perceived some students as “academically good or bright” and behaved comparatively well with them, the students

thought that excused their behavior—skipping school and incomplete work. However, when their “academically weak” and lower caste peers behaved in a similar manner it was inexcusable to them. Consequently, low teacher expectations and deficit peer perspectives had intertwined with the caste designations of students.

Other ways in which caste-based discrimination manifested at CSS was in General or OBC students’ descriptions of their peers from lower castes as “dirty” and “stinky,” with whom they would not prefer to sit in the class or share their food. Additionally, the seating arrangement in the classroom at CSS had, with time, discreetly pushed “academically weak” students, who were mainly from Dalit communities, to the margins (left-hand side of the class). Like the teachers, their peers had consciously or unconsciously excluded them from the classroom with their poor attitude and behavior. The systemic and insidious ways through which caste-based discrimination took place in Grade IX-CSS classroom was concerning.

The negative behavior by teachers and peers proved to be detrimental to students’ learning and perceptions of self as the students had internalized these evaluations. However, some students were skipping school to avoid getting beaten, scolded, or humiliated in the classroom in front of peers. I argue that, by deciding to stay at home, these students took matters in their own hands; they exercised what little power and agency they had. The violent disciplinary practices, labelling, low teacher expectations, deficit views, peer rejection based on students’ caste designations and poor academic performance, were all exclusionary in nature. It inhibited students’ sense of school belonging and impeded student engagement.

In the next chapter, I draw upon the contextual and ethnographic material presented thus far to locate the significance of this study in relation to schooling. I present the

concluding remarks in the this chapter as well, and discuss how schools reproduce social and educational inequalities among students from low-income and socially disadvantaged communities.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF INDIAN SCHOOLS IN REPRODUCING SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

Hierarchical social structures, sharp economic disparities, and social and cultural diversities characterize Indian society. Stratification based on caste, class, and gender is a characteristic of the Indian social fabric (Kaul, 2001), which results in unequal opportunities in all aspects of life. Education is supposed to offer a means of economic and social mobility for low-income and socially disadvantaged communities. Yet, there is reason to believe that the Indian education system has not fulfilled this promise to children from disadvantaged groups. There is a continued crisis in public schooling in India's low-income and socially disadvantaged communities. The school system in India is highly differentiated and deeply stratified (Yunus, 2022), where students' socioeconomic status shapes their access to and experiences at school. Systemic issues and institutionalization of class- and caste-based biases often shape teacher-student relations and reproduce educational and social inequalities in and through schooling (Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003).

Traditional explanations of the reproduction of educational and social inequalities in primary education have focused on unequal access and low participation, teachers' attitudes to their work and toward students from marginalized caste and class groups, pedagogic approaches, and disciplinary practices (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011; Nambissan, 2009; Tiwari, 2019). Research on secondary schooling in India has focused on low enrollment rates among students from low-income families living in rural areas (Bandyopadhyay, 2017; Biswal, 2011; Tilak, 2020). Among those who attend secondary school, especially children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, only a small proportion of students graduate from Grade X (R. Singh & Mukherjee, 2015). According to the 71st National Sample Survey (NSS), only 12.8 percent of males and 9.6 percent of females could complete secondary education (GOI, 2015). Studies have investigated the low retention and graduation rates and high dropout rates among marginalized students in secondary schools (Chugh, 2011); and highlighted the inadequate infrastructural facilities, large class sizes, high pupil-to-teacher ratio, high teacher absenteeism rates, and unqualified teachers in secondary schools attended by students from low-income families in rural areas (Bandyopadhyay & Chugh, 2020).

However, there is a dearth of studies on secondary schooling that focus on students' classroom experiences and the impact of these experiences on their learning outcomes and subjectivities—perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. This study tries to address the gap in this understudied area and extends the body of literature on the sociology of schooling in India. In addition, I believe that examining students' life at school and the everyday practices and processes are crucial to opening up the “black box” of the secondary school system in India.

To this end, this dissertation focuses on children's classroom experiences and explores what is happening inside secondary schools at the ground level using an ethnographic approach. This study concerns the interplay between teacher-student interactions, peer interactions, student learning, and subjectivities. Furthermore, by examining the everyday classroom processes and practices, the study casts a spotlight on the reproduction of social and educational inequalities in Indian schools.

So, how does the reproduction of social and educational inequalities in school occur? I find that a complex set of circumstances, systems, and behaviors work together to create a vicious cycle of marginalization. I answer this question by discussing the interplay between teachers' deficit views of low income and socially disadvantaged students, their negative behavior and attitudes that affects students' educational outcomes and subjectivities, and students' resistance to the toxic, humiliating, and hierarchical school system. This section summarizes and integrates the findings presented in the last three chapters to answer this question.

The students who attend Village Secondary School (VSS) and City Secondary School (CSS) come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and lower castes. Students' family circumstances make it difficult to focus on schooling as students struggle with poverty and juggle multiple responsibilities, including those related to school and home. Yet, beating all odds, the students enter school.

Schools are supposed to provide them opportunities to learn, develop, and level the playing field. However, in reality, the school that the VSS students attend is dilapidated with insufficient facilities, large class sizes, high student-teacher ratios, and high teacher

absenteeism rates. For instance, VSS fails to provide the students with proper toilet facilities, drinking water, proper furniture, and lighting. The toilets are often locked and have no running water, making them unusable. In addition, the Principal encouraged students, both boys, and girls, to defecate in the open. Interestingly and unfortunately, teachers defecated in the open as well. In other words, the school's physical environment was not conducive to learning and set a discouraging tone for the students as they entered school. Conversely, in comparison to VSS, CSS provided students with adequate infrastructural facilities, with proper furniture, lighting and fans. Moreover, CSS had a small class size, with low student-teacher ratios, and low teacher absenteeism rates.

Most teachers who taught at both of these schools were underqualified or lacked proper training, or their training was decades old, and they simply failed to acknowledge and meet the diverse learning needs of the students. The teachers usually belonged to higher castes than students and held deficit views toward students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and lower castes, treated them poorly, labeled and stigmatized them based on their performance, and held low expectations for them. Teachers adopted a top-down teaching approach, focused on 'chalk and talk' methods – either dictating or writing on the blackboard for students to copy, memorize, and recite in class. Most teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices about learning, knowledge, the purpose of education, and equality did not center on the learners. Instead, teachers considered poor and lower caste students as “uneducable,” “nil,” “academically weak,” or “incapable of learning” and viewed their parents as irresponsible, uninterested, and uncaring of their children's schooling. Moreover, teachers discriminated against lower caste students in systemic and insidious ways – by

writing names of lower caste students in a different ink or facing away from them while teaching but turning towards them for a round of questions and answers. These attitudes and practices adversely affected students' confidence in their ability to learn, fostered disengagement, and lowered their perceptions of self.

Teachers' deficit views of poor and lower caste students affected their behavior and attitudes towards these students in shocking ways. In essence, teachers regularly abused students verbally and physically. They used violent disciplinary practices, like physical violence, verbal aggression, and humiliation, to maintain discipline, reprimand students for poor academic achievement, and facilitate teaching. For instance, teachers threatened to break students' bones or beat them until they turned black and blue if they did not answer their questions. Moreover, teachers create examples of "bad" and "academically weak" students by beating them in front of peers, so others do not make the same mistakes as these students.

The use of violent physical and verbal discipline created a vicious cycle where incomplete work or not learning or being able to recite answers to teacher's questions resulted in teachers beating or scolding the students, making students feel scared. Students responded to this fear of the teacher and violent discipline by missing class, which resulted in more incomplete work and poor classroom performance. These academic outcomes only fueled teachers' violence and abuse towards students and led to the same outcome the students were trying to avoid, being beaten, or scolded.

Importantly, although CSS had better facilities, smaller class sizes, and lower student-teacher ratio, and somewhat more caring teachers than VSS, in the end, the same classroom

processes and practices occurred. For example, teachers discriminated against some students, were physically, verbally, and emotionally aggressive towards them, and labeled and stigmatized them as “stupid” and “nil.” In addition, they cared more about rote-memorization and performance on examinations than whether students understood the course material.

The prevalence of violent discipline at the schools led some students to internalize its use as “for their own good” and regard it as normal and even inevitable. In addition, peers (mainly upper caste, but some were lower caste students, especially at VSS, who sat in front and attended school regularly and perceived themselves as better than their backbencher peers) picked up on the insensitivities of the teachers towards specific students and ended up reinforcing degrading views towards these lower caste students. Teacher-student interactions shaped peer interactions and relationships. Violent disciplinary practices like physical violence, verbal aggression, and humiliation used by teachers were detrimental to students’ learning and negatively shaped their subjectivities – their perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. It created a hostile learning environment and hindered students’ learning. Moreover, it made students feel humiliated and less confident and diminished their sense of school belonging.

Students stayed at home and frequently skipped school to avoid violent discipline and humiliation at school. The use of violent discipline also hindered student engagement. The predominant mode of “discipline and punish” adopted by teachers intimidated the students, leading to two outcomes: (1) students disengaged both physically and mentally from the classrooms; (2) though some were physically present in the class, they disengaged mentally. Students disengaged (physically) from the classrooms and remained absent to escape the

humiliating hierarchical school system. Although unexplained absence has been seen traditionally in negative ways, such as truancy, by responding to violent discipline by skipping school, we should view students as exercising their agency and resisting the insulting and humiliating experiences at school. Who would want to go through such humiliation?

Overall, the negative interactions with teachers and peers had detrimental effects on students' learning outcomes, student engagement, perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. This contempt of teachers towards students from low-income and lower caste students elicited by caste hierarchy reinforces the social hierarchies and reproduces educational inequalities. Meanwhile, students' attempts to maintain their dignity and avoid humiliation and abuse meant they missed school and were even less likely to succeed academically. As a result of these interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors, the educational system in these two schools reproduces the social order. In addition, it leads to the social and educational exclusion of poor and lower caste students, which ultimately limits their future opportunities.

Impact of Violent Discipline and Abuse on Students – “A Teacher Beat A Boy So Much That He Fainted, and After That, He Did Not Attend School for the Entire School Year.”

An apparent effect of physical punishment in schools was that it legitimized violence as a means to an end. In these two schools teachers used physical punishment as a tool to discipline students and motivate them to memorize course content and prepare them for exams. The context of fulfilling goals – like, high performance and syllabus completion – has

led to the prioritization of maintaining order and control over students, which has made schools more susceptible to violence as opposed to creating a safe and humane environment for learning. Moreover, as teachers administered physical punishment for even the most trivial matters (examples include but are not limited to forgetting a notebook at home, not wearing the school uniform, and having long nails), violence became trivialized. Its everyday use ensured that it became normalized and routinized. Students internalized its use as “for their own good,” and some even advocated for it. In this way, children’s experience of violent school discipline reflects the hidden curriculum in schools that promotes violence as an acceptable tool for the powerful (teachers) to impose their will on those less powerful (students), and this reinforces structural violence through class-, caste-, and gender-based inequalities.

Teachers’ continued use of physical punishment affected classroom participation and engagement by restricting learning opportunities. For example, many students, both boys and girls, refrained from answering teachers’ questions or asking questions from teachers in the classroom due to the fear of being beaten by them. In fact, girls at VSS dropped out of Math and took up Home Science because they did not want to be scolded or beaten in front of boys. They feared that boys would tease them in class if they got scolded by the teacher for not knowing something in Math (see chapters 5 and 6 for more details). In addition, students feared that teachers might humiliate or insult them in front of their peers in class, which prevented them from actively participating in class.

There was also a gendered aspect to physical punishment, which had detrimental effects on students’ learning and future opportunities. Male and female teachers at VSS used

physical punishment to discipline students. At VSS, both boys and girls recognized that teachers beat boys more than girls or that teachers do not ask girls to do squats. Boys found such treatment unfair, which angered them and led them to sometimes rebel. For instance, in Chapter 5, we saw how Amit tore and threw away his Art notebook when the Art teacher beat him more than girls for incomplete work. Or when Vivek declared he would not attend the Art class when the Art teacher refused to hear his explanation for incomplete work and beat him. CSS only hired female teachers (see chapter 3 for the reasoning), and though most teachers subscribed to physical punishment to discipline students, they did not use it as they feared students would complain to the Principal. The teachers at CSS were aware of the ban on corporal punishment by the government under the Right to Education Act (2009).

However, during interviews, female teachers mentioned that some boys in Grades IX and X were so big (tall) and needed to be beaten to be scared of the female teachers.

Violent discipline hindered student engagement and forced students out of school. Verbal aggression and humiliation by teachers made students doubt their learning abilities, making them feel that they were not good enough. Students expressed feeling less confident about themselves, feeling humiliated and embarrassed in front of their friends and peers, and a diminishing sense of school belonging. Students would remain absent from school for long periods to avoid getting beaten by the teachers in front of peers. Prolonged absenteeism from school had deleterious effects on students' learning and led students to drop out of school. These violent disciplinary practices at schools reinforce and reproduce social and educational inequalities among students who are already marginalized and disadvantaged socially, culturally, and economically.

Post-Right to Education (RTE) Act research has focused on teachers' perspectives on the ban on corporal punishment in India. Scholars have found that teachers' perceptions "vary with demographic, educational, and sociocultural factors" (Cheruvath & Tripathi, 2015, p. 128; Tiwari, 2014). Teachers argue that corporal punishment effectively instills discipline for learning and achieving high scores on exams (Tiwari, 2019); and to command respect from the students and make them comply with their advice and directives. But few have come to grips with the extent of violence and abuse and addressed the consequences of physical and verbal aggression, and, more importantly, its impact on student engagement – that it leads students to disengage (for a study on Lebanon, see Bahou & Zakharia, 2019; for India, see V. Morrow & Singh, 2014).

(2017, p. 73) examine the relationship between corporal punishment and mental health issues among students in India. Their finding suggests that "students who experienced corporal punishment in schools reported experiencing more depression, anxiety, as well as lower levels of resiliency than other youth" (p. 73). Fewer studies have brought students' voices to the forefront and discussed how students relate to and experience violent discipline in schools in India and its impact on student engagement and perceptions of self and sense of school belonging.

This dissertation contributes to the educational research literature on the Global South by bringing students' voices to research and documenting the adverse effects of violent discipline on student engagement and their subjectivities. Various scholars have recommended creating awareness by addressing the negative impact of corporal punishment on students' emotional and behavioral well-being in India and beyond (Cheruvath &

Tripathi, 2015; Tiwari, 2019). I extend the literature on violent discipline in schools in India by documenting the prevalent use of violent discipline at schools and how it hindered student engagement and led to a diminished sense of school belonging among students, resulting in increased student absenteeism, and eventually leading to social and educational exclusion from schools.

Truancy As Students Exercising Their Agency

As noted earlier in this chapter, students exercise agency and resist the humiliating school processes and practices by disengaging from school and remaining absent. When teachers label students as “academically weak” or “stupid” or disparage them in front of peers for their inability to read or answer teacher’s questions, students feel embarrassed and humiliated and lose confidence and their sense of belonging in the classroom. Such humiliation in the classroom also leads to disengagement. Students are unable to pay attention to the teachers because they are reeling from the harsh words of the teachers or thinking about how they are going to face their classmates. To avoid being embarrassed and insulted in front of peers, students exclude themselves from the classrooms by remaining absent from school.

These absences by teachers get categorized as unexplained absences or truant behavior, casting a negative light on students’ attitudes towards schooling. But the question that needs consideration is: are these school absences really unexplained? Or are students being pushed out of school due to teachers’ negative attitudes and behavior, which peers reinforce? It is imperative to point out that many students experience these negative interactions with teachers and peers, and not all exclude themselves, but some students are

particularly vulnerable to them. By not acknowledging the systemic processes that precipitate school absences among low-income and socially disadvantaged students, schools and teachers tend to perpetuate structural inequities.

School absences go unexplained because most teachers do not care to ask the students about the academic and non-academic problems they might be facing at home and at school. When students struggle with academics at school, teachers chalk their low academic performance as students being unmotivated and disinterested in learning, and resort to violent disciplinary practices to reprimand students. These deficit views and labels by teachers are picked up by peers, who then modify their behavior and their views about these students to conform with the teachers' deficit views. So, students disengage from school to save face and preserve their dignity. They try to maintain their self-esteem, dignity, and image in front of peers. Teachers' lack of care and deficit thinking creates an exclusionary cycle from learning and inadvertently pushes students out of schools and perpetuates the long-standing social and educational inequalities creating an inequitable school system.

In this dissertation, I argue that truancy or unexcused student absences from schools should be viewed as students' exercising their agency and resisting the hierarchical school system that is prejudiced against them. Research should view this phenomenon of truancy as a form of resistance – to a harsh and abusive school environment. Because in some ways, students are not missing out by missing school. The teachers had already formed their expectations about *if* and *what* the students could achieve at school based on their knowledge of students' characteristics, like their gender, socioeconomic status, caste, rural residence, and prior academic achievement. Their deficit views resulted in low expectations for

students. Moreover, teachers adapted their pedagogical practices and used directive instructions, gave less feedback, and asked more closed ended questions of students and did not engage with them. Thereby, students were not getting the quality education that promised them holistic development and social and economic mobility. Rather, they disproportionately received violent discipline and humiliation. So, by missing schools they were not missing out. Instead, they were surviving. Students do not seem to be conscious of the social inequities and accept the situation as “the way things are,” so their resistance is individualized and helps them survive. However, it does not allow them to access better economic and social opportunities; it keeps them “stuck” and restricts their economic and social mobility.

Studies focusing on discrimination in education in India report increased truancy among students that face discriminatory behavior (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Research on violence in homes and at schools show that when students face violence at school, they avoid it by not attending school (V. Morrow & Singh, 2016). Increasingly, scholars are starting to recognize truancy as a form of resistance. For instance, educational anthropologists argue that when students withdraw from schools or disengage, they are resisting (Ogbu, 1982; Smyth, 2006).

The tension between structure and agency is well depicted in Paul Willis’ *Learning to Labor*, where the school was a place for the power struggles between the teachers and ‘the lads’ (Willis, 1978). In the book, we see how the “working class lads” become aware that their experiences at school will not lead to social and economic mobility. In this dissertation, I draw parallel from Willis’ work and argue that the low-income and socially disadvantaged

students, who experience violent discipline at schools are drawn into an awareness that the education they are receiving (or not) at school, is not going to lead to a life of economic and social opportunities. Just as ‘the lads’ in Willis’s book reject the official school ideology, the students in this study too resist the humiliating hierarchical school system. The students remove themselves from schools that serve to embarrass and insult them in front of peers; and, like in England, while this form of resistance protect dignity, it keeps marginalized youth in their place in the social order.

As Chia at CSS stated, “students act like *caged wild animals* (emphasis added) when the school gets over. They try to run out of the school as soon as the bell rings. It looks as if the students were caged or tied and have now been released, so they are all running away.” The atrocities and abuse by the teachers and peers made students feel “caged” or “stuck” in their school and life. By responding to violent discipline by skipping school, students exercise their agency and resist the harsh, toxic, and humiliating experiences at school. In other words, students try to “break free” and exclude themselves from the humiliating hierarchical school system or their “cages” by skipping school and remaining absent.

Social exclusion

In this study, students from low socioeconomic and socially disadvantaged backgrounds face the threat of social and educational exclusion. Through this study I identified *who* gets excluded, excluded *from what*, *what factors* lead to exclusion, excluded *how*, and excluded *why*. The processes that led to social exclusion included labelling of students, teachers’ deficit views, the use of violent discipline, and the discriminatory

practices. The conceptual framework of this dissertation clearly depicts the schooling processes that are exclusionary and lead to the outcome of social exclusion (figure 9).

I emphasize that the negative attitudes and discriminatory practices experienced by students from marginalized backgrounds force them to exclude themselves from a toxic, abusive, and harsh school environment. When student exclude themselves from the humiliating and hierarchical school system, they take a step towards removing themselves from a situation that was harmful to their learning and self-worth. This is a positive form of social exclusion. However, this exclusion reinforces and reproduces the social, economic, and educational inequalities that these marginalized students face. In addition, it concretizes teachers' "deficit views" of these students, as students exclude themselves by remaining absent from school. This school absence affects their educational outcomes, leads to violent discipline, and continued student absence, which reinforces teachers' views about these students, resulting in an ongoing cycle of marginalization of the already marginalized. Again, these interconnected vicious cycles serve to keep these students from low-income and socially disadvantaged communities marginalized by reinforcing the deficit views and negative attitudes and behavior of teachers and peers towards them.

Teachers' deep seated "deficit views" of students from low-income and socially disadvantaged communities, is a primary cause of social exclusion in schools. Yosso (2005) states, "deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75). These assumptions about disadvantaged communities most often lead schools to default

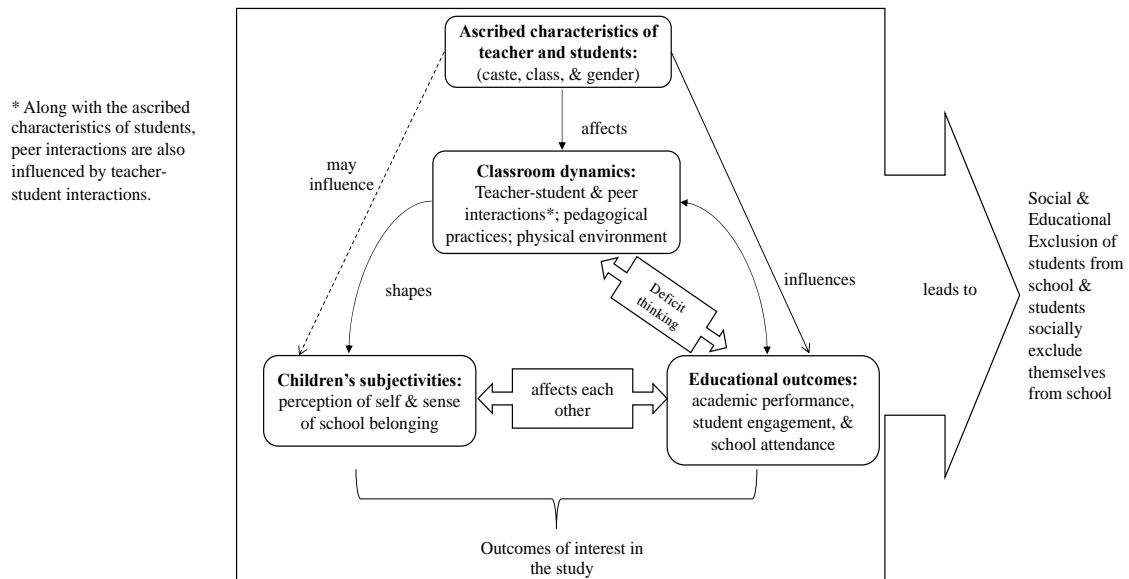
to the banking method of education that Paulo Freire (1973) critiqued. These deficit views also lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, as students' conform to teachers' expectations of them. Thus, to address this cause of social exclusion, schools and people who work in schools need to evaluate how schools can adapt to the students' needs instead of expecting the students to adapt to the school's structure.

Kabeer (2006) states, "addressing the causes of social exclusion means breaking the processes by which disadvantage is reproduced over time and across generations" (p. 70). By documenting these processes and causes of social exclusion in secondary schools in India, this dissertation contributes to the larger literature of social exclusion as an outcome and as a process in hierarchical school systems.

Conceptual Framework (revised)

Figure 9 represents the conceptual framework (revised) for this dissertation and is informed by this study's findings and the past literature.

Figure 9: Social Exclusion of Marginalized Students in Secondary Schools



Compared to the conceptual framework with which I began this study (see chapter 2), this revised framework shows that the ascribed characteristics of the students directly affected their educational outcomes (solid line in figure 9). Another key point to note is that students at neither school described themselves as being marginalized or facing disadvantages. This is important especially because it showcases how students identify themselves and their life circumstances. Even so, it was evident that their low-income status or caste identity led to several disadvantages and challenges. For instance, as noted in the literature section of chapter 2, many studies have reported that poor students from Dalit communities attend government schools that are characterized by poor quality of infrastructure, lack of resources, and less than adequate number of teachers (Nambissan, 2009). A report by Human Rights Watch (2014) notes that Dalit children attend school irregularly or drop out because they face discriminatory behavior by teachers. The ascribed

characteristics also determine how teachers shaped their pedagogical practices according to the views they held of these students by adapting the “banking method of education” (Freire, 2005). Therefore, the relationship between students’ ascribed characteristics and educational outcomes is crucial.

These ascribed characteristics of the students might influence their perceptions of self and sense of school belonging. For instance, an empirical study by Nambissan (2009) on Dalits in the state of Rajasthan in India revealed that schools continue to discriminate against students based on caste, which leads to “denial of full access to cultural and symbolic resources and social relations, including dignity and social respect” (Wankhede, 2013, p. 186). Therefore, there is an ‘invisible’ line connecting the ascribed characteristics of the students and their subjectivities (the dotted line in figure 9).

Contribution to research practices in the Global South

The research for this dissertation makes contributions to theory, research methods, and educational practice. This study can inform research practices with children in the Global South in two ways. First, the study implores us to consider the complexity of researching with children in hierarchical school settings and the ethical considerations involved in the research process. It offers a reflexive account of the ethical challenges and dilemmas that I adhered to protect the children who were active participants in the research process. In addition, I reflect on navigating ethical considerations and dilemmas around witnessing corporal punishment in schools in this study. There is a dearth in the literature on how researchers, especially in the Indian context, have dealt with the ethical dilemmas of witnessing harm caused to the research participants through corporal punishment. Through

this study, I contribute to the ongoing conversation on navigating ethical dilemmas in schools beyond obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals.

The use of physical and verbal violent discipline at both schools confronted me with an acute ethical dilemma. Indeed, as a researcher and a human being, it was my responsibility to stop the instances of violence, but with no clear alternative for reporting that would not lead to retaliation towards the students from the school authorities, my primary concern was to not leave students feeling distress. I decided not to intervene with the fear that I might lose access and that teachers would still use violent discipline to reprimand students. So, my intervening would not have changed the students' situations. Therefore, I decided to create awareness about the persistent use of violent discipline at schools by bringing students' voices to light and documenting their experiences with violent discipline and its impact on their learning outcomes, perceptions of self, and sense of school belonging. By listening to the students, I tried to create a 'safe space' for them to share their feelings and discuss some issues they might be facing at home or school. Through this research, I also urge researchers to talk about the ethical dilemmas they might face when researching in similar contexts, especially in the Global South.

Second, this dissertation contributes to the understudied domain of everyday classroom and school practices and processes in secondary schools in India through a qualitative inquiry. The study's scope and methodological approach contribute to understanding students' schooling experiences through their perspectives. One of the data collection methods used in this study was a self-administered student survey consisting of close-ended questions. However, during data collection, a challenge that I encountered was

the lack of basic literacy skills among certain students, which ultimately deterred some of them from participating in the study. Of those who participated in the survey, I had to read aloud the questions along with the choice options for the students and inquire which answer best suited their experience at school. Moreover, information reported by some students on the survey did not match the observational data and the interview data. Therefore, this study cautions researchers researching similar domains in the Global South about using surveys and encourages them to collect data through an in-depth inquiry into the children's worlds.

Third, this study is about two schools, so we cannot automatically generalize the results. However, the schools in this study are not unique. Based on the literature, we know that other schools in India and other similar contexts are discriminating against students, or teachers are using violent discipline to punish students. For instance, students in other regions of the country with similar social, cultural, and economic backgrounds to the students in this study may have similar experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Therefore, the results from this dissertation may well apply to other places where teachers use violent discipline and abuse children. In this manner, this dissertation also contributes to the international literature on violent discipline and corporal punishment.

Policy Implications

This study supports the need for a bottom-up approach to policymaking, which requires policymakers to understand the ground-level realities of what is happening inside the schools. The education policies in India emphasize lack of access and low enrolment rates; however, there is not enough attention paid to the quality of education provided to students when they are in schools, especially at the secondary level. This study contributes

significantly to understanding the gaps between what is stated in policies versus how policy is practiced when it comes to opening the “black box” of secondary schooling in India. The examination of the students’ classroom experiences in the two different schools provided a grounded picture of educational processes and practices in secondary schools – in fact, it exposed the disconnect between policy and practice. It captures the contradiction in policy conceptualization and implementation at the sub-national level.

In this deeply stratified Indian society, the education policies view universalization of education as a powerful tool for leveling the playing field for all children and achieving equity and inclusion in and through education (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013a). For instance, the RTE Act (2009) attempted to do this by guaranteeing “all children the right to go to school, the right to be treated with love and care, and most importantly, the right to be treated equally and with dignity” (Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013b). Yet despite the good intentions of the Act, the schools are not creating a level-playing field for all children. This is evident from the schooling experiences of students documented in this study. The study cast a spotlight on the several social, financial, and cultural barriers that students from marginalized and disadvantaged populations continue to experience in the hierarchical educational institutions in India. These barriers and the discriminatory and exclusionary practices adopted by teachers reinforce social and educational inequalities among children and prevent the spirit of the Act from being fulfilled.

Through the findings from this ethnographic study, I indicate that there can be multiple entry points for changes or improvements in the secondary education system in India. The findings, along with the changes suggested, can help policymakers acknowledge

not only the prevalence of discriminatory and exclusionary practices in schools but also address how these changes can be made. In this way, this dissertation has the potential to have an impact on policy recommendations and re-examine global discourses on attaining the goal of Education for All. It emphasizes that no progress can be made without addressing the root causes that act as barriers to the fulfillment of such goals and policies.

The RMSA policy framework placed an emphasis on **the provision of required infrastructure, especially library, Science and Mathematics laboratories, computer lab; providing teachers in all the subjects – especially Mathematics and Science**. However, in this dissertation we see that the physical infrastructure requirements, along with the requirement of subject teachers in schools, under the RMSA, have not been met at the two schools. As noted in chapter 4, neither of the schools had Science and Mathematics laboratories or Computer labs. There was a library, however, it lacked in terms of books available. Putting aside access to laboratories and libraries, one of the schools did not even have proper school buildings and functioning toilets for boys and girls.

Providing remedial courses to enable students to reach Grade IX level (RMSA, 2009). Moreover, due to a lack of budget, the schools did not offer any remedial courses to enable students to reach their grade level. The findings in the dissertation suggested that the learning needs of students were diverse, and students' literacy and numeracy skills were not up to their grade level. Some students at the Grade IX level could not read or write in Hindi, which was the medium of instruction at the school. These students were present physically but disengaged mentally from class. Their lack of basic literacy skills also made them the victims of violent disciplinary practices by teachers.

RMSA highlights the need to reform the examination system to move away from rote learning, and include adolescent education programme, school-level counselling and sensitization of the school head and teachers. Yet, the schools still practice rote-memorization and pedagogical practices that are not culturally responsive. Moreover, most teachers were apathetic towards students' struggles inside and outside the school. In my time, I did not hear or see teachers or the school head attend any sensitization program or counselling session. Through these missing aspects at the two schools we can see the disconnect between policy framing and policy implementation at the local level.

Furthermore, under the Right to Education Act (2009), Section 17 states that **'no child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment.'** The findings in this study suggests that there is a disconnect between the what is written vs. what is happening on ground. This is evident against the backdrop of the findings and analyses discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. As discussed earlier in this chapter and in the findings chapters that school persistently use violent discipline, which has deleterious impact on student engagement and students' subjectivities. Hence, if we really want to achieve goals of universal education for all, the government needs to crack down such schooling practices. To do so, we need to look at the root of the problem and identify the reasons why teachers resort to such harsh practices. One of the prominent reasons that emerged in this study was the deep-seated belief that students from low-income and socially disadvantaged backgrounds are uneducable. How do we combat such an issue at the policy level?

A policy implication that should be targeted toward pre-service teachers and incorporate discussions on reflexivity and positionality in teacher training to check the

implicit biases held by teachers. The findings in this dissertation indicated that teachers held deficit views of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds or lower castes, which affected their teaching, interactions, and expectations of these students. Therefore, the concepts of self-reflexivity and culturally responsive practices need to be introduced in teacher training to counter the deficit views and the stereotype threats held by teachers. Such components if added to the teacher training would enable teachers to examine their assumptions about the socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of their students and the larger society. However, it is essential to note that the underlying beliefs held by teachers are embedded in the deeper cultural beliefs, and for effective results, teacher training must be contextualized.

Another component that teacher training might incorporate is Human Rights Education (HRE). In this study, we saw how teachers were the *cause* of human rights abuses when they used violent disciplinary practices to reprimand students. Such a training in HRE has been successful in India as shown by Bajaj (2011) in her in-depth study of the role of teachers in Human Rights Education in India. She argues that teachers' own transformation should be at the center of discussions of educational reform and provides evidence that when such trainings are contextualized, appropriate, and engaging, it incentivizes teachers to participate and legitimizes the message and the messengers of human rights.

The findings from this dissertation reveal that caring teachers matter and that students respond well to positive and encouraging teachers. These findings are similar to the evidence from Bajaj's study which indicate that once teacher transformation occurs, several benefits follow as teachers now become allies to the students, and try to focus on the root of the

problem rather than using corporal punishment when students make mistakes. Such benefits led to minimizing the social distance between teachers and students, and students felt encouraged to share family problems with their teachers. I propose that the Government should consider implementing such initiatives for Human Rights Education for teachers in schools across India and especially those in rural areas serving students on the very margins of the Indian society.

Limitations of the Study

No study is without limitations, be it methodological or overall limitations of the study. The limitations that I experienced during the research and writing process can be organized in four categories:

(1) Limitations in gaining a full understanding of student experience: As mentioned in chapter 3, student interviews were conducted in groups and in multiple rounds. A drawback of conducting group interviews over numerous days was the student's unavailability, particularly the same group of students on these days. Often, the same groups of students were not available to interview—someone or the other was absent from school. In such cases, I split the group or dropped a student out of the next round of interviews. There were also instances where a student who had interviewed in Round 1 with, say, Group A but insisted on continuing their interview with another group of students. I did not see much choice in such cases and let the students participate in the interviews as per their comfort level. In addition, Hindi was used for verbal communication, including informal conversations and interviews with teachers and students; and surveys. All the field notes were written down in English. Later, the interviews were translated and transcribed into English. I performed all the

analyses, interpretation, and dissemination of the results in English. However, some of the nuances were lost in translation. Nevertheless, speaking the same language as the participants of this study gave me an advantage.

(2) Limitations in capturing the full range of student experiences: This study could only capture students' experiences who were present in the school system and attended school regularly. In this study, I could not include students who had dropped out of school after completing Grade VIII. In addition, I could not capture the experiences of those students who were enrolled in school but did not attend school regularly, which was a limitation of this study. Often, irregular school attendance occurred when students had sustained violent disciplinary practices by their teachers, feared the use of violent discipline, or felt a diminished sense of school belonging due to bad classroom experiences. Again, it was a limitation because this study, in its attempt to capture how schooling processes and practices might be reproducing educational and social inequalities, could not directly capture the voices of some students who may have first-hand experienced discriminatory and exclusionary practices such as violent discipline—physical, verbal, or emotional – by their teachers or peers.

(3) Limitation in capturing the full range of schooling environments facing low income and Dalit children: Another limitation of the study, and therefore consideration for future research, is that it only focused on two secondary schools despite its scope. An extension of this study could include more secondary schools both in the rural and urban areas to better understand who attends these schools, based on gender identities, caste designations, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and how these students' experiences differ.

(4) Limitations in capturing the interaction between students' life at school and home: Due to the limited time and resources and the scope of the study, it could not focus extensively on students' life at home and the impact on their life at school. Therefore, though I did get a glimpse of students' home backgrounds and associated struggles, it requires more attention. In addition, it is essential to hear parents' views towards their child(ren)'s education. More so due to the deficit views teachers held of the parents and blamed the poor educational outcomes of the children on their parents' "lack of education and awareness." Therefore, understanding parents' perspectives about their child(ren)'s education, aspirations for their children, and the struggles they may face in sending their children to school might help break some of the deficit views and 'blaming the victim' syndrome that teachers hold.

Implications for future research

This study suggests the need for more longitudinal studies that examine children's schooling experiences and subjectivities through the school years. I suspect that as children's subjectivities change over time, so will their motivation to attend school or not. I assume that children's aspirations to continue education and the ways they speak about their lives at school and their futures will change over time due to the examination process and its outcomes and the familial and societal pressures faced. The opportunity cost of attending school for students is high, as many face financial constraints at home. As the students grow older, especially boys, the demands by parents to drop out of school and go into paid work increase. Similarly, as they hit puberty, girls face the pressure of marriage by their family members, leading to girls dropping out of school.

A longitudinal dimension to this study would help examine two things: (1) capture the prolonged effect of discriminatory and exclusionary practices adopted by teachers and peers towards some students on these students' schooling outcomes (whether they drop out or not) and their subjectivities; and, (2) explore the impact of familial and societal pressures on students' educational outcomes as they grow older. In addition, a longitudinal study could help delineate the effect of life at home and life at school on students' educational outcomes and future aspirations.

Due to limited time and resources, this study could not (a) investigate children's life at home, parental views of their children's education, future aspirations, and struggles they may face in sending their children to school; and, (b) include more than two schools in this project. Therefore, an extension to this study would include these three key aspects. To attain national and international goals surrounding Education for All (EFA) and eliminate the social and educational exclusion of students from marginalized and vulnerable populations, it is of essence to include their voices in educational research studies. Additionally, including parents' views on education is key to debunking some myths that teachers hold about parents of students from low-income families and rural areas. As discussed at length in chapters 5 and 6, teachers' deficit views and low expectations of students from low-income families drive their interactions and pedagogic approaches. Lastly, expanding this study to include more schools both in rural areas and the city would help us better understand the larger phenomenon/a in play at schools and classrooms that may shape students' experiences and inform their subjectivities.

Despite all the negative accounts provided in this dissertation, some children in this study looked forward to going to school. They expressed excitement about seeing their friends who they missed at home. Though students disliked some teachers who beat or scolded them, they also showed deep respect and spoke favorably of those teachers who were caring and showed an interest in them and their problems. So, not all experiences of schooling are bad. This suggests that the promise of education beats in the heart of young people; there is a hunger for learning, for relationship, for opportunity, that will not be extinguished no matter how harsh children are treated. This should re-invigorate us to work to transform our educational systems to truly meet the full promise of democracy.

In conclusion, if we really want our students to thrive and become active citizens of society and have equal social and economic opportunities, the “caged animals” (low-income and socially disadvantaged students) need to be “set free” from the discriminatory and exclusionary institutions like the schools in this dissertation that serve to reproduce the social and educational inequalities.

APPENDIX A: STUDENT PROFILES AT THE TWO SCHOOLS

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Caste	School	Observations/Insights of Note
Rinki	F	14	OBC	CSS	Polite and very open in the interview about the troubles at home. Her father was a drunkard and had an affair with another woman in the village and would beat her mother. Mother tried to commit suicide but is fine now. Father could not afford the school fees for Grade IX and the class teacher paid the school fee for Rinki to attend school. Rinki behaves well in the classroom. Listens to the teacher and is motivated to study.
Aditi	F	14	OBC	CSS	Outspoken. Liked craft and did not have much interest in playing (sports or outdoor games). Disliked being at school when her friends were absent. Supported the use of corporal punishment by teachers at school because as per her students do not behave or understand when teachers explain politely. Wants to become a teacher.
Mahi	F	14	OBC	CSS	Confident and outspoken about her perception of peers, particularly about other girls who sit in the back and were labelled academically 'weak' by teachers. Disapproves of teachers who favor certain students over her but likes teachers who favor her over other students. Likes Math a lot.
Chia	F	14	GC	CSS	Outspoken.
Shabana	F	15	Muslim	VSS	Friendly, confident, and well-spoken. Spoke favorable about all her teachers and thought they taught well. Had a good relationship with all the students and teachers in school.
Sheetal	F	14	SC	CSS	Shy and timid.
Gudiya	F	14	SC	CSS	Quite shy and hesitant in the interview. Lived in extended family with aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Had to help mother with household chores like cooking; but did not like to cook at all. No one at home who can help her with academics. Spoke unfavorably of Home Science teacher, particularly about teacher beating her.
Vivek	M	15	SC	VSS	Friendly, insightful, and outgoing. Enjoyed school. Thought school was better than home and time passed quickly at school. Enjoyed playing cricket with friends & male teachers. Stated that when teachers taught, he definitely studied. Did not like Sanskrit and Art, particularly painting. Teacher scolded him for not knowing how to paint.

Ansh	M	16	GC	VSS	Friendly and confident. Eldest brother, with father living away from home. Responsible for looking after and working the fields, or hiring laborers. Had to skip school sometimes to work on the fields. Enjoyed playing cricket with friends. Liked everything at school, except boundary wall. Liked Math the most, especially factors.
-------------	---	----	----	-----	---

Notes: VSS: Village Secondary School; CSS: City Secondary School
GC: General Category; OBC: Other Backward Classes; SC: Scheduled Castes
M: Male; F: Female

APPENDIX B: TEACHER PROFILES AT THE TWO SCHOOLS

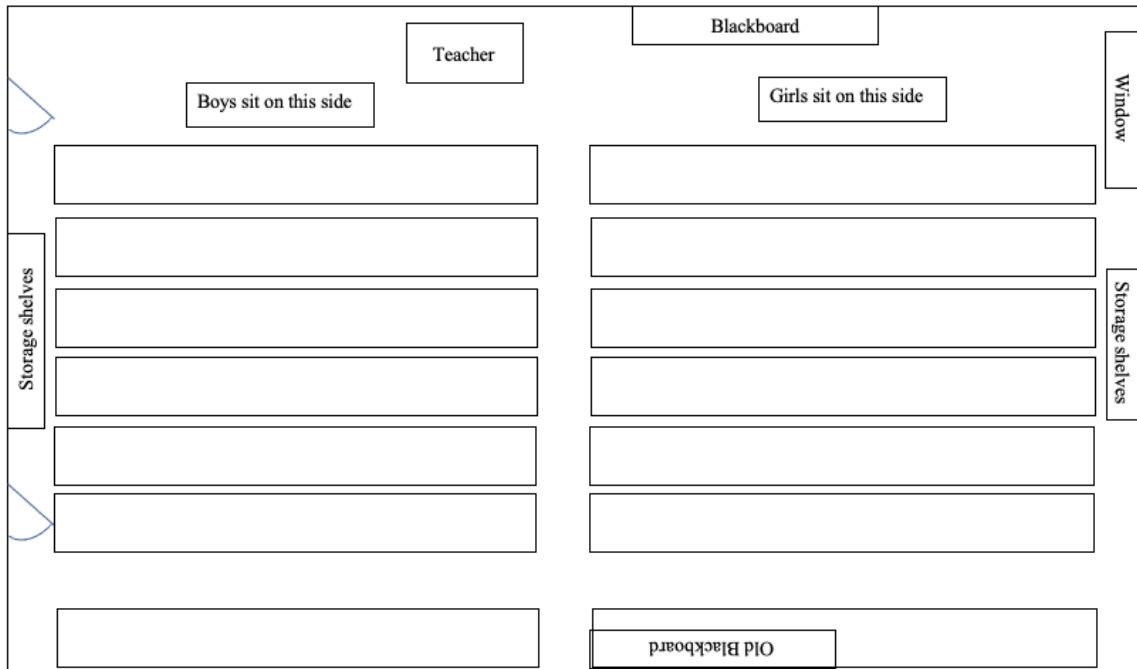
Subject teacher	School	Gender	BA	MA	B.Ed.	Other teacher training	Teaching experience
Hindi & Sanskrit teacher	VSS	M	Yes	Yes	Yes (1990)	PGT, TGT	23 years of teaching experience (combined as a teacher in private and government schools and as a lecturer)
Principal	VSS	M	Yes	Yes	Yes		34 years of teaching experience; 2 years Principal
English teacher	VSS	M	Yes	Yes	Yes		10 years approx.
Mathematics teacher	VSS	M	Yes	Yes	Yes		15 years approx. (3 years of private tuitions (2004-2007); Private school (2007-2017); government-aided school (2017-present))
Social Studies teacher	VSS	M	Yes		Yes (2012)		came to teach here in 2009-2010 realized that he needed training then went on to get B.Ed.
Art/Drawing; Home Science teacher	VSS	F	In final year	No	no	no	no teaching experience before this.
Science teacher	VSS	F	Yes	No	no	D.Lit. (first semester)	no teaching experience before this. (preparing for UPP (training/exam for teaching in primary classes))
Math & Physics teacher	CSS	F	Yes	Yes (double)	no	Diploma in Elementary Education	no teaching experience before this. Taught here b/w 2010-12 and then joined again 2018.
Hindi & Sanskrit teacher	CSS	F	Yes	Yes	Yes		2015-2016 joining; 4-5 years

Chemistry & Biology teacher	CSS	F	Yes	Yes & MBA	Yes		5-7 years
Social Studies teacher	CSS	F	Yes	Yes (triple)	Yes	M.Ed.	11 years
English teacher & Principal (High School)	CSS	F	Yes	Yes	Yes.		5-7 years; 2 years at IX-B

Notes: BA: Bachelor's degree; MA: Master's degree; B.Ed.: Bachelor's in Education.
VSS: Village Secondary School; CSS: City Secondary School
M: Male; F: Female

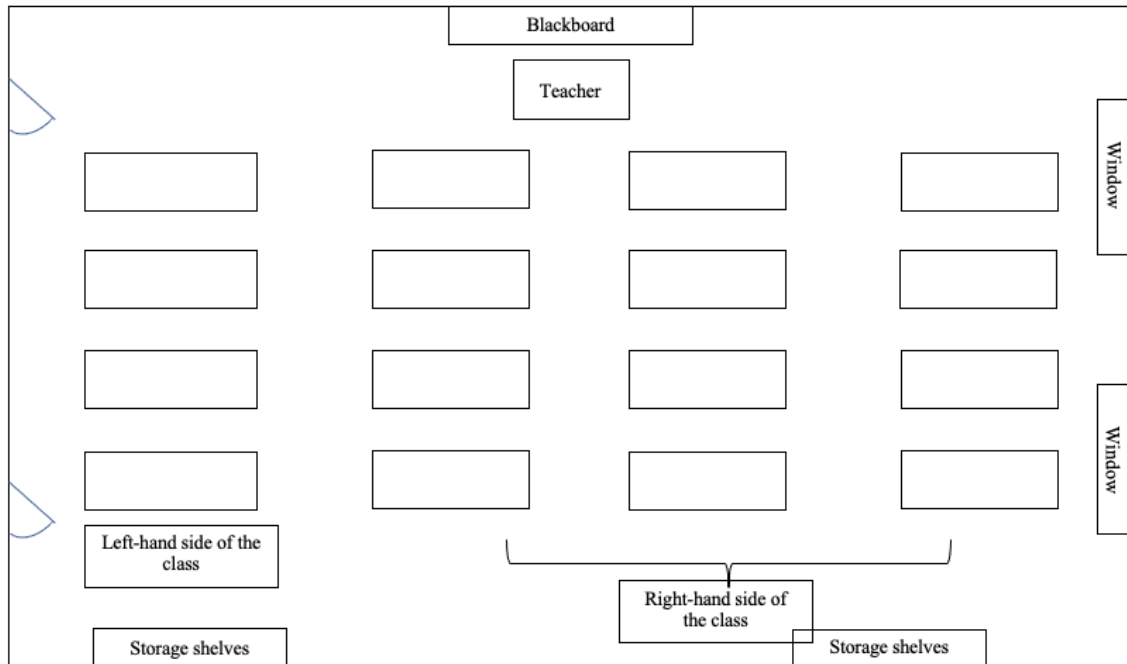
APPENDIX C.1: SEATING CHART GRADE IX-VSS

DECEMBER 2019



APPENDIX C.2: SEATING CHART GRADE IX-CSS

FEBRUARY 2020



APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS AND RATIONALE

Data Collection Strategy	Data Participants	Rationale
Surveys	Dalit and non-Dalit students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to retrieve closed-ended cross-school self-reported data from a large number of informants from different socio-cultural schooling contexts for comparison ▪ to identify variations/ correlations for further exploration in interviews/ observations ▪ to select participants for interviews/ focus groups
Classroom Observations	students, teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to observe complex phenomena/ interactions/ behaviors within their natural setting ▪ to observe unreported data; discrepancies or disparities ▪ to direct further inquiry through interviews or focus groups ▪ to observe the validity of the self-report data from interviews; triangulation
In-depth, semi-structured interviews	Teachers/ principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to retrieve comparable self-report data ▪ to understand participant views ▪ to test propositions/ discrepant data from observations
Multiple, in-depth, semi-structured group interviews	Dalit and non-Dalit students (boys and girls)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to provide open-ended self-report data ▪ to explore complexity of phenomena/ multiple dimensions, observations

APPENDIX E: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Directions: Please tell me about yourself by providing the following information to the best of your knowledge, or by checking the responses that apply. The questions are for research purposes only, and all the information you provide will be kept confidential.

A. Student demographics	
1. Age: _____ years	4. Where do you live? (for example: Sultanpur) _____
2. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female	5. Languages you speak at home: _____ Hindi _____ Urdu _____ English _____ other (please specify)
3. Religion: _____ Hindu _____ Muslim _____ Other (please specify)	

B. School and Aspirations
6. Favorite subject: _____
7. Least favorite subject: _____
8. Where do you sit in class? (ex. in the front, at the back) _____
9. Name two of your friends at school. (a) _____ (b) _____
10. Name two people you play with at school. (a) _____ (b) _____
11. Level of formal education you hope to complete: _____ lower secondary _____ higher secondary _____ college _____ other (please specify) _____
12. What do you want to do when you grow up? _____

13. In the last year, which of these have happened at least once at school? *(please check all that apply)*

- I was punished for coming late to school
- I saw others being punished for coming late to school
- I was scolded at school
- I saw others being scolded at school
- I asked a question to the teacher when I did not understand something in class
- I was teased by classmates
- I was teased by teachers and/or headmaster
- I played with classmates outside school
- I invited my classmates to my home
- I was invited to my classmate's home
- I felt uncomfortable around my classmates
- I felt uncomfortable around my teachers
- I was hit/struck by my teachers
- I was hit/struck by my classmates
- Teacher changed my seat

C. Parent demographics	D. Activities
<p>14. Father's highest level of schooling:</p> <p>_____ primary school (Class 1-5)</p> <p>_____ upper primary school (Class 6-8)</p> <p>_____ lower secondary (Class 9-10)</p> <p>_____ higher secondary (Class 11-12)</p> <p>_____ college</p> <p>_____ my father did not go to school</p> <p>15. Mother's highest level of schooling:</p> <p>_____ primary school (Class 1-5)</p> <p>_____ upper primary school (Class 6-8)</p> <p>_____ lower secondary (Class 9-10)</p> <p>_____ higher secondary (Class 11-12)</p> <p>_____ college</p> <p>_____ my mother did not go to school</p>	<p>16. How many hours do you spend on the following tasks on a usual school day? If you do not spend any time on an activity, say none or 0. <i>(to be recorded in hours)</i></p> <p>a. Domestic tasks (fetching _____ water, firewood, cleaning, hours cooking, washing, etc.) _____</p> <p>b. Work on the family farm or hours business _____</p> <p>c. Caring for family members hours (siblings, ill household _____ members) hours</p> <p>d. Paid work _____</p> <p>e. Studying outside of school hours time _____</p> <p>f. Play time/ general leisure hours</p>

SECTION II – SCHOOL-RELATED EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES

Directions: Below are some statements that may describe your experience at school. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) disagree, or (d) strongly disagree. Then circle the response that most closely matches your views. There are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested in your opinions.

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
I like coming to school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel proud to be in school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have friends at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers usually treat me well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My classmates usually treat me well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers usually treat me well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I usually understand what teachers say in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I have a problem at school, I can ask my teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I have a problem at school, I can ask my classmates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SECTION III – ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Directions: Please write your responses to the following questions in the space provided.

1. Do you have any other ideas about learning in school or other school-related experiences that are not included above?

2. Do you have any comments or additional clarifications on your answers above? (If you are providing more information regarding a specific question/answer, please provide the question number.)

3. Would you be interested in being interviewed about your experiences in classrooms and at school?

_____ yes _____ no

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire and for sharing your ideas about your schooling experiences.

APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION GUIDE

The classroom observations will be conducted in rounds to gain a better understanding of the classroom setting, the classroom environment, how children adapt to this environment, the way teachers navigate the classrooms, and most importantly, gain an understanding of this classroom from the student's vantage point. To understand how children, traverse through this space and the impact of classroom interactions and processes on children's subjectivities. The focus of the observations is children's experiences, but to complete the circle and to get a thick and rich description of classroom processes, teacher's perspective is noted as well. The stance of the researcher (me) will not be evaluative, rather I will present myself as a student who is there to learn from the teachers. I will take a "fly on the wall" approach for these observations. If possible, the observations will be audio-recorded so that during my observations, focus can be directed towards non-verbal communication. Also, audio-recording the verbal communication will help me capture the interactions verbatim and help me obtain a "thick and rich description" of the context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

With each round of classroom observations, I will narrow the focus of the observation. The data through classroom observations will be conducted concurrently, I will divide my week between the two schools, meaning I will spend two- three days of the week in each classroom.

Observations inside classroom

Round 1: General Observations

- general treatment of the students

Round 2: Infrastructural Set-up

- presence of desks, chairs, blackboard, teacher's table
- what is on the walls?
- Whether students' work has been displayed on the walls? What kind of work?

Round 3: Observations with focus on students

- classroom chatters
- reactions on the material being taught
- reactions on what the teacher is saying
- interactions between teacher and children
- interactions between and among children
- reception of course material
- Seating arrangement—who sits next to whom

Round 4: Observations with focus on teachers

- Writing on blackboard
- Reading from textbook
- Asking students to do any kind of written work
- Asking students oral questions
- Checking written work
- Giving dictation
- Asking students to recite, singly or all together
- Asking students to write on blackboard
- Asking students to work in groups
- interactions between teacher and student
- assigning chores to students? Cleaning classroom, fetching water

Observations outside classroom

- daily routine of the schools
- uniforms—who wears it and who does not; condition of the uniform
- teacher's reaction towards students not wearing the uniform or if uniform is tardy
- general treatment of the students
- how do students and teachers commute to school

- playground present? What type of equipment, other sports facilities?
- school infrastructure
- where do students eat lunch?
- what is on the walls?

- chatters
- interactions between teacher and student
- interactions between and among students
- who plays with whom?
- Who sits during lunch hour with whom?
- Do they share food?

- interactions between teacher and student
- assigning chores to students? Cleaning toilets or playground or school premises, fetching water

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

The key themes that will be explored through the interview with students are: self-perceptions, caste-based discrimination, gender-based discrimination, education related issues, social support (from home, teachers, and peers), aspirations (educational and occupational), peer relations, relationship with teachers, emotional support, school liking and avoidance, and other related factors. Below are sample interview questions that will be used for the multiple, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students. These interviews will be conducted in 3-4 rounds, with a focus on various aspects of students' lives in each round. Additional questions will be added to this interview guide depending on what is observed in the classrooms and outside of them.

Introductions

Hello! My name is Vishakha Agarwal and I am a student. I am here to conduct research on how students, such as yourself, experience 'life at school,' what motivates you to attend school, your future aspirations, and your views on your school and your teachers. I would also like to know about how you perceive yourself. To do so, I would like to interview you or speak with you on multiple occasions as per your convenience. Would that be fine with you? Please say yes or no to indicate your approval or assent.

Before we start this interview, I would like to clarify some points about this interview process and would like to get your assent to conduct these series of interviews.

1. At any point during this interview, if you feel you do not want to answer any questions, please feel free to stop the interview or indicate your discomfort with the questions and we can either skip those questions or stop the interview.
2. For the purpose of this research, I will like to audio-record our conversation, using this audio-recorder, would that be fine with you? Do you feel uncomfortable with me audio-recording our conversation? I assure you that this audio-recording will not be shared with anyone in school or with your parents. It is purely for research purposes and for ease of note-taking. We can stop the audio-recording during the interview if there is something you would want to share with me personally. I request you to not share information that you feel uncomfortable about.

Shall we begin? Are there any questions you would want to ask me?

Round 1: Life at home

So, tell me a little about yourself.

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you live?
3. Do you have any siblings?
4. What do your parents do?
5. Do you help your parents with household chores or with work in the field?

6. Are your parents supportive of your education? Do they ever talk about you dropping out? Or do they ask you about not attending school to take care of your siblings?

Round 2: Life at school

1. How do you get to school? Do you walk, or take the school bus, or your parents drop you, or you cycle to school?
2. How did you come to attend this school?
3. Do you like coming to school?
4. What is your favorite thing about this school?
5. What do not you like so much about school?
6. What kinds of problems do you have in school?
7. Do have problems with schoolwork—getting it right? finishing schoolwork?
Understanding schoolwork?
8. Do you feel comfortable in school?
9. Do you feel safe at school?
10. Tell me about some of the rules that you have to follow in school.
11. If you could make school a better place, what would you change about your school?

Round 3: Experience with teachers

1. Do you understand the material taught at school?
2. If you do not understand something in class, do you ask your teacher?
(if yes) did the teacher explain the concept again to you?
(if no) why did you not ask the teacher? Does she/he not help when you ask for help? Do they ignore your request?
3. Does the teacher assign you seats in class?
(if no) who decides the seating arrangement in class? On what basis is the seating arrangement decided?
4. Do you think your teachers treat you well, as compared to other students?
5. Have you ever felt that the teacher did not talk with you properly?
6. Can you please describe an event or instance when you felt that the teacher did not speak properly with you?
Is this type of behavior of the teacher common? Is she/he like this with all students?
How did this make you feel?
7. Do you think you get along with your teacher? Why or why not?
8. Does the teacher appreciate your work in class?
9. Does she give you feedback on your school work? What kind of feedback do you get?
10. Are there only red marks or does the teacher explain why what you wrote is wrong?
11. Does the teacher motivate you to do better in class or in exams and tests? How does that affect you? Do you feel motivated by your teacher's words?
12. Have you ever been beaten by your teachers? Did you confront them about why they bullied or beat you? Do they still bully/beat you? Did you report about the bullying to the principal?
13. I have observed that teachers scold/ punish students. What is your opinion about this?
How do you think this affects students and their performance? Does it have a positive or a negative effect on them? Can you elaborate?

14. Have you seen teachers discriminate against students based on class, caste, or gender?
Elaborate.

Round 4: Experience with peers

1. When you feel low or sad, who do you share your feelings with? e.g., friends, parents, siblings, someone else in the family.
2. Name the person who you sit in the classroom with. is *name* your friend?
3. Outside of school, do you have any academic support?
4. Are you able to solve all the homework from school on your own?
5. Do you face problems when working on your homework?
6. Who do you go for help with homework? E.g. Parents, friends, teachers
(if friends) Is this friend helpful? Have they ever refused to help you with homework?
(if yes) why do you think they refused to help you with homework?
Does this person come to you for help? Have you ever refused them for help?
7. Have you ever been beaten by your peers? Did you confront them about why they bullied or beat you? What did you do about the bullying or physical violence? Do they still bully/beat you? Did you report about the bullying to the teacher or principal?
8. Do you invite your peers to your house? Why or why not?
(If yes) what do you all do when your friends come over? Study together? Play?
15. Have you seen students discriminate against students based on class, caste, or gender?
Elaborate.

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

A. *General questions*

Please start by telling me a little by yourself.

1. Which neighborhood do you live in?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. What is your highest level of teacher training qualification?
4. When did you join this school? Do you remember?
5. Before joining this school, did you teach somewhere else?
6. What is your current role in this school?
7. For how many years have you held this current role at this school?
8. What subjects do you teach? Have you always wanted to teach these subjects? Which subjects did you want to teach? Why are you teaching the subjects other than the ones that you wanted to?

B. *Experience at and perceptions of the current school*

1. What is your perception of this school? Can you tell me about some of the things that you like and dislike about this school?
2. What are some of the things that can be improved?
3. How has your experience been at this school? Can you give me some instances of some positive and negative experiences, if any?
4. What made you choose this school? Why not any other school?

C. *Beliefs and perceptions of students*

1. How is the performance of students at this school?
2. Who is the best student in terms of academics in your class? What makes him/her so good?
3. I know that many of the students in this school come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Does this affect their performance in your opinion? (if yes) How so?
4. How well are students supported by their parents or other family or community members outside school?
5. Are there any specific students that consistently perform poorly in your class? Why do you think this student performs so poorly?
6. What measures have you taken to help these students to cope with their studies? Can you give me some examples?
7. What do you do to motivate students to learn better in class?
8. Do you reward students who perform well? How do you reward them? Can you give me examples? Do you think this motivates these children to perform better?
9. Are there students in your class who create unnecessary problems during class? How do you handle such behavior?
10. What type of measures have you been advised to take to maintain discipline in class?

11. Have you seen other teachers discriminate against students based on class, caste, or gender? Elaborate.
12. Have you seen teachers discriminate against other teachers based on class, caste, or gender? Elaborate.

D. Home-related issues that is reflected in student's performance at school

1. How often do you give homework to the students? What type of homework do you give them?
2. Can you think of instances when the students have expressed difficulty in completing the homework? What kind of problems have the students expressed? How often have you been able to help the students?
3. Are there students in your class who have come to you with problems they face at home or at school? How did you handle such a situation? On what basis did you give this particular advice? Do you think that your advice helped the student?
4. Have you experienced any kind of discrimination at school in terms of your gender or caste? How did that make you feel? How did you cope with that?

APPENDIX I. ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR TEACHERS

I am Vishakha Agarwal, a student from the University of Massachusetts Boston. I am doing research on student's experiences in classrooms in India. The research will use student's experience at school and in classroom, specifically student's interactions with their teachers and peers to understand how these interactions shape student's perceptions of self, their educational outcomes, and aspirations. As a teacher, I would like to know your opinion of the student and understand your perspectives on how and why you hold such perceptions of the student. I will ask you questions and will record the conversation. If you do not want to be recorded please let me know, and I will not record our conversation. The recording is for researcher convenience and will be kept confidential and I will not play it in front of anyone else. The interview will be 40-60 minutes long.

I will start with a question and based on your answers will ask follow-up questions, and this is how we will continue the conversation. You may choose to skip questions that you prefer not to answer. You can at any time during the interview decide to withdraw from the study and can do so at any time without consequence. The participation in this study is voluntary. You can ask me any questions during the interview process or any of our other conversations. The information provided by you will be kept confidential. Any publication or report that comes out of this study will not use your name or any other identifiable information.

Risks and Benefits: A risk of participation is the emergence of emotional distress in completing the research materials. You may speak with me, Vishakha Agarwal, to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. A risk of participation is a breach of confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your information. There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study.

Questions: You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have research-related problem, you can reach Vishakha Agarwal by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or the faculty advisor Mark Warren at Mark.Warren@umb.edu .

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Would you like to take part in the study? Please say yes or no. Also, please indicate if you are fine with me audio-recording our conversation. Please say yes or no; please do not state your name when giving consent. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you or affect your relationship with the school or affect your status as a teacher. Thank you!

APPENDIX J. ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR STUDENT'S PARENTS

I am Vishakha Agarwal, a student from the University of Massachusetts Boston based in the US. I am doing research on student's experiences in classrooms in India. The research will use student's experience at school and in classroom, specifically student's interactions with their teachers and peers to understand how these interactions shape student's perceptions of self, their educational outcomes, and aspirations. I am here to ask if you would be willing to let your child to take part in this research study by completing a survey and through interviews. To do so, I will ask questions related to the child's experiences in school and classroom and will record the conversation. If you do not want to be recorded please let me know, and I will not record our conversation. The recording is for researcher convenience and will be kept confidential and I will not play it in front of anyone else. The interview will be 30-40 minutes long and I would like to interview your child on multiple occasions.

I will start with a question to the child and based on his/her answers will ask follow-up questions, and this is how we will continue the conversation. The child may choose to skip questions that he/she prefers not to answer. The child can at any time during the interview decide to withdraw from the study, they can do so at any time without consequence. The participation in this study is voluntary. The child can ask me any questions during the interview process or any of our other conversations. The information provided by the child will be kept confidential. Any publication or report that comes out of this study will not use your child's name or any other identifiable information.

Risks and Benefits: A risk of participation is the emergence of emotional distress in completing the research materials. You may speak with me, Vishakha Agarwal, to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. Another risk of participation is a breach of confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your information. There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study.

Questions: You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree for your child to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have research-related problem, you can reach Vishakha Agarwal by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or the faculty advisor Mark Warren at Mark.Warren@umb.edu . If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Would your child like to take part in the study? Please say yes or no. Also, please indicate if you are fine with me audio-recording the conversation with your child. Please say yes or no; please do not state your name when giving consent. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize your child or affect your child's grades or affect your child's status as a student. Thank you!

APPENDIX K. ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR STUDENTS

I am Vishakha Agarwal, a student from the University of Massachusetts Boston based in the US. I am doing research on student's experiences in classrooms in India. The research will use student's experience at school and in classroom, specifically student's interactions with their teachers and peers to understand how these interactions shape student's perceptions of self, their educational outcomes, and aspirations. I am here to ask if you would be willing to take part in this research study by completing a survey and through interviews. To do so, I will ask questions related to your experiences in school and classroom and will record the conversation. If you do not want to be recorded please let me know, and I will not record our conversation. The recording is for me and will be kept confidential and I will not play it in front of anyone else. The interview will be 30-40 minutes long in multiple rounds.

I will start with a question and based on your answers will ask follow-up questions, and this is how we will continue the conversation. You may choose to skip questions that you prefer not to answer. You can at any time during the interview decide to withdraw from the study and can do so at any time without consequence. The participation in this study is voluntary, that is, it is up to you to decide if you want to take part in the study. You can ask me any questions during the interview process or any of our other conversations. The information provided by you will be kept confidential, it will not be shared with your parents, or teachers, or peers. Any publication or report that comes out of this study will not use your name or any other identifiable information.

Risks and Benefits: A risk of participation is the emergence of emotional distress in completing the research materials. You may speak with me, Vishakha Agarwal, to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. A risk of participation is a breach of confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your information. There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study.

Questions: You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have research-related problem, you can reach Vishakha Agarwal by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or the faculty advisor Mark Warren at Mark.Warren@umb.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Would you like to take part in the study? Please say yes or no. Also, please indicate if you are fine with me audio-recording our conversation. Please say yes or no; please do not state your name when giving assent. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you or affect your grades or affect your status as a student. Thank you!

APPENDIX L: FEE STRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS IN GRADE IX & X AT VSS

Table 9: Fee Structure for Students in Grade IX and X at VSS

Fee Breakdown	Amount (per academic year) (in Rupees)
Development	₹ 120.00
Sports	₹ 60.00
Science	₹ 60.00
Scouting	₹ 60.00
Red Cross	₹ 12.00
Fan	₹ 20.00
Poor fund	₹ 10.00
Refreshments	₹ 10.00
Library	₹ 12.00
Audio Visual	₹ 2.00
Art	₹ 2.00
Magazine	₹ 20.00
Report Card	₹ 5.00
Home exam	₹ 50.00
Total	₹ 443.00

REFERENCES

- Aber, J. L., Thompson Gershoff, E., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2002). Social Exclusion of Children in the U.S.: Compiling Indicators of Factors From Which and By Which Children Are Excluded. *Conference on Social Exclusion and Children*.
- Adler, K., Salanterä, S., & Zumstein-Shaha, M. (2019). Focus Group Interviews in Child, Youth, and Parent Research: An Integrative Literature Review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919887274>
- Agrawal, T. (2014). Educational inequality in rural and urban India. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 34(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2013.05.002>
- Alcott, B., & Rose, P. (2017). Learning in India’s primary schools: How do disparities widen across the grades? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 56, 42–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2017.05.002>
- ASER. (2018). *Annual Status of Education Report 2017: “Beyond Basics.”*
- Bacolod, M. P., & Ranjan, P. (2008). Why Children Work, Attend School, or Stay Idle: The Roles of Ability and Household Wealth. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 56(4), 791–828. <https://doi.org/10.1086/588165>
- Bahou, L., & Zakharia, Z. (2019). ‘Maybe that’s how they learned in the past, but we don’t learn like this today’: Youth perspectives on violent discipline in Lebanon’s public schools. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 70(October 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.102098>

- Bajaj, M. (2011). Teaching to transform, transforming to teach: Exploring the role of teachers in human rights education in India. *Educational Research*, 53(2), 207–221.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2011.572369>
- Balagopalan, S., & Subrahmanian, R. (2003). Dalit and Adivasi Children in Schools: Some Preliminary Research Themes and Findings. *IDS Bulletin*, 34(1), 43–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2003.tb00058.x>
- Bandyopadhyay, M. (2017). Quantity, Quality and Equity in Secondary Education in India. *IASSI Quarterly*, 36(4), 366–385.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=131503881&site=ehost-live>
- Bandyopadhyay, M., & Chugh, S. (2020). Status of Secondary Education in India: A Review of Status, Challenges and Policy Issues. In *Universal Secondary Education in India* (pp. 17–49). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5366-0_2
- Barret, P., Treves, A., Shmis, T., Ambasz, D., & Ustinova, M. (2019). *The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence*. The World Bank.
- Bhagavatheeswaran, L., Nair, S., Stone, H., Isac, S., Hiremath, T., T., R., Vadde, K., Doddamane, M., Srikantamurthy, H. S., Heise, L., Watts, C., Schweisfurth, M., Bhattacharjee, P., & Beattie, T. S. (2016). The barriers and enablers to education among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe adolescent girls in northern Karnataka, South India: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 49, 262–270.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.04.004>

- Bhattacharjea, S., Wadhwa, W., & Banerji, R. (2011). *Inside Primary Schools: A study of teaching and learning in rural India*. www.macrographics.com
- Birioukov, A. (2016). Beyond the excused/unexcused absence binary: classifying absenteeism through a voluntary/involuntary absence framework. *Educational Review*, 68(3), 340–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1090400>
- Biswal, K. (2011). *Secondary Education in India: Development Policies, Programmes and Challenges* (CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 63).
- Borooah, V. K., Diwakar, D., Mishra, V. K., Naik, A. K., & Sabharwal, N. S. (2014). Caste, inequality, and poverty in India: A re-assessment. *Development Studies Research*, 1(1), 279–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2014.967877>
- Borooah, V. K., Sabharwal, N. S., Diwakar, D. G., Mishra, V. K., & Naik, A. K. (2015). *Caste, Discrimination, and Exclusion in Modern India*. Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=a7iICwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&q=Borooah,+V.+K.,+Sabharwal,+N.+S.,+Diwakar,+D.+G.,+Mishra,+V.+K.,+%26+Naik,+A.+K.+\(Eds.\)+\(2015\).+Caste,+discrimination,+and+exclusion+in+modern+India.+New+Delhi:+Sage.+&ots=ryF4YXCub](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=a7iICwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&q=Borooah,+V.+K.,+Sabharwal,+N.+S.,+Diwakar,+D.+G.,+Mishra,+V.+K.,+%26+Naik,+A.+K.+(Eds.)+(2015).+Caste,+discrimination,+and+exclusion+in+modern+India.+New+Delhi:+Sage.+&ots=ryF4YXCub)
- Boswell, J., Corbett, J., & Rhodes, R. A. W. (2019). *The Art and Craft of Comparison*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108561563>
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* (Second). SAGE Publications.

- Bramoullé, Y., Djebbari, H., & Fortin, B. (2009). Identification of peer effects through social networks. *Journal of Econometrics*, *150*(1), 41–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeconom.2008.12.021>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bray, M., Adamson, B., & Mason, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods*. Comparative Education Research Centre, Springer.
- Brooks, R., Riele, K. te, & Maguire, M. (2014). Ethical Theories, Principles And Guidelines. In *Ethics and Education Research* (pp. 18–43). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473909762.n2>
- Bros, C. (2014). The Burden of Caste on Social Identity in India. *Journal of Development Studies*, *50*(10), 1411–1429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2014.940908>
- Burchardt, T., Le Grand, J., & Piachaud, D. (1999). Social Exclusion in Britain 1991 - 1995. *Social Policy & Administration*, *33*(3), 227–244.
- Census of India. (2011). *Primary census abstract data (final population)*. *10*, 1.
- Chanana, K. (2014). Inclusive Secondary Education in India: Challenges and Future Directions. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, *16*(2), 121–138.
<https://cice.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/16-2-8.pdf>
- Cheruvath, R., & Tripathi, M. (2015). Secondary School Teachers' Perception of Corporal Punishment: A Case Study in India. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *88*(4), 127–132.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2015.1045821>

- Chiang, T. H. (2019). How do underachieving working class students survive in the classroom? Critiques on the perspective of resistance. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 96(March), 32–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.03.007>
- Chugh, S. (2011). *Dropout in Secondary Education : A Study of Children Living in Slums of Delhi*.
- Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (Eds.). (1986). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics and Ethnography*. University of California Press.
- Coffey, D., Hathi, P., Khurana, N., & Thorat, A. (2018). Explicit Prejudice. *Economic & Political Weekly*, LIII(1).
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education* (Eighth). Routledge.
- Colwell, M. J., & Lindsey, E. W. (2003). Teacher-Child Interactions and Preschool Children's Perceptions of Self and Peers. *Early Child Development and Care*, 173(2–3), 249–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443031000071888>
- Connell, J. P., Halpern-Felsher, B. L., Clifford, E., & Usinger, P. (1995). Hanging in there: Behavioral, Psychological, and Contextual Factor Affecting Whether African American Adolescents Stay in High School. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 10(1), 41–63.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1).

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? *Https://Doi-Org.Ezproxy.Lib.Umb.Edu/10.1080/02619768.2017.1315399*, 40(3), 291–309.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2017.1315399>
- Darmody, M., Smyth, E., & McCoy, S. (2008). Acting up or opting out? Truancy in Irish secondary schools. *Educational Review*, 60(4), 359–373.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910802393399>
- Deb, S., Kumar, A., Holden, G. W., & Simpson Rowe, L. (2017). School Corporal Punishment, Family Tension, and Students' Internalizing Problems: Evidence from India. *School Psychology International*, 38(1), 60–77.
<https://login.ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1129968&site=ehost-live>
- Delamont, S., & Atkinson, P. (2018). The Ethics of Ethnography. In R. Iphofen & M. Tolich (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics* (pp. 119–132). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Fifth). SAGE.
- Deshpande, A. (2000). Does Caste Still Define Disparity? A Look at Inequality in Kerala, India. *The American Economic Review*, 90(2), 322–325.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/117244>

- Dhillon, M., & Bakaya, S. (2014). Street harassment: A qualitative study of the experiences of young women in Delhi. *SAGE Open*, 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014543786>
- Downer, J., Sabol, T. J., & Hamre, B. K. (2010). Teacher–Child Interactions in the Classroom: Toward a Theory of Within- and Cross-Domain Links to Children’s Developmental Outcomes. *Early Education and Development*, 21(5), 6999–723.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2010.497453>
- Earthman, G. (2002). *School Facility Conditions and Student Academic Achievement*.
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sw56439>
- Earthman, G. I. (2004). *Prioritization of 31 criteria for school building adequacy*.
- Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2001). Interviewing Children and Adolescents. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research* (pp. 181–201). SAGE publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588>
- Egan, M. L., Matvos, G., & Seru, A. (2017). *When Harry Fired Sally: The Double Standard in Punishing Misconduct* (No. 23242; Nber Working Paper Series).
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th anniv). Continuum.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp. 311–323). Basic Books. <https://doi.org/10.7767/boehlau.9783205790099.1209>
- Geetha, K. A. (2021). Entrenched Fissures: Caste and Social Differences among the Devadasis. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 22(4), 87–96.

- Gelfand, M., & Virginia, C. (2019, April). Women Don't Just Face a Pay Gap at Work. They're Also Punished Far More Than Men. *Time*.
- Gershenson, S., Holt, S. B., & Papageorge, N. W. (2016). Who believes in me? The effect of student–teacher demographic match on teacher expectations. *Economics of Education Review*, 52, 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ECONEDUREV.2016.03.002>
- Gershenson, S., & Papageorge, N. W. (2018). The Power of Teacher Expectations: How racial bias hinders student attainment. *Education Next*, 18(1).
- Goel, S., & Husain, Z. (2018). Gender, caste, and education in India: A cohort-wise study of drop-out from schools. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 58(October), 54–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2018.10.002>
- Goetz, J. P., & LeCompte, M. D. (1984). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*. Academic Press, Inc.
- GOI. (1980). *Report of the Backward Classes Commission*.
- GOI. (2009). *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act*. <http://www.mhrd.gov.in/rte>
- GOI. (2015). *Key Indicators of Social Consumption* (Issue June). http://www.mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/nss_71st_ki_education_30june15.pdf
- Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 597–607.

- Goodnight, M. R., & Bobde, S. (2018). Missing children in educational research: investigating school-based versus household-based assessments in India. *Comparative Education*, 54(2), 225–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2017.1383085>
- Gordon, D., Levitas, R., Pantazis, C., Patsios, D., Payne, S., Townsend, P., Adelman, L., Ashworth, K., Middleton, S., Bradshaw, J., & Williams, J. (2000). *Poverty and social exclusion in Britain*.
- Govinda, R., & Bandyopadhyay, M. (2010). Social exclusion and school participation in India: Expanding access with equity. *Prospects*, 40(3), 337–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-010-9160-8>
- Gowda, S. (2020). *Public-Private Partnerships in Education: A Vertical Case Study of The Right to Education Act (2009), India*. University of Massachusetts Boston.
- Goyal, S., & Pandey, P. (2012). How Do Government and Private Schools Differ? *Economic And Political Weekly*, XLVII(22), 67–76.
- Hafen, C. A., Hamre, B. K., Allen, J. P., Bell, C. A., Gitomer, D. H., & Pianta, R. C. (2015). Teaching Through Interactions in Secondary School Classrooms: Revisiting the Factor Structure and Practical Application of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System–Secondary. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 35(5–6), 651–680. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431614537117>
- Halim, N., Yount, K. M., & Cunningham, S. (2016). Do scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women legislators mean lower gender-caste gaps in primary schooling in India? *Social Science Research*, 58, 122–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.01.002>

- Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: problems and prospects. *Ethnography and Education*, 1(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820500512697>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Third). Routledge.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure? *Child Development*, 76(5), 949–967. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00889.x>
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2007). *Learning opportunities in preschool and early elementary classrooms*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Hamre, B. K., Pianta, R. C., Downer, J. T., DeCoster, J., Mashburn, A. J., Jones, S. M., Brown, J. L., Cappella, E., Atkins, M., Rivers, S. E., Brackett, M. A., & Hamagami, A. (2013). Teaching through Interactions. *The Elementary School Journal*, 113(4), 461–487. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669616>
- Hamre, B. K., Pianta, R. C., Mashburn, A. J., & Downer, J. T. (2007). Building a Science of Classrooms: Application of the CLASS framework in over 4,000 U.S. Early childhood and Elementary Classrooms. *Foundation for Childhood Development*, 30(2008), 1–45. <https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2016/04/BuildingAScienceOfClassroomsPiantaHamre.pdf>
- Hanushek, E. A. (1992). The Trade-off between Child Quantity and Quality. *Source Journal of Political Economy*, 100(1), 84–117.

- Hanushek, E. A., Kain, J. F., Markman, J. M., & Rivkin, S. G. (2003). Does peer ability affect student achievement? *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, *18*(5), 527–544.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jae.741>
- Harbison, R., & Hanushek, E. A. (1992). *Educational Performance of the Poor: Lesson from Rural Northeast Brazil*. Oxford University Press.
- Heath, S., Brooks, R., Cleaver, E., & Ireland, E. (2009). *Researching Young People's Lives*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Heimer, C. A. (2013). “Wicked” ethics: Compliance work and the practice of ethics in HIV research. *Social Science and Medicine*, *98*, 371–378.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.10.030>
- Hoff, K. R., & Pandey, P. (2006). Discrimination, Social Identity, and Durable Inequalities. *American Economic Review*, *96*(2), 206–211.
- Hoff, K. R., & Pandey, P. (2014). Making up people-The effect of identity on performance in a modernizing society. *Journal of Development Economics*, *106*, 118–131.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2013.08.009>
- Holzwarth, S., Kanthy, S., & Tucci, R. (2006). *Untouchable in School Experiences of Dalit Children in Schools in Gujarat*.
- Human Rights Watch. (2014). “They say we’re dirty”: Denying an education to India’s marginalized. In *Human Rights Watch*. <http://www.hrw.org>
- Humphreys, S. (2008). Gendering corporal punishment: beyond the discourse of human rights. *Gender and Education*, *20*(5), 527–540.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250701797150>

- India Infrastructure Report, 2012. (2012). *India Infrastructure Report 2012 Private Sector in Education*. Routledge.
- http://www.idfc.com/foundation/policy/india_infrastructure_report.htm
- Jain, C., & Prasad, N. (2017). *Quality of Secondary Education in India: Concepts, Indicators, and Measurement*. Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4929-3>
- Jelas, Z. M., Azman, N., Zulnaidi, H., & Ahmad, N. A. (2016). Learning support and academic achievement among Malaysian adolescents: the mediating role of student engagement. *Learning Environments Research*, 19(2), 221–240.
- <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-015-9202-5>
- Jemielity, S. (2017). *Forgiving males , firing females : Women in the workplace face harsher discipline*.
- Jenkins, R., & Barr, E. (2006). Social Exclusion of Scheduled Caste Children from Primary Education in India. In *UNICEF India*.
- https://www.unicef.org/files/Social_Exclusion_of_Scheduled_Caste_Children_from_Primary_Education_in_India.pdf
- Juvonen, J., Espinoza, G., & Knifsend, C. (2012). The Role of Peer Relationships in Student Academic and Extracurricular Engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*. Springer Science+Business Media, LLC.

- Kabeer, N. (2000). Social exclusion, poverty and discrimination: Towards an analytical framework. *IDS Bulletin*, 31(4), 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2000.mp31004009.x>
- Kabeer, N. (2006). Poverty, Social Exclusion and the MDGs: The Challenge of ‘Durable Inequalities’ in the Asian Context. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(3).
- Kalapura, J. (2016). Dalit Experience of Exclusion with Special Reference to Education in Bihar. *Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies XISS, Ranchi*, 14(3, 4), 7067–7082.
- Kang, C. (2006). Classroom peer effects and academic achievement: Quasi-randomization evidence from South Korea. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 61(3), 458–495.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2006.07.006>
- Kaul, R. (2001). Accessing Primary Education: Going beyond the Classroom. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 36(2), 155–162.
https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2001_36/02/2076.pdf
- Kawulich, B. B. (2017). Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data. In D. Wyse, N. Selwyn, E. Smith, & L. Suter (Eds.), *The BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research: Two Volume Set* (pp. 769–790). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473983953.n39>
- Kennedy, J., McDonnell, M.-H., & Stephens, N. (2016). Does Gender Raise the Ethical Bar? Exploring the Punishment of Ethical Violations at Work. *Academy of Management Proceedings*. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2016.11664abstract>

- Kumar, K. (1983). Educational Experience of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18(36/37), 1566–1572. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4372479>
- Kumar, W. (2017). The Forms of Exclusion in Schools: A Case of Dalit Children in Hyderabad Slums. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 22(9), 14. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2209071420>
- La Paro, K. M., Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. (2004). The Classroom Assessment Scoring System: Findings from the Prekindergarten Year. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(5), 409–426. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499760>
- Ladd, G. W. (1990). Having Friends, Keeping Friends, Making Friends, and Being Liked by Peers in the Classroom: Predictors of Children’s Early School Adjustment? *Child Development*, 61(4), 1081–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1990.tb02843.x>
- Ladd, G. W., Kochenderfer, B. J., & Coleman, C. C. (1997). Classroom Peer Acceptance, Friendship, and Victimization: Distinct Relation Systems That Contribute Uniquely to Children’s School Adjustment? *Child Development*, 68(6), 1181–1197.
- Lafleur, M., & Srivastava, P. (2019). Children’s accounts of labelling and stigmatization in private schools in Delhi, India and the Right to Education Act. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27(135). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4377>
- Lareau, A. (1987). Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital. *Sociology of Education*, 60(2), 73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2112583>
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*. AltaMira Press.

- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction (Ethnographer's Toolkit Book 1)* (Second). AltaMira Press.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2013). *Analysis and Interpretation of Ethnographic Data: A Mixed Methods Approach (Ethnographer's Toolkit Book 5)* (Second). AltaMira Press.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2015). *Ethics in Ethnography: A Mixed Methods Approach (Ethnographer's Toolkit Book 6)* (Second). AltaMira Press.
- Leff, S. S., Thomas, D. E., Shapiro, E. S., Paskewich, B., Wilson, K., Necowitz-Hoffman, B., & Jawad, A. F. (2011). Developing and validating a new classroom climate observation assessment tool. *Journal of School Violence, 10*(2), 165–184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2010.539167>
- Levitas, R., Pantazis, C., Fahmy, E., Gordon, D., Lloyd, E., & Patsios, D. (2007). *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0003-2697\(74\)90161-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0003-2697(74)90161-4)
- Lewin, K. M. (2011). Expanding access to secondary education: Can India catch up? *International Journal of Educational Development, 31*(4), 382–393.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.01.007>
- Majumdar, M. (2005). Schooling and ‘Skilling’ of the Country’s Youth Secondary Education in Four Indian States. *Economic and Political Weekly, 40*(22), 2351–2363.
- Majumdar, M., & Mooij, J. (2011). *Education and Inequality in India : A Classroom View*. Taylor & Francis Group.

- Majumdar, M., & Mukherjee, S. (2020). Push-Out, not Drop-Out: Youth and Secondary Schooling in India. In *Universal Secondary Education in India* (pp. 51–70). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5366-0_3
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (L. Bickman & D. J. Rog, Eds.; Third). SAGE.
- McCane, S. A. (2008). *Teacher Academic Expectations and Student Outcomes*. University of Louisville.
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. (2008). Teacher expectations, classroom context, and the achievement gap. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*, 235–261.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.05.001>
- Mertens, D. M. (2018). Ethics of Qualitative Data Collection. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection* (pp. 33–48). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070.n3>
- MHRD. (2009). *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) Government of India, Ministry of Education*. <https://www.education.gov.in/en/rmsa>
- Miliband, D. (2006). *Social Exclusion: The Next Steps Forward*.
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 250–260.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250>
- Morrow, V. (2008). Ethical dilemmas in research with children and young people about their social environments. *Children's Geographies, 6*(1), 49–61.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280701791918>

- Morrow, V., & Richards, M. (1996). The ethics of social research with children: An overview. *Children and Society*, 10(2), 90–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.1996.tb00461.x>
- Morrow, V., & Singh, R. (2014). *Corporal Punishment in Schools in Andhra Pradesh, India: Children's and Parents' View* (No. 123; Young Lives Working Papers). www.younglives.org.uk
- Morrow, V., & Singh, R. (2016). *Understanding Children's Experiences of Violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India: Evidence from Young Lives* (Innocenti Working Paper 2016-19). www.unicef-irc.org
- Muralidharan, K., & Sundararaman, V. (2015). The aggregate effect of school choice: Evidence from a two-stage experiment in India. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(3), 1011–1066. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv013>
- Nambissan, G. B. (1996). Equity in Education? Schooling of Dalit Children in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(16/17), 1011–1024.
- Nambissan, G. B. (2005). Integrating gender concerns. *Changing English*, 12(2), 191–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13586840500163948>
- Nambissan, G. B. (2009). Exclusion and Discrimination in Schools: Experiences of Dalit Children. In *Children, Social Exclusion and Development* (No. 1; 1).
- Nambissan, G. B. (2012). Private Schools for the Poor: Business as Usual? *Economic & Political Weekly*, 47(41), 51–58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41720245>

- Nambissan, G. B., & Rao, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Sociology of Education in India: Changing Contours and Emerging Concerns*. Oxford University Press.
<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198082866.001.0001/acprof-9780198082866>
- Noltemeyer, A., Kunesh, C., Hostutler, C., Frato, P., & Sarr-Kerman, B. J. (2012). The effects of student and teacher characteristics on teacher impressions of -and responses to-student behaviors. *International Education Studies*, 5(4), 96–111.
<https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v5n4p96>
- Ogbu, J. U. (1982). Cultural Discontinuities and Schooling. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 13(4), 135–156. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1982.13.4.05x1505w>
- Paik, S. (2009). Chhadi lage chham chham, vidya yeyi gham gham (the harder the stick beats, the faster the flow of knowledge): Dalit women’s struggle for education. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 16(2), 175–204.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150901600202>
- Parajuli, A. (2019, June). The punishment gap : how workplace mistakes hurt women and minorities most. *World Economic Forum*.
- Pasupathi, M., & Ghosh, A. (2016). Perceptions of Students and Parents on the Use of Corporal Punishment at Schools in India. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, VIII(3), 269–280. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2840613>
- Patterson, J. A., Hale, D., & Stessman, M. (2007). Cultural contradictions and school leaving: A case study of an urban high school. *The High School Journal*, 91(2), 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2008.0001>

- Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K., & Allen, J. P. (2012). Teacher-Student Relationships and Engagement: Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Improving the Capacity of Classroom Interactions. *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, 515–539.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7>
- Pillay, J. (2014). Ethical considerations in educational research involving children: Implications for educational researchers in South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 4(2), 18. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v4i2.211>
- Popay, J., Escorel, S., Hernández, M., Johnston, H., Mathieson, J., & Rispel, L. (2008). *Understanding and Tackling Social Exclusion*.
- Prakash, R., Beattie, T. S., Javalkar, P., Bhattacharjee, P., Ramanaik, S., Thalinja, R., Murthy, S. H., Davey, C., Gafos, M., Blanchard, J., Watts, C., Collumbien, Martine Moses, S., Heise, L., & Isac, S. (2018). *The Samata intervention to increase secondary school completion and reduce child marriage among adolescent girls: results from a cluster- randomised control trial in India*.
- PROBE Team, T. (1999). *Public Report on Basic Education in India*. Oxford University Press. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593\(99\)00038-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(99)00038-3)
- Proctor, L. M. (2015). “Boys Must Be Beaten”: Corporal Punishment, Gender, and Age in New Delhi Schools. *Landscapes of Violence*, 3(3), 3.
<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/lov/vol3/iss3/3>
- Qureshi, M. G. (2012). The gender differences in school enrolment and returns to education in Pakistan. *PIDE Working Papers*, 51(84), 1–24.

- Ramachandran, V. (2018). *Inside Indian Schools: The Enigma of Equity and Quality*. Routledge. <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/books/mono/10.4324/9780429490804/inside-indian-schools-vimala-ramachandran>
- Ramachandran, V., Das, D., Nigam, G., & Shandilya, A. (2020). *Contract Teachers in India: Recent Trends and Current Status* (Issue June). <https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/SitePages/research-projects.aspx>
- Ramachandran, V., & Naorem, T. (2013a). What it means to be a dalit or tribal child in our schools: A synthesis of a six-state qualitative study. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(44), 43–52.
- Ramachandran, V., & Naorem, T. (2013b). What it means to be a Dalit or tribal child in our schools: A synthesis of a six-state qualitative study. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(44), 43–52. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23528806>
- Ramanaik, S., Collumbien, M., Prakash, R., Howard-Merrill, L., Thalinja, R., Javalkar, P., Murthy, S., Cislighi, B., Beattie, T., Isac, S., Moses, S., Heise, L., & Bhattacharjee, P. (2018). *Education, poverty and ‘purity’ in the context of adolescent girls’ secondary school retention and dropout: A qualitative study from Karnataka, southern India*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202470>
- Ramanujan, P., & Deshpande, A. (2018). *A Study of Access, Transition and Learning in Secondary Schools*.
- Rao, G. (2019). Familiarity Does Not Breed Contempt: Generosity, Discrimination, and Diversity in Delhi Schools. *American Economic Review*, 109(3), 774–809.

- Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. Sage Publications.
- Rodgers, G., Gore, C., & Figueiredo, J. B. (Eds.). (1995). *Social Exclusion: Rhetoric, Reality, Responses*. International Labour Office.
- Sanyal, A., & Muthukrishnan, S. (2017). Does Sanitation Influence Upper Primary Educational Outcomes? Quantitative Evidence from DISE Data of Gujarat State. *IASSI-Quarterly Year*, 36(2 and 3), 192–215.
- Sarangapani, P. M. (2003). Childhood and schooling in an Indian village. *Childhood*, 10(4), 403–418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568203104002>
- Sayed, Y. (2009). Overcoming exclusion in education. In *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples* (pp. 24–35). Minority Rights Group International.
www.minorityrights.org
- Sayed, Y., Subrahmanian, R., Soudien, C., Carrim, N., Balagopalan, S., Nekhevha, F., & Samuel, M. (2007). Education Exclusion and Inclusion: Policy and Implementation in South Africa and India. In *Department for International Development*.
- Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (2013). *Essential Ethnographic Methods: A Mixed Methods Approach (Ethnographer's Toolkit Book 3)* (Second). AltaMira Press.
- Schwartz-shea, P., & Yanow, D. (Eds.). (2012). *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. Routledge.
- Schylander, H. (2017). *Girls' equal participation in education. Period. A field study on how Indian schoolgirls perceive menstruation stigmas to affect their access to education*. Uppsala University.

- Sedwal, M., & Kamat, S. (2008). *Education and Social Equity With a Special Focus on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Elementary Education* (Issue 19).
- Sen, A. (2000). *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Scrutiny*.
- Shah, P. P. (2016). Partnerships and appropriation: Translating discourses of access and empowerment in girls' education in India. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 49, 11–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.02.001>
- Sieber, J. (1993). The Ethics and Politics of Sensitive Research. In C. M. Renzetti & R. M. Lee (Eds.), *Researching sensitive topics* (pp. 6–14). Sage Publications.
- Silver, H. (1994). Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms. *International Labour Review*, 133(5–6), 531–578.
- Simon, L., & Thorat, S. (2020). Why a Journal on Caste? *CASTE / A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.26812/caste.v1i1.159>
- Singh, R., & Mukherjee, P. (2015). *Determinants of Successful Completion of Secondary Education Evidence from Young Lives, Andhra Pradesh* (No. 143).
www.younglives.org.uk
- Singh, R., & Mukherjee, P. (2017). *Diverging Pathways: When and Why Children Discontinue Education in India* (Issue October). www.younglives.org.uk
- Singh, R., & Sarkar, S. (2015). Does teaching quality matter? Students learning outcome related to teaching quality in public and private primary schools in India. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 41, 153–163.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.02.009>

- Singh, V. (2014). Pattern and Determinants of Social Exclusion in Schools among Children of Scavenger Community at Primary Level Education in India. *Voice of Dalit*, 7(1), 81–93.
- Skelton, T. (2008). Research with children and young people: Exploring the tensions between ethics, competence and participation. *Children's Geographies*, 6(1), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280701791876>
- Smyth, J. (2006). “When students have power”: Student engagement, student voice, and the possibilities for school reform around “dropping out” of school. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 285–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120600894232>
- Somani, T. (2017). Importance of Educating Girls for the Overall Development of Society : A Global Perspective. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 7(1), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2017.07.1.10>
- Soudien, C. (2007). Caste, Class and Race: Continuities and Discontinuities across Indian and South African Schools. *South African Historical Journal*, 57(1), 113–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470709464712>
- Speybroeck, S., Kuppens, S., van Damme, J., van Petegem, P., Lamote, C., Boonen, T., & de Bilde, J. (2012). The role of teachers' expectations in the association between children's SES and performance in kindergarten: A moderated mediation analysis. *PLoS ONE*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0034502>
- Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Sprague, C. (2018). *Gender and HIV in South Africa: Advancing women's health and capabilities*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Srivastava, P., & Noronha, C. (2016). The myth of free and barrier-free access: India's Right to Education Act—private schooling costs and household experiences. *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(5), 561–578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2016.1220087>
- Stevens, A. H., & Schaller, J. (2014). Short-run Effects of Parental Job Loss on Children's Academic Achievement. *NBER Working Paper*, 15480(2), 81–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2>
- Stewart, V. (2009). Expanding Secondary Education in India. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(1), 97–98. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/218482134/abstract/54A71A87032C4433PQ/1>
- Still, C. (2014). *Dalits in Neoliberal India: Mobility or Marginalisation?* Routledge.
- Subrahmanian, R. (2003). Introduction: Exploring processes of marginalisation and inclusion in education. *IDS Bulletin*, 34(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2003.tb00053.x>
- Swain, J., & Spire, Z. (2020). The Role of Informal Conversations in Generating Data, and the Ethical and Methodological Issues. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-21.1.3344>
- Talboys, S. L., Kaur, M., VanDerslice, J., Gren, L. H., Bhattacharya, H., & Alder, S. C. (2017). What is eve teasing? A mixed methods study of sexual harassment of young women in the rural Indian context. *SAGE Open*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017697168>
- Thorat, S. (2009). *Dalits in India: Search for Common Destiny*. SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd . <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/dalits-in-india/book231799>

- Thorat, S., & Newman, K. S. (2010). Blocked by caste: economic discrimination in modern India. *Oxford University Press*, 377.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (Ed.). (2020). *Universal Secondary Education in India: Issues, Challenges and Prospects*. Springer Singapore. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-981-15-5366-0>
- Tiwari, A. (2014). Teachers, discipline, and the corporal punishment ban in Delhi, India. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, August, 157.
- Tiwari, A. (2019). The corporal punishment ban in schools: Teachers' attitudes and classroom practices. *Educational Studies*, 45(3), 271–284.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2018.1446330>
- Turner III, D. W. (2010). The Qualitative Report Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754–760.
- UNESCO. (2010). Reaching the marginalized. In *World*.
<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2714.4568>
- Valencia, R. R., & Black, M. S. (2002). “Mexican Americans Don’t Value Education!”—On the Basis of the Myth, Mythmaking, and Debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(2), 81–103.
- Velaskar, P. (2013). Sociology of educational inequality in India: A critique and a new research agenda. In *Sociology of Education in India: Changing contours and emerging concerns* (pp. 103–135).

- Verschueren, K., Doumen, S., & Buyse, E. (2012). Relationships with mother, teacher, and peers: Unique and joint effects on young children's self-concept. *Attachment and Human Development, 14*(3), 233–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.672263>
- Wankhede, G. G. (2013). Caste and Social Discrimination: Nature, Forms and Consequences in Education. *Sociology of Education in India: Changing Contours and Emerging Concerns*, 182–198.
- Ward, J. (2018, August 15). Women face “punishment gap” in finance industry, study finds. *Independent*.
- Waughray, A. (2010). Caste discrimination and minority rights: The case of India's dalits. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights, 17*, 327–353.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/157181110X495926>
- Willis, P. (1978). *Learning to Labour How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (First). Ashgate. <https://www.routledge.com/Learning-to-Labour-How-Working-Class-Kids-Get-Working-Class-Jobs/Willis/p/book/9781138421844>
- Wilson, A. B. (2017). *Black Students: Stereotypes and Educational Opportunities*. California State University, East Bay.
- World Bank. (2011). Social Exclusion : Who Is Being Left Behind ? In *Perspectives on Poverty in India : Stylized Facts from Survey Data*. World Bank Publications.
- Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. M. E. Sharpe.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315703275>

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>

Yunus, R. (2022). ‘Labour class’ children in Indian classrooms: theorizing urban poverty and schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(1), 104–119.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2021.2003181>