

This is a repository copy of '*Labour class' children in Indian classrooms : theorizing urban poverty and schooling.*

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/180579/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Yunus, Reva [orcid.org/0000-0002-3266-2047](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3266-2047) (2021) '*Labour class' children in Indian classrooms : theorizing urban poverty and schooling.* *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* ISSN 0142-5692

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2021.2003181>

---

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

British Journal of  
Sociology of Education



**'Labour class' children in Indian classrooms: theorizing urban poverty and schooling**

Journal:	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>
Manuscript ID	CBSE-2020-0227.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Poverty, 'Labour class', Classroom processes, Informal worker, Caste, Deficit view
Abstract:	This paper challenges (inter)national development narratives that propose schooling as a way out of poverty in the global South by interrogating poor children's experience of pedagogic and disciplinary processes in an Indian classroom. It also develops a theoretical framework to interrogate the relationship between urban poverty and classroom processes which attends to wider class and caste relations in the contemporary context of economic liberalism and 'political and social illiberalism'. Drawing upon parent interviews and ethnographic fieldnotes from a classroom in a state school it unpacks the term, 'labour class', used by teachers to refer to pupils' social background. Further, deploying the notion of 'deficit view' it shows how pedagogic practice, physical and verbal aggression experienced by pupils, and pupils' struggles to engage with classroom teaching are shaped by realities of deeply stratified schooling, inadequate infrastructure in state schools, and the relationship between 'labour class' communities and middle-class teachers.

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

## **‘Labour class’ children in Indian classrooms: theorizing urban poverty and schooling**

### **Abstract**

This paper challenges (inter)national development narratives that propose schooling as a way out of poverty in the global South by interrogating poor children’s experience of pedagogic and disciplinary processes in an Indian classroom. It also develops a theoretical framework to interrogate the relationship between urban poverty and classroom processes which attends to wider class and caste relations in the contemporary context of economic liberalism and ‘political and social illiberalism’. Drawing upon parent interviews and ethnographic fieldnotes from a classroom in a state school it unpacks the term, ‘labour class’, used by teachers to refer to pupils’ social background. Further, deploying the notion of ‘deficit view’ it shows how pedagogic practice, physical and verbal aggression experienced by pupils, and pupils’ struggles to engage with classroom teaching are shaped by realities of deeply stratified schooling, inadequate infrastructure in state schools, and the relationship between ‘labour class’ communities and middle-class teachers.

### **Keywords**

Poverty, ‘labour class’, informal worker, classroom processes, deficit view, caste.

### **Introduction**

Poverty emerged as one of the ‘top priorities’ of the World Bank’s development programmes in the 1990s even as education began to be circulated as ‘critical’ for improving growth rates and reducing poverty (Shain 2013). Since then, the Bank and liberalizing states in the global South have increasingly been concerned about ‘poor’ children’s schooling, but scholars have long argued that this concern needs to be scrutinised with reference to the Bank’s more fundamental commitment to aid ‘global capitalist accumulation’ and poor individuals’ ‘incorporation into and subjection to competitive labour markets’ (Cammack 2004, 190). It is within this framework and with the ultimate objective of

1  
2  
3 increasing 'the productivity of labour' that the Bank and the post-liberalization Indian state have  
4 focused on promoting limited social security for the working poor on the one hand, and limited public-  
5 funded schooling for their children, on the other (Pappu 2002; Shain 2013).  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 International aid programmes have continued to view poverty and educational marginalisation as  
11 'societal' and individual problems (WDR 2018) and are not invested in challenging the broader  
12 development model or its interplay with historically specific economic inequalities (Shain 2013).  
13 Significantly, and in part owing to aid conditionalities (Cammack 2004; Sarangapani 2010), the Indian  
14 state has also systematically shifted from the ideals of 'equality of educational opportunity' (Velaskar  
15 2010, 64) and a 'public education system of uniform quality' (ibid, 65) to a policy approach that  
16 intensifies stratification of schooling and advocates fragmented, limited and targeted benefits  
17 ostensibly to compensate for historical exclusion, but no longer talks of equality (Velaskar 2010).  
18 Today, the Indian state guarantees free and compulsory education only for eight years, from Class I  
19 till Class VIII. Despite a highly differentiated and deeply stratified school system within which access  
20 and experience are shaped by pupils' socioeconomic locations (Kamat 2015; Tukdeo 2019; Vasavi  
21 2003) policy has focused on expansion and ignored educational processes and experiences, thus,  
22 encouraging inequality in and through schooling (Batra 2015; Vasavi 2003). The Bank has also tended  
23 to offer technocratic solutions to the question of pedagogic processes and relations, reducing it to that  
24 of learning outcomes and measuring 'quality' (Cammack 2004; Sarangapani 2010; WDR 2018) and  
25 ignoring the historically specific social and economic realities that shape pupil experience and  
26 classroom processes.  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

50 Whilst expansion and international pressure on the developmental state have meant that an  
51 unprecedented number of children from the most marginalized groups are now participating in  
52 education, stratification of the school system has resulted in poor children being concentrated in  
53 government schools and 'budget' private schools (Kamat 2015). Thus, when (inter)national policy  
54 talks about public-funded schooling it is precisely poor children's schooling that is under discussion  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

(Sarangapani 2010); but there is no longer any policy concern around unacceptable inequalities in educational experience, levels or outcomes. India also continues to have high rates of poverty as well as high absolute numbers of poor as neither the slow growth and planned development of post-independence decades, nor the higher growth of the last four decades of liberalization have brought down poverty adequately (Kohli et al. 2003). Moreover, historical disparities based on gender, religion and caste continue to shape economic inequalities, and in some cases, have intensified post-liberalization (Jaffrelot et al. 2019).

Significantly, the discipline of Sociology of Education was a 'latecomer' to India. It, then, developed slowly and remained peripheral to research concerns in Sociology departments owing to early sociologists' view of education as an 'applied and normative' discipline rather than a 'theoretical and empirical' one; moreover, research funding has largely remained tied to policy requirements of national and international organisations (Nambissan and Rao 2013, 13). Reviews of existing literature (Batra 2015; Bhatta 1998a, 1998b; Nambissan 2013, 2014; Velaskar 2013) show that detailed ethnographic accounts and systematic analyses of classroom processes and social relations remain rare; and are only beginning to emerge in the urban context. Most importantly, scholarship has tended to view poverty only as a barrier to schooling and not as a factor crucially shaping educational processes (Batra 2015). As Velaskar (2013, 122) summarises, despite long-standing preoccupation with inequalities of access and experience, accounts of poor pupils' schooling have largely remained descriptive and rarely grapple with poverty 'as a structural condition emanating out of class and caste relations.'

The central contribution of this paper is that it begins to develop a theoretical framework to interrogate the relationship between poverty and classroom processes which also accounts for wider class and caste relations<sup>i</sup>. This paper is part of a larger project which offers a rare theoretical engagement with the relationship between educational and socioeconomic marginalisation in urban India, especially how intersections of gender, class and caste shape classroom processes and poor pupils' classroom

1  
2  
3 experience.<sup>ii</sup> The project draws upon parent and pupil interviews and a classroom ethnography  
4 undertaken in a state school in the central Indian city of Indore. This paper locates classroom discourse  
5 and processes within historical class-caste based inequalities and their interplay with liberalization. It  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10 unpacks the term ‘labour class’ used by teachers to refer to pupils’ social background in the context of  
11  
12 broader patterns of economic inequality and informalisation, and financial and physical hardships  
13  
14 faced by parents. It further shows how pedagogic and disciplinary processes in the classroom are  
15  
16 shaped by historical and post-liberalisation social and educational stratification.  
17

18  
19  
20 The theoretical framework developed in the paper draws upon scholarship in political economy,  
21  
22 sociology of education and economic sociology in order to systematically 1) ‘caste’ (labour) class;  
23  
24 2) ‘class’ teachers’ expectations and ‘deficit view’ of poor pupils and parents; and 3) unpack how  
25  
26 teachers’ views and school stratification shape teacher-pupil relations and pedagogic and disciplinary  
27  
28 processes in the classroom. Unravelling the relationship between caste, labour, poverty and school  
29  
30 stratification, it, thus, simultaneously casts and classes pupils’ classroom experience in the urban  
31  
32 Indian context.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38

### 39 **Understanding contemporary poverty and implications for classroom processes and relations<sup>iii</sup>**

#### 40 Literature review

41  
42  
43  
44  
45 Of the substantial body of research on school stratification, unequal access, and experiences of poor  
46  
47 pupils only a limited body of work offers thick descriptions of classroom processes and social relations  
48  
49 (Nambissan 2013; 2014) or unpacks how these are shaped by the wider socio-material context,  
50  
51 especially in urban settings. Majority of the scholarship discussing poverty looks at access and rates  
52  
53 of retention, child labour, and economic, demographic and other benefits of schooling, primarily in  
54  
55 rural areas. Scholarship on poverty and teacher-pupil interaction has typically been based on surveys,  
56  
57 interviews and focus-group discussions rather than school or classroom ethnographies and limits itself  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 to describing teachers' attitudes towards their work and pupils from marginalised caste and class  
4  
5 groups, and some pedagogic and disciplinary practices.  
6  
7

8 Notable exceptions engaging with classroom processes and discourse include Manjrekar (2007), Iyer  
9 (2013), Majumdar and Mooij (2011), and Pappu and Vasanta (2010). Of these, only Majumdar and  
10 Mooij and Pappu and Vasanta offer some insights into the larger class relations inscribing classroom  
11 discourse. Other literature locating classrooms systematically within local socioeconomic context,  
12 especially in urban settings, includes Talib (2003), Balagopalan and Subrahmanian (2003), Goswami  
13 (2019) and Manjrekar (2019), though these do not offer ethnographic details of classroom processes.  
14  
15 More generally, recent literature on urban education looks at middle-class groups' decision-making  
16 and aspirations around schooling, spatial and institutional exclusion, privatisation and low-cost  
17 schooling. It is, however, yet to offer a theoretical engagement with informal work, historical and  
18 contemporary economic inequalities, or caste-class intersections.  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

31 Pappu and Vasanta (2010) describe poor children's experience of labour and schooling and teachers'  
32 attitudes in the context of stratified schooling in Hyderabad, but do not discuss how wider economic  
33 logic shapes classroom processes. Talib (2003) problematizes the exclusion of the world of labour  
34 from curriculum in a classroom full of the children of quarry workers in Delhi and foregrounds the  
35 class relationships at stake in teaching and learning in a state school. While he describes the  
36 marginalised caste groups quarry workers belong to, he fails to account for its historical intertwining  
37 with class, or how that impinges upon classroom discourse. Manjrekar's (2019) research with poor  
38 Muslim communities, and Balagopalan and Subrahmanian's (2003) research with poor SC and ST  
39 pupils link teacher-pupil relations and classroom experience more systematically with local social  
40 relations and economic exclusion.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

54  
55 Existing literature shows that owing to long histories of class and caste based economic and  
56 educational exclusion, the majority of teachers, especially regular full-time ones, belong to the upper  
57 castes and middle classes. Therefore, first-generation learners tend to be seen as  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 ‘uneducable’/‘unteachable’ even as their parents are considered to be disinterested in children’s  
4 learning (Balagopalan & Subrahmanian 2003; Talib 2003; Nambissan 2009; Vasavi 2003). Research  
5 also shows that though some teachers, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds tend to be  
6 more supportive of learners from marginalised backgrounds teacher-pupil relations are also shaped by  
7 systemic issues and institutionalization of class and caste-based biases (Balagopalan and  
8 Subrahmanian 2003; Nambissan 2009). Most importantly, the colonial morphing of teachers into ‘state  
9 functionaries’ and as such, ‘key agents’ of the post-independence developmental state not only burdens  
10 them with non-teaching responsibilities but also continues to complicate their relationship with  
11 marginal communities (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian 2003; Kumar 2013).  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26

### 27 [Building a framework for interrogating poverty and classroom processes](#)

28  
29  
30 Extending this body of work on schooling in the context of urban poverty, I develop and demonstrate  
31 a theoretical framework for interrogating the relationship between the structural underpinnings and  
32 lived realities of poverty, and classroom social relations and processes. To this end, I draw upon  
33 analyses of economic informality, and the evolving relationship between caste and economic  
34 inequality. This approach avoids essentialised understandings of economic inequality and blaming  
35 teachers as individuals or a community of professionals; instead, it foregrounds their class-caste  
36 locations. I also draw upon Lipman’s (1998) analysis of how teachers’ ‘deficit view’ of pupils from  
37 low-income families shapes classroom relations and processes. This view is based on a ‘negative and  
38 degrading cultural model’ of low-income families (ibid, 82) and links their ‘economic and social  
39 conditions’ with ‘social and moral pathologies’ (ibid, 75). Such a conceptualisation enables a nuanced  
40 account of teachers’ views and practices and the relationship between the two.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54

55 Since a majority of the parents in my study were informally employed, attending to their working  
56 conditions became central to my analysis of their children’s schooling. Indeed, the majority of workers  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 in India have always been informally employed and despite claims to the contrary, informal  
4 employment has expanded substantially more than formal employment post-liberalization (Srija and  
5 Shirke 2014). Thirty-eight percent of the non-agricultural labour force in India comprises  
6 'casual/contract workers and regular workers in informal enterprises' and forty-five percent, 'micro-  
7 entrepreneurs or self-employed' (Agarwala 2013). Throughout my work I use the definition favoured  
8 by Rina Agarwala who has done pioneering work on informal workers' identities and politics in India:  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16

17 The informal sector consists of economic units that produce goods and services legally, but  
18 engage in operations that are not registered or regulated by fiscal, labor, health, and tax laws.  
19 Informal workers include the self-employed, who own and run a business in the informal sector  
20 with few or no employees, as well as casual labor, who work through subcontractors either for  
21 an informal or a formal sector enterprise. The primary difference between informal and formal  
22 workers is that the latter are protected and regulated under state law while the former are not.  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31 (Portes et al. 1989 cited in Agarwala 2006, 420-421)  
32  
33

34 Drawing upon analyses of informal work and its relationship with caste and patterns of poverty allows  
35 us to understand how caste and class combine with austerity and economic informality to shape  
36 contemporary urban poverty. Firstly, even among informal workers, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled  
37 Tribes and women have historically faced greater exploitation (Breman 1996; Agarwala 2013).  
38 Secondly, post-liberalization economic growth has further entrenched caste-based exclusion and  
39 hierarchies; and SC, ST and OBC groups continue to face greater exclusion in regular salaried work  
40 as compared to Others (CES 2018-19; Deshpande 2011; Jodhka 2018; Unni 2006). Data from the last  
41 two decades indicates that being located lower down in the caste hierarchy increases the likelihood of  
42 being informally employed, and thus, having lower incomes (UNDP 2004; NSS 2014). Caste also  
43 continues to shape patterns of land-ownership, business ownership and employment and thus, incomes  
44 and status in contemporary urban economy despite recent political, educational and economic success  
45 of historically non-dominant castes (Jodhka 2018; Deshpande 2011). Further, challenges to upper caste,  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 middleclass domination since the 1970s-80s have also resulted in these groups' support for  
4 liberalisation and opposition to caste-based reservation and the welfare state (Menon and Nigam 2007;  
5  
6 Fernandes and Heller 2006) despite 'massive poverty' (Kohli 2019).  
7  
8  
9

### 10 11 12 13 **Research context and methods<sup>iv</sup>** 14

15  
16 Indore is the commercial capital of Madhya Pradesh, a 'laggard' state in terms of growth and human  
17 development. But since the early twentieth century Indore has been a significant hub of manufacturing,  
18 trade and commerce for central and western India. Since the 1990s it has also gained tremendous  
19 significance in IT and financial services. While Madhya Pradesh state has very high SC and ST  
20 populations and these children are most likely to go to government schools (Nambissan 2009), it  
21 actually has 'significantly higher' poverty than the national averages (UNDP 2004), has consistently  
22 paid the lowest minimum wages of informal workers (ILO 2018) and incurs the least per capita  
23 expenditure on education (Save the Children 2014).  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 This paper draws upon an eight-month long classroom ethnography conducted in Class VIII of a  
36 coeducational, Hindi-medium Middle School in Indore in 2014-15. The eight-strong staff at the school  
37 consisted of: the Head Master, Manish Tiwari (UC); three women Upper Divisional Teachers (UDTs),  
38 Jyoti Gupta (UC), Prabha Shinde (UC), Usha Pandey (UC); and two men UDTs, Pramod Bhargav  
39 (UC), and ML Vishwakarma (OBC) who constituted permanent full-time staff. A woman Guest  
40 Teacher, Preeti Mali (OBC)<sup>v</sup>, and a woman Midday-Meal Helper, Ganga Devi (SC) constituted the  
41 contractual staff. Of the seventy-nine students enrolled (13-16yo) thirty-eight were boys and forty-one  
42 girls. twenty-one were SC, ten ST, thirty-one OBC and seventeen Others<sup>vi</sup>.  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52

53  
54 Of the ninety-two parents who were working, nineteen (17.59%) were self-employed (47.36% OBC,  
55 26.31% SC, 3.7% ST, 5.26% Others), sixty-seven (62.04%) were informal workers (44.77% OBC,  
56 32.83% SC, 14.92% ST, 7.46% Others); and six (5.55%) were formally employed (16.66% SC, 83.33%  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Others); the formal workers had social cover like health insurance and in two cases, housing as well.  
4  
5 Many parents were construction labourers while a smaller number worked in various manufacturing  
6  
7 units. Among the mothers, self-employment consisted of domestic work, while among the fathers it  
8  
9 consisted of a wide range of occupations: tailoring; garage-ownership; managing wedding bands,  
10  
11 running maintenance services like whitewashing, carpentry, plumbing and electrical-repair; auto  
12  
13 rickshaw driving; and vending vegetables and street food. Individual monthly wages ranged from  
14  
15 £30.00 to £150.00 and net family incomes from £70,00 to £200.00, and could vary substantially from  
16  
17 one month to the next.  
18  
19  
20  
21

22 During fieldwork I spent my day with Class VIII pupils beginning with the morning assembly and  
23  
24 attending all classroom activities till the end of the school-day. Using participant and non-participant  
25  
26 observation I collected data on teacher-pupil relations, peer interaction, teaching and learning practices  
27  
28 and other classroom processes. I spent time with pupils in the playground and divided my lunch breaks  
29  
30 between pupils and teachers. I also observed interactions and processes during examinations and  
31  
32 school functions. I supplemented this ethnographic data with parent and pupil interviews, and visits to  
33  
34 pupils' neighbourhoods and homes. I systematically interviewed the sixty-odd pupils who attended  
35  
36 school more regularly; in semi-structured individual and group interviews I discussed the financial and  
37  
38 academic problems they faced, disciplinary and pedagogic practices, their relationship with teachers,  
39  
40 life at home and how it affected their ability to meet demands at school. In addition to collecting data  
41  
42 on families' social and financial background via questionnaires and pupil interviews, I visited homes  
43  
44 and interviewed a representative (based on caste, employment and incomes, type of household, i.e.,  
45  
46 joint/nuclear/single-parent, and years lived in Indore) set of nineteen parents. Here I draw upon two of  
47  
48 the interviews that represent two socioeconomically non-dominant caste categories, OBC and SC, and  
49  
50 which covered most of the themes that came up across conversations with parents: migration and  
51  
52 search for work in Indore, working conditions, concern over money and children's schooling and  
53  
54 futures.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Drawing upon this data and the scholarship outlined in the previous section I have developed a  
4  
5 theoretical framework that helps understand the relationship between poor pupils' experience of  
6  
7 pedagogic and disciplinary processes, class and caste-based economic inequality, and school  
8  
9 stratification. As I show in succeeding sections, this framework enables a three- dimensional analysis:  
10  
11 'caste-ing' (labour) class in the urban context; unpacking the classed nature of teachers' expectations  
12  
13 and practices as well as parents' struggles; and the effects of liberalisation, historical educational  
14  
15 stratification, and teachers' 'deficit view' on classroom processes.  
16  
17  
18

19  
20 I used manual coding as my field notes were largely in English, and interviews in Hindi. Initially I  
21  
22 used a combination of Descriptive, In vivo, Holistic and Provisional coding to analyse field-notes and  
23  
24 interviews. This initial analysis of fieldnotes generated codes like: teachers' views, poor parents/pupils,  
25  
26 parental irresponsibility, administrative demands, private coaching, corporal punishment, welfare  
27  
28 benefits and identity/eligibility, bad infrastructure, non-teaching work, freebies. My initial analysis of  
29  
30 interview data generated these codes: worry, 'there's no money', working conditions, physical  
31  
32 hardship, migration, 'they're not doing us a favour', school related expenses, aspirations for children,  
33  
34 lack of infrastructure, 'I don't feel like staying at home', comparing government/private, pride/self-  
35  
36 respect, views on teachers, awareness of poverty. Further analysis in the light of existing work on  
37  
38 schooling, caste, informal work and neoliberal reforms resulted in categories like: teachers' view of  
39  
40 poor/'labour class' parents and pupils; parents' view of schooling and teachers; conditions of informal  
41  
42 workers; how teachers' views shape pedagogic and disciplinary practices; effects of liberalisation on  
43  
44 informal workers and classroom processes. Analysing and synthesising these categories then gave me  
45  
46 the three dimensions of my analysis listed above.  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54

### 55 **Caste, economic equality and the 'labour class'**

56

57  
58 The term most widely used by teachers to refer to their pupils' backgrounds and socioeconomic  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 location was the English term, 'labour class'. I argue that this frequently used marker captures the  
4  
5 intersections of caste and class that shape teacher-pupil relations in urban classrooms. Ample evidence  
6  
7 exists that teachers in government schools see schooling as a process of moral improvement for poor  
8  
9 pupils (Iyer 2013; Vasavi 2003). My purpose is to locate these attitudes and assumptions in the material  
10  
11 relations in wider society, and offer a historically specific and critical account of classroom relations  
12  
13 and processes.  
14  
15

16  
17 Usha Pandey said, 'You know what, these children are from the labour class; managing [them]  
18  
19 is very difficult.'  
20  
21

22  
23 Apart from considering poor and lower caste pupils, 'unteachable', teachers also tended to view their  
24  
25 parents as irresponsible and uninterested in children's schooling. While Usha Pandey's comment does  
26  
27 not reference caste explicitly the term 'labour class' reflects a complex mix of caste- and class-based  
28  
29 realities and worldviews. Firstly, in Indore 'labour' is used to refer to manual labourers in Indore.  
30  
31 Secondly, I suggest that upper caste teachers' preference for the language of class rather than caste  
32  
33 (Sriprakash 2012, Nambissan 2009) is rooted in dominant nationalist discourses in (post)colonial  
34  
35 India. These discourses saw 'class' as a 'secular' and 'modern' category, but avoided 'caste' which  
36  
37 was seen as a term that carried 'pre-modern' baggage of ascribed status and inequality (Jodhka 2018).  
38  
39 Pandian (2002, 1735) argues that this resulted in 'transcoding' of caste, which allowed upper caste  
40  
41 elites to 'talk of caste by other means', thus 'acknowledging and disavowing caste at once.' Similarly,  
42  
43 here, the use of the word, 'class', obscures the caste connotations of 'labour class', while recording the  
44  
45 'contempt for the labouring classes and for labour as such' (Kothari 1994, 1591).  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 Moreover, as discussed earlier social class is always already *casted* (cf. CES 2018-19, Jodhka 2018,  
52  
53 Deshpande 2011). Upper castes have traditionally been over-represented in regular, salaried jobs in  
54  
55 the formal sector including in white-collar jobs (Fernandes and Heller 2006) while belonging to other  
56  
57 castes increases the chances of one's being engaged in casual labour (Unni 2006). Secondly, claims of  
58  
59 a 'secular' market notwithstanding caste-based networks and economic relations continue to shape  
60

1  
2  
3 access to segments within the labour market and ‘exploitation’ of workers by employers (Harris-White  
4 and Gooptu 2001, Unni 2006). While Dalits are registering their presence as self-employed workers  
5  
6 (Jodhka 2018), they largely represent ‘bottom-of-the-ladder, low productivity, survival activities’ with  
7  
8 ‘lower rate of growth’ (Deshpande and Sharma 2013, 22). Lastly, whether they are self-employed,  
9  
10 contractually employed or regular wage-earners, SC and ST groups have fared worse than OBCs in  
11  
12 getting into the middle classes; whereas upper castes are concentrated in the upper and middle-class  
13  
14 (Unni 2006).  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19

20 If broader patterns of economic inequality offer insights into structural underpinnings of poverty then  
21  
22 parents’ stories offer insights into the lived realities of deprivation and hardship. Attending to these  
23  
24 stories is crucial in order to problematize classroom processes and teacher-pupil relations. The primary  
25  
26 reason for most parents to have migrated to Indore was lack of livelihoods in their native villages.  
27  
28 Secondary reasons related to conflicts within joint families, and in a few cases, children’s schooling;  
29  
30 either because schools were not good, or because the overall atmosphere did not encourage children  
31  
32 to engage. Several parents related stories of farming having become unviable and state compensation  
33  
34 falling short, other rural crafts and arts like weaving dying away, and casual work in agriculture and  
35  
36 associated activities bringing in very low wages. Even land-owning Rajput families could not subsist  
37  
38 on incomes from farming while two of the landless SC families reported having had to migrate to  
39  
40 escape caste-based oppression and exploitation. The work all these parents found in Indore was  
41  
42 exhausting, demanding and insecure while expenses, especially rents, were much higher. Except a  
43  
44 handful of families all others lived in one-room houses which varied widely in quality and size while  
45  
46 deadlines for paying their rents were typically non-negotiable. At least one SC and one ST family had  
47  
48 to often prioritize rent over food. Healthcare expenses were also an enormous drain on incomes.  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

54 Neetu’s (OBC) parents’ experiences are representative of several parents’ stories. Sadhna and Deepak  
55  
56 had migrated from rural Madhya Pradesh to Indore to look for work a year ago. Deepak had worked  
57  
58 as a *beedi*<sup>viii</sup> contractor in their village and used to hire labourers to till his family’s land, but after  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 incurring heavy farming losses due to excessive rainfall he now worked as a casual labourer in Indore.  
4  
5 After working in a plastic manufacturing unit where he developed respiratory health issues he had  
6  
7 settled for lower paid work in a unit manufacturing steel vessels. In order to improve their net earnings  
8  
9  
10 Sadhna had also found work outside her home for the first time. With the help of an aunt by marriage  
11  
12 she had begun working in a snack manufacturing unit where she rolled dough into balls and packed  
13  
14 these into containers. Her work also paid little and her wages fluctuated since the supervisor often  
15  
16 miscounted the containers and refused to pay overtime. She made around £1.00 a day working six days  
17  
18 a week, between eight and nine hours everyday. She also bore much physical discomfort at work:  
19  
20

21  
22 [We] have to sit for long hours and my legs start hurting... four hundred items go into one  
23  
24 crate... work is okay, but [the supervisor] keeps saying, 'you are not working properly, six  
25  
26 crates should be filled everyday.' Now I am new, haven't even finished one month. I said, 'it  
27  
28 will take time to pick up speed'. He said, 'if you don't fill six crates, this will be your last  
29  
30 month'. I said, 'okay, I will quit before you sack me!' So now I am looking for another  
31  
32 'company' for myself... you know, if you make these things, hands get bruised, (indicating the  
33  
34 insides of her thumbs and index fingers) fingers get bruised.  
35  
36  
37

38  
39 Her neck, shoulders and back were constantly painful because of the work. Yet, she hardly got any  
40  
41 leave except on Sundays; nor could she afford to report for work even five minutes late, as that cost  
42  
43 her half a day's wages. But she often had to stay and work beyond her stipulated hours: 'if I am late,  
44  
45 they say all kinds of things, [but] if they make me stay for longer, then [that's] nothing!', Sadhna did  
46  
47 not possess any identity card as a worker, and thus, could not access any benefits available to informal  
48  
49 workers. The couple had also been unable to obtain the documents required to access free ration and  
50  
51 cooking gas at discounted rates and had to spend substantial part of their incomes on food. In any case,  
52  
53 neoliberal reforms have increasingly limited available social cover for workers like them (Agarwala  
54  
55 2013).  
56  
57  
58

59  
60 An even more thankless struggle was being waged by Raviraj's (SC) parents. His father, Mahesh, had

1  
2  
3 lived in Indore almost all his life, having migrated as a teenager and his mother, Lakshmi, had moved  
4 to the city a couple of years after their marriage. However, the family continued to struggle both  
5 financially due to low wages and in obtaining documentary evidence of identity and address despite  
6 having been forced to bribe local authorities on multiple occasions. Mahesh was a supervisor in a local  
7 oil manufacturing unit and Lakshmi had recently become a construction worker. Mahesh had tried  
8 working as a vendor but the negligible income forced him to join the mill as an informal labourer.  
9 Since he was able to continue working in the same place for a few years he had risen to the position of  
10 Supervisor, though still without a contract or social protection and earning a low ₹75.00 per month.  
11 He and other workers had tried striking for a raise but owing to availability of large pool of available  
12 workers willing to work for even lower wages, they had had to withdraw their strike when threatened  
13 with the loss of their jobs. The couple also acted as security guards for the building in which they lived.  
14 Their family of four occupied a single room with a tin roof on the top floor of a building which housed  
15 many small manufacturing units.

16  
17 Teachers, however, failed to recognise hardships faced by labour class parents and their roots in past  
18 and present socioeconomic inequalities; instead, their deficit model allowed them to blame 'low  
19 academic performance' (Lipman 1998, 71) on pupils' and parents' perceived disinclination to expend  
20 resources and effort on academic success. For instance, the Head-Master Manish Tiwari argued that  
21 parents who send their children to private schools think that:

22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65  
66  
67  
68  
69  
70  
71  
72  
73  
74  
75  
76  
77  
78  
79  
80  
81  
82  
83  
84  
85  
86  
87  
88  
89  
90  
91  
92  
93  
94  
95  
96  
97  
98  
99  
100  
101  
102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109  
110  
111  
112  
113  
114  
115  
116  
117  
118  
119  
120  
121  
122  
123  
124  
125  
126  
127  
128  
129  
130  
131  
132  
133  
134  
135  
136  
137  
138  
139  
140  
141  
142  
143  
144  
145  
146  
147  
148  
149  
150  
151  
152  
153  
154  
155  
156  
157  
158  
159  
160  
161  
162  
163  
164  
165  
166  
167  
168  
169  
170  
171  
172  
173  
174  
175  
176  
177  
178  
179  
180  
181  
182  
183  
184  
185  
186  
187  
188  
189  
190  
191  
192  
193  
194  
195  
196  
197  
198  
199  
200  
201  
202  
203  
204  
205  
206  
207  
208  
209  
210  
211  
212  
213  
214  
215  
216  
217  
218  
219  
220  
221  
222  
223  
224  
225  
226  
227  
228  
229  
230  
231  
232  
233  
234  
235  
236  
237  
238  
239  
240  
241  
242  
243  
244  
245  
246  
247  
248  
249  
250  
251  
252  
253  
254  
255  
256  
257  
258  
259  
260  
261  
262  
263  
264  
265  
266  
267  
268  
269  
270  
271  
272  
273  
274  
275  
276  
277  
278  
279  
280  
281  
282  
283  
284  
285  
286  
287  
288  
289  
290  
291  
292  
293  
294  
295  
296  
297  
298  
299  
300  
301  
302  
303  
304  
305  
306  
307  
308  
309  
310  
311  
312  
313  
314  
315  
316  
317  
318  
319  
320  
321  
322  
323  
324  
325  
326  
327  
328  
329  
330  
331  
332  
333  
334  
335  
336  
337  
338  
339  
340  
341  
342  
343  
344  
345  
346  
347  
348  
349  
350  
351  
352  
353  
354  
355  
356  
357  
358  
359  
360  
361  
362  
363  
364  
365  
366  
367  
368  
369  
370  
371  
372  
373  
374  
375  
376  
377  
378  
379  
380  
381  
382  
383  
384  
385  
386  
387  
388  
389  
390  
391  
392  
393  
394  
395  
396  
397  
398  
399  
400  
401  
402  
403  
404  
405  
406  
407  
408  
409  
410  
411  
412  
413  
414  
415  
416  
417  
418  
419  
420  
421  
422  
423  
424  
425  
426  
427  
428  
429  
430  
431  
432  
433  
434  
435  
436  
437  
438  
439  
440  
441  
442  
443  
444  
445  
446  
447  
448  
449  
450  
451  
452  
453  
454  
455  
456  
457  
458  
459  
460  
461  
462  
463  
464  
465  
466  
467  
468  
469  
470  
471  
472  
473  
474  
475  
476  
477  
478  
479  
480  
481  
482  
483  
484  
485  
486  
487  
488  
489  
490  
491  
492  
493  
494  
495  
496  
497  
498  
499  
500  
501  
502  
503  
504  
505  
506  
507  
508  
509  
510  
511  
512  
513  
514  
515  
516  
517  
518  
519  
520  
521  
522  
523  
524  
525  
526  
527  
528  
529  
530  
531  
532  
533  
534  
535  
536  
537  
538  
539  
540  
541  
542  
543  
544  
545  
546  
547  
548  
549  
550  
551  
552  
553  
554  
555  
556  
557  
558  
559  
560  
561  
562  
563  
564  
565  
566  
567  
568  
569  
570  
571  
572  
573  
574  
575  
576  
577  
578  
579  
580  
581  
582  
583  
584  
585  
586  
587  
588  
589  
590  
591  
592  
593  
594  
595  
596  
597  
598  
599  
600  
601  
602  
603  
604  
605  
606  
607  
608  
609  
610  
611  
612  
613  
614  
615  
616  
617  
618  
619  
620  
621  
622  
623  
624  
625  
626  
627  
628  
629  
630  
631  
632  
633  
634  
635  
636  
637  
638  
639  
640  
641  
642  
643  
644  
645  
646  
647  
648  
649  
650  
651  
652  
653  
654  
655  
656  
657  
658  
659  
660  
661  
662  
663  
664  
665  
666  
667  
668  
669  
670  
671  
672  
673  
674  
675  
676  
677  
678  
679  
680  
681  
682  
683  
684  
685  
686  
687  
688  
689  
690  
691  
692  
693  
694  
695  
696  
697  
698  
699  
700  
701  
702  
703  
704  
705  
706  
707  
708  
709  
710  
711  
712  
713  
714  
715  
716  
717  
718  
719  
720  
721  
722  
723  
724  
725  
726  
727  
728  
729  
730  
731  
732  
733  
734  
735  
736  
737  
738  
739  
740  
741  
742  
743  
744  
745  
746  
747  
748  
749  
750  
751  
752  
753  
754  
755  
756  
757  
758  
759  
760  
761  
762  
763  
764  
765  
766  
767  
768  
769  
770  
771  
772  
773  
774  
775  
776  
777  
778  
779  
780  
781  
782  
783  
784  
785  
786  
787  
788  
789  
790  
791  
792  
793  
794  
795  
796  
797  
798  
799  
800  
801  
802  
803  
804  
805  
806  
807  
808  
809  
810  
811  
812  
813  
814  
815  
816  
817  
818  
819  
820  
821  
822  
823  
824  
825  
826  
827  
828  
829  
830  
831  
832  
833  
834  
835  
836  
837  
838  
839  
840  
841  
842  
843  
844  
845  
846  
847  
848  
849  
850  
851  
852  
853  
854  
855  
856  
857  
858  
859  
860  
861  
862  
863  
864  
865  
866  
867  
868  
869  
870  
871  
872  
873  
874  
875  
876  
877  
878  
879  
880  
881  
882  
883  
884  
885  
886  
887  
888  
889  
890  
891  
892  
893  
894  
895  
896  
897  
898  
899  
900  
901  
902  
903  
904  
905  
906  
907  
908  
909  
910  
911  
912  
913  
914  
915  
916  
917  
918  
919  
920  
921  
922  
923  
924  
925  
926  
927  
928  
929  
930  
931  
932  
933  
934  
935  
936  
937  
938  
939  
940  
941  
942  
943  
944  
945  
946  
947  
948  
949  
950  
951  
952  
953  
954  
955  
956  
957  
958  
959  
960  
961  
962  
963  
964  
965  
966  
967  
968  
969  
970  
971  
972  
973  
974  
975  
976  
977  
978  
979  
980  
981  
982  
983  
984  
985  
986  
987  
988  
989  
990  
991  
992  
993  
994  
995  
996  
997  
998  
999  
1000

‘If I am paying thousand [rupees] for school, let me pay another five hundred [rupees] to the  
tutor as well’.

The implication was that people who had to pay for education tried harder to ensure their children's  
success and therefore, readily paid for additional private coaching, whereas, parents whose children  
received free state education did not care how their children did at school. In his view, the *willingness*  
– not the *ability* – to spend and ensure that one's children succeeded, distinguished parents of students  
in private schools from those of children in government schools. However, parents like Lakshmi



1  
2  
3 approached children's schooling differently:  
4  
5

6 'Now see, my Raviraj studies in [a] government [school] but I pay for tuition too... let me  
7  
8 spend, so that my child would learn something.'  
9

10  
11 Here, Lakshmi is saying that just because she did not have to pay fees for Raviraj's schooling it did  
12  
13 not mean that she was loath to spend on her son's education. Indeed, like some other labour class  
14  
15 parents she and Mahesh had also enrolled their younger son in a private school as private schooling at  
16  
17 primary level is more affordable than that at higher levels. Secondly, since it took parents a few years  
18  
19 of stable incomes to be able to afford private schooling, often, only the youngest children could attend  
20  
21 private schools. However, teachers failed to empathise with these socioeconomic realities of labour  
22  
23 class families, and this failure shaped both their pedagogic and disciplinary practices.  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

### 30 **Teaching and disciplining 'labour class' children**

31  
32  
33 Lipman (1998, 82) argues that the deficit model tends to be 'reflected in lower expectations for  
34  
35 academic performance, a watered-down curriculum, more rote learning, and an emphasis on  
36  
37 controlling behaviour.' I also found this to be true, and in this section, I show how such a deficit model  
38  
39 was reflected in verbal and physical aggression by several (but not all) teachers; and their inability to  
40  
41 recognise pupils' struggles or efforts to learn and succeed.  
42  
43  
44

45  
46 Following fieldnotes taken during Prabha Shinde's Sanskrit class capture important aspects of  
47  
48 classroom activity and the aggression pupils faced regularly. She was the Class Teacher for Class VIII  
49  
50 and was responsible for administrative work relating to examinations, disbursement of welfare benefits  
51  
52 and the infrequent cultural activity organised at the school. As a result, despite her efforts she struggled  
53  
54 to finish her syllabus in time for the monthly tests.  
55

56  
57 Prabha Shinde is being particularly vicious today. She seems terribly frustrated. Shivam (UC)  
58  
59 got hit too hard, his head banged against the wall. His twin sister, Shweta, was asked to come  
60

1  
2  
3 sit in front. Everyone seemed a bit upset and subdued.  
4

5  
6 Of the teachers, only Usha Pandey gets along without abusing and hitting the kids at all.  
7

8 (Fieldnotes)  
9

10  
11 That day, once the students settled down Prabha Shinde started on her administrative work. After a  
12  
13 few minutes Pramod Bhargav, the Hindi teacher, came in without her permission and begun a round  
14  
15 of the classroom, shouting orders at the students without any provocation:  
16

17  
18 ‘Sit straight!’, ‘Look at the board!’, ‘Take out your book!’ He says all this very aggressively...  
19  
20 almost like abusing. So much contempt in such simple words. (Fieldnotes)  
21  
22

23  
24 Throughout Pramod Bhargav’s visit and after he left Prabha Shinde continued to work through the list  
25  
26 of pupils who still needed to submit caste certificates for caste and income-based scholarships; she  
27  
28 alternated between repeating instructions on how to obtain the certificates, and reproving the children.  
29

30  
31 Prabha Shinde said, ‘An order has come from above that everyone’s caste certificates must be  
32  
33 prepared... you don’t have time, your parents don’t have time, *we* have a lot of time!’ She then  
34  
35 listed the names of all the students who were yet to submit their caste certificates. She also hit  
36  
37 Raviraj and others, commenting: ‘No matter how much you are hit, scolded, it doesn’t make a  
38  
39 difference!’ She then recapitulated the sources and processes for obtaining a caste certificate.  
40  
41  
42 (fieldnotes)  
43  
44

45  
46 While she was still in the classroom the Manish Tiwari, also came in to announce instructions for the  
47  
48 annual, state-wide standardised test, *Pratibha Parv* (‘Talent Fest’). The *Pratibha Parv* required  
49  
50 students to take tests in a multiple-choice format in all subjects, participate in co-curricular activity on  
51  
52 the day and have all their notebooks and project files inspected by state officials. In a system centred  
53  
54 on textbooks (Kumar 1988) and constrained by inadequate resources (Jha 2005), standardised testing  
55  
56 encouraged further bureaucratisation and rigidity in terms of content, pedagogy, and the order and time  
57  
58 in which lessons were done. Thus, teachers’ objectives were limited to explaining lesson content and  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 ensuring that all pupils had ‘completed’ their notebooks, i.e., neatly written down answers to all  
4  
5 questions at the end of each lesson in the textbook. Some teachers followed this process diligently  
6  
7 whilst others rarely did any of it, instead, distributing ‘guides’<sup>1</sup> and directing students to copy answers  
8  
9 from these. Pramod Bhargav fell in the latter category. Later that day, during the Hindi period, I  
10  
11 observed the following:  
12  
13

14  
15 Pramod Bhargav just entered the classroom and he is doing a round. He often steps on the ends  
16  
17 of children’s clothes and their stationery – doesn’t take care not to do that. Sometimes other  
18  
19 teachers also do this. He is asking several students to show him their ‘completed’ notebooks:  
20  
21 ‘take out your notebook!’, ‘sit straight!’, ‘Show me your notebook! How much have you  
22  
23 completed?’ He has never shown interest in the status of their work so far – but now the  
24  
25 *Pratibha Parv* is approaching. He shouted at Sandeep (SC), ‘Who will write the rest? Your  
26  
27 grandfather? Will he come from above and finish this?’ He then threw the boy’s notebook  
28  
29 down and threatened, ‘I will show this to Sir’ referring to Manish Tiwari. He also shouted at  
30  
31 Shivam (UC) and asked him to leave the class. He held up Bindu’s (OBC) notebook as an  
32  
33 example of good work... spent entire period looking at notebooks. (Fieldnotes)  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38

39 Throughout fieldwork I observed this pattern of humiliation, undignified treatment and stress on  
40  
41 mindless copying and memorising of answers to questions in the textbooks. This frequency and  
42  
43 intensity of physical and verbal aggression was possible in state schools precisely because these were  
44  
45 labour class children and not middle-class ones. For example, Prabha Shinde and Pramod Bhargav  
46  
47 frequently addressed their pupils as ‘*jaanwar*’ (animal), a practice that would not be countenanced by  
48  
49 middle-class parents.  
50  
51

52  
53 Teachers also expressed explicit resentment at the time and effort spent in welfare disbursement because  
54  
55 they saw these as ‘freebies’ being wasted on ‘undeserving’ pupils and designed originally to inveigle  
56  
57

---

58  
59 1 Books that offer summaries of lessons and answers to questions in school textbooks. These are available for all levels of education and all kinds  
60 of syllabi in Indian markets.

1  
2  
3 'greedy' parents into sending children to school. Prabha Shinde and Jyoti Gupta often made comments  
4  
5 like the following:  
6  
7

8           Prabha Shinde to Raviraj (SC) and Ashok (SC): 'Why don't you get new school uniforms  
9           stitched? [You] keep showing up in torn clothes! Government has given you the money, hasn't  
10           it?' (Fieldnotes)  
11  
12  
13  
14

15  
16 Teachers failed to appreciate that the money provided by the state was inadequate for two sets of  
17  
18 uniforms, and school-related expenses, like notebooks, bags and shoes exhausted the meagre incomes  
19  
20 of parents like Lakshmi. Such comments also capture teachers' classed and casted 'illiberalism'  
21  
22 (Fernandes and Heller 2006). Since liberalization offered the largely upper caste middle class the  
23  
24 promise of greater upward mobility they have failed to see how it worsened informal workers' working  
25  
26 conditions; why welfare benefits are crucial to the latter's survival, or how informal workers have  
27  
28 fought for these benefits from the state, asserting rights as citizens when employers refuse to grant fair  
29  
30 wages and social security (Agarwala 2013).  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 Teachers' also felt frustrated with welfare administration because it took up time and effort that should  
36  
37 have been spent teaching. Usha Pandey, who avoided doing any of her administrative work in the  
38  
39 classroom, regretted that this work had not allowed her to focus on "weaker" students at the beginning  
40  
41 of the academic year thus affecting those students' performance all year. This was also because state  
42  
43 schools, despite being a crucial link between labour class children and the welfare state, lacked support  
44  
45 staff and adequate infrastructure. An old computer had been donated by a local bank, but there was no  
46  
47 internet, landline phone, or printer at the school. Teachers had occasionally also had to pay for  
48  
49 expenses out of their pockets: e.g., electricity bills, photocopying official documents, remunerating the  
50  
51 casually employed and low-paid Midday Meal Helper for additional work. India's school system has  
52  
53 always been stratified and post-liberalisation privatisation has intensified even as state spending on  
54  
55 school education has reduced or stagnated (Jha 2005). Thus, whilst the large mass of Indians continues  
56  
57 to rely on state schools, this category of schools operates with much fewer resources compared to elite  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 private and government schools (ibid, Nambissan and Batra 1989). Significantly, it was under the  
4 (post)colonial state that teachers turned into ‘important local functionaries of the government  
5 bureaucracy’; if this led to manifold increase in teachers’ administrative burden it also compounded  
6 their authority, viz. a viz. labour class communities as they began to mediate the latter’s relationship  
7 with the modern state (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian 2003, 52).  
8  
9

10 I suggest that lack of infrastructure and stratified schooling shape middle-class teachers’ relationships  
11 with labour class pupils and pedagogic and disciplinary processes in the classroom. I found Prabha  
12 Shinde acting differently in the classroom sometimes when she was free of administrative work. For  
13 example, one afternoon she had to cover for Usha Pandey. Even though Science was not her subject,  
14 Prabha Shinde made students read out passages from the ongoing science lesson, explained meanings  
15 of difficult words to the pupils, and showed uncharacteristic patience with Taruna (SC) who was  
16 considered a ‘weak’ student and was nervous about reading out loud. Though rare, these instances of  
17 kindness and patience show that given the right kind of support teachers and classrooms could be quite  
18 different.  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

35  
36 Such instances also had the potential to motivate pupils. In the weeks leading to the *Pratibha Parv*  
37 Manish Tiwari spent all his spare time revising mathematical concepts with Class VIII pupils and thus,  
38 supplementing regular teaching by Preeti Mali. The test largely required only basic knowledge of most  
39 subjects and revising concepts from lower grades was useful in preparing for it. This proved to be quite  
40 useful for pupils since many of them struggled with concepts from Classes VI and VII. During one  
41 such revision class Manish Tiwari asked pupils to recite multiplication tables and invited Taruna to  
42 the front:  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51

52  
53 Taruna tried to speak twice and then Manish Tiwari asked her to write. He praised her for her  
54 courage and confidence in speaking before three teachers (including me) and the whole class....  
55 [He is] very warm and supportive today. Got people to clap for her after multiplication tables  
56 of 9 and 12. (Fieldnotes)  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 In the weeks following this episode I found Taruna making impressive efforts to engage in class and  
4 prepare for examinations; this was striking given her previous disengagement. She even began to tackle  
5 Math problems on her own. That Manish Tiwari's efforts and praise were responsible was evident  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10 from the fact that during her regular Math class, taught by Preeti Mali, Taruna still refused to copy  
11  
12  
13 anything from the blackboard.

14  
15 I've asked Taruna in interviews why she does not write anything during classes and she often  
16  
17 shrugs or laughs at the question because she, perhaps, thinks that I've no right to ask. Today  
18  
19 during Math class she snapped back at me: 'What good will it be to write?' Just before that  
20  
21 waving her hand at the blackboard full of sums Preeti Mali had solved, she demanded, 'you  
22  
23 have written so much, explain what it is too!' (Fieldnotes)

24  
25  
26  
27 Taruna's efforts and remarks capture the centrality of teachers' efforts to pupils' learning and  
28  
29 motivation. But even teachers who taught sincerely failed to see that their efforts motivated pupils to  
30  
31 try harder to engage. I found that even pupils who were regularly scolded by Prabha Shinde, Manish  
32  
33 Tiwari and Usha Pandey tried to follow their instructions and engage with their teaching. However,  
34  
35 ignorant of such efforts, all three teachers despaired of any improvement in their pupils' levels of  
36  
37 motivation or achievement. They did not find the overwhelming reliance on rote-learning, which  
38  
39 required regular support at home, problematic. They did not seem to appreciate that 'first generation  
40  
41 learners' may have a specific set of pedagogic needs (Ramachandran 2004); or that an unsympathetic  
42  
43 and aggressive atmosphere could prevent students from approaching them for help. Except Usha  
44  
45 Pandey, who wanted a proper library and smaller class-size, no teacher expressed any inclination to  
46  
47 examine teaching methods, textbook content, or their view of their pupils. They only saw that labour  
48  
49 class pupils' achievements fell below required levels, which they blamed on pupils' and parents'  
50  
51 perceived lack of effort. They 'believed that student deficiencies, rooted in social conditions beyond  
52  
53 the school, posed an insurmountable obstacle.' (Lipman 1998, p.81) This view prevented them from  
54  
55 noticing Taruna's excitement at her smallest conceptual advancement, her struggle to build on it, or  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 from offering appropriate support.  
4  
5  
6  
7

## 8 **Conclusion**

9  
10  
11 This paper challenges (inter)national development discourses around the relationship between  
12 schooling and poverty in the global South by interrogating classroom processes and teacher-pupil  
13 relations in an urban Indian state school in the light of poor pupils' socioeconomic locations and wider  
14 economic logics. It makes important empirical and theoretical contributions to sociological analyses  
15 of schooling by developing and demonstrating a theoretical framework that brings together political  
16 economy perspectives, sociological analyses of economic inequality and the notion of 'deficit view'  
17 to explain how class and caste relations inscribe teacher-pupil interaction and relations. It shows the  
18 economic and physical hardships faced by poor parents and how economic constraints shape their  
19 efforts to support their children's schooling. While poverty restricts labour class families' options to  
20 state schools with inadequate infrastructure, parents' inability to cope with academic demands of  
21 schooling also makes their children's classroom lives harder. Poverty also forces parents to rely on  
22 welfare while their working conditions prevent them from meeting bureaucratic demands relating to  
23 welfare disbursement at school, especially, submitting documents proving eligibility.  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40

41  
42 Teachers' failure to recognise these struggles further strengthens their perception of labour class  
43 children as unteachable and unmanageable; whilst this deficit view renders children's struggles and  
44 efforts to learn invisible for teachers, it also keeps the focus on disciplining pupils rather than  
45 supporting their learning. The deficit model is reflected not only in classroom practice but in policy as  
46 well; it leaves state schools ill-provisioned when these are the only schools accessible to poor pupils  
47 whose parents cannot summon the educational and financial capital that middle class parents can. Thus,  
48 socioeconomic and educational stratification combine to produce both, 'labour class' pupils as well as  
49 their specific experiences of struggle and marginalisation in the classroom. Clearly, the questions of  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 poverty and poor pupils' schooling are complex economic and political ones, not individual or societal  
4  
5 ones, and need to be addressed in conjunction with each other.  
6  
7  
8  
9

## 10 11 **References**

12  
13  
14 Agarwala, Rina. 2006. "From Work to Welfare: A New Class Movement in India." *Critical Asian*  
15  
16 *Studies* 38(4): 419-444.

17  
18  
19 Agarwala, Rina. 2013. *Informal Labor, Formal Politics, and Dignified Discontent in India*. New York:  
20  
21 Cambridge University Press.

22  
23  
24 Balagopalan, Sarada and Ramya Subrahmanian. 2003. "Dalit and Adivasi Children in Schools: Some  
25  
26 Preliminary Research Themes and Findings." *IDS Bulletin* 34(1): 43-54.

27  
28  
29 Batra, Poonam. 2015. "Quality of Education and the Poor: Constraints on Learning." *Poverty &*  
30  
31 *Education Working Paper Series, Max Weber Stiftung*.

32  
33  
34 Bhatta, Kiran. 1998a. Educational deprivation in India: a survey of field investigations. *Economic and*  
35  
36 *political Weekly*, 33(27): 1731-1740.

37  
38  
39 Bhatta, Kiran. 1998b. Educational deprivation in India: a survey of field investigations. *Economic and*  
40  
41 *political Weekly*, 33(28): 1858-1869.

42  
43  
44 Breman, Jan. 1996. *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
45  
46 University Press.

47  
48  
49 Cammack, Paul. 2004. "What the World Bank Means by Poverty Reduction, and Why it Matters."  
50  
51 *New Political Economy*, 9(2): 189-211.

52  
53  
54 Centre for Equity Studies. *India Exclusion Report 2018-19*. Centre for Equity Studies and Yoda Press.  
55  
56 <https://indiaexclusionreport.in/>. Accessed 28 Sep 2020.

57  
58  
59 Deshpande, Ashwini. 2001. "Caste at Birth? Redefining Disparity in India." *Review of Development*  
60



1  
2  
3 *Economics*, 5(1): 130-144.  
4

5  
6 Deshpande, Ashwini. 2011. *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*.  
7  
8 Oxford University Press.  
9

10  
11 Deshpande, Ashwini and Smriti Sharma. 2013. "Entrepreneurship or Survival? Caste and Gender of  
12  
13 Small Business in India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(28): 38-49.  
14

15  
16 Fernandes, Leela and Patrick Heller. 2006. "Hegemonic Aspirations." *Critical Asian Studies* 38 (4):  
17  
18 495–522.  
19

20  
21 Goswami, Nirmali. 2019. "'Ours is a semi-English medium school.' Schooling aspirations and a  
22  
23 neighbourhood school in Banaras." *Poverty & Education Working Paper Series, Max Weber Stiftung*.  
24

25  
26 Harriss-White, Barbara and Nandini Gooptu. 2001. "Mapping India's World of Unorganized Labour."  
27  
28 *Socialist Register*, 37. <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5757>. Accessed 27 Sep  
29  
30 2020.  
31

32  
33 ILO (International Labour Organization). 2018. *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A*  
34  
35 *Statistical Picture 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* Geneva: International Labour Office.  
36  
37 [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_626831/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_626831/lang--en/index.htm) (accessed 27 Sep  
38  
39 2020).  
40  
41

42  
43 Iyer, Suvasini. 2013. "An Ethnographic Study of Disciplinary and Pedagogic Practices in a Primary  
44  
45 Class." *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 10(2): 163-195.  
46

47  
48 Jaffrelot, Christophe, Atul Kohli and Kanta Murali, eds. 2019. *Business and politics in India*. Modern  
49  
50 South Asia.  
51

52  
53 Jha, Praveen. 2005. "Withering Commitments and Weakening Progress: State and Education in the  
54  
55 Era of Neoliberal Reforms." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(33): 3677-3684.  
56

57  
58 Jodhka, Surinder. 2018. *Caste in contemporary India*. Abingdon Oxon: Routledge.  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Kamat, Sangeeta. 2015. "Inequality in Education." *Seminar* #672. Available at: [https://www.india-](https://www.india-seminar.com/2015/672/672_sangeeta_kamat.htm)  
4 seminar.com/2015/672/672\_sangeeta\_kamat.htm.  
5  
6  
7  
8 Kothari, Rajni. 1994. "Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste." *Economic and Political*  
9 *Weekly*, 29(26): 1589-1594.  
10  
11  
12  
13 Krishna, K., 1988. *Origins of India's "textbook culture"*. New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and  
14 Library.  
15  
16  
17  
18 Kumar, Krishna. 2013. *Politics of Education in Colonial India*. Routledge.  
19  
20  
21 Lipman, P., 1998. *Race, class, and power in school restructuring*. Albany: State University of New  
22 York Press.  
23  
24  
25  
26 Manjrekar, Nandini. 2019. "The Neighbourhood and the School: Conflict, Educational  
27 Marginalisation and the State in Contemporary Gujarat." *Poverty & Education Working Paper Series*,  
28 *Max Weber Stiftung*.  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33 Majumdar, Manabi and Jos E Mooij. 2011. *Education and Inequality in India: A Classroom View*.  
34 London: Routledge.  
35  
36  
37  
38 Manjrekar, Nandini. 2007. "Ideal child in the ideal nation." *EMIGRA working papers*, (62): 0001-11.  
39  
40  
41 Menon, Nivedita and Aditya Nigam. 2007. *Power and Contestation: India Since 1989*. London: Zed  
42 Books.  
43  
44  
45  
46 Nambissan, Geetha. 2013. "Opening Up the Black Box?" In *Sociology of education in India changing*  
47 *contours and emerging concerns*, edited by Geetha B. Nambissan and S. Srinivasa Rao, 84-103. New  
48 Delhi: Oxford University Press.  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53 Nambissan Geetha. 2014. Research in Sociology of School Education in India, 2000-10. In Singh,  
54 Yogendra. ed. *ICSSR research surveys and explorations: Indian sociology*, vol. 2.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59 Nambissan, Geetha and Poonam Batra. 1989. "Equity and excellence: Issues in Indian Education."  
60

1  
2  
3 *Social Scientist*, 17(9/10): 56-73.  
4

5  
6 Nambissan, Geetha and S. Srinivasa Rao, eds. 2013. *Sociology of Education in India Changing*  
7  
8 *Contours and Emerging Concerns*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.  
9

10  
11 National Sample Survey. 2014. *Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, July 2011-June*  
12  
13 *2012*. New Delhi: Ministry of Statistics and Programme and Implementation.  
14

15  
16 Pandian, M. S. S. 2002. "One Step Outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and Public Sphere."  
17  
18 *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(18):1735-1741.  
19

20  
21 Pappu, Rekha. 2002. "Within the Edifice of Development: Education of Women in India." *IDS Bulletin*,  
22  
23 *35(4)*: 27-33.  
24

25  
26 Pappu, R. and D. Vasanta. 2010. Educational Quality and Social Inequality: Reflecting on the Link.  
27  
28 *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 7(1): 94-117.  
29

30  
31 Sarangapani, Padma. 2010. "Quality Concerns: national and extra-national dimensions."  
32  
33 *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 7(1): 41-57.  
34

35  
36 Save the Children 2014. *Wings 2014. The world of India's girls. A Status report*. New Delhi: Save the  
37  
38 Children. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/8749/pdf/wingsreportpdf.pdf>. Accessed, 28  
39  
40 Sep 2020.  
41  
42

43  
44 Shain, Farzana. 2013. "'The Girl Effect': Exploring Narratives of Gendered Impacts and Opportunities  
45  
46 in Neoliberal Development." *Sociological Research Online*, 18(2): 181-191.  
47

48  
49 Srija, A. and S. V. Shirke. 2014. *An Analysis of the Informal Labour Market in India. Economy Matters*.  
50  
51 <http://www.ies.gov.in/pdfs/CII%20EM-october-2014.pdf>. Accessed, 28 Sep 2020.  
52

53  
54 Sriprakash, Arathi. 2012. *Pedagogies for Development: The Politics and Practice of Child-centred*  
55  
56 *Education in India*. Dordrecht: Springer.  
57

58  
59 Talib, Mohammad. 2003. "Modes of Learning-Labour Relations: Educational Strategies and Child  
60

Labour.” In *Child Labour and the Right to Education in South Asia*, edited by Naila Kabeer, Geetha Nambissan and Ramya Subrahmanian, 143-163. Sage.

Tukdeo, S., 2019. *India Goes to School*. Springer India.

United Nations Development Programme. 2004. *Estimating Informal Employment and Poverty in India*. New Delhi: UNDP.

Vasavi, A. R. 2003. “Schooling for a New Society? The Social and Political Bases of Education Deprivation in India.” *IDS Bulletin* 34(1): 43-54.

Velaskar, Padma. 2010. “Quality and Inequality in Indian Education: Some Critical Policy Concerns.” *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 7(1): 58-93.

Velaskar, Padma. 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*, edited by Geetha B. Nambissan and S. Srinivasa Rao, 103-135. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Unni, Jeemol. 2006. “Contours of Conflict and Coalition: Rise of the Intermediate Classes and Castes.” In *Contested Transformations: Changing Economies and Identities in Contemporary India*, edited by Mary E. John, Praveen K. Jha and Surinder S. Jodhka, 237-260, Tulika Books.

---

i I discuss the intersections of gender with caste and class-based exclusion elsewhere (Author 2020).

ii I have discussed urban children’s (un)waged work elsewhere (Author 2018, 2020).

iii In this paper I follow India’s official classification: ‘Others’ are upper caste (UC) Hindus and everyone else who does not fall into the other three categories; ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBC) are located between upper castes and ‘Scheduled Castes’ (SC) who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and the ex-‘untouchable’ castes. Scheduled Tribes (ST) are not considered part of the caste system and economic discrimination faced by the socioeconomically and educationally marginalised STs is beyond the scope of this paper. I have used following short-forms throughout: UC, OBC, SC, ST.

iv Pseudonyms used throughout.

v She will be replaced later in the academic year by Geeta Sisodiya (UC).

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

---

vi OBC and Others include Muslim pupils as well but economic discrimination based on religion was beyond the scope of my project.  
vii Indigenous equivalent of cigarette, made from roll *tendu* leaves.

For Peer Review Only