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*Navigating School Development and Children's Rights Governance in Resource-Poor  
Contexts in Karnataka, India.*

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy –  
PhD

**School of Education**

**College of Social Sciences**

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## **Abstract**

How do participants in school governance govern rights-based policies to education? In north Karnataka, India, School Development and Management Committees (SDMCs) are legal governance bodies where marginalised, resource-poor citizens can govern school affairs and enact school development goals. India's 2009 Right to Education not only focuses on development goals, but also emphasises a rights-based approach that implicates notions of childhood and discourses of children's rights. Therefore, school governance is also bound up with governing the rights attached to the right to education. The dual nature of governance- its potential for emphasising structural inequality as well as its capacity for social empowerment- signify a middle ground, where perils coexist with promise. In this dissertation, I investigate the practice of school development and child rights governance in two government schools, one rural, one urban in Kalaburagi, north Karnataka. Taking a theoretical approach that fuses key developments in the studies of governance and childhood, I concentrate on eliciting narratives of the bottom-up practice of governance from resource-poor parents, children, teachers, and activists. Designing a qualitative methodology to elicit these narratives, I relied on a variety of research methods: group and individual interviews, observations, fieldnotes, and arts-based interviews during two phases of research in the field spanning three months and two weeks in total. Through thematic analysis of prevalent patterns in participants' accounts, I found that while governance demanded much effort and commitment from participants, they rationalised their efforts (and governance failures) through a discourse of care. Care for children was instrumental in helping participants navigate the middle ground of governance, preserve their motivation, and orient their practice.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institutions.

**Printed name** Rebecca Ipe

**Signature** Rebecca Ipe

## **Definitions/Abbreviations**

ASER: Annual Status of Education Report

CBM: Community-based management

DPEP: District Primary Education Program

EFA: Education for All

NEP: National Educational Policy

POCSO: Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act

RTE : The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

SDG: School development governance

SBM: School-based management

SDMC: School Development and Management Committee

SSA: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

TET: Teacher Eligibility Test

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## Chapter 1 Introduction

In “The Governance of Families in India: Education, Rights and Responsibility,” R Maithreyi and Arathi Sriprakash (2018) draw attention to an emerging pattern in Indian public education, in which families and community form partnerships with schools to govern children’s right to education. The narrative of education reform, they aver, now follows a discourse “of family responsibility for education... in which parents are expected to be ‘morally’ compelled to meet the state’s education goals” (p. 352). In this pattern, the narrative of welfarism historically present in India’s education reform is currently eclipsed by the narrative of responsibility and governance. Technically, school governance features “devolved systems of education planning managed through the interaction, cooperation and co-influence of multiple stakeholders” (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2018, p. 5). Maithreyi and Sriprakash spotlight the Indian features of a global phenomenon, where school-community partnerships are increasingly touted as solutions for low educational achievement and service delivery. These policies follow a line of thinking that assumes that communities as school “stakeholders” are more motivated and operate as short routes to accountability (Barerra-Osorio *et al.*, 2009). In the hands of parents, school development governance is rendered a daily technical exercise, a hoped-for habit with the hoped-for benefits of accountability: increased efficiency and school quality.

Emphasising participation, and collective action seeks to counter India’s uneven and sobering human development record. It lags behind in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries in which it is frequently grouped as a ‘rising superpower’ and its service deliveries in education and health tend to be closer to less-economically developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Dreze & Sen, 2002; Kingdon, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. The chasm between the elite and urban middle-classes and those living below the poverty line are often visually depicted in images of slums clustering around skyscrapers (Boo, 2012). Keeping this context in mind is crucial to understanding how participation in governance is framed and how governance subjectivities and norms are marked by the rhetoric and imagery of crisis. Commenting on the diversity, divergence and volatility of educational reforms in India, Shivali Tukdeo (2019) asseverates that in India, “educational expansion and educational crisis are closely connected” (p.7). Therefore, school governance participants are not only called to manage schools, but to manage poverty, and respond to the crisis poverty generates.

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<sup>1</sup> The average literacy rate in India is 74.04%, with 63.6 million children estimated to be out of school (Source: <https://in.one.un.org/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-4/>)

To problematize this governance phenomenon in India, Maithreyi and Sriprakash focused on three major characteristics. The first was the decentralisation of education, where “communities” are “increasingly positioned as sites of efficient delivery” (p. 353). As opposed to their previously passive roles as development recipients, parents and poor families have been repurposed by policy into development actors, human resources, and stakeholders in school affairs. Lending support to school governance policies are children’s rights-based approaches, notably India’s landmark Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2009, which guaranteed universal education to children between 6 and 14. Maithreyi and Sriprakash emphasised how school governance discourses of rights and responsibilities are being applied to “poor and marginalised families (who) are being required to incorporate themselves, vis-à-vis their ‘rights’, into a deeply unequal system” (p. 353)

This “whole school approach to human rights” (Lundy, Orr & Shier, 2017, p. 374) is implicated in global movements such as Education For All (EFA) as well as wider development rhetoric. Leon Tikly (2017) argues that EFA should be understood as “a global regime of educational governance”, signalling a move by international organisations into the sphere of politics. Spurring this turn towards governance was acknowledgement by influential global actors such as the World Bank that aid assistance had so far proven ineffective. A different strategy was needed to engineer development via political, social, and economic channels (Santos, 2001). The new governance regime problematized poverty not only in terms of material resources, but also in terms of political power. The World Bank, for instance, highlighted corruption as an endemic concern that thwarted poverty alleviation in many developing countries. Not only would governance render institutions accountable to the poor, but participation was intended as a hallmark feature that would render governance more effective in reaching educational access and quality.

Maithreyi and Sriprakash’s paper was not revealing novel information, nor even necessarily charting a nascent trend. Indeed, school-community partnerships, or school-based governance had been institutionalised in India for decades in the form of SMCs (School Management Committees) (Govinda & Bandhyopadhyay, 2011). Even before the RTE, national educational development programs had instated VECs (Village Education Councils), an early prototype of school-community partnerships. A form of decentralised governance existed in village *panchayats*, rural semi-autonomous administrative bodies that had endured through centuries of feudal regimes and British colonial occupation. Rather, Maithreyi and Sriprakash’s contribution spotlights how the school has become a key site of managing both development and human rights ills as well as the corresponding lack of research on the perspectives of families participating in school governance. Despite

the flurry of school governance and education policies, there was little research that illuminated the relationship “between the embodied human subject and social policy” (Bansel, 2015, p. 5). Families’ relationships, agency, and mediation with the state, they believed, continued to be overlooked, despite the centrality of communities to the education development agenda. Additionally, Maithreyi and Sriprakash argued that despite the apparently empowering premise of participatory school governance, neoliberal practices prevailed and reinforced educational inequalities.

In excavating different facets of school governance, the assertions of these authors helped my dissertation evolve over the span of fieldwork and analysis. In late 2018, I had arrived in Kalaburagi district, located in the northern region of Karnataka state.<sup>2</sup> My initial intention was to study one arm of school governance: specifically, the social dynamics of SDMCs (School Development and Management Committees), local governance bodies that brought school staff and parents together to manage school affairs. My interests lay in seeking to understand how diverse implicated actors, i.e., school staff, parents, students, and NGO workers, navigated school governance policy and practice. Each government school had been mandated in India’s 1986 National Education Policy (NPE) to appoint school management committees. In Karnataka, they bear the label of SDMCs. Indeed, Karnataka’s history with school governance bodies predates the RTE. The state government had issued an executive order for SDMCs to be formed in 2001, with around 90% of schools complying by the end of the year (Niranjanaradhya, 2014). Therefore, school governance in Karnataka arose from state rather than central command, which gives the state a unique governance history.

During my first three months in Kalaburagi, interacting with two school communities and a constellation of ‘stakeholders’, my loose research orientation coalesced into a wider preoccupation with school governance as a practice. I soon realised that my research focus on SDMCs was too narrow. In my initial theorizations around school governance bodies, I had incorporated the lenses of Childhood Studies, to hopefully throw additional light on how children understood and navigated their families’ repurposing from passive development subjects (as Maithreyi and Sriprakash had demonstrated in their historical analysis) to governance actors. These lenses nudged me beyond explorations of

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<sup>2</sup> As of January 2021, India has 28 states and 8 union territories. Although under federal command, each state has its own administrative and legislative government headed by a Chief Minister. Karnataka is geographically located in South India, and its primary language, Kannada, descends from the Dravidian language family. It is helpful to think of each Indian state as linguistically and culturally distinct, almost a country on its own. Karnatakan citizens further identify themselves regionally (as coming from the North or South) and also from their natal *gaon* (representing a village or town community). Indeed a Karnatakan from the coastal city of Mangalore can regard one born in Kalaburagi as slightly other based on differing dialects, cuisines, and social customs.

SDMC functioning. My fieldwork extended to interrogating governance as a practice amongst the diversity of actors implicated in it. A key appeal of participation in governance is its apparent ability to secure accountability for marginalised people groups. But as Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava and Véron. (2005, p. 3) remark in their reflections on rural governance:

It is one thing to provide institutions to promote accountability and decision-making at the panchayat, Block and District levels, and quite another to produce men and women who are able to participate effectively in these new or revamped structures. The production of skilled citizens is not something that happens overnight.

Corbridge *et al.*'s (2005) work is instrumental in pointing out that governance policies do not merely birth additional accountability or efficiency. Rather, these policies intend to produce 'skilled citizens', skilled, presumably, in responding to current problems of educational service delivery and poverty. The governance approach to school development is hardly unique to India. It also manifests in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods and schools from the United States to Europe (Ruiz-Román *et al.*, 2019; Lunneblad, 2019) and is supported by influential discourses from organisational psychology and neoliberal economics.

My interests lay in seeking to understand how different implicated actors: school staff, parents, students, and NGO workers navigated school governance policy and practice. Moreover, the contentions of Maithreyi and Sriprakash and my own observations in the field indicated that the ambit of school governance also encompassed children's rights. To govern the school, was by extension, to govern children's rights. My research was divided into two phases. I lived in Kalaburagi, north Karnataka for three months in late 2018, conducting qualitative research in two government schools (one in a rural location, the other located in an urban-poor neighbourhood). In December 2019, I returned to these schools for two weeks of interviewing. Additionally, I interviewed schoolteachers and students at a government high school that served the rural location I researched. I further added data from interviews with academics and NGO workers in Karnataka's capital city, Bangalore, who were directly involved with SDMCs, or child rights governance.

This research project originated in my own personal research interests in comparative education, international development, and India, as well as the demands of the scholarship I obtained at the University of Glasgow. As a 'second-generation' Indian-Canadian who had grown up outside of India, I was curious about how various class

groups in India engaged with education and development. Receiving a scholarship from the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow had attached me to my supervisor's research project, which concentrated on SDMCs in north Karnataka. However, I was allowed the freedom to design and carry out my own PhD project under the aegis of the larger project.

I selected Kalaburagi as a fieldwork site for two reasons. The first was convenience: canvassing the acquaintances of my extended family living in Bangalore, I was introduced to a gatekeeper who ran an organic goat farm in rural Kalaburagi. Through him I met other NGO workers who helped me stay and access government officials and schools in Kalaburagi. The second reason was that Kalaburagi was presented in local and development discourses as emblematic of social 'backwardness' and in need of development intervention. Indeed, the distinctions between North and South Karnataka were often made on the basis of their social development (or lack thereof). South Karnataka contained cosmopolitan metropolises, beaches, and a 'softer' strain of Kannada; North Karnataka was predominantly rural, produced low educational achievement, and was apparently still recovering from historic dominance by the feudal Nizams<sup>3</sup>, according to Martin, an NGO worker who'd lived in Kalaburagi for 15 years. I will elaborate more on Kalaburagi's reputation later in this chapter. In the next few paragraphs, I flesh out the contours of the theoretical and academic discussions surrounding school governance, education development reform, and children's rights.

Crisis, and childhood, are two formations I propose that are salient to understanding school governance practices. Powerful notions of the crisis of India's development record and the low levels of primary school student achievement drive policy, social narratives and norms around education reform (Tukdeo, 2019). Crisis and childhood can operate on several fronts simultaneously. They are employed not only to render the state accountable, but also schools and families. They are key formations which fuel education development and child rights governance. While education development and children's rights have historically played important roles in universal primary education campaigns in India, the move towards increased governance interprets development as a major responsibility for school actors, as well as a reflection of the nation's trajectory of progress. Children are often framed in policy as the future of the nation (Hopkins & Sriprakash, 2015), and the educational crisis which concerns them also framed as a collective concern.

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<sup>3</sup> The Nizams of Hyderabad who also ruled over northern Karnataka were one of a series of Islamic ruling dynasties that have left their stamp upon this region (Faruqui, 2009). Along with traces of Bahmani civilization in Kalaburagi itself, Bijapur, a neighbouring district, attracts tourists year-round to its iconic Gol Gumbaz, a mausoleum of the Adil Shahi Sultanate.



The ways crisis and childhood are deployed furthermore possess global antecedents. These most notably surface in global education policy-setting communities such as the World Bank and UNICEF<sup>4</sup>. If crisis is a formation that drives education development goal setting, and necessitates its governance, then childhood is a formation that legitimates school development governance and clothes it with a “moral-ethical imperative” (Nambissan & Rao, p. 159). The ethos of “good governance” where “decentralizing decision making encourages demand for a higher quality of education and ensures that schools reflect local priorities and values” (Barrera-Osorio *et al.*, 2009, p. 2) continues to be naturalized. The UN-endorsed 1995 report of the Commission on Global Governance defined governance as “the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs” (p. 2). Governance was perceived to address “failure” in the mass education systems of developing countries and figured as an attempt to charter global consensus around education development, goal setting, and norms. As Barnett and Duval (2005, p. 1) note, “the very language of global governance conjures up the possibility and the desirability of effecting progressive change in global life through the establishment of a normative consensus- a collective purpose...” The transfer of responsibility from a central education office to the community is framed by governance advocates as securing two main benefits: social empowerment and increased education quality at the school level. Community-based school governance has spread in various manifestations across much of the global South, from Latin America to Africa and Asia (Ahumada *et al.*, 2012; Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011; Kingdon & Muzammil, 2013; Channa & Faguet, 2016).

These trends in Indian school governance reflect global trends in education reform. Referred to as school-based (SBM) management or community-based management (CBM), school governance is operationalized through coalitions of local communities and schoolteachers that manage school budgets, evaluate teacher performance, and maintain school infrastructure (Edwards, 2018). Inclusion of marginalised communities and the diffusing of power through decentralised networks are promoted as the hallmarks of ‘good

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<sup>4</sup> See UNICEF. (2005). *The state of the world's children 2006: excluded and invisible*. Unicef; UNICEF. (2007). *The state of the world's children 2008: Child survival* (Vol. 8). Unicef; and more recently, Watkins, K. (2016). *The State of the World's Children 2016: A Fair Chance for Every Child*. UNICEF. 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

World Bank. 2019. *Ending Learning Poverty: What Will It Take?*. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32553>

Silwal, Ani Rudra; Engilbertsdottir, Solrun; Cuesta, Jose; Newhouse, David; Stewart, David. 2020. *Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update. Poverty and Equity Discussion Paper*. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34704>

governance', which thus intends to compensate for low accountability and low achievement rates. SDMCs are therefore an iteration of school-based management, which reflects the wider "governance turn" in education (Ball, 2009, p. 537), where power is exercised through various groups and communities along goals of service delivery.

Scholarly enquiry on school-based governance in various parts of the world has so far investigated claims that SBM improves school quality and empowerment (usually measured through student achievement and community representation). Several of these studies focus on the stakeholders of school governance: principals, teachers, parents and in rarer cases, on students (Grinshtain & Gibton, 2017; Gaziel, 2009; de Forsberg, 2009; Umar *et al*, 2017), their perceptions and practice of school governance. The research in this thesis builds upon this body of work. It utilises key theories in the field of governance studies<sup>5</sup> (a discipline dedicated to studying and theorising governance) in its research orientation.

Although governance bears multiple meanings and assumes multiple forms (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2018<sup>6</sup>), governance scholars generally agree with Ball and Junemann's (2012, p. 3) assertion that it is "accomplished through the 'informal authority' of diverse and flexible networks" as opposed to the authority of government, which is conceived of as static, hierarchical, and dispersed through the mechanism of bureaucracy. There are still distinctions, however, in how school governance is leveraged. In global South countries, the rhetoric and practice of "participation" is prevalent. Indeed, for Kristin Phillips (2012), it was in studying participation where she came to observe "how the social projects of education and development re-group and re-order people to grant them uneven rights to their own labour, property, and means of subsistence" (p. 280). This unevenness of rights, as Maithreyi and Sriprakash (2018) have noted, can trigger dissonant educational experiences for marginalised families.

## **Education Rights and Governance**

Crisis is also utilised to draw various nation states into consensus over widening educational access for marginalised children usually through the discourse of rights. These 'education rights' involved not just access to education, but its quality and intended

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<sup>5</sup> Governance scholars have not only studied the phenomenon in schools, but also political institutions, commercial sites and digital security operations (Craig & Porter, 2006; Weishaar *et al.*, 2012; Burr & Milano, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> Olmedo and Wilkins (2018, p.26) argue that education governance is difficult to define because it displays "polyvalence", assuming various guises such as policy initiatives, interventions, projects, "vehicle of empowerment" rhetoric and norm-bearing discourses.

outcomes for marginalised children (Lundy *et al.*, 2017). Spreen and Vally (2006) have highlighted how “rights to education are closely tied with human rights universals that have currency in the many international agreements, declarations, and treaties to which most countries... have signed, whereas ‘rights in education’ include education quality and opportunities to learn” (p. 353). These scholars note how rights are not “merely moral entitlements” but social products emanating from a complex network of socioeconomic and political relationships. The relational dimension to rights typifies Gurchathen Sanghera’s (2016) argument that rights are socially constructed, an argument backed by other scholars studying children’s rights (Liebel, 2012; Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013). This perspective is supported by child rights scholars who have drawn attention to the school as the site where rights can be modelled and practiced (Shallcross *et al.*, 2006).

Understanding education rights as socially constructed “and located squarely in the panoply of other dedicated rights for children” (Lundy *et al.*, 2017, p. 366) testifies to the complexity of governing rights. Rights are not merely rules (Galant & Parlevleit, 2005). The ways in which they are constructed in policy and interpreted socially impact their intended beneficiaries. To demystify the conceptual tangle of education rights, I turned to academics engaging with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). As early as 1994, Eugene Verhellen sought to order education rights through envisioning them in three parallel streams. The first was the right *to* education. The second stream dealt with children’s rights *in* education, with emphasis on participation, freedom from classroom abuse and so forth. The third stream was the realisation of rights *through* education (Verhellen, 1994). Another key commentator on children’s education rights, Katherine Tomasevski, detailed the four A’s of the right to education itself: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Adaptability. This is helpful in understanding the current limits of government schooling in Karnataka, where thus far research suggests that the focus remains on securing availability and accessibility over acceptability and adaptability (Majumdar *et al.*, 2011; Alcott & Rose, 2015; Vaidyanatha, 2016).

### **Travelling Governance Policies**

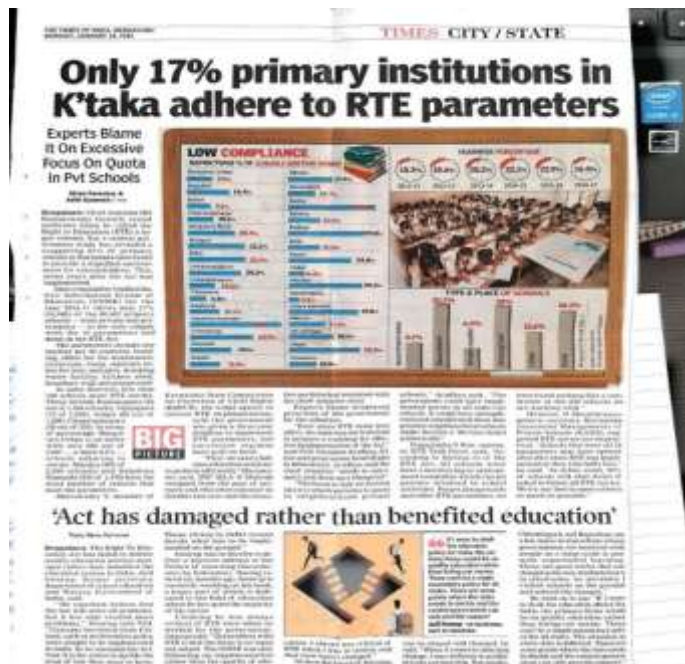
Comparative education scholarship has for decades tracked and debated how education policies travel and are translated and adapted to their country of context. While key comparativists have stressed the need to understand nuance in policy borrowing and have highlighted resistance and rejection of policy transfer in specific contexts, they admit to “links and correspondences” (Ball, 1998, p. 122) which run through global education policies. Indeed, in defining the simultaneous similarities and specificities of education

policy transfer, Robert Cowen (2009, p. 315) writes that “as it moves, it morphs.”

Underscoring how policies are adapted, Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2014) invokes the octopus as a metaphor : “local actors reach out and grab the arm of the octopus that is closest to their particular policy agenda and thereby attach (local) meaning to a “global” policy” (p. 155-156). Thus, research on policy implementation, she notes, follows two tracks. The first she categorizes as normative - research allied to discourses on ‘best practices’ and operationalized usually through quantitative assessments. The second research approach seeks to understand “how the structural bleeds into the personal” (Head, 2018, p. 4) and uses qualitative research to engage with the impact of policy on stakeholders. The research in this dissertation locates itself in the second approach, which focuses on how policy is reinterpreted and embodied by school and community governance actors.

### **Researching Governance from the Ground- Up**

My proposed involvement with school governance participant narratives legitimated a departure from studying policy texts, charting networks, and interviewing elites. Rather, I focused on providing a “decentered account” of education governance, which would explicitly draw on “the contingent activity of the relevant individuals” (Bevir and Rhodes, 2011, p. 209). These accounts help animate dispassionate quantitative reports and remind policy makers of the humanness of policy implementation. Thus, my decision to foreground participant experiences also received support from academic calls for a “third-wave” of governance studies where attention is devoted to ‘bottom-up’ processes of governance engagement and implementation. While the first wave of scholarly interest introduced the changing relations of authority, where power appeared now dispersed across networks rather than concentrated in a central government hierarchy, and while the second wave focused academic investigations upon these networks themselves, Bevir and Rhodes (2011) argue that the third-wave transcends institutions and institutional norms to solicit “meanings in action, and from social logic to narratives” (p. 210). The discourses threading through these narratives and actions are therefore also important to study. In both my fieldwork and in combing through academic literature, I found that the discourses of governance and of education rights paralleled and intersected with each other. Discourse refers to not merely what is said, but how, and why things are said, diving beyond the surface of language to underlying beliefs (Van Dijk, 1997).



**Figure 1** A newspaper article from the first phase of fieldwork (Parashkar & Gyanesh, 2019)

The article above exemplifies the discourse of crisis surrounding the RTE. Published during my first phase of fieldwork, it raised discussions online over the quality of government schooling and whether the Right to Education was actually impacting marginalised students' lives for better.

### **The Right to Education and School Governance**

The RTE has utilised an explicit rights-based discourse (Bajaj, 2014), and the structures of governance formalised in the Act (such as SMCs) revolve around the governance of this inclusive, rights-based approach to universal primary education. The entanglement of rights with school governance parallels wider global trends. Indeed, Karen Mundy (2007) traces the historic rise of global governance with an emergent institutionalisation of human rights and education norms post Second World War. Subsequently, my study on how school staff, parents, students, and NGO workers navigate the governance landscape, with its emphasis on participation and responsabilisation, cannot be decoupled from the Right to Education itself; how it speaks to national projects of development and progress and to existing challenges of educational inequality in the system. Vinod, activist and academic in Karnataka's capital city of Bangalore, summarised the current situation to me in his interview: "The Right has major lacunae...segregation has continued."

He further argued that the Right's intention to improve school quality was hampered by its tacit permission of increased privatisation, which some scholars have claimed

undermines educational equity (Walford, 2013; Chudgar & Creed, 2016; Kingdon, 2020). The RTE applies to every school in the country, and private<sup>7</sup> primary schools are expected to reserve 25% of their seats for marginalised people groups (Section 12[1][c], Government of India, 2009). Critics view this permissiveness as a parallel strategy of the state, which continues to pursue “a rhetoric of scarce resources for education” (Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019, p. 3) alongside an ambitious and expansive program of reform (National Education Policy, 2020). Thus, in India, rights-based education policies and formal structures for governance coexist with an increased reliance on privatisation to address educational needs and gaps, not only through private schooling, but also through public-private partnerships with both the commercial and charity sectors (Srivastava, 2010; Tomassini, 2012; Gopalan, 2013; Srivastava and Noronha, 2016; Santhakumar *et al.*, 2016; Ray and Saini, 2016).

### **Governance as Neoliberal and Progressive Endeavours**

Maithreyi and Sriprakash expressed their concern that school governance could assume a neoliberal character, a concern shared by others in the wider literature on educational governance (Klees, 2008; Ball & Junemann, 2012; Lunneblad, 2019; Regmi, 2021). In a neoliberal governance mode parents and students are positioned as consumers, with decentralised governance a means of efficiently achieving accountability and development (Edwards & Klees, 2015). Neoliberal modes refine upon a liberal approach which courts participation to inform policy development. Such approaches are characterised by institutional agendas and “tend to enable and sustain participation only as a front-end process that does not carry over to program management or policy implementation” (Edwards & Klees, 2015, p. 491). However, governance can also assume a progressive character. The progressive approach distils the means and ends of participatory governance into both individual and social change.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, with the RTE promoting both a rights-based rhetoric along with allowance for increased privatisation, it is helpful to see participants as navigating these differing approaches which can co-exist simultaneously.

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, private refers to private schools unsupported by the government, or private “unaided” schools. These schools are privately owned, managed, and financed. Depending on the clientele they target, private schools are either low-fee (Ashley, 2013) or charge fees affordable by mostly middle to upper classes.

<sup>8</sup> Paolo Freire (1972) and Jean Anyon (2005) have popularised seeing education and participation as tools for developing both individual and social critical consciousness (“conscientization”) and mobilising against systems of oppression.

Governance policies are meant to target specific problems. “How ‘problems’ are constituted, given shape and meaning within policies,” create “specific social and political realities” (Bacchi, 2016, p. 2). Not only is the lack of accountability a problem, but so is poverty. Corbridge *et al.* (2005, p.47) note that national governance policy and programs often enforce the belief that poverty is a failure:

The production of poverty as a failing, or as an incomplete set of capabilities, is linked to the production of persons who can be labelled as poor, and who can either be reproached for being the bearers of certain pathologies – the illiterate man who has to be educated...

This production of poverty as a failure perpetuates a vision of modernized progress that middle classes and elites are more likely to achieve (Gupta, 2012). However, in a neoliberal orientation of education reform, this vision of progress is presented as both necessary and desirable. Maithreyi and Sriprakash (2018) see neoliberalism as the dominant governance mode, arguing that poor parents are positioned “specifically and explicitly as individualised duty-bound choicemakers in an increasingly marketised school system” (p. 353). They note that while educational welfare has shifted from ostensibly paternalistic to ostensibly participatory, paternalistic practices continue to exist alongside what David Mosse (2005, p. 5) refers to as the “new managerialism in international development.” Nambissan & Rao (2012) note that “the market is increasingly influencing the aims of education and is being viewed even among the most marginal sections, as the major arbiter of the futures of children” (p.2).

These academics view India’s neoliberal economic policies (initiated in the 1990s) as influencing the contemporary commercialisation of education, where the growth of private tuition and language centres reinforces both competition and social understandings of what it means to be educated (Scrase *et al.*, 2016; Gilbertson, 2016). However, the economic and cultural resources needed for the private, English-medium education that is both a social asset and gateway to the white-collar job market, is out of reach for most poor families. The ‘exit’ of the middle classes to private schools perpetuates educational segregation with poor children “left behind” in government schools. Thus, school governance accords families and communities the ‘soft power’ of participation, while the ‘hard power’ of decision-making and control remains at the top levels of bureaucracy and politics (Sriprakash & Maithreyi, 2018). Marginalised families have to navigate both paternalistic and participatory channels of poverty alleviation afforded them by the state.

The lack of political will to address the growth and popularity of private schools cements another paradoxical experience for the poor, who on one hand experience state

solicitude in the provision of education reform and resources such as books and uniforms, while experiencing state neglect in the favour of a free market approach to education and employment on the other (Mehrotra, 2012). Thus, educational governance is riven by the opposing paradigms of concern and apathy. The Janus-faced nature of development has prompted anthropologists such as Akhil Gupta (2012) to argue that despite the Indian state's rollout of diverse programs intended to tackle poverty since the early 1990s, "high rates of poverty are tolerated because, much like any other natural phenomenon, they are seen as part of the landscape" (p.15). Indeed, Gupta contends that despite the large rates of mortality associated with poverty, structural violence against the poor "does not constitute a scandal" nor does it provoke "national soul-searching" (p. 18).

Gupta's argument, building on an ethnography of government bureaucratic agencies tasked with mediating participatory governance of the poor, fleshes out a portrait of governance paradox for India's marginalised population. Crisis may place their experiences at the forefront, but these experiences can also be ignored in actual practice. The language and formation of crisis itself can thus ignore certain concerns while focusing on others. At the same time, crisis is also a malleable formation that marginalised groups can utilise to secure their interests. Therefore, Gupta's work uncovering the uncaring and systematic corruption despite avenues for participatory governance bolsters my thesis that crisis is a formation with multiple uses. However, at the same time the state can use crisis to deflect responsibility back on the poor; however, at the same time, the mechanisms of participation in governance render the state open to criticism and collective action by the poor.

Keeping this dilemma in mind, we can turn to the studies done by anthropologists and scholars working in developing countries at the intersection of governance and development to understand how participatory governance helps or hinders. Certain researchers have critically unpacked the import of governance on marginalized populations. One such scholar is Tania Li, whose work examines development governance in rural Sulawesi, Indonesia. Li notes the pervasiveness of "the will to improve" and its impact on the lives of those it is intended to help (Li, 2007). A key finding from her research is how community participation is often "rendered technical" in the world of projects. Anthropologist Kristin Phillips (2012) embroiders upon this critique in her observations of school management councils in rural Tanzania. She discovered that village parents were compelled to undertake projects of school development that not only circumvented some of their own interests and needs but had to be carried out through their own unpaid labour.



The work of anthropologists turning their critical lens on governance as a decentred practice, dislodges it from its elite and emancipatory rhetorical moorings. In governance, mechanisms of control and the production of “skilled citizens” pivots on the conception of governmentality. Governmentality represents the internalising of desirable behaviours, habits, and dispositions, according to Michel Foucault. In referring to government as the “the conduct of conduct” Foucault (1982, p. 220-221) cast government as a verb, a process distinct from the machinery of the state (but implicated in it). To govern oneself is to subsume national concerns into individual ones. Governance can thus be assumed to transmit dissonant messages of both liberation and compliance. These dissonant messages inform both the policy infrastructure and less visible characteristics of governance in practice, as well as surfacing in the actions and attitudes of its practitioners. Thus, tensions, and how school governance actors attempt to reconcile this dissonance, adds to knowledge of governance in practice. Furthermore, rights-based approaches can emphasize dissonant experiences of governance even as they influence governance policy and practice.

### **The Right to Education and the Responsibilisation of Families through Crisis and Childhood**

The RTE can be read as a policy which steers school governance and around which its practice revolves. The rhetoric of rights can spark collective action, but it can also be wielded bluntly: where securing children’s rights takes precedence over understanding their particular experiences. Childhood scholar Sarada Balagopalan (2019) acknowledges the RTE as “a landmark legislation that has initiated coalition-building around children’s rights discourses among local, national, and international actors and also prompted much-needed child-specific analysis and provisioning of the country’s budget” (p. 314). However, she also draws attention to how parental responsibility for their children’s education is reframed as a “personal ethic”, despite their paradoxical experience of a socioeconomic landscape which prioritizes continued exclusion of poor children by refusing to build equitable institutions and increasingly relying on private provision.

The Right to Education as the engine of school development and child rights governance displays the interdependency of education and children’s rights in India. Additionally, it rests on formations of crisis and childhood to mobilise various groups to work towards its aims. Children’s rights increasingly justify and naturalise school development governance and are used to bring resource-poor families to compliance with development targets. However, just as poor families can experience education as a ‘contradictory resource’, the same argument could be applied to children’s rights. This

view is supported by scholars who draw attention to the malleability of human rights, to rights as “sites of power” (Sanghera, 2016, p. 3). Rights can not only be used on behalf of marginalised people groups, but they can also be used against them. My interest lies in the place children’s rights occupies in Karnataka’s school development governance discourse and practice. Moreover, the school as the site of governance practice produces and perpetuates social imaginaries. Dilip Gaonkar defines social imaginaries thus:

social imaginaries are ways of understanding the social that become social entities themselves, mediating collective life ... They are first-person subjectivities that build upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices. They are embedded in the habitus of a population or are carried in modes of address, stories, symbols, and the like. They are imaginary in a double sense: they exist by virtue of representation or implicit understandings, even when they acquire immense institutional force; and they are the means by which individuals understand their identities and their place in the world. (Gaonkar, 2002, p. 4)

The concept of a social imaginary is helpful in understanding the messages and norms that prevail and render both the experience of school and school development governance a paradoxical experience for marginalised families. Not only is the school the site where social imaginaries of education as an abstract good are constructed, they are also sites where governance subjectivities are naturalised. These subjectivities are underscored by Indian cultural practices which positioned the school as a primary site of exclusion between the middle and lower classes (Fernandes & Heller, 2006).

### **Seeking the Middle Ground of Governance**

These avenues of opportunity must be considered against the wider landscape of policy and practice. In Karnataka, education policies and programs frequently combine concern for social development with technical projects to achieve it. Education policy documents frequently quote Tagore, government instruction is commenced at Kannada-medium rather than Hindi-medium or English-medium, two languages whose dominance southern states argue is inimical to the preservation and valence of their own languages. In a 2019 press release, the Vice President of India Shri. M. Venkaiah Naidu quoted Mahatma

Gandhi's words when he stated that , "the future of the nation lies in its villages."<sup>9</sup> That the progress of the nation is so explicitly tied to its rural areas further reflects the responsibility invested in them by state development discourse and practice. The progress of the nation is often tied to the 'progress' of its rural areas, a progress that is measured in educational and development targets. In India especially, Nambissan (2012) argues, "communities designated illiterate... had only themselves to blame for their oppression... Not only were they backward themselves, they also carried the burden of the nation's backwardness" (p. 165). Development inhabits both geographical and generational paradigms. In the drive towards compulsory schooling in India, children's presence and participation in school takes on moral overtones that further justifies the project of school development governance (Balagopalan, 2019). Thus, children's rights are often evoked in the hopes of instilling visions of educational development across governance actors.

On the flip side are the avenues of opportunity that are simultaneously present within school governance and children's rights policy. In their overview of governance and governmentality, Corbridge et al (2005) argue that "an exclusive emphasis" on socio-political oppression "sometimes fails to point out the spaces of citizenship that are being created or perhaps widened". While Hickey and Mohan (2004, p. 3) agree that participatory development simplifies issues of power, they argue that it can also be a "legitimate and genuinely transformative approach to development." Their work and the work of the academics featured in their book discusses the "complexities of indigenous decision-making" (p.4) and how participation can open up spaces for new civic engagements and movements. After all, Karnataka is not only exceptional for its early drafting of SDMCs, it has also legally mandated *makkala panchayats* (children's parliaments), which point to the explicit inclusion of participatory governance for children. One of the guiding premises of this thesis is to occupy the middle ground, to reach for a "more nuanced understanding of how people inhabit and encounter the state" (Corbridge, et al., 2005) in light of school development and child rights governance policies.

### **Contributions of Childhood Studies**

To understand how childhood is deployed in Karnataka's education policy and how participants engage with it in the practice of school development governance, we must first engage with it as a social formation. I therefore rely on scholarly contributions from the

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<sup>9</sup> Ashutosh Pandey (2008) notes that Gandhi promoted a vision of rural development that centred on indigenous industries and decried the concentration of wealth in the hands of elites.

new sociology of childhood to develop my theory and methodology of governance in practice. The conceptualization of childhood as a social category was proposed by a group of scholars in the late eighties, a proposal that took form in the emergence of the new sociology of childhood (NSC). Its primary advocates Allison James and Alan Prout, advanced an understanding of childhood as a social construction, one that deviated from the essentialism and prescriptive standpoint of child development theories (James & Prout, 1990). Scholars argued for a view of children as social actors who produced both labour and culture. Children's experiences were also judged worthy of inclusion and investigation, an argument that also sprung from the conviction that they were equally rights-holders with adults (Mayall, 2002).

The burgeoning of the subsequent academic field of enquiry categorised as Childhood Studies was spurred by the field's interdisciplinarity: scholars from disciplines ranging from education, law, anthropology, psychology, and geography have joined in adding knowledge that has impacted global development policy and practice (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Specifically, in exploring Majority-world childhoods, childhood scholars have been instrumental in capturing fine-grained detail of lived experiences of marginalised children (Punch, 2004; Abebe & Aase, 2007; Balagopalan, 2008). Their ethnographies testify to children's strategic actions and decision-making as they navigate the intersection of poverty and schooling. Such portraits complicate the images of vulnerability that often saturate the global development media apparatus. These studies thus further scholarly attempts to reinstate children as autonomous rather than passive agents in ongoing narratives around globalisation (Wyness, 2006). Adherents of NSC operate from an epistemic orientation of children as "human beings and not human becomings" (Qvortrup, 1994, p. 4), important (re)producers of culture (Corsaro, 2005) and 'active in the construction and determination of their own lives' (James & Prout 2008, p. 8). While children were acknowledged to certainly appropriate learned information from adults, their peer cultures were simultaneously held as distinct and worthy of sustained inquiry (Malone, 2013).

However, such attention on children's agency and autonomy should not detract from the fact that children are impacted by the structural forces of the systems they are embedded in (Qvortrup, 1999, p. 4). Indeed, a salient critique of NSC arises from its expansion as a field coinciding with the expansion of a growing child rights regime. Matthew King (2007) argues that scholars critical of NSC risk being seen as paternalistic or a "children's rights skeptic" (p. 194). Overprivileging children's voices and agency can potentially lead to researchers romanticising child subjects without paying sufficient

attention to how children also possess capacities for resistance and oppression (Gallagher, 2008; Holloway *et al.*, 2018). A recent development in Childhood studies has turned children's rights themselves over to critical enquiry. This offshoot of interest was spurred by NSC architects highlighting the importance of nuance and calling for research to move beyond dichotomous boundaries of agency/passivity, childhood/adulthood and include "the excluded middle" (Prout, 2011, p. 4). In the words of Reynolds, Nieuwenhuys & Hanson (2006) scholars should take "more nuanced views of children's rights as social practices that emerge from the encounter between everyday experiences and the body of knowledge in which practical decision-making is based" (p. 297).

### **The Intersection of Children's Rights and Governance**

The impact of children's rights on local cultures can be theorised as an instance of what social theorist Anthony Giddens (1990, p. 19) has termed as "distanciation", where "locales are thoroughly penetrated and shaped in terms of social influence quite distant from them." While north Karnataka may not necessarily figure as a locale "thoroughly" influenced by flows and discourses of globalisation, it does not fit into romantic ideals of an isolated region where children are untouched by current ideas and politics either. Children's rights, especially enshrined in the UNCRC, have shaped a "global model of childhood" (Morrow & Pells, 2012, p. 908) which critics argue reinforce normative views of childhood in pro-Western and neo-colonial ways. Normative views of childhood espoused in children's rights and global educational regimes buttress the school as an institution foundational to development. Child rights governance and school development are therefore seen as interlinked and interdependent. Thus, my study also probes how understanding childhood and children's rights frames and impacts Karnatakan school stakeholders' governance practice. Not only are they responsibilised to govern the RTE, they are also expected to govern corresponding children's rights and ensure safe environments, i.e., rights *in* education (Covell *et al.*, 2017; Bajaj, 2014).

As global concerns over education reform are reflected (in diverse ways) by local education reform, so is childhood. Children's affective weight has been utilised not only as justification for inviting community involvement, but their affective weight is also leveraged in funding campaigns and donor reports. The "Poor Third World Child" is a visual trope that continues to resurface across brochures, NGO websites and other advertising media and, scholars point out, comprises a largely passive figure around which development projects can mobilise (Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Penn, 2005; Hopkins & Sriprakash, 2013). The existence of marginalised communities and their children

legitimises development at the same time as it stirs nationalistic concerns of ‘progress.’ Responsibilisation of communities in governance is also framed as responsibilisation for their children. The rights, well-being and development of their children are often leveraged at communities and schools by the development apparatus (Maithreyi & Sriprakash, 2018; Nambissan, 2011; Sriprakash, 2012; Chopra, 2015).

Participation in governance therefore derives further momentum from how children are seen and mobilized in policy prescriptions and school governance spaces such as SDMCs. And yet, policy itself often triggers contradictory renditions of children’s rights, with the RTE targeting out-of-school children while the most recent Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act (2016) condones children’s labour during ‘out-of-school’ hours. These paradoxes arise from what scholars have noted is a murky legal environment of children’s rights, which they see as emerging from the dissonance evoked by the state promoting a neoliberal market economy together with democratic social justice (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005; Balagopalan, 2019; Thangaraj 2016). So far, I have endeavoured to piece together the layers that give school governance its complexity. Thus, all these layers contain dissonant aspects, distilled into what Corbridge *et al.* (2005) refer to as the overarching peril and promise of governance. Social anthropologists such as Curtis & Spencer (2012) call for ethnographic studies of development as a “category of practice”, aimed at understanding the ways in which development “becomes produced and reproduced as a common sense part of people’s understanding of the world and their place within it” (p. 179). I will extend this label to school development governance as a ‘category of practice’ and use a qualitative methodology to investigate how various stakeholders assimilate their understandings of poverty, childhood, and rights in their practice.

### **Converting Theoretical Insights into Methodological Aims**

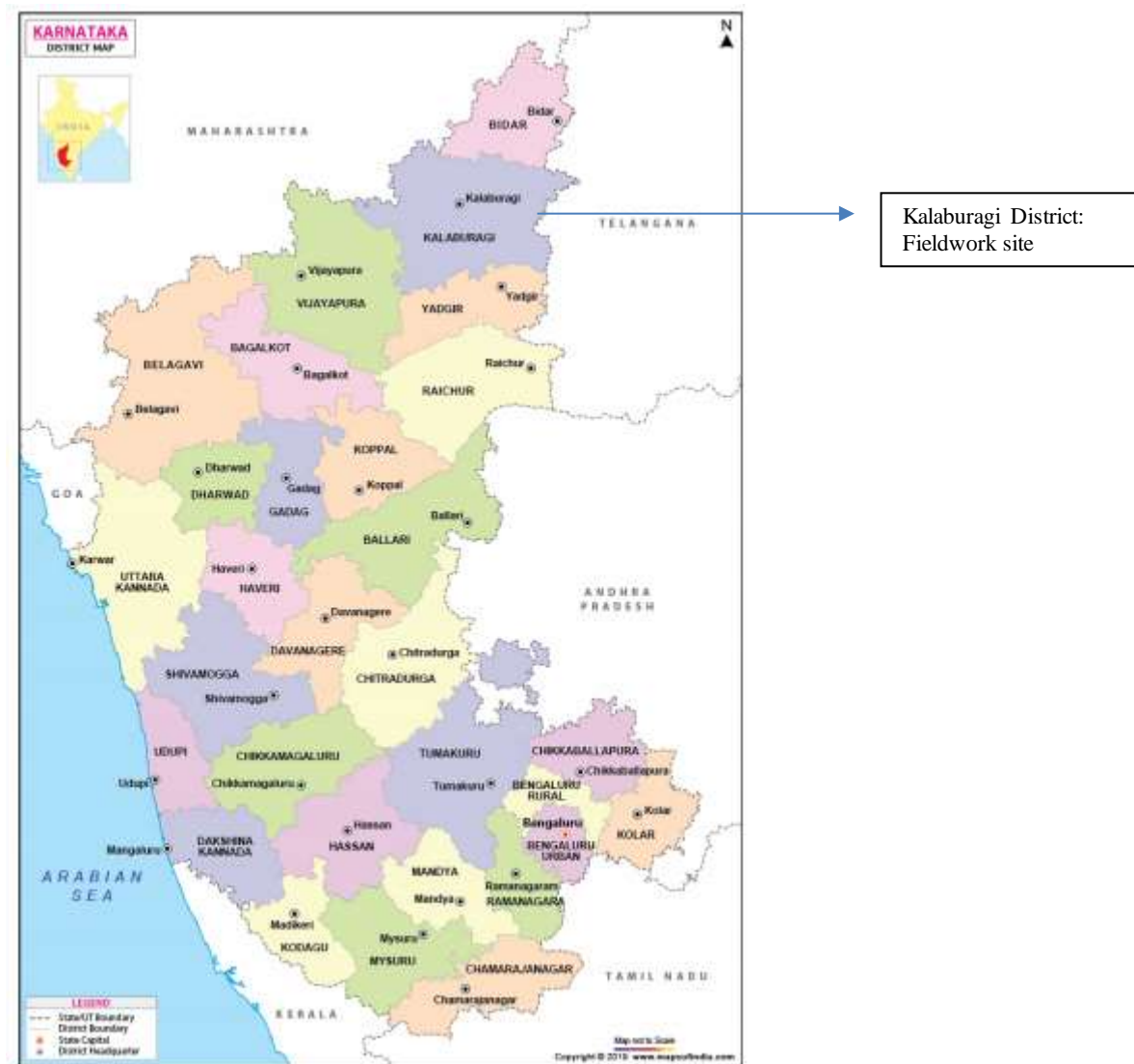
Building on the foundations laid by my preceding paragraphs, I use the term ‘school development governance’ or SDG to denote the national project of governing poverty and marginalisation through the space of the school. I position the school as the key site of development governance and the space in which various stakeholders communicate, interact, govern and are governed. I examine how children’s rights are socially constructed by education policy and discourse. I explore how this discourse filters to resource-poor school communities in Kalaburagi, and how it shapes their understanding and engagement with the educational milieu. During my months in India, I asked myself how resource-poor communities viewed an educational landscape that while purportedly providing them with

more benefits, more scholarships, better school infrastructure, a chance to participate, child-centred pedagogy, all the trappings in short of accessible schooling, seemed to ignore the migration of well-off citizens to private schools, the vagaries of teacher absence, increasing reliance on NGOs and private providers to fill in material and relational gaps, the lack of options at secondary and tertiary levels which led to children dropping out after primary school, and a market economy that is seeing an increase in multiple strains of informal and seasonal labour.

Without the safety net of a welfare apparatus under them, poor families often work long hours at mostly manual jobs, agriculture, and construction, eking out a precarious survival. The invitation to participate in governance therefore, in the view of this precarity, adds new responsibilities that policy uncritically paints as democratic (Li, 2011; Maithreyi & Sriprakash, 2018). The extent to which communities imbue and form governance subjectivities enables better understanding of the extent to which development governmentality is navigated and internalized. It also captures the diverse ways participants internalize, resist, appropriate, and reconcile the norms and subjectivities associated with school governance. Additionally, I consider how children's right to education and child rights governance are woven into this practice and their import for stakeholders.

### **Education and Human Development in Kalaburagi, North Karnataka**

Kalaburagi, one of the northernmost districts of Karnataka and my fieldwork site, typifies policy and popular discourses of the crisis of human development.



**Figure 2 District Map of Karnataka. Retrieved from:**  
<https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/karnataka/karnataka.htm>

Referred to as “the most backward district in Karnataka” by Rajasekar *et al.* (2018, p. 13), Kalaburagi possesses low human development indicators compared with the rest of the state. Agriculture represents the dominant industry for its occupants according to the 2011 Census of India, with 20.26% of its workers forming ‘cultivators’ and 38.20% working as agricultural labourers (Government of India, 2011). My fieldwork experience suggests, however, that work cannot be so neatly categorised; with certain villagers often working several manual jobs as well as cultivating their own (leased or purchased) plots of land. Intra and interstate migration (both seasonal and protracted) is a current and ongoing socioeconomic phenomenon, one that has received very little attention in education development literature in India thus far (Rai, 2018). The district Kalaburagi (formerly called Gulbarga and still referred to colloquially in conversation as Gulbarga), means



“stony land” in Kannada, cementing its reputation as a geographically (and developmentally) tough terrain.



**Figure 3 Detailed District Map of Kalaburagi. Retrieved from:**  
<https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/karnataka/districts/gulbarga.htm>

The district capital is also called Kalaburagi, and hereafter I shall refer to it as Kalaburagi city. The city houses a historic fort built during the reign of the Bahmani kings (1300-1500 CE) and is an important commercial hub between the cities of Bombay, Hyderabad and Bangalore. Shekar (2019) notes that, “since the city is located in an economically underdeveloped region, it has become a nodal centre for many developmental activities that started attracting rural folk from neighbouring districts” (p. 37). The city also attracts migrant workers as well as providing an important transit point to further migration to the cities of Bombay, Bangalore, and Hyderabad.



**Figure 4 Part of the Bahmani Fort, Researcher Photo**

However, an urban population of 32.5% testifies to Kalaburagi's predominantly rural character. With 169 villages and 721 government primary schools in rural areas as compared to 232 private schools, Kalaburagi's rural population's experience of schooling more or less revolves around government provision. A quarter of Kalaburagi's population identifies as Scheduled Caste (SC referring to low, or historically 'untouchable' caste status), and its latest human development report claims low levels of development compared with the rest of Karnataka (Kalaburagi District Human Development Report, 2014).



**Figure 5 School celebration in Isila village, Kalaburagi. Researcher photo.**

Statistics from the report show that 56.6% of children under 5 in rural Kalaburagi tend to be stunted, compared with a state-wide average of 38.5. These statistics reinforce the notion of 'backwardness', that low development indicators depict a region mired in

poverty and lack of socioeconomic progress. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), a nationwide educational survey which focuses primarily on rural districts in Indian states, noted that for 2018 in rural Karnataka, 47.6% of Standard 5 children in government schools could read a Standard 2 level text. While the percentage of unenrolled children between 6 to 14 was a low 0.7%, it climbs up to 7.0 and 7.8% for boys and girls between 15-16 (ASER, 2018). These statistics reflect the work of scholars commenting on persisting inequalities for India's rural poor (Dreze and Kingdon, 2001; Siddhu, 2011; Diwan, 2015; Alcott & Rose, 2015).

### **A Social Approach to Poverty**

Although I have hitherto referred to socioeconomically disadvantaged groups as “poor” and “marginalised”. I shall henceforth refer to them as ‘resource-poor’. This label attempts to address the stigma and stereotyping associated with the word “poor” (Lister, 2008). Moreover, in India, educational reservations for marginalized families have boosted their access to and graduation from higher education institutions. Nevertheless, high unemployment remains a key concern among these graduates (Bahl & Sharma, 2021). Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery (2004) note that while economically poor families may gain cultural capital through educational credentials, their lack of social capital (access to networks and connections, fluency in the English language) can depress efforts to obtain white-collar jobs. Therefore, what I refer to as resource-poverty encompasses ideas of economic self-sufficiency, social capital and cultural capital, and extends to “uneven power relations” (Naveed & Arnot, 2018, p. 2).

Representations of Kalaburagi as a ‘backward’ district or deprived area which therefore was also ripe for development, posed difficulties for me as researcher in ‘classifying’ the communities where I studied. Bhattacharya and Basu (2018, p.4) argue that ‘unpacking the discourse of marginality is imperative’ to engage with normative ideals and research in India. I also wrestled with the neocolonialist aspect of ‘labeling’ communities as underprivileged and marginalised, given the fact that I was the one endowing them with that label. Anthropologists who have turned the scholarly gaze onto the very professionals responsible for ‘engineering development’, have revealed how the development ‘industry’ underscores patrimonial ties with targeted communities through norms of ‘governmentality.’ Indeed, scholars such as Yarrow and Ventakesan argue that ‘development’ is the term “by which the industrialized 'West' has continued to exercise control over processes of global change in a postcolonial world” (Yarrow & Venkatesan, 2012). As Corbridge and colleagues (2005) have so eloquently phrased it, the poor come to

see themselves in terms of lack, partly because of how they are categorised and treated by the development apparatus.

Therefore, rather than labelling my participants as ‘marginalised’, I opted to reframe my participants as stakeholders in resource-poor contexts. From a sociological perspective, this linguistic framing enables a deeper and more complex portrait of the various stakeholders in school development governance and allows for analysing the actions of educated middle-class activists, degree-holding schoolteachers, and low-income parents together. I will examine how the logic of school development governance is re-interpreted colloquially and what that means for relations of poverty. Here I rely on David Mosse’s (2010) definition of poverty as primarily relational: “one that first views persistent poverty as the consequence of historically developed economic and political relations” (p. 1157).

This approach thus levels a glance at power relationships and distributions of power within school development governance. As Mosse (2010) argues “power has to be understood as an effect (a constraint) on the agency of poor people themselves, perhaps a means to generate acquiescence or compliance” (p.1157). This understanding of power sharpens the critical lens of my empirical framework. It enables me to examine how various stakeholders grapple with systemic features of a resource-poor landscape. The relational aspects of school development governance are highlighted as vital to the success of its agenda. How then do normative assumptions and relationships around poverty and childhood operate in the daily workings of school governance?

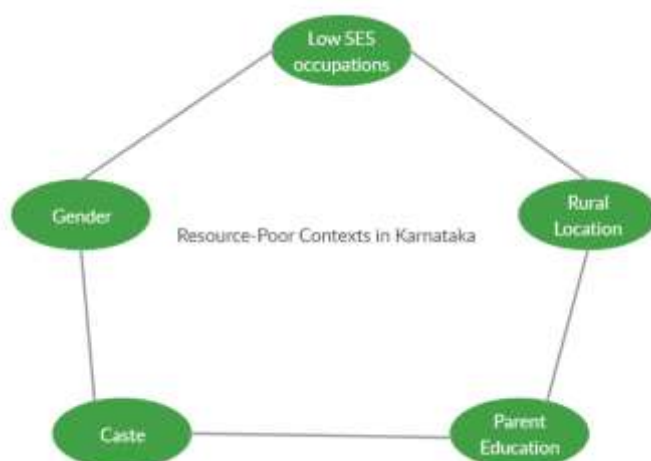
### **The Markers of Resource-Poor Contexts**

This section will offer a working definition of a resource-poor context and why the two schools I studied in Kalaburagi can be considered as located in resource-poor contexts. I relied on academic literature studying education in India to draw a model of a resource-poor context and have isolated six key features of a resource-poor environment. These features are:

- Low socioeconomic status (SES) and occupations
- Rural and urban-poor neighbourhoods
- Caste
- Gender
- Parent literacy/education

These six categories are regularly mentioned in Indian development literature and are especially implicated in school governance (Booroah & Iyer, 2005; Kingdon, 2007; Goel & Hussain, 2018; Alcott & Rose, 2015; Dejaeghere & Arur, 2020). Mosse (2010)

argues that categories constitute a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of social reproduction and that “inequalities of different kinds – caste, race, gender, ethnicity, class, age, citizenship, educational levels, or (dis-)ability – only appear to differentiate in separate ways. They are underpinned by similar social processes” (p. 1163). Therefore, although I acknowledge that gender adds a distinct facet in experiences of poverty, here I have incorporated it with the others into my overall rendering of resource poverty. I organised ‘resources’ into social and economic categories, with geography also acknowledged to play a key role. For example, rural-poor and urban-poor neighbourhoods are associated with narrow access to diverse schooling options as well as social stigma.



**Figure 6 Visual framework of resource-poverty<sup>10</sup>**

## Research Questions and Aims

The major research question this thesis seeks to probe is:

How do north Karnatakans engage in the practice of school development and child rights governance and how do they interpret child rights discourses?

To help answer this broad research question, I have drafted the following sub-questions:

- What are the tensions of ‘doing’ school development governance articulated by school staff, parents, students and activists?

<sup>10</sup> I built this framework relying on studies that engaged with the poverty-education nexus in India, specifically incorporating their sociological lenses: Nambissan, 2010; Sriprakash, 2012; Sarangapani, 2003; Morarji, 2011; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2001; Morrow, 2013; Morrow & Vennam, 2010; Froerer, 2011 & 2012; Dreze & Sen, 2013. This list is by no means exhaustive but provided integral support in ‘seeing poverty.’

- How do these various stakeholders perceive and respond to children's rights in their governance practice?
- How do participants reach for the 'middle ground' of school development and children's rights governance?

I pursue these questions with a hope to illuminate how school development governance unfolds in marginalised communities in rural North Karnataka, examine the constructions and contradictions in the ways various stakeholders perceive school development, and explore how children and their families navigate poverty under imperatives of school governance. I have opted for a qualitative research design which Bevir and Rhodes (2011) view as formative in procuring narratives of governance from the bottom-up. In generating a descriptive and analytical portrait of how communities construct children's rights and navigate school development governance, I hope to add to knowledge about the evolving social nature of school development governance and a deeper understanding of how to respond to the needs and concerns of resource-poor children and their families.

### **Outline of Dissertation**

This dissertation centres on school development and child rights governance as a practice that attempts to hold resource-poor communities accountable to development ideals. The layout is sectioned into three parts. The first provides a theoretical foundation of key developments in governance studies. I then move on to charting the currents of national education reform in India, focusing on the powerful impact of 2009's Right to Education, and the rising dominance of a child rights regime that mobilizes and justifies school development governance. I consider the case of Karnataka, and examine participatory school governance in the form of legally mandated School Management and Development Committees (SDMCs), focusing specifically on how resource-poor parents engage with the moralizing rhetoric of a participatory school governance that is premised on children's rights. Empirical focus on SDMCs provides us with an intriguing portrait of "school development governance on the ground" and opens several facets to structure my research inquiry.

In Chapter 3, I draw upon the scholarly field of Childhood Studies and assess its contributions to an understanding of children as social actors, culminating in recent developments that call for deeper exploration of the governance of children's rights. I argue that such an understanding adds an important dimension to studies of school

development governance, and that children's perspectives are often missing despite their being the purported beneficiaries of education policy. I also briefly examine the UNCRC and the RTE, their origins and the history of education in India. This investigation of inter/national children's rights and education policy will dovetail with extant research on resource-poor Indians' experiences of schooling. I next draw up a conceptual framework of school development governance and children's rights, drawing on the work of childhood scholars and theorists of governance to direct both research and analysis.

Chapter 4 details my methodology. It unfolds an iterative qualitative design deployed over two phases of fieldwork in Kalaburagi between 2018 and 2019. During the primary phase, I cast out a wide net, seeking to understand how communities experienced educational reform and their perceptions of their children's educational futures. I noticed that children's rights constituted a major driver in legitimating education development. Yet the dissemination of these rights did not follow clear-cut trajectories and often placed resource-poor parents and children in decision-making quandaries. The second phase plunged deeper into these themes, with the interviews constructed around participant experiences and meaning-making of practicing SDG. In this chapter, I also detail my analysis of the data collected.

The following chapters provide both the findings and discussion. Chapter 5 addresses themes oriented around school development governance, while Chapter 6 focuses on themes related to the constructions of childhood, children's rights, and participant navigation of children's rights governance. Each chapter embeds these themes into a greater discussion where I draw upon supporting literature to highlight key themes and condense them into major conclusions. Therefore, chapters 5 and 6 present major themes that emerge out of the fieldwork: themes that dissect the work of school development and child rights' governance alongside current structural barriers evoked by school staff, parents, and activists. Finally, I end with reflections on how themes from this study can be investigated in deeper and more longitudinal formats in future studies.

## **Chapter 2     School, Development, and Governance: A Review of the Literature of Governance Theory and Its Practice in Karnataka**

### **Introduction to Chapter**

This chapter introduces key definitions and developments in the study of governance. It identifies hallmarks of governance such as the diffusion of power across networks and groups and the production of self-governing citizens. Critiques of governance are explored in the chapter to set the stage for launching my study of third-wave governance. The “third wave” in governance studies calls for investigations of governance from the ground in a bid to move away from networks and the perspectives of elites and concentrate on grassroots practitioners. Thus, I locate my research orientation in this third wave and pair it with the call from Corbridge *et al.* (2005) to seek the middle ground of governance practice. This middle ground acknowledges the perils of governance while finding promise in its possibilities for social change. I then briefly discuss accountability as a key practice of school development governance. Finally, I introduce the history and formation of SDMCs in Karnataka, members’ responsibilities and empirical reports to flesh out a portrait of the challenges, gaps, and potential for change.

### **Definitions of Governance**

Governance as a field of study traces its roots to the work of notable European theorists in the twentieth century, who intended to account for the collapse they witnessed of old political and social structures. Here power was no longer located centrally in one head of state or state body, but diffused across networks and various bodies (Rose, 1999; Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992; Pierre & Peters, 2000). Various governance scholars have attempted to crystallise definitions of governance that adequately reflect its mutability in both theory and practice. Some scholars such as Jessop (2002, p.12) see governance as “the heterarchy of reflexive self-organization”, accounting for possibilities of consensus-building and organizing according to collectively-defined goals. On the other hand, scholars who view governance as a “neoliberal language game” (Bevir, 2011, p. 3) remain sceptical of claims that networked governance deepens democratic participation. Walters (2004, p. 35) notes the potential of governance to turn into a “liberal game of assimilation” with control of the public effected through soft power. These scholars rely on a Foucauldian conceptualisation of governmentality, where collaboration towards externally-set goals arises from individual and collective self-management and discipline



(Triantafillou, 2004). In attempting a definition, Ball and Junemann (2012, p. 5) rely on the productive properties of the organisation of governance bodies. They note that “network governance... essentially involves the treatment of seemingly intractable public policy issues... through forms of managerial and organisational response” that revolve around collaborations between diverse groups.

These intractable issues return us to the ambivalent outcomes of a school governance intended to address the crisis in Indian education. As I have noted in the introduction, governance can be attached to both social empowerment and neoliberal economic agendas. Phyllis Pomerantz (2011) draws attention to how governance in a development context aligns public institutional functioning with economic progress and market activity. In development, she argues, governance is a “big tent” housing rights processes, accountability procedures, and democratic participation. She thus sees this designation as provoking confusion over which aspects to prioritize. The relative looseness of the definition of governance by influential development organizations such as the World Bank, serves to illustrate how such confusion can arise among governance actors: “Governance refers to the manner in which public officials and institutions acquire and exercise the authority to shape public policy and provide public goods and services” (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2007: 3).

However, the deliberate pursuit by the World Bank of “good governance” highlights what Nikolas Rose, prominent governance theorist, describes as the “normative” theme (Rose, 1999), which qualifies governance as either good or bad. Critically for the World Bank, good governance is achieved less in terms of state input and more through major contributions from a constellation of social actors: communities, businesses, and charities, in addition to existing state governance bodies. Furthermore, the World Bank’s earlier definitions of governance rested on the goal of development, where governance was defined as “[t]he manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social recourse for development” (World Bank, 1992, p. 1).

Later and more recent definitions of governance from the World Bank have not lost sight of socioeconomic development as the end goal of governance (Barrera-Orsorio *et al.*, 2009). The elasticity and scope of governance can be demonstrated in India, where school management councils coexist with public-private partnerships and NGO support (National Education Policy, 2020). Moreover, in education, empirical studies pursuing the normative theme of governance tend to focus on weighing the evidence for the claims of ‘good governance’, usually through student achievement (Yamauchi, 2014). The Annual Status of Education (ASER) report is a nationwide evaluation of children’s learning in rural

districts across India. It relies on an army of citizen volunteers and partner organisations and employs both school and household surveys as well as devising its own learning tests (Banerji *et al.*, 2013; Goodnight, 2017). Given both its rigour and reach, ASER results can be regarded as complementary to national surveys on education. However, it focuses only on rural regions, which limits its usefulness to those wishing to consult data on learning in urban centres (Kingdon, 2020). ASER's architects originally devised the survey to hold the national government to account. However, as I have demonstrated in the introduction, ASER findings can also be used by news media to precipitate the rhetoric of crisis. Thus, although nationwide evaluations such as ASER can function as empirical accountability measures meant to provoke national soul-searching, the focus on learning outcomes may obscure social-political mobilisation amongst resource-poor groups, alternative learning pathways, and children's particular definitions of success.<sup>11</sup>

### **Scholarly Developments in the Study of Governance**

Historically and popularly, governance has been perceived in the 'old school' style of state authority radiating from the centre to the community below. This image abounded in metaphors of fixed hierarchies: 'pyramids' of power, sovereigns above and subjects below. While scholars argue that such political analysis of governance is simplistic and now obsolete in the wake of globalization (Rose, 1999), there is a scholarly consensus that the spatial contours of governance have transformed from fixed to fluid, with communication and complexity toppling historic ideas of hierarchy. Theorists of governance such as Nikolas Rose and William Walters owe an intellectual debt to Foucault's work on governmentality, which has proved an important driver for analyzing power relations. Foucault (1982, p. 220-221) defined government as the "conduct of conduct", an encompassing reach of government from the public to the private, where individuals would internalize the governing apparatus. His call for greater attention to be paid in theorizing the transcendence of governance from its hitherto confined location to the spheres of community and the individual is an important diving-off point for this study.

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<sup>11</sup> For a deeper look into the complexity of ASER as it is designed and carried out, see Goodnight (2017). The survey has branched out from its initial focus on learning in primary education. The survey of 2017 focused on rural youth between 14 to 18 years of age and extended focus on learning achievement to whether the sampled youth could employ their learning in daily tasks requiring literacy and numeracy. Crivello and Morrow (2019) have provided resource-poor children's alternative definitions of achievement and success in their study of Young Lives data from Vietnam, Peru, India, and Ethiopia.

Arguably, governance has always been concerned with the conduct of individuals. However, scholars argue that the “will to improve” (Li, 2007) is now enacted in a variety of ways that appear self-evident. The RTE, for instance, mandates community participation in SDMCs and legally requires a percentage of its members to come from marginalized groups. The enfolding of participation into ‘good governance’ thus contains broad implications for how individuals learn to govern schools, communities, and themselves to reach the RTE’s goals. The state as centre of power retains a powerful measure of influence, but governance is enacted with both legal might and a host of techniques of persuasion and coercion diffused via an array of third-party actors:

New governance pertains to a novel form of society in which the traditional goals of governments- welfare, prosperity, and security- can no longer be accomplished by the centre acting alone. Increasingly they are sought through processes of concertation, interaction, networking, piloting and steering; processes in which traditional centres of authority (ministries, agencies, public bureaucracies) interact in networked configurations with, and a host of private, para-state, third sector, voluntary and other groups (Walters, 2002, p. 29)

As Rose (1999) points out, individuals, families, and communities have always been more or less governed by states via legal and financial regulations and moral imperatives. However, he argues that through governance, these practices are stripped of their paternalistic flavour and are rendered both technical and invisible:

These links between the molar and molecular have taken a variety of forms...more complex and subtle procedures for establishing a delicate and complex web of affiliations between the thousands of habits of which human beings are composed - movements, gestures, combinations, associations, passions, satisfactions, exhaustions, aspirations, contemplations- and the wealth, tranquillity, efficiency, economy, glory of the collective body”(p. 6)

School governance policy in Karnataka, although prescribed in a top-down fashion, is intended to promote ‘soft’ forms of behaviour change and goal-shaping rather than resorting to ‘hard’ forms of governing (i.e., legal and military pressures).

Rose identifies two central themes of governance as: i) normativity (which qualifies governance as good or bad) and ii) a ‘sociology of governance’, which focuses on the self-organization of networks and outcomes of technicalized relationships. The rules in the

RTE which operationalise good governance (via rules governing SDMCs), are meant in turn to govern both school and community. This governing thus intends to govern poverty, to transform intractable issues of inequality 'from within' and through an interlinking of various groups of society. Governance seeks to diagnose, as Rose puts it, rather than describe. Reflecting on the creation of 'governance subjects' in India, however, I would go further and argue that governance attempts to both diagnose and prescribe. Its structures are mediated to be both diagnostic and potential cure.

The disaggregation of authority and the reinterpretation of governance along lines of communication as well as the fracturing of public-private binaries means that people are regarded as political agents in the light of governance. They are now governance 'actors', with latent capabilities to campaign, organise, and govern. They are invited to participate in the activities of governance, to proffer solutions for intractable problems, and to work collectively to apply these solutions. Pertinent for education scholars is the orientation of the individual as a *learner*:

... the skills of people expand and thereby enable them to perform better the tasks of group membership and to engage more effectively in varying kinds of citizenship behaviour. The learning may occur in fits and starts, reaching new heights in acute crises and subsiding to a steady state in "normal" periods, but across time it varies and thereby differentially impacts on the course of events. Furthermore, the learning consists of both intellectual and emotional development (Rosenau, 1992, p. 278)

While Rosenau cautions that citizens could be just as easily stirred up in simplistic discourses of nationalism and that groups with differing agendas can complicate governance's unitary goals, the premise of the citizen as learner in the analytic of governance holds critical value in the light of the participatory 'bent' in education. When communities are invited to participate in school governance, they are introduced to the pedagogic discourses and expectations prevalent in a school landscape. Rose (1999) argues that in the classroom, subjects such as English were introduced into the curriculum primarily as an instrument for self-interrogation and monitoring: "they would help the child become aware of these internal states, they would provide a language for speaking about them, they would provide criteria for judging them: in short, they would actually create new civilized sensibilities" (p.78)

Substitute the practice of children's rights in for school subjects and re-pose these questions. Do rights 'awaken' awareness and act as instruments of self-monitoring, actualization and agency? Scholars argue that a primary advantage of governance lies in its

productivity mechanism: by moulding self-monitoring and actualizing citizens, social issues can be addressed and an orderly cycle of social change initiated:

They dreamed that one could produce individuals who did not need to be governed by others, who would govern themselves through introspection, foresight, calculation, judgement and according to certain ethical norms. In these ideal individuals the social objective of the good citizen would be fused with the personal aspiration for a civilized life: this would be the state called freedom” (Rose, 1999, p. 78).

The production of self-governing individuals must be contextualised against what Olmedo and Wilkins have referred to as the “polyvalence” of governance. This polyvalence engenders confusion over the ends of governance, with some scholars highlighting increased neoliberal modes of acting and being, while others pointing to increased representative democracy and empowerment for marginalised people groups. For instance, Wacquant argues that neoliberal governmentality is a “flowing and flexible conglomeration of calculative notions, strategies and technologies aimed at fashioning populations and people” (Wacquant, 2012, p. 69). These claims intend to expose the “hidden hand” of neoliberalism (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2018), while the flip side of the argument points to the empowerment of increased spaces for participation and voice (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Gaventa, 2004). Gaventa (2004) argues that “bringing more direct and empowered forms of participation into the local governance sphere can lead to both democracy-building and pro-poor developmental outcomes” (p. 25).

Governance is therefore perhaps best viewed neutrally as “a slippery concept that also speaks to different sets of grievances, discontents and hopes” (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2019, p. 1), where neoliberal visions of increased efficiency can co-exist with visions of community empowerment. Indeed, in reflecting on community management of water supply services in Malawi, Chowns (2015) muses that the appeal of governance lies in its mutability, in becoming “all things to all people” (p. 35). However, the notion of a hollowed-out state does not indicate that the state’s power is diminished. One inadvertent consequence of focusing on governmentality and the prevalence of market-based logics of citizen school choice is supposing that the state is in retreat. Indeed, scholars studying development and class in India have questioned this notion (Gupta, 2012; Tukdeo, 2019). The Indian state may have set up communal governance spaces such as SDMCs, but marginalised families can still feel the weight of state power through what Fernandes (2018, p. 6) notes is “an intensified set of state practices of policing, surveillance, and

containment that marks expanding capacities of state power as exercised within civil society and the public sphere.” In their ethnographies of the weight of bureaucracy that characterises rural education ministry offices and their functions, both Gupta (2012) and Mangla (2013) present a state that is rather more complex than the concept of the ‘hollowed-out’ state suggests.

### **Examining Neoliberal Governance**

The plasticity of governance and its malleability in neoliberal policy service has been raised as a key concern by Maithreyi and Sriprakash (2018), who view it as exacerbating educational inequality for marginalised families. They have been joined by other commentators and researchers on Indian education (Morarji, 2014; Sanghera, 2016; Balagopalan, 2019) who argue that state pursuit of liberal economic policies alongside ambitious development programs falls short of the commitment needed to build the institutions that can serve resource-poor people groups.

Scholars have called attention to neoliberal ideology as one that spans global processes and strategies (Sanghera, 2016) and central in limiting power to a handful of political and economic elites (Colas, 2005). In her book *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, Aihwa Ong (2006) describes neoliberalism as a “technology of governing.” Relying on Foucault’s definition of governmentality as both internal and external self-regulation, she notes that “neoliberal governmentality results from the infiltration of market-driven truths, and calculations into the domain of politics” (p. 4). Not only are individuals “then induced to self-manage, according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness,” but Ong also draws attention to how elements such as human rights are “becoming disarticulated and rearticulated with forces set into motion by market forces” (p. 7).

Scholars such as Ong have made important contributions in defining the elements that constitute neoliberalism (i.e. reliance on the market to distribute public resources and encouraging individualistic competition and self-regulation). They have shed light on the progress of neoliberal discourses and practices, which Harvey (2005) claims, are increasingly naturalised in current postmodern societies. He argues that neoliberal logics are presented as “common sense” in how we “interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). This ‘common sense’ logic of national growth has repercussions on how states include and exclude marginalised citizens (Ong, 2006). While Milton Friedman in his (1999) economic treatise lauded the virtues of neoliberalism, opponents were swift to point out the subsequent disintegration of social welfare and growing trends of

individualism over communalism (Gill, 1995; Falk, 2002; Shiva, 2005). These critics also questioned whether the promises of social change through governance could be obscured by processes of neoliberalism. For Cox (1997) the malleability of governance served to underscore its opacity. Cox's observation of the lack of transparency in global governance stands in contrast to the objectives of SDG to make school management more transparent, accessible, and therefore accountable.

However, while these calls to pay attention to neoliberalism's hold on global and national economic spheres are important, Gershon (2011) questions the practice of researchers regarding neoliberalism "as an overarching, unified trend." Her solution is not to counter global trends with local responses, since she posits that neoliberalism works its way into local contexts to survive. Michael Crawley (2019) enlarges on this assertion by noting that certain tenets of neoliberalism (such as individual self-responsibility) may resonate with pre-existing elements of "local" custom. Therefore, the idea of a child as a "responsibilised citizen" (Ferguson, 2009; Hopkins & Sriprakash, 2015) may not be a singular neoliberal import into Karnataka but can resonate with current social conceptions of child responsibility. Indeed, Leela Fernandes (2018) also cautions against treating neoliberalism as a monolithic entity that explains continued structural marginalisation: "neoliberalism has also too easily become a self-evident catch-all phrase that serves as an explanatory device for the inequalities, exclusions, and forms of social change that have been unfolding in comparative contexts" (p. 1). As I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs, she questions the supposed 'retreat' of the state and argues that it "redeploys in complex ways *and* continues to exercise power through long-standing practices, institutions and ideologies" (Fernandes, 2018, p. 1).

The Indian state may have set up school governance spaces such as SDMCs, but resource-poor families can still feel the weight of state power through what Fernandes notes is "an intensified set of state practices of policing, surveillance and containment that marks expanding capacities of state power as exercised within civil society and the public sphere" a practice Wacquant (2012) labels 're-regulation' rather than deregulation. Understanding that the concept of the 'hollowed-out state' deployed by governance masks the complexity of actual state power is helpful when regarding how resource-poor children and families interact with governance bodies. Corbridge *et al.* (2005) highlight the importance of viewing the state from the perspectives of the resource-poor. According to these scholars, the resource-poor have historically been patronised and rendered as passive

objects of development agendas and programs<sup>12</sup>. Thus, they may remain sceptical of participation in light of contradictory experiences of state power. However, Meda Couzens (2017, p. 527) argues that the usage of local governance bodies by children and families demonstrates their endorsement, or at the very least, a ‘starting point’ for their participation. Investigating these interactions and the novel relationships and possibilities generated by them could support what Patti Lather (2019) argues is the spirit of ‘post-neoliberalism’, where research “can spotlight mutual interests and shared norms across difference” (p. 769). Although Lather is referring to greater social movements such as youth demonstrations against climate change, her speculation that seeking sustainable ways of relating to others engenders possibilities for social change brings me to the agenda of “third-wave governance.”

### **Critiques of Governance and the “Third Wave”**

Despite touching on various tendentious aspects of governance as a field of study: the difficulties in defining it satisfactorily, its possibilities for discipline and empowerment, I have not yet discussed in depth two landmark debates of the field. The first presents a critique of the Western-centric location of governance theory and the second charts the progress of governance as a field of study and research.

Certain scholars have pointed out that the hollowing out of the state in networked governance does not necessarily erase the state of its power. Rather, they note that power is redefined through indirect “soft” means such as relationship brokerage and aligning goals with values. Thus, network governance could actually “increase public control over society” (Pierre & Peters, 2000, p. 78). Academic interest has filtered from networks to the ‘shadow’ aspects of power emanating from decentralised governance. This ‘second wave’ of governance (Bevir & Rhodes, 2011) raised academic interest in metagovernance, the role of the state in brokering consensus, coordination, and regulation. What Rose (1999) refers to as the ‘descriptive’ study of governance, characterises the second wave, which was concerned with describing the organization and functioning of various actors and networks in governance.

A salient critique of the governance approach in the field of political studies is that most of its theory derives from European examples (Held & McGrew, 2000). Despite the flourishing of empirical studies of school governance across the global South, there exists

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<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these groups may have experienced corruption and misdirection of financial assistance for relief (Harris-White, 1991; Gupta, 2012)



very little Southern theoretical work on governance<sup>13</sup>. However, these empirical studies have been helpful in constructing what Bevir and Rhodes (2011) have defined as the “third wave narrative of ‘decentred governance’ (p. 204). Unlike the first and second waves, which focus largely on states, institutions, and networks, the third wave prioritizes governance as a social practice informed by “the disparate and contingent beliefs and actions of individuals” (Bevir & Rhodes, 2011, p. 204). Here the emphasis is on participants making meaning of governance as they practice it. For Bevir and Rhodes, narrative functions as the ideal form to understand both participant beliefs and actions in governance. They point to how theories and studies of institutions and networks can obscure the beliefs and norms of participants as they practice governance: “the actions of these individuals are not fixed by institutional norms or a social logic of modernization, but, to the contrary, arise from the beliefs individuals adopt against the background of traditions and in response to dilemmas” (2011, p. 210).

This ‘third wave of governance’ is thus where I locate my research study and where I hope to contribute. Indeed, studies of school governance in the global South (Botha, 2006; Zajda & Gamage, 2009) have already contributed important revelations of how participants engage and perceive school governance, such as Okitsu and Edwards’ (2015) qualitative case study of SBM in three rural schools in Zambia. In soliciting participant narratives of their governance experience, I aim to investigate the tensions participants navigate through a practice that can be either constraining (neoliberal) or empowering (progressive). The capacity of governance to either end was noted by Corbridge *et al* (2005), who advised seeking a middle ground that accounted for increased constraints on resource-poor participants as well as their increased capabilities engendered by governance.

### **Seeking the Middle Ground in School Development Governance**

In their book *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*, Corbridge *et al* (2005) advance pursuing a balanced approach to governance that accounts for both its capacity to constrain and its capacity to change. Maithreyi and Sriprakash (2018, p. 353) concentrate their focus on the unequal impacts of school governance. They argue that despite the enabling language of rights and participation, families are in effect positioned as “depoliticized entities” regardless of the political capacities inherent in participation.

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<sup>13</sup> Raewyn Connell (2007) expands on the importance of including perspectives from Southern contexts in sociological studies. Her suggestion of “multiplying the local sources of our thinking” (p. 207) is a useful starting point for researchers in global South contexts.

According to Maithreyi & Sriprakash (2018), governance invites and expects a de-politicized participation that renders problems of poverty technical rather than social, and hopes via the mechanisms of governance to sustain cycles of solution, innovation, productivity and efficiency, while evading political contentions and social anarchy. These scholars are not unique in their scepticism of the promise of school governance. Deeper sociological examinations in government school systems in India, such as Sriprakash's (2012) study of the child-centred *Nali Kali* pedagogy in Karnataka, reveals that school governance reform demands personal and material investments by local actors. It is, moreover, a project embedded in social and political relationships, rather than a "context-free intervention" (Sriprakash, 2012, p. 180).

Schooling in India continues to re-invent modes of differentiation and segregation of caste and class (Nambissan, 2011). The work of childhood scholars Sarada Balagopalan (2014) and Miriam Thangaraj (2016) note that the ambitious projects of child rights governance and school reform often criminalise children's survival strategies and alternative livelihoods. Indeed, Balagopalan contends that "the working out of children's rights might not necessarily challenge, or substantively disrupt, prevailing exclusions that mark these communities' relationship with the state." (2019, p. 307). Corbridge *et al.* (2005, p.7) agree that participatory governance may seem like a tall order, especially when taking into account the histories and practices of marginalisation (such as paternalistic development policies) that have depressed informed involvement from communities. Scholars such as Sriprakash (2012) and Balagopalan (2019) would also add that learning governance is not confined to resource-poor groups alone, but also to more powerful social actors, such as teachers and local education officials. Their work has documented how these actors' perceptions of resource-poor students impacts their own governance practices and the beliefs and norms they perpetuate. Nevertheless, Corbridge *et al.* (2005, p. 5) argue that participatory governance can lead to change, although perhaps not through the timelines and manifestations envisioned in 'good governance':

...we believe that the lives of poorer people in rural India are being changed perceptibly, and in some cases for the better... An exclusive emphasis on the shadow state, or on a relentlessly 'vertical' political society, sometimes fails to point up the spaces of citizenship that are being created, or perhaps widened, in the wake of the good governance agenda and the popular mobilizations to which it can give rise.

The research agenda I pursue for this thesis is inspired by finding the middle ground in participant narratives, in noting both where governance introduces constraints and where it develops fledgling capabilities for and of its participants.

While Corbridge *et al*'s (2005) call for more inquiry into the middle ground is fitting given the dominance of this trend in the Indian education landscape, there remains a gap for educationists interested in applying an additional layer of childhood to this trend. The work of scholars on childhood in India tends to veer towards studies of labour (in which schooling is certainly implicated). However, school development governance in India is also driven by the rhetoric and subsequent governance of children's rights (Thangaraj, 2016). I will discuss children's rights governance as part of the school development governance agenda in the next chapter. At present I will examine accountability as a major sub-practice in SDG to contextualise the particular responsibilities of governance actors. I will finally turn to empirical studies on SDMCs in Karnataka to chart the experiences of the assortment of school governance actors: schoolteachers, resource-poor parents and students.

### **Accountability as a Social Practice**

Although several scholars have attempted to define accountability in various ways, it was Ranson (2003) who defined accountability as "a social practice pursuing particular purposes, defined by distinctive relationships and evaluative procedures" (p. 462). Rather than seeing accountability as a part of governance practice, Ranson insists it is *the* practice: "accountability is no longer merely an important instrument or component within the system, but constitutes the system itself" (Ranson, 2003, p. 459). Accountability is therefore transformed in governance practice as not only an external process (actors accountable to another) but actors interiorising accountability and acting accordingly. This brings us back to governmentality and how accountability practices in SDMCs can be used to bring about desired states and conduct. Indeed, the practice of accountability in school governance can be seen as what Rose (1999, p. 54) refers to as one of the technologies of government "[which are] imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events'.

The transformation of accountability as a social practice does not mean that hierarchies and traditions of control have disappeared. Instead, their co-existence can lead to school governance as a tense and ambiguous practice for participants. While most scholars agree that the responsibility of community members and school staff has intensified, their authority has not risen concurrently. This suggests that SDMCs represent

deconcentration, which relies on the shifting of responsibility, rather than authority, on local governance bodies (Gregersen *et al.* 2004). Govinda (1997, p. 16) maintains that while school affairs can be managed more closely and responsively through this process, the “weight of bureaucracy” is subsequently increased.

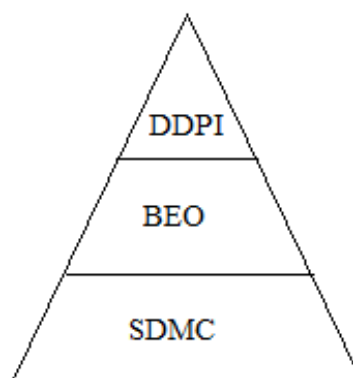
Mbiti (2016) notes that accountability in centralised education systems is often achieved via the “long-route” (i.e. through voting or school choice), while in decentralised systems, “short routes” (direct engagement with service providers) is possible. However, in the case of Karnataka, short-route accountability is not necessarily ensured by SDMC participation. Certain scholars have also attempted to parse the dimensions of accountability, with Schedler (1999) noting that accountability can be largely conceptualised as the i) capacity to demand answers (i.e., answerability) and ii) the capacity to sanction. These dimensions are helpful for my study when thinking of what education stakeholders desire when they think of accountability. SDMCs do not have the legal and political authority to sanction school staff, but they theoretically can demand answers. Fox (2007) notes that “for many, however, answerability without consequences falls short of accountability” (p. 667). Indeed, community attempts to demand accountability from school staff can have repercussions. Corbridge *et al* (2005) narrate the attempt of an SC community in a north Indian village to form its own SMC, with committee members visiting the school regularly to monitor teacher attendance. Their efforts led to the teacher bribing a higher education official to transfer him out, as well as notifying his peers of the increased community vigilance. As a result, finding teachers willing to teach at this village school grew difficult, and the school had to close for a short time (p. 144). This narrative questions the empowerment rhetoric of SDMCs. It demonstrates that the promises of decentralised school governance are not necessarily bolstered by institutional support for accountability of those at higher levels of power to resource-poor parents.

The purported increased transparency afforded by an SDMC is thus what Fox defines as ‘soft’ accountability rather than a ‘hard’ accountability. Therefore, resource-poor parents may not be interested in investing their time and labour in a school governance body which does not guarantee ‘hard’ accountability. However, to view power as resting solely in the hands of political and social elites simplifies its distribution in school governance practice. Webb’s concept (2008, p. 127) of “stealth power” is helpful here in taking a broader view of power: how it can be wielded in diverse forms and through diverse agents in education (p. 127). SDMC participants can leverage the power they do have in various ways to achieve their ends.

## Composition and Responsibilities of SDMCs in India

While accountability and power are contested concepts, scholars appear to be more in agreement over responsibility. Swinburne *et al* (2015) define responsibility as an actor's obligation. Lauermann & Karabenick (2011) propose responsibility as an internal state that produces or prevents external outcomes. They also highlight responsibility as obligation and note that it engenders a sense of commitment. Grinshtain and Gibton (2017) break accountability down into authority and responsibility, seeing responsibility as simpler to determine than authority. In Karnataka, district offices of the state government possess the most authority in administering educational reform policies in schools (Mangla, 2013). Karnataka state is sectioned into 34 educational districts and 202 blocks (GoK, 2012). The total number of schools in Karnataka is over 77,000, although 55% of pupils were enrolled in government schools in 2018-9, which testifies to the fact that almost half of the surveyed students enrolled in private or aided schools (GoK, 2019). These districts are administered by the Joint Director of Public Instruction. However, the Deputy Director(s) of Public Instruction (DDPI) can be considered as the highest district authority, as they are in charge of school education in their appointed districts. For example, in Kalaburagi, I had to visit the DDPI's office to obtain government approval to conduct research. Under the DDPI are the Block Education officers (BEOs) who work with around 100 schools in their allotted taluks (GoK, 2001). The BEO is the most important point of contact for communities and SDMCs, since they are the government officials most equipped to deal with school affairs in their catchment area (Mangla, 2015).

In Karnataka, the BEOs are also assisted by cluster resource persons (CRPs), teachers who have been given responsibility for around 15 schools in their area. In the course of my fieldwork, I briefly met two CRPs. The first CRP was in Isila school the first day I visited and expressed her approval of my doing research there. The second CRP I met during the preparations for Isila school's science festival, where he was helping the school staff direct and set up the celebration. He told me that he routinely travelled around the state to assist schools in this manner. Below I have constructed a simplified diagram of school governance to convey an understanding of its hierarchy of responsibility and authority. Mangla (2013) notes that the top tiers of educational governance hierarchies are often responsible for administrative duties, the collection of statistics and the dissemination of policy, while the bottom tiers (i.e. SDMCs) are involved with the day-to-day duties of school governance.



**Figure 7 A simplified diagram of the school governance hierarchy**

Keeping this hierarchy in mind, I will now turn to the composition and responsibilities of SDMCs members. Section 21 (1) of the RTE (2009) draws up the ‘blueprint’ for democratic participation in SMCs:

- Three-fourths of the committee must be parents or guardians of children, with "proportionate representation" bestowed on disadvantaged (SC/ST) parents.
- Fifty percent of the committee must be women

The duties of the SMCs are thus prescribed:

- I. Monitoring the school's functioning and development
- II. Monitoring of grants
- III. Preparing a School Development Plan

However, the GoK (2016) specifies additional criteria for its 18 SDMC members. The headteacher is to serve as secretary. The village *panchayat* must nominate 1 member, while the public health worker and the *anganwadi* (government nursery worker) are *de facto* members. A child representative is also supposed to be selected from the senior class.

The original RTE did not specify the contents of these School Development Plans or make provision for monitoring of teachers. These arrived later in the form of amendments in 2014. SMCs would monitor teacher performance, disburse and deduct salaries for absences. In addition, the School Development Plan would be streamlined into local government planning, in order to consolidate the power of the SMCs, which has been acknowledged to lack teeth since they were given responsibility without authority. However, not all SMCs have these powers: the SDMCs in Karnataka have no authority over teachers except to lodge complaints with the BEO. The Karnataka-specific training manual for SDMCs lists several responsibilities, the chief being “to inform the

neighbourhood about the rights of children in the RTE” (GoK, 2016, p. 15). This is the first responsibility listed. Others include fielding teacher complaints, running education camps for labouring and special-needs children, maintaining a continuous attendance list, widening access for special-needs children and addressing discrimination, monitoring the distribution of government resources such as midday meals, uniforms and scholarships, as well as monitoring government education programs.

The SDMC is also responsible for supervising the development and maintenance of school infrastructure (GoK, 2016). In addition, SDMC parents are expected to encourage other parents to involve themselves in school activities. The list of SDMC duties is long and denotes the effort and personal investment of time that parents are expected to make. Such a list prompts us to consider whether as Tukdeo (2019) avers, “community participation has become shorthand for contract labour and downsizing” (p. 132). SDMC members are also expected to preserve a “child-centric” environment in schools, which policy insists encourages the development of children’s physical and mental capacities and promotes active learning as well as the acquisition of knowledge (GoK, 2016). Importantly, the document also highlights freedom of fear and encouraging student voice, although it does not give further guidelines on how to actually promote such an environment.

The following paragraphs will look at research conducted on SMCs in various states of India before moving on to Karnataka. My rationale for this is that academic research on SDMCs in Karnataka is sparse and research on SMCs in other states may complement the developing portrait of current SDMC practice. Karnataka is a particularly salient case for investigations into school development governance, since it has a history of SDG which predates the RTE. An interim report published by the government-initiated Task Force on Education in 2000 explicitly connected SDMC purpose with education development.

“The school should be treated as a unit of planning and development... Therefore, there is a need for a body called School Development and Monitoring Committee at the school level itself” Interim Report of Task Force on Education (2000, p. 22)

Here the school is explicitly referred to as the site of development and the SDMC equally explicitly tasked with managing that development. This report galvanised SDMC formation in Karnataka’s government schools. Following the release of the government circulars and information campaigns in villages, a council of parents was convened to elect

nine SDMC members, three of whom were women and representatives from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The nonpartisan nature of SDMCs was temporarily jeopardised by a contingent of MLAs who attempted to elect the heads of SDMCs (as well as electing themselves heads of SDMCs) but a state-wide outcry by non-MLA SDMC members as well as community and social groups, together with an effective media campaign, caused the state government to withdraw their support for MLA backing of SDMCs, restoring the depoliticised framework (Niranjanaradhya, 2014).

### **Summary of Challenges Facing SDMCs**

The challenges facing SDMC functioning in school development governance in Karnataka run along three main lines: (1) democratic participation, (2) transparency, and (3) accountability.

Scholarship examining democratic participation in SMCs note that it must be expressed through actions rather than allocations. For example, allotting half of SDMC membership seats to women does not necessarily ensure that women are actively participating. Democracy is a fragile state, liable to co-option at any stage in the SDMC functioning process (Wankhede & Sengupta, 2005). Vaddiraju and Sangita (2011) note that inclusivity of marginalised SDMC members (such as women and SC/STs) should be encouraged with actionable plans rather than resorting to tokenistic representation to satisfy government mandate. The block and district education offices may hold haphazard trainings and audits in order to fulfil national policy mandate rather than scheduling regular audits and trainings. Democratic participation is restricted to SDMC meetings, with parents then unable to use their voice to reach higher tiers of the educational administration. This proves particularly difficult when parents cannot bypass school administration, limiting the nature and scope of their participation.

Ambiguity in the roles and functioning of SMCs was also apparent in a case study of four different VECs in West Bengal, with the authors discovering that VEC members did not always display a coherent understanding of their responsibilities (Wankhede & Sengupta, 2005). The salience of emotional ties was projected as a possible reason for members joining the VEC: this was especially the case for community members who'd spent a number of years in the community. In contrast, recent migrants from Bangladesh and those who migrated from urban centres did not display such tight bonds, suggesting that moving and migration have not been adequately considered by education policy with regards to VECs. Self-selection of members into VECs because of emotional ties or interests with education may represent a possible avenue for interventions but may also



bypass parents who cannot express or nurture such interest due to frequent short-term migration for work. Wankhede and Sengupta's (2005) study also testified to the discrepancies in the reporting of meetings by VEC members and teachers as well as participation of VEC members in those meetings.

Transparency, especially in communication between school staff and parents, has been difficult to achieve. Headteachers and teachers often fear inquiry into school administration by parents and can use their social standing to obscure SDMC roles and responsibilities and condescend to parents. Headteachers often assume sole responsibility for disbursement of SDMC grants, as they have the power to sign off on cheques (Niranjanaradhya, 2014). Qualitative research reveals that school staff tend to view SDMCs as an intrusion in school governance affairs and have done little to integrate the SDMC or make transparent school governance issues for parents who often have had little schooling (CEIAR, 2019). SMC members display a reliance on school staff in decision-making, with gender and caste discrimination as reported barriers to marginalised members voicing their concerns with school quality (Burnette *et al.*, 2015; Wankhede & Sengupta, 2005; Narwana, 2015; Govinda & Bandhyopadhyay, 2010). A lack of communication between teachers and parents hampers smooth running of SDMCs and can restrict SDMC activities to inputs in school infrastructure rather than teacher attendance monitoring (Bandyopadhyay & Dey, 2011). Moreover, there appears little interaction between SMCs and *panchayats*, suggesting a lack of communication between local governance bodies, which, according to Vaddiraju and Sangita (2011), is particularly the case in Karnataka.

Greater transparency with regards to school development funds and regular auditing of SDMC activities is still to be realised. SDMC members often misreport discussions surrounding finances, and there appears to be no external body to ensure democratic decision-making is happening within SDMC meetings. Thus far the work of SDMC has largely fallen within the remit of improvements to physical infrastructure.

State governments have been reluctant to devolve budgetary support and planning support decisions along with the devolution of responsibility (Govinda and Bandhyopadhyay, 2010; Kumar, 2016). Additionally, a CREATE India policy brief noted that 83% of the SMCs in the poorest areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh reported satisfaction with the functioning of their schools, despite the underperformance of these schools (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010). This suggests that more research is needed to determine possible indicators of the mismatch between SMC perceptions and actual school performance. Confusion also manifested when SMC members discussed utilisation of funds, a key SMC responsibility as mandated by the RTE. Such a mismatch of reporting

between headmasters and SMC members implies both a lack of clear communication and possible elite capture of school governance dynamics. Qualitative research by academics illuminates the lack of accountability such ambiguousness produces: Burnette *et al* (2015) reported the confessions of parents to signing and letting the teachers make decisions.. As Narwana (2015) notes, such policy endeavours "have failed to customize the global notion of community participation to meet the local circumstances in India. These programmes grossly undermine the local character of community served by the public schools" (p. 249).

Two studies of SMCs in India probe the complexity of participatory governance. Banerjee *et al*. (2010) conducted randomized control trials of an informational intervention in Uttar Pradesh (UP) 4 years after the institutionalisation of Village Education Committees (UP's iteration of SMCs). The interventions were designed to contain information about VECs as well as facilitate discussions between parents, community members and teachers. Three major interventions were carried out, with each intervention varying (one offered training of village volunteers to lead reading camps, another merely comprised informational pamphlets) to test hypotheses on citizen monitoring and mobilisation. The RCT discovered that neither of the interventions successfully increased involvement by any of the key players (here, the parents, the VEC, the teachers) nor did they improve school performance (attendance of children, attendance of teachers or community participation in schools). Perhaps the most significant finding is that while treatment did not seem to have any direct effect on VEC participation, the reading intervention held promise in that village volunteers could teach children how to read in relatively easy and inexpensive ways. The authors conclude that it is possible to encourage collective action through specific means (i.e. reading camps), without the aid of the school or government system. The paper presents a rather bleak view of the effects of interventions designed to increase participation in SMCs, countering the promises of governance policies.

Burnette *et al*'s (2015) study in the northern state of Assam and the southern state of Telangana, which comprised interviews and focus group discussions, noted that while virtually all community members were supportive of participation, many had vague ideas of what participation actually constituted. Parents reported difficulties in attending the meetings due to time constraints imposed by their agricultural labour, therefore relying on 2-3 members to represent them. In addition, social hierarchies such as caste and gender were reported by the parents interviewed as barriers to participation, as well as corruption and misappropriation of funds. On the other end of the governance side,

teachers reported the lack of parental understanding of roles as owing to the fact that many members did not attend the training sessions provided.

### **SDMCs and potential for change**

A year after state-wide implementation of SDMCs, Mythili (2002) reported on qualitative research she had done in a rural district of Karnataka, probing the nature of community intervention on schooling. Through interviews and focus groups discussions, she spotlights two forms of community intervention: one through human resources and cash contributions, and the other through parents' indirect monitoring of teachers via children's performances. The children in the village she observed seemed to have a high level of engagement with their studies, with educated children roped into working as volunteer teachers to fill temporary gaps in the school. Community members relied on school schedules to monitor teachers, noting late starts and stops, and through indirect assessing of their children's learning at home. However, this form of concerted communal monitoring may not be present in every village and does not account for those who have dropped out or are out of school.

Research conducted by Meher & Patel (2018) in Odisha revealed that despite challenges such as lack of clear communication between community and school and groupism, the SMCs of the selected schools were successful in maintaining school infrastructure, tending school gardens, increasing teacher-parent communication, and addressing drop-out rates. Reports of SMCs pursuing increased involvement both with government school staff and private companies (Rout, 2014; Prakash & Chandra, 2020) to fulfil their school development responsibilities indicate that SDMCs can indeed prove community participation an asset to school development and management. Such reports remind us of the 'middle ground' of governance, that:

... governmental practices such as these can, slowly and unevenly, be instrumental in providing poorer people with a greater sense of self-worth, dignity and, more rarely, a degree of power over those who would govern them. They can be made to work, that is, to change the contours and effects of political society (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005, p. 262)

These studies demonstrate the complexity of SDG practice through their investigations of S(D)MC functioning. By featuring key takeaways from these studies, I have endeavoured to capture a sense of how poor families participate in school governance

and the tensions they face when attempting to fulfil governance agendas while living through their social structural constraints.

The next chapter will extend this discussion to the sphere of childhood, a focus that has very recently attracted scholarly attention. How does school development governance justify itself by its basis in rights rhetoric? And how is childhood constructed by the multiple actors in governance? How do children themselves perceive the governance of rights intended primarily to benefit them? To what extent does participation in governance internalise and rationalize rights rhetoric and assist marginalised families in shaping their identities as actors of social change? These questions are not intended to argue for causal relationships between rights rhetoric, governance, and social change. Rather, they are meant to probe shifting conceptualisations of childhood and gauge the responses of school actors to their responsabilization in the agenda of “good governance.”

## **Chapter 3     Childhood Studies, Children’s Rights Governance and Theoretical Framework**

### **Introduction to Chapter**

This chapter critically examines the contribution of childhood studies and children’s rights studies (with reference to the UNCRC) to how children’s rights are deployed in India’s education reform, and specifically their immersion in school governance. I will first touch upon key developments in Childhood Studies, a field whose focus on children as social actors not only informs research methodologies, but also destabilises notions of children as passive, not-yet-formed adults (‘becomings’) or ‘adult apprentices’ (Smith, 2011, p. 29). I will next critically consider the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the “globally agreed blueprint for children’s education” (Lundy *et al.*, 2017, p. 367) and briefly examine its history and the scholarly debates it has engendered, notably over its instrumental role in how children’s rights are perceived and governed. Importantly, the UNCRC divides education rights into provision (access to school) and protection in Article 28, while enumerating rights of participation in Article 29.

In the light of this bilateral approach to rights, I will examine the RTE’s claims and scaffold it with scholarly criticism of its aims, omissions, and deployment amongst resource-poor families in India. The RTE shapes SDG discourse and practice, but as education is one children’s rights among several, expanding my scholarly focus to a governance of children’s rights renders the methodology more holistic. Teachers, parents, children, and NGO workers are not merely governing the right to education; they are also governing rights which intersect with children’s participation in labour and marriage. This chapter prepares the ground for examining how participants conceptualise childhood and children’s rights and how they deploy these concepts in their governance practice.

### **The Emergence of Childhood Studies**

The leveraging of scholarly attention around the *governance* of child rights is a fairly recent phenomenon amongst scholars of childhood (Holzcheiter *et al.*, 2019). The impetus for the study of childhood with children as co-creators of culture was formalised by Allison James and Alan Prout and quickly gained a following amongst scholars who decried views of children as passive objects to be moved around in policy games (Davis, 1998; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Alanen, 2012; Thorne, 1987; Mayall, 2002; Corsaro, 2017).

This impetus followed the emergence of Childhood Studies as a field in the late 1980s. Prior to this consolidation of academic interests around children, scholars of childhood were few and flung far between the disciplines of medicine, sociology, anthropology, education and the law. However, its status as a discipline, albeit interdisciplinary, does not imply universal consensus from its scholars on its approaches on all principles (Tisdall & Punch, 2012; Hanson *et al.* 2018; Skelton & Aitken, 2019). Key features of the field include a relocating of children from the margins of scholarly inquiry to its centre, and a stress on interdisciplinarity. Initiative and interest in the field flourished as a reaction against collapsing children into studies of the household or regarding them as human ‘becomings’ (Quortrup, 2009).

Another motivating factor for studying children in depth arose from the popularity of developmental psychology, which aimed to quantify and disaggregate information about children to inform scholarly understandings of human development and evolution. Jean Piaget is a leading figure in education whose studies revolved around this view of childhood as a stage in human development. Mirroring the developmental strand of thinking, which regarded childhood as a stage of human development, scholars of anthropology and sociology viewed childhood as a stage in socialisation (Smith & Greene, 2014). Advocates for childhood studies therefore pointed out to the fallacies of sidelining children in academic inquiry and the “New Sociology of Childhood” was launched as a corrective to this historic scholarly blindness. Allison James and Alan Prout, in their 1990 book, *Constructing and Re-constructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* identified key features of their “new paradigm”, among which included regarding childhood as a social construction. Engaging with childhood as a social construction was meant to invite further commentary and inclusion into the process of reconstructing childhood (Balagopalan, 2002).

Ethnography was promoted as the ideal research method in acquiring data on children’s creating and shaping of culture, and it remains a prominent research method in the field (Dennis & Huf, 2020). While there have been calls for more quantitative studies on children (Alanen, 2012), the use of ethnography and qualitative methods was believed to be less intrusive and a more ‘natural’ mode of inquiry into children’s daily lives. Other “child-friendly” methods include arts-based methods and group interviews. Recently, data collection has also taken place in online “worlds,” with digital data collection representing a relatively new but revealing method of inquiry in how children construct identities and forge social practices that traverse the online-offline divide (Montgomery, 2007; Danby *et al.*, 2018; Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Support for childhood as a social construction also arose

from within the discipline of education itself, with well-known educationists such as John Dewey an early proponent of the grounding of education in social relationships. Dewey drew links between cognition and cultural change, writing of “the habits of mind which secure social changes” as early as 1916. Lev Vygotsky a few years later, theorised on cognition, learning, and behaviour, arguing that children’s social engagement and internalising of social rules was a driving factor in their cognitive advancement (Vygotsky, 1994).

The shaping of cognition by culture in tandem with the reworking of culture through cognitive acts was emphasized by cultural anthropologist Barbara Rogoff, who argues that “human development is a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations” (2003, p.37). Agbenyega (2009) credits Hedegaard (2008) for labelling the cultural-historical iteration of child development as a “a dialectical relationship”, an “(interactional) relationship between environmental and cultural factors and biology as shaping individual development” (p.32). Upon reflecting on the contributions of Childhood scholars over the past two decades, Alan Prout (2019) noted that studying childhood destabilises “taken-for granted ideas about childhood” (p.3) which he perceives as a hallmark task of academic scholarship.

Viewing children as social actors has transformed research studies in education and schooling, introducing novel methods and perspectives from a range of ages from kindergarten-age children to adolescents and secondary-school teens (Cameron *et al.*, 2020; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Golann, 2015; Wilson *et al.*, 2019; Duckett *et al.*, 2010) on topics ranging from pupil well-being to investigating student perspectives on academic pressure. Studies which engaged with children and children’s perspectives on poverty and schooling also emerged in Global South regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Punch, 2002; Balagopalan, 2008; Aitken, 2019; Phiri & Abebe, 2016; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2015; Greenwood *et al.*, 2020). The Young Lives study, which follows the lives of 12,000 resource-poor children divided into two age-grouped cohorts across Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam combines both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand children and young people’s experiences and their transitions through education and labour (Iyer & Moore, 2017).

In India, scholars have produced sociologically-rich accounts of children’s experiences in education and labour that crystallises a portrait of the complex experiences of school and work for these children. Ethnographic investigations of child labourers and transitions of resource-poor children between school and work in India depict the

difficulties children face when trying to reconcile contradictory messages from the RTE, the promises of education policy and their own lived experiences (Balagopalan, 2008; Thangaraj, 2016; Morrow, 2013; Shah, 2015; Yunus, 2020; Joshi, 2020). Participatory, arts-based methods are often used in such studies as advocates claim that they are not only ‘child-friendly’ but help depress power imbalances between the researcher and child participants. Popular arts-based methods include Photovoice (participants taking photographs of their schools and communities) and group or individual interviews around children’s drawings (Mitchell, 2006; Singhal *et al*, 2007; Shah, 2015).

However, debates in childhood studies question both notions of power and assumptions of idealism in these methods. While the purpose of this thesis is not to cover these debates in their depth and complexity, I will narrow on two aspects which are particularly salient to this thesis’s epistemological standpoint and research design. The first aspect critically evaluates the notion of power, which I shall attempt to engage with in the next few paragraphs. The second, which weighs the pros and cons of participatory, arts-based methods, will be explored in the succeeding methodology chapter.

### **The Intricacies of Power and Participation in Childhood Research**

Early calls (Thorne, 1988; Mandell, 1990) to pay attention to children’s cultures as distinct and data-rich, led to a flurry of research that prioritised children’s voices. However, certain consequences of this approach emerged. Leena Alanen (quoted in Smith & Greene, 2014) noted that the trend in childhood studies seems to rely on simple amplification of children’s voices, rather than engage with the broader systems around children. She viewed the field as lacking in deep engagements with theory, although conceding that its relative youth as a discipline largely accounted for this. Not only did academic engagement with children’s cultures need greater theoretical scaffolding, but notions of participation and power were also realised to be far more ambiguous (Kothari & Cooke, 2001).

A defining challenge for researchers studying childhood in global South contexts is applying theory and methods generated in Northern institutions. Blum *et al.* (2019) have noted how childhood and adolescence is popularly conceived in the north as phases of innocence, play, and risk-taking, while in the global South, poor children and adolescents report lower ages of responsibility, and often combine schooling with labour. Scholars in the field have grappled with the thorny concept of “giving voice” and have discussed the delicate balance of ethics involved in investigating children’s “lifeworlds” (Roets *et al.*,



2013). Without an engagement with the systemic forces within which children are embedded, research on children risks re-fragmentation and political obscurity. A harnessing of critical pedagogic focus on systemic power together with childhood studies' focus on children as social actors thus provided me with investigative direction when doing fieldwork in Karnataka.

### **Governing Schools and Governing Children: Education Rights**

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the emergence of school governance as an important tool on the arsenal of education development. School governance in Karnataka, however, does not stop at the school level. SDMCs are expected to ensure compliance with RTE law, especially the laws regarding universal primary attendance. At the same time in fulfilling this development agenda, they must also fulfil a community development agenda to “participate” democratically, ensuring that marginalised groups such as Scheduled Caste (SC) parents and women are given “voice.” While SDMCs are expected to work in tandem with existing forms of village governance such as the *panchayat*, the stress on democracy and participation amongst SDMC members extends towards establishing ideal relationships and relationships in school governance.

There are structural difficulties in attempting a coherent form of governance that aims to encapsulate child, school, family and community governance. While the enfolding of these various governances, Russian-doll style, may fall in line with neo-liberal values of efficiency, there remains a concern whether such governance further marginalises and burdens groups already marginalised (Balagopalan, 2014; Maithreyi & Sriprakash, 2018; Edwards, 2018). Moreover, the technical project of school governance rarely includes curiosity or concern for existing family and community dynamics, save whether they are perceived as deficit (Gupta, 2012). Scholars of school governance in Southern countries counter that such technical views generate friction as various groups are lumped together as a “community” and are co-opted into national ‘participatory’ projects of educational reform (Bray, 2003; Edwards, 2018). This responsabilisation of parents as enforcers of universal primary education sits uneasily with the deregulation of child labour laws in India (Balagopalan, 2019). Sarada Balagopalan notes that because the law allows children to work “after school and during vacations” in any enterprise connected with a family member, parents are faced with the tension of having their children work for survival while having to comply with state rules on school attendance. The confusion engendered by such legislation and the mandates of SDMC policy to ensure safe and child-friendly school spaces extends governance practice over not only education, but also its associated rights.

## Investigating Child Rights Governance

Scholars in the field of childhood studies have drawn attention to the emergence of “child rights governance”, the discourse and practices associated with governing children’s rights. Holzcheiter, Josefsson, and Sandin (2019) note that children’s rights, enshrined in laws often disseminated by international organisations such as the UN, demarcate universal ideal childhoods. Children’s rights are often used as mobilising ground for educational reform, and in India, particular stress has been laid on universal access and attendance in the RTE. And while influential international commissions such as the UNCRC are often adapted uncritically in a variety of contexts, academics such as Nieuwenhuys (2006) and Thangaraj (2016) have noted a tendency on the part of both state actors and non-state actors such as NGOs to adopt moralistic attitudes in governance practice with child rights as their justification. Governance, for childhood scholars such as Holzcheiter *et al* (2019) is a widening of focus from the child as a target of governance to the apparatus responsible for discharging that governance. They point to the marshalling of various disparate groups such as parents, NGOs and state officials to further child rights governance. They also share the concerns of critical pedagogues when discussing that such definitions of governance distract attention away from power imbalances:

Governance, thus, deflects scholarly attention from the analysis of state power, central governments and domestic bureaucracies towards the ability of state authorities to interact with and steer a constantly widening array of non-state actors in the exercise of political authority and the crafting and implementation of policies. (p. 276)

Important as Holzcheiter *et al*’s (2019) and Balagopalan’s (2019) contributions to studying child rights governance are, there is a school-sized gap in their theoretical and research frameworks. They focus on other branches of the child rights apparatus, and on actors such as NGO workers and labouring children. I see my study as applying the layer of child rights governance over the school itself and specifically its own governance bodies. Of special interest therefore, is how communities navigate tensions and responsibilities as child rights guardians under the banner of school governance.

This exploration does not assume an idealistic uncovering of children’s “agency.” While a key contribution of the field of childhood is drawing attention to the ways children have been sidelined as important cultural actors, this increase of attention comes with the attendant temptations of romanticizing children as agents. An individualist perspective of the child has largely contributed to this romance (Wyness, 2014) and tends to view

children in isolation from their relationships with adults (Lee, 2001). While individualist inquiries can be useful for charting subjective states of childhood such as independence, scholars of childhood in global South contexts have pointed to the collective construction of childhood, where notions of 'independence' and 'individualism' deviate from their Western models. Meanwhile, scholarly concerns over adequately representing the "voices" of children, can spiral into a ceaseless quest for purity, almost a 'fetish' for the child's 'authentic voice' (Choudhury & White, 2007).

Scholarly preoccupation with foregrounding children's voices, however, has played an important role in facilitating avenues for children's participation and in deploying critical lenses towards children's tokenistic participation in decision-making structures (Hart, 2008). A canvassing of the literature on children's agency and participation suggests therefore that the researcher of childhood must delicately balance between eliciting children's participation and seeking their complete freedom from adult mediation in the context of the research inquiry. Lansdown's (2010) definition of participation is especially helpful here where she defines participation as 'children expressing their views freely and them taken seriously' (p. 11). The problematic motif of seeking a voice unsullied by adult influence loses theoretical justification when considering the view that there is probably no such thing as a 'pure' adult voice. As Wyness (2014) argues:

Adults have to rely on others in order to get their messages across; their understandings of the world are always mediated by other people and objects. The search for an authentic adult voice is seen as a fruitless task for it is always filtered through a range of media and resources. Thus the search for the authentic unmediated voice of the child must suffer a similar fate. In a complex media-driven world both adults' and children's voices are heavily mediated (p.30).

Moreover, to seek a voice unmediated by adult interference is almost impossible given that most researchers are adults themselves. Despite attempts by researchers to minimize their influence and take on a 'least-adult' positioning (Mandell, 1988; Corsaro, 2017), with the researcher possessing physical, cognitive, and social advantages, power imbalances are inescapable (Mayall, 1996; Thorne, 1993). However, these early theorisations of power focused almost exclusively on adult power and the need for its depression when conducting research with children. Mandell's 'least-adult' role posits, for instance, that researchers relinquish all adult claims to power except for physical size (1988). The experiences and narratives of researchers who have attempted to work out these roles have contributed to a more nuanced understanding. Such a role confers both

benefits and consequences (Horton, 2008; Abebe, 2009). Researchers have shown how children can employ resistance to research agendas via silence, or responses which circumvent interview questions (Spyrou, 2016). Indeed, Gallagher (2008) notes that power is not restricted to only adults, and that children also possess a measure of power, which enables them to “exploit, appropriate, redirect, contest, or refuse” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 137) research activities.

Occupying the ‘least-adult’ role can also place the researcher in a quandary when children demonstrate power imbalances amongst themselves, such as bullying each other during interviews (Atkinson, 2019). Romanticising child participation can underprepare researchers for the practical complexities of navigating power as a result of its under-theorisation in childhood research (Gallagher, 2008; Holloway *et al.*, 2018). Researchers have candidly expressed feeling out of their depth when observing playgrounds or attempting to build rapport with their child participants. Finally, additional dangers include assuming children share the same opinions because they are grouped by the research question into a category (in this case, resource-poor children) and researchers over-identifying with child participants (Hunleth, 2011; Flaherty *et al.*, 2004).

The reverential treatment of children’s rights, their largely unquestioned dissemination and popularization in the media and NGO literature leads to a portrayal of rights as sacred and unquestioned. Yet Hanson & Niuewenhuys (2012) point to the evolving character of rights, dubbing them “living rights”, idea(l)s that spur social change, both on judicial as well as relational levels. Anthropologists working at the frontiers of rural development and communal political mobilization have documented how disestablished tribal groups utilize the rhetoric of rights as well as the promise of its legislation to protest environmentally destructive practices (Tsing, 2005). For resource-poor children, this discourse of rights permeates their experiences of schooling and legitimates education reform on their behalf.

This study tracks the workings out of rights on two levels. One is the level of ‘culture’, mapping out the tangling of rights with everyday experiences and documenting how Karnatakan communities balance cultural understandings of the child and ‘childhood’ with a children’s rights originating primarily from modern, Western centres. Rights are also understood as always in flux rather than as social cornerstones. The immersion of rights in educational and cultural life in Karnataka relies on Corbett’s (2015) definition of education as a “cultural practice.”

## Contributions of Children's Rights Movements and Children's Rights Studies

The contributions of childhood studies to the image of children as active participants have also merged with advanced liberal and neo-liberal discourses and practices of increasingly co-opting children's competencies and agency (Smith, 2011). While Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie (2006) caution against drawing explicit links between neoliberal policies and research interests around children, Karen Smith (2011) notes the increasing association between flourishing notions of children's individual responsibility and educational programs and consumer discourses. This participative child who must be reasoned with, she argues, supplements the child who must be disciplined and/ or protected. These concurrent and competing child images have been traced back to Western historical conceptualizations of childhood and Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie (2006) note that socialization of children corresponds with a socialisation of *parents*. They note how prevailing norms of childhood tend to favour white, middle-class, Western lifestyles, which is bolstered by research on working-class parenting (Lareau, 2003; Reyes, 2020).

The work of these scholars foregrounds the critique that academics have levelled at the UNCRC for making assumptions of rights that correspond more to middle-class Northern childhoods than precarious childhoods. As with studies in governance, scholars have called for studies of rights from the bottom-up to reflect their constructedness. Vandenhoe (2012) calls for "localizing children's rights", and Reynaert *et al.* (2011) proffer a "lifeworld approach to children's rights" as a way of understanding how children and communities engage with rights. Therefore, a bottom-up study of school development governance goes hand-in-hand with a bottom-up perspective of children's rights.

The dominant paradigm is to view children's rights as objective, which children's rights scholars argue is problematic given the diversity and importance of social, historical, economic and cultural contexts which children inhabit. However, contextualising children's rights also invites further challenges. Striking a balance between achieving children's rights without unintentionally sanctioning abuse remains the chief one. Another is the ongoing debate between the instrumentality of the CRC and its malleability in various contexts. The primary reason for these debates is that there are no universally agreed definitions of children, childhood and children's rights (Reynaert *et al.*, 2015). Even in Northern contexts, as I have outlined earlier, representations of children as 'adults-in waiting' (Reynaert *et al.*, 2015, p. 4) have led to three major images: children as beings to be disciplined, protected, and reasoned with. These images are not set in stone and can be harnessed at different times and contexts over the span of a child's life (Smith, 2011). The UNCRC can be viewed as relying on the two latter images of childhood. Although I do

not have the space in this thesis to synthesize all the scholarly debates surrounding the drafting of the CRC and its rendition of rights, I will highlight key contributions from scholarly commentary that will scaffold how children's rights are transmitted and interpreted in Karnataka.

### **The UNCRC, its history and typology of rights**

The power of the UNCRC derives both from its legal provenance and its attempt to universalise safe and dignified childhoods for all the world's children. Fortin (2003, p. 49) called it "the touchstone for children's rights around the world" and Reynaert *et al* (2015, p. 88) note "the Convention's standing in international law as the almost universally accepted standard of children's rights." The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003, Section 12) declared the UNCRC to be guided by four general principles: i) non-discrimination, ii) best interests of the child, iii) the right to life, survival and development, and v) participation. These principles can be condensed into rights of provision, protection, and participation, referred to by Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007, p. 431) as the "3 P's". For the scope of this dissertation, I will condense these rights further into protection/provision and participation. Since its publication in 1989, the UNCRC has been ratified by all countries worldwide except for the United States of America (Robinson *et al.*, 2020).

Major challenges to implementing the CRC arise from the difficulty of monitoring its implementation in various countries (Sloth-Nielsen, 2018) and the diversity of national interpretations. Indeed, the principle of the best interests of the child can be interpreted in myriad ways and "mean all things to all people" (Kilkelly & Lundy, 2006, p. 336). Claims that the UNCRC appeals to universal experiences of being human were often made in consideration of the drafting process of the CRC, which included months of negotiations and compromises reached between nation states from across the globe (Johnson, 1992). Afua Twum Danso-Imoh (2008) provides the example of the Senegalese delegates recommending caution when approaching female circumcision while the delegates of the UK, the US, and Canada preferred targeting the practice itself. Twum Danso-Imoh records that the compromise eventually reached did not explicitly refer to Africa while securing support for abolishing customary practices that jeopardised children's health. Another concern emerged over the individualistic/collectivistic dichotomy, where rights were seen as promoting an individualistic discourse, which raised concerns from more "collectivist" cultures. For example, Ellen Key, one of the earlier proponents of children's rights,

referred to “the right of young people to stimulate individualism above all else” (Key, 1909, p. 8).

However, Landsdown (2005) cautions that the CRC should not be read as giving children complete autonomy and that a major challenge lies in harmonizing individual rights with the collective struggles of national minority groups. In brief, I view the UNCRC as promoting “moderate rather than ambitious standards of protection and promotion of the rights of the child” (Lopatka, 1993, p. 51), whose flexibility can be interpreted and re-constructed in a country such as India. Merry’s comment that human rights can be merged in how “(the) local appropriates and transforms the global for its own needs” (2000, p. 129) shapes a scholarly perspective that views children’s rights, like governance, as malleable forms that can be used to empower as well as erode resource-poor communities’ mobilisation capabilities.

Gurchathen Sanghera (2008, 2016) argues that rights discourses can deflect attention from the relative inaction of Global North countries in addressing exploitative working conditions for children. He notes the ambivalence of rights when applying them to child labour, an ambivalence that Sarada Balagopalan claims leaches into India’s own Child Labour law of 2016, where children are allowed to work out of school hours and during vacations (Balagopalan, 2019). Stearns (2017) has also explained India’s ‘pragmatic’ approach to child labour is driven by a larger national vision of socioeconomic progress. Balagopalan (2019) also questions whether this flexibility towards resource-poor children’s livelihoods supports the status quo rather than drawing attention to India’s continuing project of economic liberalisation. Moreover, she views the RTE as encouraging this ambivalence and responsabilising resource-poor children to attend school even when the system fails to respond to their needs.

### **Education Rights**

The UNCRC provides what Lundy *et al.* (2017) refer to as the “globally agreed blueprint for education” (p. 368). They note that studies focusing on the intersection of children’s rights governance and education are rare, though recently that has been changing (Couzens, 2017; Adonteng-Kissi, 2020). The school has been upheld by certain scholars as the site where children’s rights can be modelled and practiced (Shallcross *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, from the excerpt of the Task Force report in the previous chapter, in Karnataka, the school is the site for development. Tomasevki (2001, p. 43) argues that “what happens in schools is seldom examined through the human rights lens.” In spite of the various challenges in implementing the UNCRC, Lundy *et al.* (2017) note that it

“provides a consistent and clear destination” where “all children are able to develop to their fullest potential through education that is respectful of their rights” (p. 376). Not only is the school an important site for the realisation of rights, but education is both a right itself and an avenue for the realisation of other rights. Lundy *et al* (2017) propose viewing these assorted and interconnected rights as “education rights” rather than referring to them as “the right to education.”

The concept of education rights serves as an umbrella term denoting not only the right *to* education, but rights *in* education and rights that arise *through* education (p. 376). They note that the complexity of the endeavour was acknowledged through the CRC’s designation of two separate Articles regarding education: Article 28 (which addressed access to education) and Article 29 which spells out the aims of education itself. Lundy *et al.* (2017) note that the UNCRC has deliberately included flexibility for state implementation, as its drafters realised that not every nation possessed the resources to achieve its goals by specific deadlines. They are not the only scholars to make this distinction: Monisha Bajaj (2014) has also divided education rights along similar lines. A major difference in her work, however, is her focus on human rights education (HRE) as the third component (education *for* human rights).

Congruent with aforementioned scholarly perspectives on rights as social constructions, Bajaj (2014) offers a visualisation of ‘rights scapes’ which, “created by the shifting intersections of globalization, education, and human rights- are neither wholly liberating nor oppressive; rather they provide a site in which to explore the creation of new forms of citizenship, as well as the unique limitations and possibilities for the exercise of human agency” (p. 56). This perspective dovetails with the perspective I adopted from Corbridge *et al* (2005) on governance, to seek the middle ground that acknowledges new and enduring forms of systemic oppression as well as possibilities for resource-poor communities and children to strive for social change. In the children’s rights ‘scape’, Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007, p. 438) suggest to approach the UNCRC as a “social and political platform” where the state, children, and their families can practice “relational citizenship” through dialogue regarding their rights.

These authors see participatory governance as thus not a practice where children are schooled into right ways of citizenship, but as an activity that builds on dialogue and interconnectedness. “Responsibility,” they conclude “is seen as a learning process” (2007, p. 439). Balagopalan (2012, p. 136) has also discussed the dissemination and practice of rights as “intense pedagogic activities”, although she approaches it from a postcolonial standpoint that questions the UNCRC’s claims to universalism. Nevertheless, Roose and



Bouverne-De Bie offer an important contribution to the study of school development and children's rights governance, by remarking upon the learning processes narrated by participants regarding their behaviour, beliefs, and actions. Having discussed the UNCRC as a tool

that allows for resource-poor children learning participation as well as availing of the protection and provision due them, I will now turn to the RTE to examine how it approaches children's rights. Its approach generates an image of childhood around which SDG governance in India is meant to pivot.

### **The RTE as Blueprint for School Development and Children's Rights Governance**

When the Right to Education was passed in India on April 1, 2009, free education was thus mandated for all children between the ages of six and fourteen. The RTE was the first explicitly rights-based approach to universal education in India, although scholars have pointed out that it promotes positions on privatisation that are inconsistent with social justice approaches and which continue to reinforce class inequalities (Kaushal, 2012; Quinan, 2015; Kelly & Bhabha, 2016; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016; Lafleur & Srivastava, 2019). Notably for my study on participation and marginalised families' and children's enactment of citizenship, Bhattacharya and Jiang (2018) argue that the RTE does not address linguistic exclusion and class formation through the use of language (e.g. English), which they note "leads to dis-citizenship of linguistic minority students, either ignoring and/or aggravating existing social inequalities" (p.155). Linguistic education policies are just one slice of a complicated whole. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly trace the roots of educational inequality through India's history, contextualising the struggles resource-poor families continue to face. By examining the historic and social situatedness of the gaps in achieving Indian educational equity, this latter half of the chapter attempts to flesh out the origins and persistence of the various paradoxes facing not only resource-poor groups but also school staff, bureaucrats, and NGO workers connected with education in India. I then spend some time examining the Right to Education, its vision and rhetoric and the critiques it has generated. Importantly, I focus on the RTE's invocation of crisis and childhood in legitimating the school governance landscape. These sections pave the path towards a sociological understanding of the responsibilities and possibilities of practicing school development governance by historically situating India's challenges in achieving educational equality.

## A Brief Historical Overview of Education in India- A Legacy of Inequality

Unequal schisms in educational service provision can be traced over India's colonial period, with English-medium education offered to certain individuals the British hoped would act as interpreters between their interests and those of the governable masses (Tukdeo, 2019). Prior to India's consolidation as a British colony, the country was composed of several kingdoms. Northern India had been under the hold of the Mughal dynasty for several centuries, while the southern kingdoms which presided over present-day Karnataka included the major Hindu empires of Maurya and Vijayanagara (Kamat, 1980; Nair, 2011). Hindu religion, arts, and culture flourished under these empires, until the advance of the Islamic sultanates in the 16th century. Karnataka was successively governed by the Bijapur sultanate rulers, which reintroduced the waning influence of the Bahmani sultanate (whose iconic fort still remains in present-day Kalaburagi city), until the advances of their Muslim neighbour in the north, the Mughals. Mughal expansion into South India was replaced by the eras of the Nizams, the Hindu Marathas, and finally, the British. These various empires bequeathed a legacy of diverse art and religious forms, but education remained largely confined to the ruling elite. Most formal learning was conducted in religious centres or schools such as madrasahs, and under religious teachers (Goalen, 1992; Scharfe, 2002).

During the early years of the colonial administration, religious schools were allowed to continue running while the incursion of British missionaries led to the formation of mission-schools. These historical developments have bequeathed two enduring social norms which influence education in India today. One is the respect shown towards teachers, a respect evoked by the word *guru*, a figure who is a spiritual and communal mentor. The other stemmed from the socialisation process of mission schools, where lower-caste groups were invited to escape their poverty and fixed class positions through schooling.<sup>14</sup> While this sort of schooling was also designed to socialise Indian natives out of their 'heathenish' customs, the opportunities to cut across class boundaries through schooling disseminated notions of education as an achievable and abstract good. Arguably, colonial-era schooling birthed the 'middle class', following notable colonial

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<sup>14</sup> Recently, scholars of the history of education in India point to how education has always worn a contested aspect in India. Sigamoney (2020) acknowledges that while mission schools provided opportunities for marginalised castes to gain an education, the colonial administration continued to abide by larger practices of social exclusion, while undermined caste equality. Nambissan (2020) also draws attention to the ambivalent attitude of colonial authorities in publicly offered schooling, where the entry of Dalits sparked opposition by dominant castes. These roots of social exclusion in government schooling, she notes, endured through the welfare policies of post-independence and contribute to educational inequalities today.

administrator Thomas Macaulay's famous dictum of producing a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835).

English language, a colonial marker of distinction, continues to possess currency in industries that profess a 'global' leaning and outlook: India's infotech (IT) and service industries (Nath, 2011). Bangalore, the capital of south India's IT industry, is an overnight train ride away from Kalaburagi, and draws migrants from north Karnataka to its urban sphere every year. However, it is important to note that British administrators largely offered English education to upper-caste, already educated elite classes in India. And despite the widening of schooling opportunities offered to lower castes, their employment opportunities were slim, for the British recruited educated Indians from upper, propertied castes into the Indian Civil Service (Platz-Robinson, 2014). As Fernandes and Heller (2006) note, an English education redefined hierarchy "both within the middle class and in relation to subordinate groups" (p. 6).

Thus, while certain groups vaunted over economic boundaries through English education, the majority of lower-caste and marginalised groups could not afford to access this education. If the lower-classes were to benefit from English education, it was via processes of "downward filtration" which British administrators assumed would trickle to the rest of the population (Tukdeo, 2019). In the 19th century, the colonial educational apparatus expanded, as educational reforms in Britain were "transplanted" in Indian soil, to support colonial economic infrastructure (Tukdeo, 2019). Many existing local schools were absorbed into the fabric of a "western" vision of secular education, one that involved setting out curricula, training teachers, and establishing universities. The colonial mission of "improving"; of producing subjects with cultural ties to the empire arguably mirrors the governance mission of producing citizen subjects.

### **Post-Independence Education Policy Reform**

The neglect of the majority of India's population that was the legacy of British colonial education meant that the post-Independence state faced a daunting task in providing universal primary schooling. Despite the Hunter Commission of 1882, where Sir William Hunter recommended the expansion of primary schools overseen by local and municipal districts under the Local Self Government Act (a very early form of decentralised school governance), there was little concerted effort to implement these recommendations.

As I have discussed in the previous section, this neglect went hand-in-hand with the conscious creation of a ‘class of persons’ that possessed the cultural capital of an English education and of the employment acquired with it: civil service, teaching, medicine and the law. The creation of a ‘middle class’ through an English education has led to middle and elite classes appropriating English-medium private education as their particular asset, an asset by which they continue to distinguish and distance themselves from lower classes (Platz-Robinson, 2014; Bhattarcharea & Jiang, 2018). Other social forms of exclusion manifested upon the constitutional directive to provide mass primary education up to 12 years within 10 years of its publication. Two major enduring forms were Dalit (‘Untouchable’) caste exclusion and the exclusion of women from formal schooling. Patriarchal gender norms which favoured practices of purdah (where women were barred from traveling outside the family home) coincided with casteist practice which barred lower castes and ‘tribal’ populations from school access (Kingdon, 2002; Borooah & Iyer, 2005; Azam & Kingdon, 2013; Borooah, 2017; Dejaeghere & Arur, 2020). Today scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) groups document persistently low levels of literacy and schooling (Prakash *et al.*, 2017).

Despite ambitious schemes devised by the then ruling Congress Party to address these barriers, a lack of substantial political commitment turned these visions into exercises of empty rhetoric. The Education Commission of 1966 (colloquially referred to as the Kothari Commission after its chair D.S Kothari) intended to investigate “the state” of India’s education, and subsequently published dismal findings. Marking a “turning point in India’s educational life” (Adiseshiah, 1979 quoted in Tilak, 2018), the Kothari Commission made several recommendations to improve educational service delivery, most of which were implemented unevenly. Perhaps the most controversial recommendation was that of devoting 6% of India’s GDP to the education budget, a recommendation that has so far failed to be implemented (Tilak, 2006; Mehtrotra, 2012; Mangla, 2013). The Kothari Commission explicitly took a human capital approach by linking education to socioeconomic development: “education and research are critical to the entire developmental process of a country, its welfare, progress and security.” Indeed, it went on to argue that education “determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people” (p. 3). This link between education, development, and socioeconomic progress would endure throughout several Five-Year Plans and continue to inform education policies and programs.

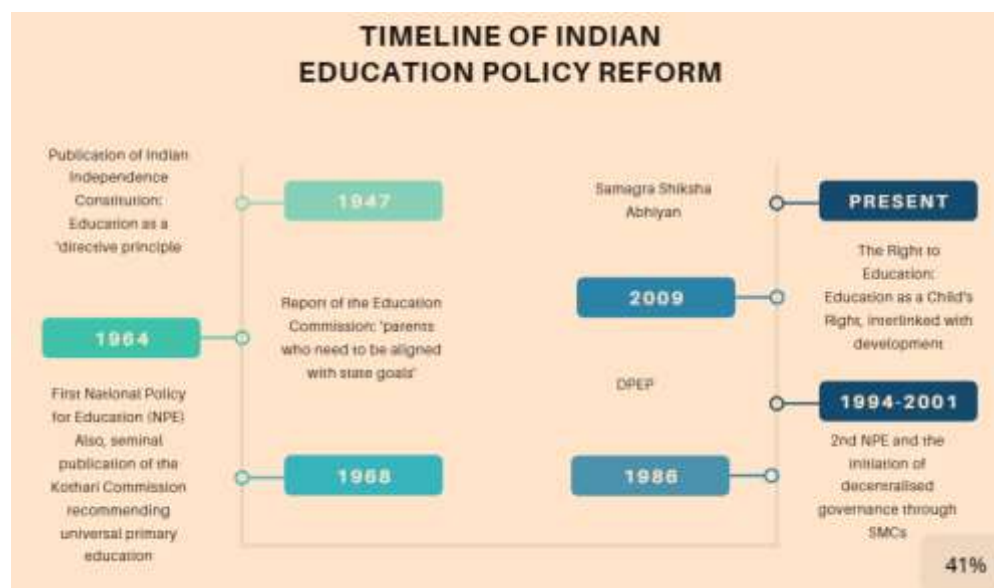
By the mid-1980s, India’s central government, concerned at regional disparities, (with states such as Kerala displaying higher literacy rates than many of its northern

neighbours) took a firmer hold of the policy reins. It started devoting more than 3.5% of the GDP to the education budget, and publication of the 1986 National Policy of Education triggered a seismic shift in India's primary education system. Not only were ambitious targets set out for universal primary schooling, but decentralised forms of school governance were promoted. The state program "Operation Blackboard" demonstrates government commitment to overhauling its government schools: improvements to school infrastructure were bolstered by finances made available to hire more teachers.

India's economic policies of the 1990s, where it 'opened' to the world, ushered in not just income growth and the flourishing of the IT and service sectors, but initiated a neoliberal approach to education that promoted the expansion of private institutions, especially in higher education (Dreze & Sen, 2013; Dreze, 2015). On the other hand, India had also hitched itself to the Education for All movement, pledging to achieve universal primary education by 2000. India's economic policies dovetailed with accepting aid investment from the World Bank for its District Primary Education Program. The DPEP was a prototype of India's subsequent educational reform program, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. DPEP operations spanned 219 districts and created thousands of new schools, sponsored scholarships for SC students, hired new teachers and para-teachers, and most importantly for this dissertation, initiated joint parent-teacher school management in Village Education committees (VECS) (Unterhalter & Dutt, 2001; Azam & Saing, 2017).

The DPEP broke new ground in India's educational landscape by tying developmental concerns explicitly into education, ranging from improving access to schools for girls and SC/ ST minority groups to teacher training and community participation. Its operations were subsequently absorbed into Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, India's 'flagship' program which committed to providing free universal education to children from the ages of 6 to 14. Currently, it is now referred to as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan committed to providing quality education and removing barriers to primary school access, all the while in a political climate that continued to support economic liberalisation. Its most tangible feature is the Midday Meal Scheme, where children going to government schools can have one free, freshly-served meal daily. Initiated in 2001, SSA received major judicial and symbolic support from the Right to Education in 2009, which mandated education as an enforceable right. This reinforces an educational landscape where competing humanist discourses of rights, practices of participatory governance and affirmative action policies jostle with an as yet underdeveloped education system (Mangla, 2013) and the spread of private education institutions.

**Table 1 Timeline of Major Education Policy Reform in India (Source: Author)**



## Historical Origins of the Right to Education

As I have mentioned previously, education provision in India was marked by a flourishing of private schools for the middle and elite classes, while government schooling suffered from a lack of political commitment to concrete vision and financing. The Right to Education was born out of two landmark court cases in India, which spurred the Supreme Court to re-investigate and redefine educational equality on the basis of rights. The entangling of private education with access and justice is depicted in the *Mohini Jain vs Karnataka* case, a historical landmark in the RTE's trajectory. A student from Uttar Pradesh, Mohini Jain was denied admission to a private medical college in Karnataka because she could not pay its inflated fees. Tuition fees for those who had secured 'government seats' (i.e., those whose grades were the highest in a highly competitive entrance exam) were much lower, while the rest had to pay higher rates based on their residency (in-state or out-of-state). The case sparked a national and legal debate on the access to education. For the first time in judicial history, the practice of extortionate tuition fees and the impact this had on distancing disadvantaged groups from access, was examined and pronounced unjust. With no explicit provision for education in the Constitution, the Supreme Court reverted to Article 21, which sets out the right to a dignified life.

Education was thus ruled as essential to dignified life for everyone, with income-based discrimination struck down. Ten years later, an amendment to the constitution included education under Article 21 A. The *Unnikrishnan vs. Andhra Pradesh* case

extended the debate to children, which crystallised the formation of the RTE. It is important to note that private institutions were perceived, through these rulings, to be upholding a public function, i.e. education. This promoted the policy view of private schools as agents of the state. Despite their for-profit interests, private schools were ostensibly expected to toe the development line in ensuring fair access to education by resource-poor groups. This expectation was furthered by an amendment to the Constitution itself, transforming education from a principle to a right. The drafting of the RTE was therefore triggered by the 86th Constitutional Amendment, which re-affirmed the right of children between six and fourteen to free compulsory education. The RTE thus fused the affective powers of rights rhetoric with the muscle of constitutional power.

### **Criticism of the RTE**

The drafting of the RTE itself was mired in contestations and negotiations. Its release sent private school lobbies all the way to the Supreme Court to protest what they read as “undue government interference” (Srivastava & Noronha, 2014b, p. 52). Interviews with the bureaucrats, planners, and academics responsible for drafting the RTE reveal a range of constraints and backroom contestations. The officials expressed concerns over the RTE’s concessions to quality, noting that in its zeal to enforce the right to universal primary education, the RTE neglected quality factors such as teacher training, pre-school education and lack of grievance redressal systems (Srivastava & Noronha, 2014b). Nevertheless, the RTE is important as a document that enshrines education as a civil-political right, especially for the marginalised groups which are its targeted beneficiaries. The RTE’s vision statement induces a tension from its introduction: by legally mandating “free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years,” the right to education dissolves for children before and after these ages. Prachi Srivastava and Claire Noronha (2014b) make the case for the RTE as a “result of a negotiated process marking the beginning of a new phase of institutional evolution in India” (p. 51).

As the inspiration and cornerstone of this ‘institutional evolution’ the RTE also drew parameters around who would benefit from this right. In focusing on a demarcated age range, the RTE cannot address universal secondary and tertiary schooling, nor does it account for early childhood education.<sup>15</sup> This fragmentary approach to reform perpetuates paradoxes for resource poor families and children who weigh their options based on a

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<sup>15</sup> Current Indian policy regarding early childhood education concentrates on parenting practices and adopts global discourses on family readiness, which Sriprakash *et al.* (2020) criticise as assuming middle-class resources and practices.

longer-range evaluation of educational opportunities and barriers. For example, the lack of secondary schools within reach in rural areas, coupled with a volatile economic market, leads to early marriages for girls, which families conclude is a more viable path towards social stability, despite central government campaigns which promote girls' education. In spite of these weaknesses, however, the RTE figures as a central document which promotes powerful conceptions of crisis and childhood to structure school development governance practice and discourse.

### **Definitions of Childhood and Rights in the RTE**

This section examines the legal definitions and categorizations of childhood and rights, seeking to demonstrate how the RTE's boundary-drawing and the subsequent handing over of the reins to parents crystallise the conceptions of 'duty' and sacralise the upholding of the right to education.

The RTE defines a child as a "male or female child of the age of six to fourteen years." (Ch.1, 2.c). It further defines disadvantage as "the child belonging to the Schedule Caste, the Scheduled Tribe, the socially and educationally backward class or other such group having disadvantage owing to social, cultural, economic, geographical, linguistic, gender or other such factor as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification" (Ch1, 2.d). The language of the RTE denotes poorer parents as 'weaker,' going further to state that the "child belonging to weaker section" means a child belonging to such parent or guardian whose annual income is lower than the minimum limit specified by the appropriate Government, by notification" (Ch1,2.e). The RTE also accords children with disabilities the right to free and compulsory education and Singal (2016) notes the trend of increased policy support for and indeed surveillance of, children with special needs.

The central government and state and local bodies are therefore under legal obligation to enable children to pursue these education rights. In the RTE, these obligations centre primarily around ensuring compulsory attendance and providing infrastructure. Chapter 3 of the RTE emphasizes monitoring of access and attendance in Sections 8. ii, where the government is obliged to "ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child of the age of six to fourteen years" (p.4). Section 8.ii.f reiterates the duty of the government to "ensure and monitor admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child" and devolves responsibility on local authorities to carry out this monitoring on the ground. In addition, parents are responsibilized with rhetoric of 'duty' in Chapter 3.10: "It shall be the duty of



every parent or guardian to admit or cause to be admitted his or her child or ward, as the case may be, to an elementary education in a neighbourhood school” (p.5).

### **Duties of Parents and Communities in the RTE**

The RTE relies on the rhetoric of rights to morally legitimate school attendance and upholding the civil-political rights of children from 6 to 14 (Ray & Saini, 2016). To ensure unimpeded exercising of these rights, schools, parents, and teachers are responsibilised into minimising barriers and monitoring attendance. Attendance and completion are turned into measures and these measures must constantly be taken and updated to ensure that children are not deprived of their rights. However, the criticism levelled at government schooling, the flight of parents to private schools, and the drop-out at transitions to secondary and higher education point to continued difficulties government schooling faces in making good on its promises. Ray and Saini (2016) argue that it is not enough to merely rely on the affective power of rights discourse:

“The idealism of the rights-based approach lies in its belief that when constitutional status is granted to a right, citizens become naturally empowered to exact their rights and states become either altruistic or accountable. The rights approach discourse is often at the risk of being rhetorical because it seeks to achieve a reversal of inherent social and power structures on the basis of a rights–development nexus” (p. 275).

While Ray and Saini’s argument that idealism does not necessarily augur transformation is sound, they miss the potential of the governance power that the RTE has operationalised, both through local education authorities and through parent-teacher bodies such as SMCs. However, their conclusion receives support from other scholars in education development in India. Indeed, the rhetoric of rights is premised on certain economic outcomes of education: that it will not only provide opportunities for upwardly mobile children but will also contribute to both individual and national development. The following paragraphs present some of the challenges school development actors are expected to address. These challenges have been utilised to support presentations of crisis and the subsequent legitimisation for governance practice. However, they also explain parent rejection of government schools and turn towards private schooling.

## **Does Enabling the Right to Education lead to Better Achievement?**

Have the efforts of education reform in India translated into higher achievement scores? Although some might argue that the RTE's main function is to widen access and ensure participation, the main criticism levelled at government education is that it is of such poor quality that children are better off without it (Santhakumar *et al*, 2016). In terms of improving access, the RTE seems to have accomplished its goal: the 2011 ASER report documents a decline in unenrolled children (aged 6-14) from 6.6% to 3.3%. Conversely, ASER 2011 reported a decline in both reading and mathematics levels across states, e.g. the national proportion of children in Std V able to read a Std 2 level text fell from 53.7% in 2010 to 48.2% in 2011. However, recent ASER reports have disclosed high enrolment levels, with the number of unenrolled children in 2018 (aged 6-14) standing at 2.8% (ASER, 2018). Small gains have been recorded, i.e., slightly more than half of Standard V children can read a Standard II text, nationally. The 2018 evaluation also introduced a 'beyond basics' component, which gave children tasks they could apply to everyday scenarios, such as calculating time, making financial decisions such as computing discounts and figuring out how many water purification tablets to use. These questions were given to 14-16 year olds, with under half reported as giving the correct calculations (ASER, 2018).

These latest results suggest that for many children, what they are learning in school is not necessarily applied to their daily lives. Such findings underscore the experience of education as a contradictory resource for resource-poor families. The latter half of this chapter attempts to flesh out a portrait of the challenges in the primary school system, with reference to Karnataka. This portrait is intended to contextualise the paradoxes school actors face and to further understandings of how governance exacerbates tensions. A key tenet of this thesis is that dissonant experiences of school development governance hinge on accountability. Accountability surfaces in two main areas: teaching quality and private schooling. I will thus focus on teacher quality and private schooling for what they can tell us about how families perceive and strive for gaining accountability in their children's schools. Each of these aspects possess implications for school governance and ripple across reform efforts. Each of these aspects also provokes discourses that funnel into social narratives over education. These aspects kept cropping up in my interviews and my participants dwelt on them with an intensity that highlighted their importance.

## Holding Teachers Accountable: Absenteeism and Teaching Quality

The literature on teachers in India falls broadly between two intersecting camps: teacher absence and teaching quality. The much-referenced report by Kremer et al (2005): *Teacher Absence: A Snapshot*, aimed to portray a bleak representation of the teaching quality associated with Indian government schools. Although the RTE states that a teacher is to “maintain regularity and punctuality in attending school” (Ch IV, 24.1.a), these researchers uncovered a different portrait of practice. They discovered that around 1/4th of teachers in government schools were absent on the days the survey teams visited, with only half of the teachers present actually engaged in teaching. Karnataka had a reported absence of 21.7%, still a number significant enough to warrant parent concerns over teaching quality at government schools. The finding that private school teachers are less likely to be absent (though only by a small margin) than public school teachers may bolster parent decisions to opt for private school (when and if they can afford it). In their study, Kremer *et al.* (2005) claimed to find little evidence for a positive correlation between consolidating community ties and reducing teacher absence. The roots of teacher absence lie in their tenure as permanent civil servants, which disincentivise teachers from regular engagement with their classes (Sharma, 1999; Fagernas & Pelkonen, 2012)<sup>16</sup>. And for rural areas, with their perceived isolation in terms of location and access to facilities when compared to urban centres, the struggle to attract motivated teachers remains consistent. Indeed, Fagernas and Pelkonen (2012) in their study noted that teachers preferred urban to rural postings, with gender playing a decisive factor, as female teachers were reluctant to travel large distances.

However, in India, teachers do not decide their eventual posting, which may further account for lack of motivation. Relationships between teachers and powerful political figures in the community can also play a role in transfers, either in the teacher’s favour or otherwise, often resulting in a deficit of teachers in remote schools (Mehrotra, 2006). Teachers’ political affiliations and relations with elite figures remains understudied, although possessing implications for interactions with SDMC members. Teachers’ unions are a powerful (and also understudied) feature in the political landscape, with teachers allowed to run as MLAs and MPs. Teacher’s political relations thus configure their relations to their professions and the communities they serve. Writing in 2006, Mehrotra wondered how powerful teachers’ unions could co-exist with the decentralisation processes

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<sup>16</sup> Economists researching teaching quality and teaching performance have noted teacher support for performance pay (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2011) and provide evidence that incentives lessen teacher absenteeism in their studies (Duflo *et al.*, 2012).

that were being initiated. He predicted that teacher accountability would be difficult to achieve given the influence and cohesion of these unions. Thus, while parents in SDMCs can theoretically hold teachers accountable through monitoring, they have no recourse to any disciplinary measures save complaints to the Block Education Officer (BEO).

Running in parallel with teachers' social power and the lack of disciplinary measures for absent/underperforming teachers, are teachers' struggles against waves of education reform that fail to account for their voice in the creation and dissemination of new policies. The move from decades of teacher-centred pedagogies to child-centred pedagogies in the early 1990s, has only gained in ideological momentum, favoured as it is by organisations such as the UN (Osher *et al.*, 2009; Sriprakash, 2009; 2012, Miglani *et al.* 2017). However, the shift has been unevenly implemented, with many government school teachers continuing to favour rote methods of learning or resorting to an uneasy hybrid of the two. Sriprakash (2012) noted that not only were teachers were often inadequately trained, but that policy enthusiasm for 'new' pedagogies failed to account for social conceptualisations of childhood, especially childhoods perceived to be 'rural' and 'backward.' Therefore, the RTE's mission of "learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child-centered manner" (RTE Act 2009, p. 9) has, in practice, met with limited success in Karnataka. Such limited success highlights the difficulties teachers face on transitioning from teacher-centred pedagogies to child-centred pedagogies such as Nali Kali (Sriprakash, 2009; Gowda *et al.*, 2013; Sriprakash, 2012).

In studies which elicit parent opinion about teaching and teachers, parents have been shown to perceive teachers as apathetic. Ramachandran, Bhattacharjea, and Sheshagiri (2008) note "there has been a great deal of public anger against teachers responsible for the poor levels of educational outcomes due to a lack of motivation and 'inadequate content knowledge and pedagogical skills' (p. 5). Yet, there is also the legacy of respect for the teacher as guru. In her interviews amongst urban-poor parents in Gujarat, Hemalatha Ganapathy Coleman (2014) explored how parents regarded teachers as gurus, a Vedic ideal of a "teacher-sage", rendered accessible to lower castes through the Hindu Bhakti (devotional) movement.

In north Karnataka, the town Basavakalyan is a key pilgrimage and tourist site on account of its association with the religious social reformer Basava. Through his writing and teaching, Basava furthered his view that gender and socioeconomic background should not be used to discriminate amongst worshippers. Thus, north Karnataka has precedents of teachers-reformers. The cultural idealisation of the teacher as *guru*, moreover, appears to stand in diametric opposition to the image of the government schoolteacher as absent and

disinterested. However, it is possible to hold a culturally elevated view of teachers as gurus together with the social view of teachers as emblems of an apathetic and clientelist political system<sup>17</sup>. This is a tension teachers themselves attempt to reconcile.

Clarke (2003), in tracing the effect of the District Primary Education Program, studied teacher perceptions and practice in rural Karnataka. She emphasized the importance of “structural hierarchies” preserved through decades of education practice in India. Historically and culturally, teachers have enjoyed a certain cachet of status and respect from the community, which Clarke argues, effectively distances them from the families they serve. Occupying a culturally vaunted position, a teacher may wish to conserve this distance. They may perceive their status as threatened by child-centered pedagogies. As Clarke muses, “the social framework restricts teachers from fully appropriating the concept of going down to the child’s level, their prior knowledge, interests, and needs”(2003, p. 36) Reinforcing the findings of the 2018 ASER report that children’s learning was divorced from their quotidian learning needs, she writes that “what is learnt in the classroom is treated as separate and disconnected from the lived reality of the student” (p. 37).

This phenomenon has been noted and elaborated upon by numerous scholars in rural India, from Sarangapani (2003), to more recently, Mooij (2008) and Sriprakash (2012). A mixed-methods study of Activity-Based Learning in seven states (the national program that incorporated child-centred approaches) noted that while teachers in Karnataka reported the highest buy-in of ABL among the states, their understanding of the state ABL program was mostly procedural, and there was a disconnect between policy expectations and the levels of support and training provided to teachers (Miglani *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, while Miglani *et al.* noted that only 13% of the 110 classrooms observed demonstrated high levels of student engagement, teachers often struggle with high pupil-teacher ratios and large classes, making CCE approaches difficult to implement. They concluded however, that teacher buy-in is crucial to successful implementation of ABL, which leads to a domino effect of student participation, engagement and learning.

Communication between teachers and parents remains one of the key weaknesses raised in decentralisation efforts, hampered in no small way by teachers routinely categorising poor parents as “illiterate” (Mooij, 2008). Since overt discrimination by caste is illegal, it now adopts subtler guises. Categorising students and parents as illiterate and ‘dirty’ may function as indicators of casteism, as poor, illiterate parents still largely belong

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<sup>17</sup> This view is not restricted to the Hindu religion. Teachers are treated as respected figures in Islam and Christianity, other major religions present in India.

to SC/ST groups (Nambissan, 2011). Despite affirmative action measures in both education and government sectors, SC/ST groups still face a more restricted sphere of educational opportunities. Education is therefore a more fraught undertaking for them, which seems to be largely unacknowledged by teachers, who have concentrated more on frustrations of communicating with parents than on seeking their point of view:

There is, however, a systematic failure in the relationship between the schools and the parents, which means that there is almost no way for parents to show their interest. Many (not all!) teachers do not welcome parents in the school. They cannot enter the class rooms. They are visited rarely and called only in case of problems or at flag-hosting or other annual rituals in the school. Parent-teacher meetings, if they are held at all, focus primarily on enrolment and irregular attendance. Parents are lectured at best, scolded at worst, about their inability to make their children go to school. It is this impossibility to relate to the school in a more constructive way that makes parents, indeed, ‘disinterested’ (Mooij, 2008, p. 512).

From this excerpt, it appears that even as some teachers relinquish control over policy and curricula reform, they can continue to cling to it in certain instances of practice and perpetuate both class and educational hierarchies in this manner. Indeed, poor parents have long been accustomed to regarding the teacher as an authority and tend to leave all matters of learning in their hands. National education policy is often “translated” from the elite, often inaccessible jargon of expertise, to diffuse “vernaculars”, which re-interpret and re-inscribe policy into classroom practice (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay, 2015).

The idea of translation is a useful one, for it conveys an image of the efforts local actors make in absorbing and carving out spaces for themselves in the shifting culture of education reform. Out of all the actors involved, teachers best represent the contradictions of a governance discourse which melds a neoliberal emphasis on achievement and efficiency with the ideals of a rights-based approach to education. They embody the difficulties of inhabiting dissonant modes of governance concurrently. These contradictions are reinforced by Mooij (2008), whose focus group discussions with government schoolteachers revealed that most teachers sent their children to English-medium private schools. Teachers “are therefore not only products of the class structure, but also accomplices in the reproduction of this structure in the realm of education” (Mooij, 2008, p. 518). However, in the project of school development governance, where

teachers are cast alongside communities as co-labourers of development, seeing the teacher as (re)producer of class inequalities may be far too simplistic. Teachers can also be genuinely attached to the well-being of their resource-poor students and work tirelessly on their behalf (Spary & Sury, 2020). Of far more importance to this inquiry is how teachers reconcile the tension between their mandated role as accomplices of governance alongside their aforementioned role as accomplices in educational inequality (however unconscious they are of this).

### **Implications of Teacher Absence**

Parent frustration at teacher absence usually finds expression in parents opting for private schooling if they can afford it (Harma, 2011; Goswami, 2015; Mousumi *et al.*, 2017). Although school governance in the form of SDMCs provides one route of accountability, the promises of a job for life can paradoxically de-motivate teachers from continuing to persist in serving their marginalised students. While teachers can be fired, these instances only occur through serious infractions of child rights such as abuse, and generally the lack of political will in higher circles to follow policies through guarantees teachers' sense of security in their positions. Uneven practices of accountability often start before teachers assume their posts. As Tara Beteille (2015) discovered in her research in Karnataka, the teacher transfer or "counseling" process can be managed by teachers via bribes, mostly to government officials. While teachers can get choices based on seniority and years of service, younger teachers do not have a say in where they are posted. Previously, teachers could be posted anywhere, but starting from 2012 in Karnataka, the policy was revised to not send teachers more than 3 km from their school (Education Secretariat, 2012). In Beteille's (2015) survey of 2340 teachers in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, between 68 to 76% of teachers in Karnataka believed one had to pay bribes to secure desirable transfers. Similar percentages were recorded for those who believed you also needed to have connections. Beteille argues that these beliefs perpetuate the narrative of the state as corrupt and inefficient, which weakens anticorruption drives and reinforces unsustainable practices.

Teacher lack of choice of school may trigger a lack of enthusiasm for their post, especially if long commutes are required. They are often also conscripted into extraneous administration duties that take them away from their classes. Their involvement in state election processes and their use as government civil servants during village politics can fracture consistent school attendance. India does not have a system for substitute teachers in place, and in rural and remote areas which struggle to retain teachers, there is a greater

need for consistent teacher presence. Teachers are expected to uphold the RTE by recording attendance and creating safe classroom environments which continuously stimulate learning. However, they also grapple with the realities of clientelism, insufficient and unsystematic training, as well as simultaneously contending with top-down rights-based reform policies and the lack of political will to monitor these policies. They contend with the realities of teaching resource poor rural schoolchildren, who may also attend infrequently because of duties at work or in the fields, children whose parents may not have the resources to help them with their schoolwork or practice the ‘concerted attention’ (Lareau, 2003) wealthier parents can afford.

### **Private Schooling as Performance of Class?**

A key factor in the emergence of the crisis of educational inequality is the role private schooling plays in class formation and reinforcing class identities. Geeta Nambissan (2010) notes that “the key route to upper middle-class status in India has been the exclusive English medium ‘public’ (private) schools, which followed in the tradition of the British public schools. These are among the schools to which upper middle-class Indians have always sent their children, thereby setting trends and laying down standards of the ‘good’ in education” (p. 286). The association of private schools with English language and a middle-class, cosmopolitan disposition, continues to figure in the public imagination (LaDousa, 2014). While private English-medium schooling is regarded as the “best” kind of education, the belief in education as an abstract good continues to exercise a powerful hold across the various strata of Indian society. As Jeffrey *et al* (2008) note, “Education is also attractive [...] because it provides an achieved model of success distinct from ascribed ideas of social value’ (p. 203). And yet scholars note that the private, English-language schools middle classes patronise segregate them from poorer families not only through tuition fees, but also through various performed criteria for admission such as interviews (Sriprakash, 2013).

English is a prime “exemplar of the cultural politics of education in India,” (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, p. 201). Its utility in accessing the white-collar industries of business, government, and private enterprise can also be stretched in accessing education and employment abroad. Not only does English provide linguistic capital that widens avenues of employment, it plays an instrumental role in regulating ideals of the “educated citizen.” It belongs to a stable of characteristics necessary for cosmopolitanism, which anthropologists argue is a form of cultural capital not only current in private schools catering to middle-class and elites, and whose absence is read as a sign of lack of merit and



effort rather than ascribed to socioeconomic inequality (Gilbertson, 2016). Mohanty (2017) goes so far as to argue that English-language schooling has created “a new caste system in India” (p. 270), a claim echoed by a line in the Bollywood movie *Hindi Medium*: “In this country, English is not a language, it is (a) class” (Chaudary, 2017)<sup>18</sup>

The middle-class ‘exit’ to private schools is a phenomenon that underscores what scholars have described as a universalization of middle-class values (Fernandes & Heller, 2006; Morarji, 2012; Tukdeo, 2019). These middle-class values, however, look very different from India’s pre-modernisation era, where thrift and government schooling were the means by which the middle class held their precarious perch in the social hierarchy. The flows and discourses of globalization and neoliberalism have introduced narratives and practices of consumption, where educational and cultural success is tied up in a dominant image of cosmopolitanism, behaviour, and school choice. Morarji (2012) argues that this discourse emanates from urban spheres to the rural levels, filtering down the rungs of the class ladder and is implicit in development ideals of “what it means to be somebody” (p. 176). Middle-class ‘exit’ is replicated in poor parents’ ‘flight’ to low-fee charging private schools, a phenomenon that has been graphically captured by scholars (Srivastava, 2008; Harma, 2009; Tooley & Dixon, 2006).

In Kalaburagi, teachers and NGO activists often referred to the spread of private schools in terms of an unstoppable advance and argued that the popularity and growth of private schools undermined notions of equality and entrenched educational segregation. On the other hand, parents perceived private schools as more ‘reliable’, and hence most of them declared their preference for private schools. The idea of what it means to be educated, and hence what counts as a legitimate education, also relies on powerful notions perpetuated by the practices and discourses of the middle class. Unlike the upper or lower classes, Barbara Ehenreich (1989) opines that middle classes must renew their forms of capital to keep their class perch. Although her work referred specifically to (largely) white American middle classes, middle classes in India also deploy significant time and finances to preserving their educational status. Teresa Platz-Robinson (2014) notes that they deploy private education to secure further financial and cultural assets, such as steady employment and income.

An English medium education, as Scrase *et al* (2016) have pointed out, requires a significant investment of time and finances. For resource-poor parents in rural regions, pursuing such an education requires additional sacrifice and perseverance in the face of

uneven livelihood experiences. Not only are private schools and middle-class dispositions legitimated, they form the blueprint for the construction of the desired development subject. This is not a recent phenomenon. In 1993, Scrase examined how textbooks in West Bengal naturalized middle-class interests (Scrase, 1993). He pointed out that this legitimacy was achieved through two ways: “overtly, through bias, stereotype and distortion of “subaltern” culture, and covertly, through omission of and silence about subaltern culture’ (Scrase, 1993 p. 144).

These ways can be perceived by the normative discourses and patterns of behaviour displayed by school stakeholders, which prompted Geeta Nambissan (2012) to stress the importance of “micro-level research in Indian schools” (p. 162). To understand the social and systemic barriers school governance actors face, I intend to sketch a portrait of marginalisation in the next few paragraphs. In rural Karnataka, marginalisation is strongly associated with agricultural livelihoods, caste, and gender.

### **Marginalisation, Resource-Poverty and Schooling in India**

With qualified and experienced teachers less willing to stay in isolated or rural areas (Chudgar & Luschei, 2015; UNESCO, 2014), rural children end up with less experienced teachers who may not be there of their own choice. As “poverty continues to be the largest determinant of education deprivation and inequality,” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 73), researchers have argued that socioeconomic status and class are greater determinants of educational inequality than caste (Goel & Husain, 2018; Dutta *et al.*, 2020).

Resource-poor students are more likely to come from low SES households, SC/ST groups with parents who are semi-literate or illiterate and who work either as daily wage labourers or in the informal sector (Agarwala, 2009; Thimmaiah, 1993). Gender is an additional marginalising factor, since schooling can be regarded as a risky undertaking, exposing girls to harassment and opportunities to compromise family honour (Saha, 2013). In a study published by Jean Dreze and Geeta Kingdon (2001) on schooling in rural India, the authors noted the presence of an “intrinsic disadvantage” for SC children, despite affirmative action and pupil incentives.

Enrolment does not always confirm consistent attendance, with about 50% of students absent 50% of the time in a study conducted by the Azim Premji Foundation in a north-eastern district in rural Karnataka in 2012 (Santhakumar, Gupta & Sripada, 2016). Further analysis of the survey data revealed that boys were more likely to attend than girls, and fathers’ participation in unskilled labour negatively impacted children’s attendance.

The poorest of children, many belonging to SC/ST households are therefore 'left behind' in government schools which typically contain multi-grade classrooms and few quality resources for learning. The psycho-social factors of exclusion play a prominent role in enrolment and attainment as discrimination led to increased truancy and demotivated students, according to a report from Human Rights Watch (2014). Nambissan (2010) in her study among SC children in North India concludes that "social relations and the pedagogic processes fail to ensure full participation of SC children and they are subject to discriminatory and unequal treatment in relation to their peers" (p. 282). Scholarly research on national sample survey information suggests that SC children are least likely to be enrolled in private school, while ST children's lack of private school options is often due to their geographical isolation (Azam & Saing, 2017). Untouchability, the practice of considering "backward castes" as polluted, persists in contemporary India today (Shah *et al*, 2006).

Booroah (2017), in his study of data taken from the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), noted that conflict among various groups belonging to the 'backward' caste stratum demonstrated competition for scarce public resources: "the source of caste conflict is mostly to be found in a competition for scarce resources buttressed by a desire to preserve endogamy" (p.769). This finding coincides with Pattenden's (2017) research in rural Karnataka, where dominant castes (not necessarily belonging to higher castes such as Brahmins) prevented other castes from fully benefiting from a rural employment guarantee scheme. The dominant castes of Karnataka are typically the Lingayat and Okkaliga castes, according to Thimmaiah (1993) in his book on caste politics in Karnataka. Their social dominance arose from a legacy of historical religious and social movements and indeed, Lingayats associate themselves with the religious teacher-reformer Basava. This suggests that casteism in Karnataka is complex and cannot be reduced to simplistic understandings of Vedic hierarchies.

While policy reform efforts have narrowed the educational attainment gap at primary school levels, the gap remains wide at the college level, with few SCs making gains in income (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). The authors speculate that SCs may be more socially ostracised, given their history, compared to STs who tend to make higher gains following college completion. These findings illuminate sociological research that has followed the educational trajectories of rural male SC college graduates and found them struggling to find employment against a wider backdrop of social discrimination where social capital and networking proves more helpful in obtaining government posts than college degrees (Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery, 2004) This strand of research reveals how SC/Dalit groups

battle a tension between widely-accepted discourses of social mobility through education and the understanding that the gap between their realities and these ideals may be too wide to straddle.

### **Governing Educational Inequality**

Policymakers promote parent participation in school governance as a means of improving school quality at the local level. Middle-class and affluent parents in urban centres have been documented by anthropological research in monitoring their child's schooling and positioning themselves as consumers having 'bought' this education as well as practicing an Indianized form of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2004) which shrugs off rural areas (and specifically poor, less affluent schoolchildren) as 'backward' (Gilbertson, 2014; Morarji, 2014). School staff and teachers contribute to these contradictory messages: Resource-poor rural children may have greater opportunities thanks to reservations and incentives, but the constrictions of poverty, patriarchal mores, family responsibilities as well as encountering rising costs of education the higher children try to climb the rungs of the system, are "pull" factors away from school, whose power can be greater than "push factors" such as suspension or distance from school (Singh & Mukherjee, 2017) .

Indeed, despite the strength of pull factors, SC/ST children are implicitly expected by affirmative action policies to be disciplined enough to put themselves through school, an expectation not accorded to middle-class urban schoolchildren. Enumerating these barriers helps contextualise the responsibilities of resource-poor families in school governance. It's perhaps little wonder that scholars are skeptical towards the promises of SDG. Govinda writes "mostly the poorest of the poor section of society send their children to government schools. These people generally have no time to attend the meetings of VEC/SMCs or visit the school. Even when they really want to visit, their daily hand-to-mouth situation doesn't permit them to do much" (Govinda, 2003, p.5). As Kumar and Das (2004) observe:

“The relatively affluent sections of society (irrespective of caste and ethnic identity) shrug off their responsibilities towards the monitoring or supervision of (government run) schools, which they (and only they, given the social set up) are otherwise capable of doing. Their ability to take expensive private measures for their children's education creates a false sense of security, which makes them indifferent to other, sometimes greater, social insecurities” (p. 1174).

Governance duties are therefore not light, nor can they be ignored, given that parents are now cast as moral agents, whose inner compulsion should propel them to act in line with state goals. Maithreyi & Sriprakash (2018) note this move away from punitive action towards inner compulsion: the internal (even psychological) resources of the individual – their ‘moral compulsion’ – is positioned as essential to the effectiveness of the state. The state has downplayed its regulation of educational participation through explicit means (e.g. ‘punitive processes’) and instead has emphasized its expectations of internalised regulation. (p. 361). The SDMC is a “disciplinary technology” that co-opts parents as stakeholders in the enforcement of educational rights.

### **Critical Contributions to Children’s Rights of Participation and Voice**

Another key barrier rises in the discursive confusion surrounding children’s rights. As I have explored earlier in the chapter, the UNCRC’s suite of children’s rights contains children’s rights of participation as well as rights of protection and provision. While the RTE is silent on children’s rights of participation, these rights surface in discourses and practices of school development and child rights governance and SDMC training for parents and teachers that emphasize creating safe spaces where children can express their opinions. However, the participation of children and representations of voice and agency are by no means simple processes or concepts (Facca *et al.*, 2020).

In reviewing the scholarly advancements of agency over the past two decades (Klocker, 2007; Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Mizen & Ofusu-Kusi, 2013; Oswell, 2016), Edmonds (2019) argues that childhood studies remains “stuck” on agency, recycling the concept without incorporating fresher insights from the growing body of research on children. She unpicks the norming of agency as “an inherently individualistic concept, bound up with notions of power and identity that are deeply connected to ideas about a ‘unique self’ in which people are understood as autonomous and individual actors” (p. 206). Governance enfold this notion of individualistic autonomy within the framework of a collective, working towards the solving of both collective and individual issues such as poverty. However, while Edmonds contends that even in scholarly work looking at interconnected communities and “interdependence” (Punch, 2016; Spyrou, 2016), these studies, she argues, can still carry normative assumptions about agency. While it is not my purpose here to respond to Edmonds’ summation of the treatment of agency, her criticism that only the “right kind” of agency is solicited is important for our examination of SDG and child rights governance. She points out this trend especially in the field of development, where the “right kind” of agency is encouraged because it leads to the

outcomes of “good governance”: responsible decision-making and rational problem-solving.

This brings us back to the ‘middle-ground’ of governance, and its alliance with the dual-edged nature of rights as noted by Sanghera (2016). I have introduced empirical literature emerging from studying the intersections of resource-poverty and schooling in India to evoke a deeper scholarly appreciation for the intricacies and complexities of participants enacting governance. I will now provide a conceptual framework around which I can align my participant narratives, in hopes of accentuating their motivations and actions in governance.

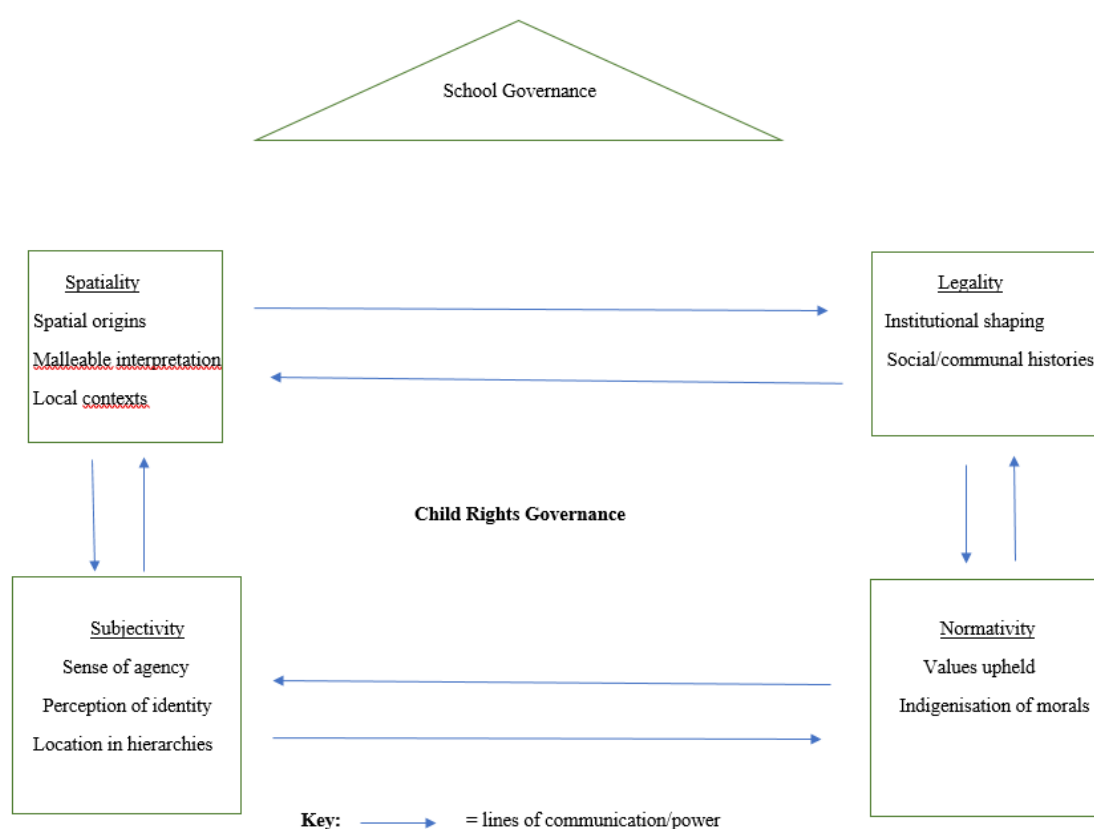
### **Conceptual Framework for Data Analysis**

I will be using the pioneering work of Holzcheiter *et al.* (2019) as a springboard to chart out my conceptual framework of child rights governance. The authors proposed this framework in a special issue of the academic journal *Childhood*. Although the governance studies had legitimated bottom-up research, scholars had hitherto not advanced theoretical models specifically incorporating childhood. The foundational claim of childhood sociologists is that children are excluded from institutions (both socially and in sociological research). Governance is no exception. Despite increased academic interest in ‘grassroots’ research, very few studies solicit children’s perspectives. The authors note how “the agency of children and young people certainly also influences the systems of rules and governance that surround them” (Holzcheiter *et al.*, 2019, p. 272). As their framework incorporated scholarship on the intersection of childhood studies and governance, it was especially useful for this study, which harnesses the theoretical work of several fields to capture the workings of school, governance, and resource-poor childhoods in rural Karnataka. They argue for a deeper exploration of the governance of child rights and how the subjectivities of children are posed within this framework of governance. They view child rights as an evolving praxis:

“We do not treat child rights as a fixed idea with clear-cut contours to be traced from the past into present – but rather as an idea that is changing in meaning and expression, and that is ‘fused’ with different ways of conceptualizing children and childhood” (p. 275).

They call for greater empirical attention to “the many ways in which a discourse on governance shapes contemporary policies, techniques and instruments associated with child rights governance” (p. 277).

As I have noted earlier, Holzcheiter *et al.* (2019) do not explicitly refer to schools. However, their theoretical framework is elastic enough to encompass schools. Given the legal entanglement of children’s education rights with labour rights in India, I will look at how the school is a site for the promotion and monitoring (i.e. governance) of children’s rights. I have thus adapted it for the purposes of my study in Karnataka, drawing up a model and changing one of their key terms to better fit the context of my study.



**Fig 1. Conceptual Framework of Child Rights Governance**

This framework adapts an analytical model proposed by Holzcheiter, Josefsson and Sandin (2019) to illustrate four key dimensions of child rights governance. This model seeks to identify lines of power and communication and ultimately focus on values upheld and normalized.

**Legality-** Here I examine how legal prescriptions for childhood mingle with local conceptualisations of children’s needs and childhood. Holzcheiter and colleagues label this

dimension as ‘temporality.’ However, I argue that a more fitting term for the framework be legality, as legal charters, documents, and acts often shape the educational landscape for these families. Examination of the legal instruments of child rights governance can reveal prescribed pathways of behaviour but also show how conflicting visions of rights can induce confusion, e.g., the heated debate of child labour versus education, a debate muddled by differing conceptualisations of childhood in the Labour Act (2016) and the RTE. I have already partially analyzed legality in reviewing the UNCRC and the RTE in this chapter

**Spatiality-** Explores how the ‘universality’ of child rights applied to the local context of the school. Here, I also explore how school governance actors mediate the school as a space for the upholding of children’s rights and how influential actors such as teachers construct childhood.

**Subjectivity-** Explores how children’s subjectivities are constructed in the school. Questions whether there is a uniform construction of subjectivity or whether competing constructions jostle for prominence. Seeks to distinguish whether this impacts resource-poor families’ location in social hierarchies.

**Normativity-** Studies how governance imperatives are ‘indigenised’ in north Karnataka. Investigates which norms of childhood prevail in school and wider community spaces and underscores children’s roles as part of these normalization processes.

### **Summary of chapter**

This chapter embarked on a “grand tour” of scholarly contributions in the fields of governance, Childhood studies, and school development in India (with reference to Karnataka). It took up recent calls from Childhood scholars to closely examine the governance of child rights, calls which resonate with prominent Indian scholars on education in India, who have noticed the rising trend of school governance and the responsabilizing of marginalised families as stakeholders in the school. I highlighted the conceptual confusion that arises over children’s rights, and how different legal instruments (the UNCRC and the RTE) conceptualise rights. The UNCRC attempts to balance children’s rights of participation with their rights of protection and provision. The RTE does not mention children’s rights of participation, yet there are governance



spaces (SDMCs, and children's parliaments) in Karnataka that encourage children's participation.

However, I also drew upon scholarly discourses that highlighted the conceptual confusion regarding participation, voice and agency with respect to children. In presenting governance as an ideological dilemmatic practice (Billig *et al*, 1988), I have attempted to contextualise several 'working' tensions: the history of education in India as a class-creating (and enforcing) enterprise, dilatory and inconsistent national educational policy visions, the fusion of paternalism and responsabilisation in governance rhetoric and practice, and differing typologies of rights as well as competing images of childhood. These are the tensions which SDG actors attempt to reconcile and which influence their governance practice and meaning-making.

## **Chapter 4     Methodological Overview**

### **Introduction to the Chapter**

This chapter presents the customised qualitative methodology I developed for and during my investigations of school development and child rights governance amongst marginalised communities in Kalaburagi. The methodology was driven by this definitive question: How is school development governance locally understood and navigated in North Karnataka, India? Structuring my inquiry along this line of questioning would, I hoped, engender fruitful engagement with my research questions. I drew upon a toolbox of qualitative methods that permitted flexibility and adaptability to exigencies I faced in the field.

### **Studying ‘School Development Governance’ in the ‘Field.’**

Taking inspiration from poststructuralism, I regard the ‘field’ as an artificial space chosen specifically for research investigations (Richardson, 2005). Kalaburagi, North Karnataka, was viewed and experienced very differently by me and my participants. For me, it was an “out of the way place” (Tsing, 1993), culturally and geographically distinct from what I called home. It was a space primarily where I sought to probe my participants’ engagement with school governance. My research methodology is thus a product of my context as a novice Western researcher and contributes to objectifying the subjects of my research (Bourdieu, 1989). For this reason, I highlight the constructed nature of my enquiry, to remember that my participants experience “the field” differently. For them, it is where they live and work.

Thus, rather than espouse romantic notions of accessing participant experiences of governance, this methodology seeks to examine expressed behaviours and practices my participants shared with me, in the hope that “the partial ability of language to convey something beyond itself” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2013, p.13) can illuminate themes and patterns in the data. As Richardson (2005) notes, “language is not the result of one’s individuality; rather, language constructs one’s subjectivity in ways that are historically and legally specific. What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them” (p. 820).

Not only did the discourses elicited by my participants demonstrate the discourses available to them, language itself marked the quality of my interactions in the field. For example, a major barrier to my research was my lack of Kannada-speaking skills.

However, the Kannada spoken in the north was a different strain to that in the south, which is often the Kannada that makes its way into textbooks. When I asked a Manglorean (South Karnataka) acquaintance if she could translate my interview audio files, she declined on the grounds that she would not understand the northern dialect. This confirmed to me the complexity of language; how different dialects distinguished outsiders from insiders and created additional sociocultural microcosms within the state itself.

Additionally, Kalaburagi's sharing of borders with the states of Maharashtra and Telangana meant that Hindi, Marathi, and Telugu helped transform the district into a sort of linguistic melting pot, with many residents speaking around two to three languages. Therefore, although I had to rely on interpreters, I also got by in the field with Hindi, and conversed with participants in that language during the occasions when there were no interpreters present. I consider Hindi my third language. I am far more proficient in listening than in speaking it, and can follow simple conversations. Although I took some Hindi conversation lessons before my fieldwork, living in Kalaburagi where the only people who were fluent in English were the NGO participants and gatekeepers, I had to learn more Hindi through speaking and continuously making mistakes.

Entering the field as a cultural and linguistic outsider despite looking like an insider, meant I was constantly negotiating access and belonging. As a woman of Indian origin, there were certain modes of behaviour I was expected to conform to. These expectations carried over to my interpreters. When I was with a female interpreter, it was harder to access and talk to male participants. With a male interpreter, it was easier to secure consent from male participants. They also appeared more comfortable with him and indeed directed most of their conversation to him. Through these experiences, I learned that access to and quality of participant interactions depend on participant norms of cultural and social propriety as well as individual preference. Obtaining government and headteacher approval did not guarantee me rich data as much as participant acceptance and their own interest.

### **Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research is useful for building a portrait that strives for both depth and detail. Holliday (2016) notes that qualitative research analyses are effectively interpretations and representations of researchers' investigative efforts. Unlike in quantitative research, which is designed to operate within fixed boundaries and with controlled variables, qualitative research is more receptive to unexpected events and findings. "Rigour in qualitative research," as Holliday (2016) claims "is in the principled development of strategy to suit the scenario being studied" (p. 24). Thus, this chapter will

attempt to detail the strategies I employed, from choice of methods to how I conducted the analysis. This is not an attempt to render my strategy objective, but to reach for transparency. Even if another researcher were to follow my strategies exactly, his or her positionality and what Qureshi (2010) refers to as the ‘relational aspect’ of research indicates that s/he would gather different data that would illuminate different facets of governance (Cameron *et al.*, 1992).

A qualitative approach thus characterised the entire research process, from designing the research questions to data collection through analysis and to the conclusion of the write-up (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Yin (2006, p. 29) refers to research design as “the logical sequence” from the study’s research questions to the empirical data gathered to the conclusions of the study”. Because of its open-ended and flexible nature, qualitative research can be difficult to define (Creswell, 2017). Here I rely on Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011, p. 3) definition because it also conveys the idea that qualitative research impacts the field:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

This emphasis on the researcher’s interpretations of the data lead me to adopt an interpretivist worldview or paradigm, to orient the research design. Such a paradigm asserts that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human being practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p.42). A paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). This paradigm assumes that the nature of reality (called ontology) and what we know about knowledge as well as how we obtain knowledge (epistemology) is both subjective and socially constructed. I chose this paradigm as the most amenable to a bottom-up study of third-wave governance. Given the malleability of how governance is understood and practised, which I have explored in the literature review chapters, I regarded participants’ understandings of governance and their actions around it as socially constructed and subjective.

## **Data-Gathering in Two Phases**

I gathered data in two phases, concentrating primarily on two schools and their surrounding communities. Isila primary school was the only government school in Isila village while Midhol school served the neighbouring urban-poor community. In the first phase, I lived in Kalaburagi city from October 4, 2018 to January 9, 2019. Actually living in the field helped me gain a taste of life for my participants in north Karnataka. Interacting with neighbours and residents in a different language, patronising local markets, and navigating unfamiliar rural routes was a mentally and emotionally taxing learning experience. However, when I returned to Kalaburagi between December 3 to 20, 2019, I felt that I was returning to a familiar place with an understanding gained by experience of the potential pitfalls and challenges to doing research there. Thus, the first phase of research was characterised by a trial-and-error approach to research. The second phase saw me more confident in venturing questions and methods which I'd designed as aligning both to various participants' ideas of safety and appropriateness as well as to my research questions. Moreover, the school staff of the two schools where I conducted my principal research inquiries now 'knew' me and knew what to expect. They appeared more relaxed around me and were willing to engage in deeper and longer interviews, which was also helped by the fact that my second interpreter was a Karnataka native who could translate directly into English. In short, I regard both these phases as crucial in my data collection.

### **Phase 1: Trial and Error Research**

In *Journeys through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork*, eminent scholars such as Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Schultz (1996) draw the curtains back upon the 'backstage' chaos behind their greatest works, noting that the practice of social science research is more fraught and chaotic than the polish of the final product (the research report) leads one to believe. During the first phase, I had to familiarise myself with social dynamics and relations of power in the field while my participants familiarised themselves with my presence. The questions and plans I'd constructed in my office in Glasgow seemed to fall apart once in Kalaburagi. A question I considered open-ended and neutral, such as "What are the challenges of your job?" spooked most teachers, who responded as if the question had been crafted with insidious political intent. Having to backtrack on this question or discard it completely mid-interview, highlighted the *messiness* of the research process, a messiness many ethnographers and anthropologists have admitted to encountering in their own fieldwork.

Therefore, an ontological understanding of “research as discovery” (Smith, 2005, p. 2) informed the refining of my research methodology. The first phase contained setbacks and surprises, and sometimes my fieldnotes seemed to have nothing to do with community participation in schooling. They contained instead accounts of scooter visits to the anti-corruption bureau, unrewarded treks to the DC’s (District Commissioner’s) office, long waits in state hospitals. Such experiences brought the first taste of what governance must feel like to resource-poor communities, and the fraught nature of relations between the state and its governed subjects. The teachers may have given me what Raj, one of my participants dubbed, “politically-correct answers”, but would also talk to me, outside the formal interview structure, of their frustrations and challenges. Parents would alternately joke and complain about their choices of government versus private. Activists would recount disturbing narratives of abuse and criminality when working in children’s rights in education.

How could I thus pierce through the diversity and scattered textures of data and weave them into a coherent portrait of governance? These experiences also refined my understanding of the state as a monolithic enterprise to one more in keeping with theories of governance: that of the state as a conglomeration of social relations (Painter, 2006). Encountering various departments, private interests, and NGOs, gave me a taste of the scope and the reach of governance; how state power can be “exercised at a variety of different and tangled scales” (Ansell & Torfing, 2016, p. 8). My visits to education departments and the Centre for the Welfare of Women and Children (CWC); my encounters with block education officers (BEOs), ministry officials, teachers (key civil servants) and activists subcontracted by the state to deliver development programs to rural areas, all furnished me with deeper insight into school development governance practice.

#### **4.1.1 Accessing Schools and Communities in Kalaburagi District**

Finding trustworthy gatekeepers initially seemed very difficult, since North Karnataka was considered a ‘remote’ part of the state. However, a cousin living in Bangalore connected me to a member of her church who ran an organic goat farm in rural Kalaburagi district. His name was Raj and he had left his job in Singapore and moved back to India with his family to start his own business. His vision consisted of running an enterprise that would practically serve local needs in underdeveloped Kalaburagi. An organic goat farm would not only be an environmentally low-impact business, it could also provide employment for rural locals and purchase directly from small farmers in the area. Raj also intended to stow away a percentage of the farm’s profits for investing in health

and education in the villages neighbouring the farm (such as Isila). On one level, the farm would provide a means of employment for locals, as well as buying feed directly from farms in the area. On another, it would also serve as a model for ethical and efficient business practice. Raj's approach seemed to stem from a belief in corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is incidentally, also an approach the central government courts in its national education policies and programs to address shortfall in education resource provision (Gopalan, 2013; Byker, 2015; National Education Policy, 2020)<sup>19</sup>. . Citing Kalaburagi's unemployment as a major concern, Raj saw his farm as responding to that need as well by straddling business and social development.

Raj divided his time between Bangalore, where he stayed with his family, and the farm. As a result, although he was my initial gatekeeper, I ended up spending more time with the contacts he put me in touch with. A key family was Martin, his wife Amelia, and their adult children. Martin was a social aid worker who had moved to Kalaburagi from Bombay fifteen years ago. He and his wife had been working in a faith-based organisation amongst various resource-poor communities in the district and though officially retired, they continued to work with the organisation. Martin's passions centered around health education and reaching remote villages to offer medical aid. He and Amelia had also taken care of boys from the 'leprosy colony'<sup>20</sup> in the town, sponsoring them at a private school and offering them a home during term-time. His experience of education thus sprung from his experiences of finding educational homes for the boys and in navigating Kalaburagi's education system for his own children.

Another key informant and guide was Miriam, a social aid worker who had previously worked in the district's department of education auditing schools. She also had personal experience of the school landscape, having fostered fourteen children during her time in Kalaburagi. When I first met her, she was embroiled in an experience of child rights governance which drew me in and opened my eyes to its prominence amongst poor

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<sup>19</sup> An exploratory study conducted by Prakash & Chandra (2020) of 100 SDMC members in Bangalore, Karnataka, revealed that 75% of them looked favourably upon CSR schemes, seeing them as supplementing government resources for school development. Thus, the national government is not the only governance actor positively inclined towards such public-private partnerships. Local governance participants may also solicit resources and input from private providers.

<sup>20</sup> This was a neighbourhood where those suffering from leprosy were socially segregated. Although those actually afflicted with leprosy were now senior citizens, their children and grandchildren lived with them to provide care. Given the legacy of such social segregation, many of the families were involved in fairly low-paid jobs, such as rickshaw driving and daily wage labour.

families and their children. Miriam's patience in ferrying me to the DDPI's (District Director for Public Instruction) office over a period of three weeks to obtain government permission to work in public schools, and her request to a higher-level government official who finally helped me obtain permission, was invaluable.

My primary translator during the first phase was a twenty-three-year-old resident of Kalaburagi city named Suvarna, who had completed half of a BEd. degree before dropping out. Her family largely relied on her father's income as a driver, and so Suvarna discontinued her education in favour of her younger sister's. She lived in a settlement on the fringes of the city, a settlement that could be termed respectably lower-middle class. Residents' occupations in low-paying service and government industries (drivers, clerks, police officers and cooks) meant that for them, education was also a matter of struggle and sacrifice. Martin had employed Suvarna as a Kannada teacher for tuitions he offered free of charge for children in the leprosy colony, and often employed her as a translator when conducting health awareness campaigns in the surrounding local villages. Suvarna could speak Kannada, Hindi, a smattering of Telugu and a smattering of English. Martin and his family had been teaching her English, but her attainment level was restricted to speaking a few sentences. While she understood more than she could speak, we mainly communicated in Hindi. She would therefore translate for me from Kannada to Hindi, and I would ask my questions in Hindi. In addition, not every student or family in Isila and Midhol understood Hindi. Her translations from Hindi to Kannada were therefore invaluable.

My interpreter for the second phase was Rohan, who could speak English as well as Hindi and Kannada. He was from another north-western district of Karnataka, and I noticed that participants seemed more comfortable and voluble around him. Having a male research assistant greatly alleviated barriers of gender relations (male participants talked almost exclusively to him during the interviews) and meant that we could stay out later or venture to additional parts of the district without having to worry about safety concerns.

Finally, my third translator, Ragini, transcribed and translated the Kannada transcripts of my interviews. Having the words of my participants in transcribed text allowed me closer access to my data and helped triangulate Suvarna and Rohan's summarised interpretations. For instance, Rohan's interpretations did not always include idioms or nuances, which Ragini's translated text did. For example, in her interview on teacher used the phrase "clapping with one hand", a phrase which was not interpreted directly to me, but present in Ragini's translated text.

In addition to these main three interpreters/translators, various other people often acted as translators for me. On the days that Suvarna could not make it for interviews,



Miriam filled in, translating parents' words and accompanying me to interview the Isilan SDMC president in his home. Teachers also acted as interpreters, notably Nimbenna when I was interviewing SDMC parents, and the headmistress of Midhol, Radha. The presence of a veritable phalanx of interpreters during my time in the field, the way each participant sought to explain how they saw the world, underscores the constructed nature of data. These multiple constructions of data, how my interpreters would comment on the interviews on bus rides home or proffer their opinions on the schools, transforms them from shadowy research assistants to research agents.

#### **4.1.2 Interpreters and their Impact on Data Collection**

Interpreters are an important feature of research, all the way from access to analysis, and their presence and positionality impacts data collection. Temple (1997) led the scholarly charge to make "visible" the contributions of research assistants such as interpreters and translators, a charge that been gaining traction from other social science researchers (Song & Parker, 1995; Edwards, 1998). Interpreters also see data collection through their own lenses and approach it with their own social constructions of feasibility and understanding.

Middleton and Cons (2014) argue that visibilising the research assistant is an important move against 'hidden colonialism' latent in research projects, a way to "offset the dynamics of ethnographic knowledge production" (p. 284). Although they were specifically addressing ethnography, this stance can be applied to general qualitative research methods as well. The paucity of research on fieldwork assistants such as interpreters has been noted by many including Borchgrevink, 2005; Temple, 2002; Malony & Hammett, 2007. One of the few scholarly musings on fieldwork assistants comes from Sarah Jenkins (2018), who reflected on how her employment of a Kibera slum resident as an assistant influenced the direction of her research and introduced grey cross-hatching between the distinctions of 'friend' and 'research assistant.' I agreed with Jenkins about the importance of including those who are central to the study. I felt that Suvarna's perspective was an important one because she was closer to the experiences of my participants than my more middle-class gatekeepers and commentators. She also invited me to her home several times, where we 'hung out' with her family members, affording me a chance to experience daily life in her context. She introduced me to the aunts and uncles that would trickle in from her natal village, brought along the little cousin she had to babysit to our classroom observations, and coaxed me into treating ourselves to *pani puri* (a popular street food) after a long, hot day of data collection. Interpreters therefore add layers of personal

experience and their own ways of approaching the world to the research project as Borchegrevink (2002, p. 111) astutely notes:

It is not only the interpreter's knowledge of English which can affect translation. Loyalties to the locality, embarrassment at certain themes, or personal interests, may all result in translations that are less than complete. Similarly, boredom and tiredness will influence the interpreter's work. Switching between several interpreters can help to act as a check on these problems.

Having three main translators in this project therefore helped triangulate interpreter impact. Witnessing how my interpreters structured data collection both in how they are perceived (and received) in a north Karnatakan context, and the commentaries they added as further data, I believe that each of them helped illuminate facets of the data. Alvesson and Karreman (2013) support emphasizing the constructed nature of data collection, writing that "empirical material is an artifact of interpretations and the use of specific vocabularies" (p. 11). Thus, my interpreters as co-research agents, added layers to the bricolage of data, their contributions invaluable in my subsequent analysis.

### **Rural vs urban poverty: Investigating Governance in Two Schools**

Isila school and Midhol school<sup>21</sup> offer two 'versions' of resource- poverty in Kalaburagi district. Isila school is located in the rural village of Isila, whose students largely belong to farming families. Midhol perches on the outskirts of Kalaburagi city, and its students come from a neighbouring informal settlement. In this inquiry, the two schools are not meant to be regarded comparatively, but complementarily. As microcosms of "rural-poor" and "urban-poor" communities, they hold promise for investigating the scope and practice of SDG in resource-poor contexts.

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<sup>21</sup> These names are pseudonyms.

## Isila School



Isila government school is located in the village of Isila, about an hour and a half away by public bus from Kalaburagi city. A couple of the teachers in Isila also live in Kalaburagi, which means that arduous commutes are part of their experience of the job. The closest town to Isila is called Kampur<sup>22</sup>, where my interpreters and I would disembark and take a shared rickshaw<sup>23</sup> to the village. The majority of schoolchildren were from families and the village is bounded by long stretches of fields. Popular crops are *tuvar dahl* and millet. Raj's farm is located a kilometre away from Isila, and if I happened to stay at the farm, I would walk down to Isila school. The women who worked in the farm came from Isila and agreed to be interviewed as they were used to me and we'd interacted and eaten together in the farm's canteen. These parents, together with the SDMC parents Isila school had called for me, were the village parents I interviewed. Isila's community is heterogenous: students came from a variety of caste, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. The village possessed a mosque in addition to a temple, and a fraction of the students identified as Lambani, a nomadic people group who are also considered resource-poor. At that time there were 135 students and six full-time teachers as well as the headteacher Gururaj and *anganwadi* (nursery worker) Divya. Isila school taught Standards 1 to 8, and also housed an *anganwadi* (nursery) on the premises. The teachers I interacted with and interviewed in depth were Nimbenna (English teacher), Kasturi (Science and Maths teacher), Saraswati (Kannada and Standard 5 teacher). Only 1 teacher lived in Isila village. The rest commuted from the neighbouring settlements of Kampur, Kalaburagi, and

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<sup>22</sup> Also a pseudonym.

<sup>23</sup> In Kalaburagi, shared rickshaw is one of the cheapest forms of transport. Passengers would enter and disembark from the rickshaw at various points, as 'sharing' meant each passenger paid less than if they had hired a rickshaw for individual use.

Humnabad. The maximum teaching tenure in the government school system amongst Isila school staff was 15 years while the minimum was 2.

### **Midhol School**



Midhol school was a government school whose student body lived predominantly in the informal settlements surrounding it. These settlements had sprung up in the neighbourhood due to its proximity to the train station (many of the children's fathers were 'coolies' (railway porters) and 'masons' (construction workers) and its location in a developing suburb, whose construction projects afforded work to daily wage labourers. The student population was 210, and the headmistress Radha informed me that all the students were categorised as SC/ST. There were eight teachers, three of whom were male. The teachers I interacted the most with and interviewed were Rohit (Hindi teacher), Radha (headteacher), Sri (Kannada teacher) and Devi (Standard 7, Science teacher). The school had Standards 1 to 7, but no Standard 8. The longest tenure of teaching in the government system amongst these teachers was 26 years and the shortest was 5 years. The headteacher Radha was nearing retirement, and informed me she had been a teacher for 36 years.<sup>24</sup> I chose Midhol school largely for convenience, as it was a five-minute walk from Miriam's house and Miriam herself had recommended the school, since she'd once sent her foster daughter there. Later Miriam confided that though there were good government schools, she'd wanted me to "see how conditions are like there (in Midhol)" and so steered my choice of school. However, apart from the mothers whom the school called for me, it was very difficult to access parents in Midhol. School staff explained that very few parents visited the school, and they expressed frustration at the perceived apathy of parents to school affairs. When I floated the prospect of visiting parents in the informal settlement,

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<sup>24</sup> Teachers' years of teaching experience were also printed on a poster in the headteacher's office in Midhol school.

Suvarna refused: “Are you crazy?! Those people (*voh lokh*) drink! What will happen to us?!” Customs of safety and propriety and collective fears about women ‘roaming around’ meant that both Suvarna and I could not access certain areas at certain times. We always had to be back before sunset (which fell around five pm) and could not venture by ourselves to areas perceived as poor and dangerous.

### **Auxiliary Neighbourhoods and Methods**

I also interviewed a cluster of mothers from Suvarna’s neighbourhood about their experiences with and perceptions of the education system. I did this out of curiosity to hear more parental perspectives, and in a hope to illumine the data I had collected from both Isila and Midhol. As Suvarna knew the participants, gaining access and trust was not difficult for us here, and I used the data later to help illumine parents’ perspectives from Isila and Midhol. We also interacted with mothers from the ‘leprosy colony’ Martin had worked in, and I used their experiences and perceptions to help me understand the data collection and further refine my methods in the field.

### **Summary of Data in First Phase (October 2018-January 2019)**

This section will summarise the data I have collected over the roughly three months between October and January. A summary of data is a useful organisational tool, since data can be jumbled up together over the course of fieldwork and will need categorisation as a precursor to analysis (Bernard, 2009) The following table attempts to compartmentalise data out of the “mess” of qualitative research (Law, 2004), which, rather than following neatly plotted trajectories, often branches out and burrows after promising leads. I often could not control who would be willing to grant me interviews or be present when I visited. Daily, consecutive lesson observations at schools were extremely difficult to carry out due primarily to teacher resistance and the constant breaks for major holidays: Dussera, Deepavali, Christmas and New Year’s, as well as the “Jayanti” holidays, which celebrated various aspects of Karnatakan culture, such as the Kannada language, or important religious/cultural figures. It was also difficult to have Suvarna accompany me every day, as sometimes she would have to work with the NGO workers who’d “loaned” her out to me or had to fulfil responsibilities at home. I visited both schools without her a couple of times but was restricted to just doing classroom observations.

### 4.1.3 Observations

Initially, I had requested each school to allow me one month of daily successive observations. I intended to rotate between classes and silently observe the daily routine of the school. Unfortunately, the agreements I secured from the head teachers soon proved to be only lip-service. Not only did the teachers appear stressed to have their classrooms observed, but haphazard teacher presence meant that it was difficult to follow a ‘routine’ of scheduled classes. In Isila, the headteacher often acted as a substitute teacher whenever teachers were absent. Some teachers displayed their reluctance to have me observe their classes by sending me to their colleagues who would send me back to the headteacher’s office. A teacher at Midhol formally asked me *not* to observe his class again. One of the teachers in Isila, upon meeting me and Suvarna in a rickshaw on our way to the school, told me to stop coming. “I will call you and tell you what happened in the classes every day,” she told me. Another teacher in Isila asked me why I was coming every day. “You can sit in (your) room and make (up) your observations,” she pointed out. These events produced enormous ethical dissonance for me. One on hand, I had the formal permissions (from government officials and head teachers of Isila and Midhol) to carry out my research.

On the other hand, I discovered that some teachers associated observations with inspections, and were worried over how their self-image and the image of the school would be represented<sup>25</sup>. Despite my assurances of anonymity, these observations could have the potential to reveal unflattering aspects of their teaching and school routines. In the light of their wishes, I felt it unethical to push my research agenda on them. In addition, frequent teacher absence, holidays, and exam diets meant that even if teachers supported my observations, it would have been extremely difficult to pursue them systematically. Thus, I have selected 7 days of classroom observations at each school from my time there because these were the days I was able to carry out observations without hindrances. Other days I conducted interviews, observed school celebrations, and ‘hung out’ with school staff and students to try and develop deeper rapport with them.<sup>26</sup>

<b>Formal Observations</b>	
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<sup>25</sup> As corroborated by Akhil Gupta’s (2012) research on the impact of school inspections by education officials.

<sup>26</sup> Isila school had taken the week 7- 14 November off for Deepavali holidays.

Isila Village School	30 October 2018- 26 November 2018 Data selected from fieldnotes from: 31 Oct, 1 Nov, 2 Nov, 5 Nov, 20 Nov, 22 Nov, 26 Nov
Midhol School	29 November- 4 January 2019 <sup>27</sup> Data selected from fieldnotes from: 29 Nov, 5 Dec, 7 Dec, 8 Dec, 13 Dec, 4 January

#### 4.1.4 Interviews

Alvesson (2011) argues that there are several ways to view interviews, such as local accomplishments, replications of cultural scripts, or “mini-seminar(s) for idea generation” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2013). The multi-purpose appeal of interviews points to their essential constructedness, with participants co-constructing the interview data along with the researcher (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). I found that my interviews tended to alternate between these metaphors. They often accomplished several things (identity work, didactic

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<sup>27</sup> Midhol school had taken two weeks holiday from 21 December to 3 January, 2019 for Christmas/ New Year's. They'd also gone on a school field trip to Mysore during this time, sponsored by state government funds.

<b>Interview Log</b>			
Participant Category	Type of Interview	No. Of Participants	Audio-Recorded or Written Down
Isila School Teachers	Group	8	AR
Isila School Headmaster	Individual	1	WD
Akash, Isila School SDMC President	Individual (X2)	1	AR
Divya, Isila Village Anganwadi,	Individual	1	AR
Isila School SDMC Mothers	Group	2	AR
Isila Village School Mothers	Individual	3	AR
Isila Village School SDMC children	Group (Arts- Based)	7 (all girls) (Std. 5 to 8)	AR
Isila Village School Children	Group (Arts-Based)	10 (4 boys & 6 girls) (Std. 6-8)	AR
Low-income Kalaburagi Neighbourhood Mothers	Individual	6	WD
Leprosy Colony Mothers	Individual	2	WD
Sangeeta (Former Private School Teacher)	Individual	1	WD
Anita (Private School Teacher)	Individual	1	WD
Martin (NGO worker)	Individual	3	AR
Bina (SDMC trainer & School Sex Education trainer)	Individual	1	AR
Raj (Farm owner)	Individual	1	WD
Miriam (Former School Auditor and current social worker)	Individual	1	AR
Suvarna (Translator)	Individual	1	WD
Midhol School Teachers	Group	3	AR
Midhol School Headmistress Radha	Individual	1	



Midhol School Children	Group	9 (5 boys & 4 girls)	
Midhol School Mothers/Grandmother	Individual	4	

story-telling) in the span of one interview. This may be due largely to the ‘open-ended’ nature of the questions, where the interview schedules served as a guide to be followed iteratively rather than adhered to rigidly. The questions were intended as launching-off points to spark discussions and I pursued a semi-structured interview format. All interview questions were translated into Hindi and then Kannada by me initially into Google Translate. They were then verified with a Hindi-speaking undergraduate student at the University of Glasgow. She adapted them to sound more colloquial (in Hindi). As I ended up using the Hindi questions with Suvarna (who translated them into Kannada during the interview), this was an important exercise.<sup>28</sup>

In total, 67 participants engaged in formal interviews with me. However, some of these participants also often confided or talked to me in the interstices among the ‘formal’ observations and interviews, inviting me home, asking me questions, expressing their discontent, opinions, and frustrations. These various threads string together to form the fabric of my qualitative research, displaying in aural, visual, and oral forms the ways in which groups of people imagine, interpret, and act under the impositions of school development governance. I have tried to arrange these miscellaneous pieces of observations and conversations, pictures and text, as tesserae in a mosaic that, while incomplete, may provide a compelling portrait to education scholars interested in the lived interface between formal iterations of SDG and its practice.

### **Researching with Children: Scholarly Debates and First Phase Research Processes**

In this first phase, I tried to foreground what children perceived as important in their schools and communities. I used arts-based methods as launching point to spark discussion and to help children feel at ease in the process. As with adult interviews, these interviews were deliberately left fairly open-ended to let the children have the freedom to steer the discussion.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview schedules are located in the appendices.



Conducting interviews with students in Isila and in Midhol proved to be both rewarding and challenging. Contrary to what I expected, securing permission for doing group interviews was relatively easy compared to interviewing adults. The teachers seemed to expect me to ask the children questions, and often took charge in selecting the students to join the group. I had also explained to the SDMC president prior to conducting the interviews, asking him to spread the word to absent parents, and had obtained additional oral consent from the Cluster Resource Person (CRP) for the area. In addition, I asked the students' consent by explaining that my translator and I would be doing group interviews and they could raise their hands if they wished to participate.

Participating students also filled out a form to indicate their written consent. Moreover, during the interviews I endeavoured to introduce both a sense of play and spontaneity which could leaven any potentially performative aspects. Children's performativity figures prominently in the works of scholars on Indian education (Sarangapani, 2003; Nambissan, 2011; Sriprakash, 2009; and Gupta 2012). They have noted that education officials often assess the performance of children in their school visits. As assessing every child during these official visits is impossible, the officials usually rely on the performance of a handful to gauge school progress. I therefore stressed to school staff and students that my interviews were not learning assessments.

## **Researching with Children: Contributions from Childhood Scholars**

The flourishing of Childhood Studies and the commitment of its scholars to foregrounding children as social actors led to a surge of interest in child-friendly research methods. Qualitative methods, especially ethnography, were deemed to be especially child-friendly. Quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires were associated with development psychology, and such instruments may additionally reinforce negative stereotypes about resource-poverty (Morrow and Mayall, 2009). These developments were also fuelled by children's rights and their emphasis on children as active participants (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Woodhouse, 2004; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Scholars were concerned with depreciating power differentials between researchers and children, the most famous attempt being Nancy Mandell's (1988) advocacy of the "least adult role", where "while acknowledging adult-child differences, the researcher suspends all adult-like characteristics except physical size" (p. 435).

Pioneering work on playgrounds and children's daily lives at school (Thorne, 1993; William Corsaro, 2003) presented rich sociological data when these researchers tried to "go native" amongst their child participants. However, the initial fervour of Childhood scholars in superseding binaries of power was cooled by a succession of studies which noted how children could resist or subvert the research process. Indeed, Gallagher (2008, p. 137) noted that there are a multiplicity of ways in which children can "exploit, appropriate, contest, or refuse" the ongoing research process. Gallagher (2008) cautions against romanticising children as a participant group, noting that they can also engage in social oppression (such as bullying) in front of the researcher. Catherine Atkinson (2019) reflects on this misbehaviour as part of her experience conducting ethnographic research in primary schools in England. She notes that though the least-adult role carries benefits such as winning children's confidence, it also confers challenges when children engage in obstructive or oppressive ways towards their peers or the researcher. Thus, the 'least-adult' role should be seen as one that is perpetually negotiated and in continual tension.

I was conscious about the power imbalances between me and the children. In Karnataka, cultural and social mores underscored politeness and deference towards adults. A general social rule of thumb was to treat anyone elder to you with respect, the measure of respect accruing with advancing years. However, to the children, adulthood was also regarded as a spectrum, on which were ranged 'potencies' of adults. As a young adult and a woman, I could occupy a social position that also made me appear less authoritative than their teachers or parents: that of the big sister. They usually addressed me as "akka" (big sister), a respectful term that connotes a protective and caring as well as authoritative

figure. Referring to non blood-related people in familial terms is a standard social practice in India (e.g., calling older women “Aunty”). Padma Sarangapani (2003) writes of how she was able to exploit these quasi-familial relationships to occupy the position of an elder sister, which her child participants perceived as less intimidating than their teachers. In her ethnographic research in a residential girls’ government school in India, Payal Shah (2015) also relied on relating to her participants as an elder ‘sister.’ Such relational approaches challenge the ‘least-adult’ approach on the basis that it was developed in a global North context that may not align towards the multiple ways in which adults and children culturally relate to each other in Southern contexts. In India, the big sister role appeared the most culturally responsive option available to me. Therefore, I do not claim to adopt the ‘least adult’ positioning nor do I claim that my research gives ‘voice’ to my child participants. Rather than presenting data from my child participants as “something to be ‘found’... conveyed accurately; portrayed as ‘truth’” (Lane *et al*, 2019, p. 68), I proffer the data from these research interactions as co-constructed and yielding an additional layer to a bottom-up study of governance. This layer influenced by how the various child participants perceived me and engaged with my research questions.

In order to make my methods ‘child-friendly’, I derived inspiration from the Mosaic Approach, developed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss (2001) for doing research with very young children. Clark and Moss in turn rely on Kathy Bartlett’s (1998) “mosaic of perspectives” in developing a methodology conducive to listening to children’s perspectives. Listening forms the backbone of their methodology:

Our intention is to broaden the approach of regarding listening as consultancy: ‘what do you think about this?’ to seeing listening as an ongoing conversation... Children are respected as is difference; so we are not trying to seek ‘the voice of *the* child’, nor trying to make children’s voices echo adult voices, nor requiring consensus.” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.10)

This attention to my child participants, however, is not an attempt to view children as “all-knowing and all-seeing” (Lomax, 2012, p. 106). Buckingham (1991) and Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) have noted that the tendency of childhood scholars to rehabilitate children from their passive historic position can be carried out to an extreme which ignores the conceptualisation of knowledge as fragmentary, evolving, and co-constructed. Therefore, I regarded my child participants as contributing their subjective knowledge that

illuminated an important and less-elicited facet of the lived experiences of resource-poverty and education.

In trying to preserve a respectful and participatory environment, I also hit a few snags. Through the process of conducting the interviews, I realised that the children found it difficult to express their opinions easily, as this dynamic where I was the listener and they the speakers, was unfamiliar to them. ‘Respect for elders’ can also translate into maintaining silence or giving ‘socially approved’ answers. Scholars who have conducted research with children in the global South have emphasized the importance of using ‘guides’ as templates for the children to manipulate. At the same time these guides must be flexible to the child’s purpose (Punch, 2002). I therefore printed pictures and used physical objects to illustrate my examples. The group interviews were therefore also learning endeavours for me as a researcher and for the children as the participants. As time went on, they grasped the possibilities and appeared more comfortable with responding.

### **Participatory Drawing with Children**

Not only can participatory, activity-based research methods help children express themselves in interview settings (Cook & Hess, 2007; Loueriro *et al.*, 2020), they can also be more enjoyable for children and procure deeper insights than the cross-examination approach of interviews (Darbyshire *et al.*, 2005). I will now add a brief reflection on participation that in no way encapsulates the range of scholarly debates on the subject. I am mindful that participation is currently “popular” and can be co-opted from its empowering purposes. Consultation of the scholarly literature also informed me that participation can fall short of its goals of empowerment (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). I relied on Roger Hart’s (1992) “ladder of children’s participation” as it was first promoted in a UNICEF publication. This choice seemed fitting given this dissertation’s focus on children’s rights governance. Hart at a later date (2008) cautioned against using the ladder as merely a diagnostic tool, writing that it should function as a starting point for reflection and that the understanding of participation must extend beyond project-based participation. He cited apprenticeship with adults as an example of the maturing of the participation process as well its transposition into children’s play and decision-making with peers. However, the ladder is useful for diagnosing whether my methods were participatory (according to the tool’s specified limits).

Thus, I have located the participatory quotient of my methods at Stage 4 (assigned but informed). While I would have liked to develop methods in consultation with the child participants, two logistical barriers prevented me from doing so. The first was that I had no

idea which schools would grant me access and the second was language. Granted, I could have reached for a Stage 5 (consulted and informed) interview after the students were more familiarised with me, but I found that the Stage 4 type of participation was already novel and challenging enough for them to navigate.

Arts-based methods have been used with children in both Northern and Southern contexts to spark discussion and insight into children's worlds. Methods such as Photovoice, where children are given disposable film cameras to take photos of whichever topic the researcher assigns or co-constructs, producing drawings or even recently, murals, have all generated novel insights into children's perspectives on resource-poverty and education, (Young and Barrett, 2001; Morrow, 2008; Mannay, 2010; Shah, 2015). Creative arts-based methods can also include collage-making (Vaughan, 2014), Lego™ (Gauntlett, 2014) and drawing (Campbell *et al.*, 2014). I first opted for drawing because it seemed to me the most accessible to my student participants. I adapted this method from the 'draw and write' method (Sewell, 2011), where, instead of annotating the drawings with written descriptions, I asked my participants to talk with me about them instead. Drawing can be used as a means to understand schoolchildren's views of certain topics, such as the study with Zimbabwean schoolchildren on how they interacted with HIV-affected peers (Campbell *et al.*, 2014). It can also be a springboard to education policy formation and adaption (Leitch, 2008).

Two scholars have greatly contributed to understanding the possibilities of using visual images in research. For Banks (2001), drawing allows creativity and the deployment of abstract thought. Gauntlett (2007) elaborates further on the benefits of drawing as data (both collection and content), noting that it gives participants time to process their thoughts and that they can choose what to include or omit. However, because it is more open to interpretation, it can be difficult to 'prove' (Silverman, 2001). The danger here lies in the researcher interpreting the drawings rather than the children, so care needs to be taken to listen to children explaining their choices, with the researcher refraining from comment (Literat, 2013). Another danger is laying too much stress on the drawings themselves as accurate depictions of children's worlds. Rather, their drawings should be regarded as "a departure point for apprehending something of their worlds and world-making" instead of "a mimetic or complete" portrait of the situation (Mitchell, 2006, p. 63).

In the following paragraphs I detail the process of conducting these methods. I combined two arts-based activities. The first involved drawing and discussing these drawings in a group setting. The second revolved around children choosing cards from a pre-set deck and talking about their choices. The sampling was purposive, and I requested

teachers to help me recruit students from Standards 6 to 8 in Isila and Standards 6 to 7 in Midhol<sup>29</sup>. In the group of SDMC member schoolchildren, we had one participant from Standard 5, whose father was the SDMC president at that time (and whom we'd also interviewed). I had designed my research for students in upper-primary, since engaging younger children requires different designs and skillsets. Moreover, children's drawings develop complexity with age (Cherney, Seiwert, Dickey & Fritchbeil, 2006).

#### 4.1.5 Phase I Child Interviews

The student interviews tended to run the longest out of all my interviews in Kalaburagi. This is partly because it took time for the children to draw, and time for each child to explain his or her drawing and answers. We made sure the children took breaks in accordance with the school schedule, which also prolonged the interviews. During these group interviews, I did my best to read "the corporeal language of children" (Arnott *et al.*, 2020, p. 795), watching for signs of confusion, boredom or discomfort. We frequently reassured the children that they could take their time and ask us questions, as well as leave if they wanted to. None of the children expressed a desire for leaving, although, as some researchers have dryly noted, this may be because some children welcome the chance to leave the classroom (David *et al.*, 2001). A surprising measure of play infused the space when the children, upon seeing me fold an origami frog while waiting for them to complete their drawings, asked me to teach them to make one too. Suvarna and I paused the 'research' to conduct an impromptu tutorial, and the children appeared to enjoy flipping their paper frogs when they were done.

I hoped that this, along with verbal encouragement, would help foster what some childhood researchers have called "brave spaces" (Cook-Sather, 2016), where the children would feel comfortable to express their opinions despite the institutional setting. I also found that the group dynamic, with the participants being familiar with each other, helped a little bit in mitigating the novelty of the research process (Arnott *et al.*, 2020). All the students who participated expressed their eagerness to join the interview and post-interview many other students came up and asked if we could do interviews with them too. Consent was obtained and recorded at the start of the group interview, and we audio-recorded the entire interview, only pausing it for breaks.

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<sup>29</sup> Midhol primary school did not have provision for Standard 8 during my first phase of fieldwork.

#### 4.1.6 Tasks

The first task consisted of a drawing activity. The students were given squares of origami paper and asked to draw what they liked about their community or their school. I gave them this choice because I wanted the task to be as open-ended as possible. If a student didn't like being at school, for instance, they might feel differently about their community.

The second task consisted of choosing a Dixit card to represent their imagined future. Dixit is a popular board game which contains several pictorial cards with fantastical imagery and involves participants using them to make up stories. I chose Dixit because I found the pictures accessible and appealing and hoped to spark conversations around them. Dixit cards have been used by other researchers to stimulate storytelling and group interviews (Vitancol & Baria, 2018; Chow *et al*, 2016).



Fig X Some examples of Dixit cards (Source: <https://coalition.agileuprising.com/t/dixit-retrospective/399>)

Dixit's versatility has been celebrated by players, as well as educators and speech trainers. As a fitting aside to this study, its creator, Jean-Louis Rabira works as a child therapist and the game had its genesis as a tool intended for an educational centre that worked alongside



teenagers, helping them develop their thinking and speaking skills. In an interview for the online publishing platform Medium, Rabira (quoted in Borowicz, 2017) said:

Players often enjoy gazing at the pictures on *Dixit* cards because they remind them of something personal, feelings or memories. The cards carry a lot of symbols, they are like pieces of dreams, or small windows opening on imagination. It creates a peaceful atmosphere that allows people to communicate easily. And that is the greatest pleasure you can offer players.

Despite my attempts at designing an open-ended and accessible interview format, I noticed that it was not all smooth sailing for the students. Some of the students seemed hesitant and unsure of how to proceed. Based on my classroom observations, they were accustomed to answering questions in choral repetition. At first, they mainly relied on short answers, pointing to features of their drawings without providing their reasoning, e.g., “this is a tree I particularly like.” Suvarna and I had to often probe further: “Why do you like this tree?” before hearing the reasoning, “because I can relax here and play.” Bernstein (2004)<sup>30</sup> theorizes that students accustomed to visible pedagogy (characterised by teacher-centred modes and rote learning) set their expectations of communication in a school setting.

Nevertheless, although the children showed a preference for lexical pedagogic codes, they also displayed the capability for the deep reflection and inferential thinking which is a feature of syntactic pedagogic code. Non-rote answers: answers that arose from thinking and reasoning, these took them more time and must have felt like a risk when they weren’t sure whether their answers were “right.” In addition, Suvarna and I were strangers. Moreover, the dynamic of a group interview differs from an individual interview. Participants in a group may feel constrained to go along with the group or maintain social harmony across the group. Most of the students spoke in Kannada, which Suvarna translated for me in Hindi and I translated into English in my interview notes. Sometimes some of the students spoke to me directly in Hindi, and where this is the case, I have used their exact words or phrases in my notes. Moreover, they also used words like “tension” or “timepass”, English words absorbed into the argot and bearing a raft of cultural meanings that can supersede their dictionary definition (Jeffrey, 2010). As the interview went on, the

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<sup>30</sup> I draw briefly on Basil Bernstein’s work here as he saw the transmission of certain pedagogies as class-based, which not only supports Indian scholars’ claims that educational inequality in India arises from class practice (as documented in my literature review), but also anchors my forthcoming analysis on the tensions resource-poor groups face in navigating these practices together with their structural constraints.

children grew noticeably more relaxed, teasing each other over their choice of picture cards.

Apart from providing them with paper for their drawings and the cards, I did not provide any other material. I occasionally lent a pen or pencil to anyone who needed it, but I refrained from bringing in coloured markers or pens because I wanted to be mindful of making assumptions about their skill set (Scherer, 2016) and also partly because I was trying to minimise as much as possible an image of me as a resource-rich foreigner. The children therefore used their own supplies or borrowed rulers and erasers from each other, a common practice in the classrooms I'd observed. Scherer (2016) has argued that carrying out art-based interviews in schools does not evade hierarchies or power and indeed may exacerbate them, making children aware that they are drawing in an environment where their performances are frequently assessed, even if that is not the aim or outcome of the interview.

However, on the whole, I would conclude that the supposedly emancipatory aspects of using visual arts during the group interview were depressed largely due to the location and to the obvious power differential of me as an adult researcher. As Catherine Burke (2008) discovered in her own arts-based research with primary school children in the Yorkshire, "as a context for research, the school is problematic as it wields a powerful cultural influence on the behaviour and imagination of those who occupy its spaces; adults and children alike... since it was initiated from within the classroom, the children carried out their tasks as schoolchildren rather than as younger and smaller members of the community" (p. 27). As children are constantly interpreting and identifying with discourses of childhood generated around them, their explanations are influenced by the pedagogical and social messages they receive from both school and home. This, however, is as true for adults as it is for children. Had I entered the community without the shadow of the school, perhaps the children would have responded differently. Had the interviews been conducted in the cricket ground at the outskirts of the village, the discussions may have had a different flavour and subsequent content. Nevertheless, their seeking me out after the group interviews and asking me questions suggested that the experience had been novel and not unpleasant.

### **Second Phase Data Collection: (December 3-20, 2019)**

The second phase of fieldwork comprised roughly two weeks in Karnataka, where I interviewed professors and activists in Bangalore and returned to Isila and Midhol in Kalaburagi. This time I eschewed observations in favour of interviews.

Given the numerous difficulties during the first phase, I was a little nervous about my reception in the schools, but the school staff at both schools seemed more relaxed about my presence this time around. Because they already ‘knew’ me, they seemed more trusting and willing to do in-depth interviews. Moreover, the temporary driver I’d engaged was a relative of one of the Isilan teachers who seemed very pleased about this, thus underscoring the importance of what Quereshi (2010) labels as relationality. Isila school also invited me and my family to attend their ‘science program’ a big event for the school and village, complete with visiting education department dignitaries. As with last year’s fieldwork, there lay some unforeseen surprises: many of the teachers were away because they wanted to ‘use up’ their allotted leave.

However, for the most part, this phase proved extremely fruitful in the depth of interviews gained. During the state-imposed curfew which occurred on my penultimate day in Kalaburagi, schools were closed, and I ended up conducting an interview at a teacher’s home. She ended up giving me a candid interview which detailed her experiences teaching at Isila school and helped bring richness to the developing portrait.

### **Data Collection Log**

I have affixed a data collection log below to present a snapshot of the data collected in the second phase. The primary instrument was largely semi-structured individual interviews around participant experiences of school and school governance. This time I conducted two arts-based interviews centred around the topic of children’s rights with groups of children in Isila and Midhol. The interview schedules for Phase 2 are located in the appendices.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Method &amp; Language</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Researcher Comments</b>
Professor Vinod	5/12/2019	Interview/English	College campus, Bangalore	Discussed his 20 year experience working with SDMCs
Nivedita	5/12/2019	Interview/English	NGO HQ and school, Bangalore	

Professor Vijay	6/12/2019	Interview/English	College campus, Bangalore	Discussed his involvement with caste movements.
Saraswati	10/12/2019	Interview Kannada & some English	Isila school classroom	
Isila children's group interview (6 students: 3 boys, 3 girls)	10/12/2019	Group Arts-based interview, Kannada	Isila science classroom	Discussed children's rights

Participant	Date	Method & Language	Location	Researcher Comments
Rekha	11/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Isila Nali Kali Classroom	
Science Festival	12/12/2019	Observation of Isila school science festival	Isila village and school	
Lakamma	12/12/2019	Interview/Kannada	Farm	
Isila village mothers (4)	13/12/2019	Group interview, Kannada	Lakamma's verandah, Isila village	Lakamma's mother had a role in the <i>panchayat</i> , although she said she lost the election for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> term.
Nimbenna	13/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Isila school science classroom	

Shoba	16/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Kampur high school classroom	PE teacher, expressed an interest in her
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				students because of her own financially precarious childhood
Guruprasad	16/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Kampur high school classroom	
Midhol students' interview (6 students: 3 boys, 3 girls)	17/12/2019	Group interview, Kannada	Midhol school classroom	

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Method &amp; Language</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Researcher Comments</b>
Tanushree	18/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Midhol school headteacher's office	
Rohit	17/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Midhol school headteacher's office	
Kasturi	19/12/2019	Interview, Kannada	Kasturi's home	Interview had to be conducted at Kasturi's home as Kalaburagi's government had declared curfew, thereby shutting down schools.
Pramila	18/12/2019	Interview in Kannada	NGO centre, Kalaburagi	

In total, I had 33 participants during the second phase which is roughly half of the first phase. However, the first phase represented a “wide” aspect to the data collection where participants were allowed to discuss many phenomena attached to their experience of schooling<sup>31</sup>, while the second is “narrow” or concentrated around participant experiences of school development and children’s rights governance. Therefore, the second phase contains a greater volume of in-depth data and helps fill in some of the gaps of the first. Both phases complement each other.

### **Second Phase Interview Schedules**

I tried to probe into issues surrounding governance without resorting to the word. As I was interested in how participants constructed childhood and conceptualised children’s rights, many of my questions revolved around these subjects. While some questions were straightforward, (e.g. What do you know about children’s rights?) other questions attempted to peer into personal and social constructions of childhood (e.g. What are some of the responsibilities of children? When you were a child, what were your responsibilities?) My experience in the first phase highlighted the importance of making the questions accessible. Accessibility in this case meant avoiding jargon, rendering questions simple but compelling enough to provoke verbal reflection. It meant building bridges between our varying conceptual and experiential worlds. Questions about the participants’ childhood and experiences of schooling almost seemed to open the floodgates, as these were topics they could converse on with greater ease and familiarity. In addition, I also tailored my interviews for the professors in Bangalore, having read their work and formulated questions in response to their research.

### **Arts-based Interview with Children: Discussing Rights**

The second-phase arts-based interviews with children also followed a narrowing of focus. This time I tried to sound out their understandings of and experiences with children’s rights. In preparation for a range of responses, I put together a collage of pictures with information about children’s rights. Einarsdottir (2007) discusses the importance of visual manipulatives not only for didactic purposes, but also for springboards to stimulate discussion. Samantha Punch (2008) talks about the importance of scaffolding conversation by providing audio or visual stimuli, especially for young

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<sup>31</sup> The debate of public versus private schooling repeatedly cropped up in all my participant interviews, as well as depictions of corruption and teacher apathy.

children. Some of the participants claimed not to fully know or understand children's rights, so Rohan and I talked about certain rights and invited the children to tell us what they thought about them. I scoured the web for material on children's rights. I used images from a publication by Save the Children (2014) designed to teach children about the rights listed in the UNCRC in a child-friendly format.<sup>32</sup> However, since my intention was to spark discussion rather than 'teach' about rights, I did not go through every single right. My intention was to encourage children to talk about what they already know or don't know, about children's rights.



**Figure 8 Printed Image used in Group Children's Interviews**

To initiate conversation, I printed colour images of various pastimes, such as painting and playing, and used them as visual aids or 'fruitful springboards' (Ruiz-Casares & Thompson, 2016, p. 36) when talking about oneself. From the first phase, I had realised the importance of guiding by example, and so I introduced myself, talked a little of my hobbies and the things I like to do. While this method may be criticised for corralling the children into a certain formula, the children's group interviews in the first phase had led me to realise that the children preferred having some guidance.

### **Research Ethics: Negotiating Consent and Understanding with Children**

If research theory and method are fundamentally interwoven with ethics, as prominent childhood scholar Virginia Morrow (2008) claims, then doing research with children amplifies ethical quandaries that may be minimised when researching adults (Arnott *et al.*, 2020). If, as Judith Ennew notes, children "have the right to be properly researched" (cited in Morrow, 2008) then considering how to reach understanding should be approached as a fraught and situated process. Ethnographers have already questioned

<sup>32</sup> The entire resource can be accessed online at "Draw Your Rights!" Save the Children (2014) Retrieved from: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/>

the “anticipatory regime” of institutional ethical approval, that Paul Atkinson (2009) argues falls short of the complexity of conducting ethnographic or deep qualitative fieldwork. His arguments find support in Murphy and Dingwall (2007), who argue that IRB approval does not mean ethical considerations are now taken care of. Atkinson notes that consent “is always relational and sequential” (p. 22), negotiated over building trust. Therefore, consent should be sought and reached through the process of doing research, rather than as a formality at the beginning.

Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow (2004)’s book on ethical research with children is often considered a foundational text, one that provides tactical guidelines that acknowledge the messy, inchoate and situated character of research with children. They define consent as “the invisible act of evaluating information and making a decision, and the visible act of signifying the decision” (p. 96). The general consensus among childhood scholars is that consent is secured via three major conduits. The researcher must first obtain the child’s assent, which is defined as his or her willingness to take part in the research (Soderback *et al.*, 2011)

Researchers must also watch body language to determine whether children are comfortable in taking part *during* as well as before the research process. Arnott *et al* (2020) label this as “emotional attuning” (p.804), an orientation which is especially useful when conducting research with very young children. This sensitivity can be learned and practiced, and having worked in various institutional settings as a nursery worker and an English teacher, I had had some experience in monitoring children’s body language and reading their reactions. However, this experience did not make me an “expert” in measuring children’s reactions. Half of my experience with children had been in an Asian setting where children were expected to regulate their emotions in school settings around teacher and group expectations. Therefore, my ‘reading’ of children’s body language during the interviews may not always have been accurate. Finally, consent must also be obtained from children’s legal guardians and/or teachers and school staff if doing research with children in a school space.

### **Informed Consent**

Fulfilling the three major components of obtaining consent from children can risk playing by ‘recipe book’ approaches to a concept that has to be negotiated by both researcher and children (Gallagher *et al.*, 2009). Alderson & Morrow suggest that children imply consent by their participation and engagement, however, David *et al.* (2001) noted



that in educational settings such as schools, children may want to participate to please their teachers or the researcher. David *et al.* (2001)'s reflections on their research was revealing for they discussed how conducting research with children in an educational setting such as a school affects the data collected, versus conducting research in a home. They noted that even presenting information about their study was done in an 'educational' way, with forms and verbal explanations. Gallagher *et al.* (2010) agree that schools play a role in structuring data collection, for children associate schools with formal learning, and a failure to demonstrate understanding can risk stigmatising the child.

Moreover, assuming that children and participants make rational, strategic decisions, assumes a narrow definition of agency that does not account for unpredictability and individual experience. I explained that I was interested in their opinions of school and community, and also explained that everything they said would be confidential and anonymised. The teachers at both Isila and Midhol appended their understandings of my research in their explanations to the children. They explained that a PhD was the highest tier of a college education and that once I obtained this, I would become a professor, or someone who 'teaches teachers.' To me, this did not necessarily explain the process of research, but the students appeared to understand this explanation better than my efforts! Although I tried my best in anticipating possible reactions and trying to negotiate understanding via photos and translations, I accepted that "neither researchers nor their participants can hope for anything more than a partial, contextual and incomplete understanding of what they are doing" (Gallagher *et al.*, 2010, p. 479).

### **Ethical Procedures of the Project**

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Glasgow's institutional review board before setting off for fieldwork and was secured till the date of thesis submission. While in the field, I applied for three amendments to my ethical approval, as I found participants I had not accounted for in my initial application. This is a normal feature of doing qualitative research in a shifting and dynamic environment.

Ethical considerations revolve primarily around protecting the identity of participants (LeCompte, 1993; Alderson & Morrow, 2011) and securing their informed consent. Securing informed consent was a process that I was constantly negotiating, based on who I approached. I found that different stakeholders understood consent differently, based on their own experiences and perceptions. Before I approached the government schools, I applied for official government approval from the Deputy Director of Public Instruction.

After obtaining this approval letter<sup>33</sup>, I approached Isila and Midhol schools and explained my research intentions to the headteachers. In Isila, the Cluster Resource officials (education authorities responsible for overseeing clusters of government schools) also happened to be present that day, and they also gave their verbal approval.

I had consent forms for those participants who were comfortable with giving written consent and secured oral consent from those who requested it. Many parents professed themselves illiterate and said they would consent verbally. Conducting research ethically with child participants in Global South contexts requires balance between safeguarding and accepting that certain child participants may have gained autonomy and independence through practices such as labour, which is generally not the case for normative global North childhoods. Elsewhere, I have discussed in greater depth the palimpsest of cultural and linguistic considerations when attempting to undertake research in a context such as rural north Karnataka (Ipe, 2019). Therefore, I strove as much as possible to allow my child participants both clarity and flexibility. For example, I had printed out pictures to illustrate my methods and showed these pictures to help them reach a better understanding of what they were consenting to. The consent forms<sup>34</sup> for the child participants were also simpler, with emoticons and red light/green light images to signal “yes” or “no.” Through these methods, I wished to promote understanding and dialogic interviews with the students (Morrow, 2011; Rampal, 2008; Hansen *et al.*, 2018). Suvarna and Rohan also gave several explanations and tried to scaffold the participants’ understanding and ease throughout the process.

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<sup>33</sup> I had to secure approval from the DDPI (Deputy Director for Public Instruction)’s office for the study, as he was responsible for dealing school administration and management in the district. It was very difficult to meet him and despite Miriam and I going to his office, every other day for a little over three weeks, we did not get to meet him. The office was also busy with “teacher counselling” at this time, where teachers are assigned to various government schools around the district. Finally, Miriam resorted to her ‘connection’, a minister in the Department of Education. He read my ethics approvals, asked me specifically what I intended to study, and then wrote a letter for me in Kannada. He explained that the letter from him would gain me the official approvals needed from the DDPI’s office. This letter set out the *talukhs* where I was to study and outlined my methods. When we returned to the DDPI’s office, the officials used the letter to affix their seals of approval. Government approval was important to ‘open’ institutional doors for me. However, it required much patience and persistence, and without Miriam’s ‘connection’, I may have had to wait weeks longer to secure it.

<sup>34</sup> Examples of consent forms for each group, together with the images used to explain the project to children, are located in the appendices.

Participants were given the choice of being audio-recorded, and assured of their anonymity via pseudonyms (though not complete confidentiality as this would be difficult for me to guarantee). I found that participants were initially suspicious of the audio-recorder and explained that while it was helpful for me for my studies to have records of the interview, they were free to withdraw or have me take notes. This helped me respect the autonomy of my research participants and some participants (Radha, Anita, Sangeeta) requested that I write down the interviews instead of recording. I also had to manage ethical processes during interviews, as sometimes teachers would saunter in (for whom I didn't have consent) and contribute their opinions.

Ethical considerations also played a part in my data analysis. I felt compelled to try and do justice to those participants who faced more socioeconomic barriers (parents, children) and pay close attention to the concerns and opinions they articulated in their interviews. I also tried to spend time with them outside the interview format, answering their questions about me, and attending non-academic school events and celebrations. This was easier to achieve in Isila than in Midhol. There were also various other ways I tried to contribute: by assisting Miriam on her visits to government officials (she confessed she needed moral support), helping Martin and Amelia offer practical gifts to low-income families, donating to activists, teaching Suvarna English, producing a report for Raj for the farm. These were small ways of 'giving back' and building relationships.<sup>35</sup> I assigned pseudonyms to each participant mentioned in the text and referred to them by these pseudonyms when sending the audio files to my external Kannada translator, Ragini.

### **Incentives**

While I did not want to provide incentives for participation, I did prepare gifts for all my participants. I resorted primarily to good quality chocolate I bought in Glasgow and fresh sweets from sweetshops in Kalaburagi City. In Kalaburagi, sweets are usually distributed for special events, such as births, graduation, employment and marriage. One of the Isilan farm workers brought us sweets when her son obtained a job. The cultural association of sweets with celebratory events meant that they were received with pleasure. I usually gave gifts at the close of interviews, so my participants were not necessarily expecting anything. During the second phase, I gave gifts of stationery I bought in

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<sup>35</sup> I continue to stay in touch with Martin and Amelia, who update me about their work and the work of other groups in areas such as Covid-19 relief efforts in Kalaburagi. For doctoral researchers wishing to study international development, I recommend retaining and maintaining contact with local social workers/ activists to continue supporting them financially and emotionally (when able), to push back against extractive processes of research.

Glasgow to the teachers and students who participated in interviews with me, as well as thank-you notes. Since they were now a bit more familiar with me, I felt that these were more appropriate gifts. For the village parents that I interviewed, I gave Rs. 100 (£ 1)<sup>36</sup> and thank-you notes after the interview to thank them for taking their time. In the first phase, I had interviewed parents already at school or at work, so I stuck with sweets. But in the second interview, they gave me their free time, which I understood as precious, given that they were SC parents who were often (or whose husbands were often) daily wage labourers.

### **Preparing to Analyse Multiple Strands and Textures of Data**

The data collected from both phases of the study initially felt unwieldy and scattered. How could I integrate children's drawings in tandem with group and individual interviews? How could I integrate my field notes of formal classroom observations with my notes of casual conversations?

Braun and Clarke's (2006) practical framework for thematic analysis (TA) came in useful for constructing a narrative of academic analysis devised from the data collected<sup>37</sup>. They argue for considering the data corpus in its entirety, beginning with a cursory sweep of semantic content to a deeper and consistent probe into texts "to find repeated patterns of meaning" (p. 15). TA searches for and identifies "common threads" (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013, p. 400) across the data set. Moreover, Breakwell (2006) notes that thematic analysis is useful in bridging similarities and differences in participant experiences. Howitt & Cramer (2020) recommend thematic analysis as a "useful initiation" for students doing qualitative research. These considerations led me to adopt TA as the best method for analysing my data.

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<sup>36</sup> To put this sum in context, daily wage labourers usually make between 100 to 300 INR per day. In August 2019, the government of India passed the Code of Wages Bill, which stipulated a minimum of 176 INR for 8 hours of work (Rohli, 2019). However, activists have pointed out that this minimum wage is hardly a fair wage, and that the bill lacked political will. The informal nature of much daily wage labour in India heightens the potential for exploitation. In thinking over monetary incentives, I had to abide by the advice of my NGO gatekeepers, who did not want to promote a view of foreigners as dispensing large sums of money. In the end, I decided to regard the money as a token incentive for participation, and since none of the parent interviews took longer than 30 minutes, I hoped the amount would compensate in a small way for their time. None of the parents appeared to be expecting monetary compensation, and appeared pleased. However, in the future I would also include little handwritten notes of thanks. I had assumed that they would not be able to read the longer letters of thanks I had written in English for the teachers. But one of the mothers asked me for my 'sign' on the card because she wanted a memento of our time together. She worked as a cook on a farm and I had spent time chatting with her months prior our formal interview. This request made me aware of my bias in assuming the parents would be less interested in handwritten notes, and that some of them appeared to appreciate them along with the small financial incentives.

<sup>37</sup> Writers reflecting on the craft note that all plots are sparked by conflict, which revolved around a question (Lamott, 1995; King, 2012). For fiction, the question is often "What will happen to the main character(s)?" In thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that the research question generates the narrative. This framing of qualitative analysis is supported by Alvesson and Kärlemann (2011), who view "writing (good) social science as similar to writing a (good) detective story" (p. 13).

## Criticisms of Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis's flexibility and malleability also contains potentials for abuse—namely a lack of intellectual rigour and a clarity in how themes are generated. These criticisms centre thematic analysis as “the poor relative in the qualitative methods family” (Howitt & Cramer, 2020, p. 404). This is partly due to the lack of clarity around what thematic analysis *is*, aided in part by its iterative and flexible nature. Vaismoradi *et al.* (2013) regard TA a “a poorly branded method” (p. 400), often incorrectly regarded as ‘easy.’ Countering these perceptions of ease, Howitt & Cramer (2020) write “carried out properly, thematic analysis is quite an exacting process requiring a considerably investment of time and effort for the researcher” (p. 405).

Part of the confusion arises in the various definitions of a theme (De Santis & Ugarizza, 2000). I rely on Sandelowski and Leeman's (2012) definition of a theme as a coherent integration of disparate pieces of data that constitute the findings. Moreover, both Spencer *et al.* (2003) and Braun & Clarke (2006) frame a theme as focusing on an important aspect of the text that relates back to the research question.

Engaging in TA therefore requires researchers to be prepared to continuously cycle through data analysis, as well as present their analytical process as transparently as possible (Howitt & Cramer 2020; Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013). Howitt (2007) takes us through his analytical process by showing how he analysed his data through several cycles of deeper and more definitive coding, organising them into categories and ‘theme piles’ before fusing them with psychological theories to arrive at the overarching themes. This transparency is seen as a crucial step in dismantling the mystique of thematic analysis (Thorne, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since I as the researcher am the instrument of analysis, this transparency also helps in establishing the credibility of my qualitative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007; Ryan *et al.*, 2007).

I used the analytical framework adapted from Holzcheiter *et al.*, (2019) to structure my ‘journey’ through the data collected. Without this guide, I was in danger of being overwhelmed by the breadth of my data. This framework would help orient my data analysis of the second phase as well as first phase data. My framework would also encourage repeated and cyclical submersion in the data while helping me reach decisions about patterns and the themes that had arisen.

## Transcription and Translation of Interviews

I personally transcribed all the interviews I had done in English by hand and hired Ragini to transcribe and translate interviews done in Kannada. She transcribed them in Kannada, and then translated them to English. I have included a screenshot of a Kannada-English transcript of an interview with Kasturi teacher of Isila school.

**Pr (10.00):** ಆಗ ನಮಗೆ ತುಂಬಾ ಮುಜುಗರವಾಗುತ್ತಿತ್ತು ಇದೇನು ಇವರು ಅಧ್ಯಯನಕ್ಕೆ ಗಮನಕೊಡದೆ ನೃತ್ಯ, ಸಂಗೀತ ಇಂತಹ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನೇ ಮಾಡಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ ಎಂದು. ಆಗ ನಮಗೆ ಯಾವುದೇ ರೀತಿಯ ಪ್ರಭಾವ ಕಂಡು ಬರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ನಂತರ ನಾನು CET ಪಾಸ ಮಾಡಿ ಬಂದೆ ನಂತರ ನಮ್ಮ ಸಹ ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರು ಬಂದರು. DEd ಮಾಡಿ CET ಪಾಸ ಮಾಡಿ ಬಂದವರೆಲ್ಲರೂ ಅಧ್ಯಯನಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಸಾಕಷ್ಟು ಪ್ರೇರಣೆ ಮಾಡಲು ಪ್ರಾರಂಭಿಸಿದವು. ಆಗ ನಾವೆಲ್ಲರೂ ಒಂದು ಕ್ರಮಬದ್ಧತೆಯನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದವು. ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ತರಗತಿಯನ್ನು ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಲೇಬೇಕು ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ವಿಷಯಗಳನ್ನು ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು ಎಂಬ ಕರಾರನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದವು. ಆಗ ಎಲ್ಲರೂ ಕ್ರಮಬದ್ಧವಾಗಿ ಶಿಸ್ತು ಅಳವಡಿಸಿಕೊಂಡರು. ಇಲ್ಲಾ ಅಂದರೆ ಶಾಲೆಯ ಘಂಟೆನೇ ಭಾರಿಸುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ ಮತ್ತು ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರು ಎಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ಹೋಗುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ಕೆಲವೊಂದು ಸಾರಿ ಸುಮಾರು ಎರಡು ಗಂಟೆಗಳ ಕಾಲ ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರು ಒಂದೇ ತರಗತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕುಳಿತುಕೊಂಡು ಬಿಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು, ಅವರ ಹತ್ತಿರ ನಾವು ತರಗತಿ ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಕೇಳಿದರೆ ಬೇಡಬಿಡಿ ಎಂದು ಹೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು. ನಾವು ಮೊದಲು ಈ ಶಾಲೆಯನ್ನು ಸೇರಿದಾಗ ಇಷ್ಟೊಂದು ಅಜಾಗರೂಕತೆ.

**Pr (10.50):** ಆ ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರೆಲ್ಲರೂ ತಮ್ಮ ನಿವೃತ್ತಿಯ ಸಮೀಪದಲ್ಲಿದ್ದರು. ಅವರೆಲ್ಲರೂ ಶಿಕ್ಷಕ ವೃತ್ತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಒಳ್ಳೆಯ ಅನುಭವವನ್ನು ಹೊಂದಿದವರು. ಅವರಿಗೆ ನಾವು ಏನೂ ಹೇಳಲಿಕ್ಕೂ ಅಗುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ಅವರು ನಮಗೂ ಕೂಡಾ ಪಾಠ ಮಾಡಲು ಅವಕಾಶವನ್ನು ಕೊಡುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ ಆ ರೀತಿಯಾದ ಪರಿಸ್ಥಿತಿ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣವಾಗಿ ಬಿಟ್ಟಿತ್ತು. ನೀವು ಏನು ಮಾಡುತ್ತಾ ಇದ್ದಿರಿ ಎಂದು ಕೇಳಿದರೆ ಸಮಾಜ ಪಾಠ ಮಾಡಿದೆ, ಈಗ ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಕಡೆಯಿಂದ ಓದಿಸುತ್ತಾ ಇದ್ದೇನೆ ಎಂದು ಹೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು. ಸಮಾಜ ಪಾಠವನ್ನು ಯಾರು ಓದಿಸುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ಸಮಾಜ ವಿಜ್ಞಾನದ ಪಾಠ ಮಾಡಬೇಕೆಂದರೆ

### Figure 9 Example of Kannada interview transcript

Scholars have discussed how in qualitative data analysis intuition and inspiration emerge as key ingredients of the brew. Therefore, I crafted an analytical guide that afforded space for intuition and ‘intellectual guesswork’ within the structure. A potential danger of thematic analysis is regarding the data as a mine, thus promoting an extractive image of the researcher as miner. However, Alvesson and Karlman’s (2013) recommendation to regard empirical material “as a partner for critical dialogue” (p.11), leads me back to focusing on the concerns highlighted by my participants. This framing also allows for examining disjuncture and deviations in my diverse dataset. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2006) hold it as “desirable that there is disjuncture between research questions, interview questions, and coding questions” (p.15), noting the creative possibilities of tension.

Although Braun and Clarke argue that “thematic analysis should be considered as a method in its own right” (p. 4), I also relied on Kathy Charmaz’s (2012) explication of grounded theory to inform my analytical memo-writing. Rather embracing a narrow “methodolatry” (Holloway and Todres, 2003), I fused the methods advocated by Charmaz, Braun & Clarke (2006) and Saldaña (2015), to ensure methodological rigour (Reicher & Taylor, 2005, p. 549).

To summarise, the open-ended nature of the first phase narrowed my focus to school development governance and the efforts of various stakeholders in practicing that governance. During the second phase, I used my interview questions and techniques to focus more on my participants’ experience of engaging in this form of governance, to understand the behaviours, subjectivities, and normativities engendered by governance. Back in Glasgow, I then moved on to the methods I used for coding and analysing the data to gather themes and engage critically with my data. I followed the approach of Saldaña (2015), who recommended coding in ‘cycles’ to ensure rigorous analysis. I first coded my data manually and then gathered all the codes into a mind map, arranging codes into various categories. I then imported my data into the software Nvivo and coded them in Nvivo. I found that freedom of manual coding spawned hundreds of codes, while the digital format of Nvivo forced me to be more concise. The following sections attempt at giving a brief look at the mechanics of my analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006), Charmaz (2014) and Saldaña (2015) have published detailed guides for thematic analysis, memo-writing, and coding. I selected and combined from their guides. For example, Saldaña (2015) recommended coding in cycles. He also developed a list of code types, some of which I used and have featured below.

### **First Cycle Coding Methods**

This cycle primarily derived codes and themes from the data in an inductive, iterative manner. Hence, I focused on the types of codes detailed below, in order to understand how my participants conceptualise governance and the ways they perceived it shaped their lives. I was also interested in the values and emotions they attach to education, and the narratives and actions they employ to sustain and guides these values. Below I have provided a list of the first cycle codes I used along with examples from my data:

- In Vivo coding

Using participants’ words to describe a phenomenon.

Saraswati: But why is that the teachers are lagging behind. Teachers alone can do nothing. **We cannot clap with one hand.** No matter how hard we try, we need the help of parents also. The children stay with us for just 6 hours. Parents should take responsibility for teaching children when they go home. If the reputable people's children come to our school, the school will also be uplifted.

- Themeing the Data

Noting themes, e.g. “demonstrating motivation” as justification for including/excluding children from schooling.

Extract coded ‘student personal motivation’ from interview with Isila village mother:

Harpita: They show good behaviour according to the way they learn. Whether studying or not, that is left to them. How we can tell them this? They need pass their classes at every level and they need to have zeal for that.

- Versus

What gets compared/ contrasted? Examples: “uninterested parents versus interested parents” or “private school versus government school?”

Extract of a versus code:

Anita: We have a different syllabus here that teachers cover- along with that students learn in a fun way- besides the lecture we use different methods of teaching, formal and informal methods (such as) class activities, using visual aids in classroom in a fun way so the children pay more attention using these visual aids makes it more interesting. Children from the home who used to go to government school before coming to us say **that government school doesn't use these methods- here it's more fun.**

- Values

Codes that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs.

There will be other teachers there. They all make their own decisions. Just for name sake they took us. But all decisions are taken by the school principal. **They are just like you. Very intelligent. They make their own decision. If they ask us to bring our children, we will take them. We will not understand anything**

In the above extract, the value coding (highlighted in yellow) depicts the values around “intelligent people” held by the participant.

- Emotional

Codes that describe participants' emotional states. Example, if a participant mentions anger or sorrow, code that as “anger” and “sorrow.”



This is completely crazy, I tell you. That's why engaging with the state is also sometime **tiresome**.  
Oh my God! Every time I have to throw my integrity, every time I have to say that I have no other bad intentions.

The extract above has been coded as “tiresome.” It can also be coded as “relinquishing integrity” or “frustration.”

- Narrative Coding

Codes where the participants tell stories/ gives examples to prove a point. What kinds of characters/situations/morals do these narratives contain?

Sir, the SDMC itself is not right. That's all for the name. There is politics in it. They should be given a share of the school's grants. Otherwise, they get drunk and fight. SDMC is not good. The drunkards will make it a complete ruin. Its original purpose is, the political people were not having work, so implement it for their sake. Some days ago, one school member of SDMC raped a teacher. See it has been in the papers. And the higher authorities dismissed him. This is happening.

In the extract above, the participant launches into a narrative of alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, and political infighting to prove his point that SDMCs are for “show” or for “namesake” and do not actually work for school development and management.

- Motif

What motifs do participants use in the interviews? What metaphors/ images do they use to lend weight to their arguments?

In private schools, it's more like a **prison** for the children, because they shall be assembled in a room. In order to learn something, the child's mind must be free to perceive the subject. But in a private school, the room is crowded and there is no freedom.

In the above extract, the word “prison” has been selected as a motif code because it evokes a certain association for the participant and can be further explored in analysis.

- Descriptive

Codes that provide participant descriptions:

That child must be proficient in painting, alphabet, tables, letters. Teachers need to be **mentors**. They must learn and tell others. We must say the right and wrong thing. We're just having a discussion here. There were many problems. Now the children of the poor must remain poor.

Here the code “teacher as mentors” is a descriptive code to underscore how teachers should operate in social relationships, according to this participant.

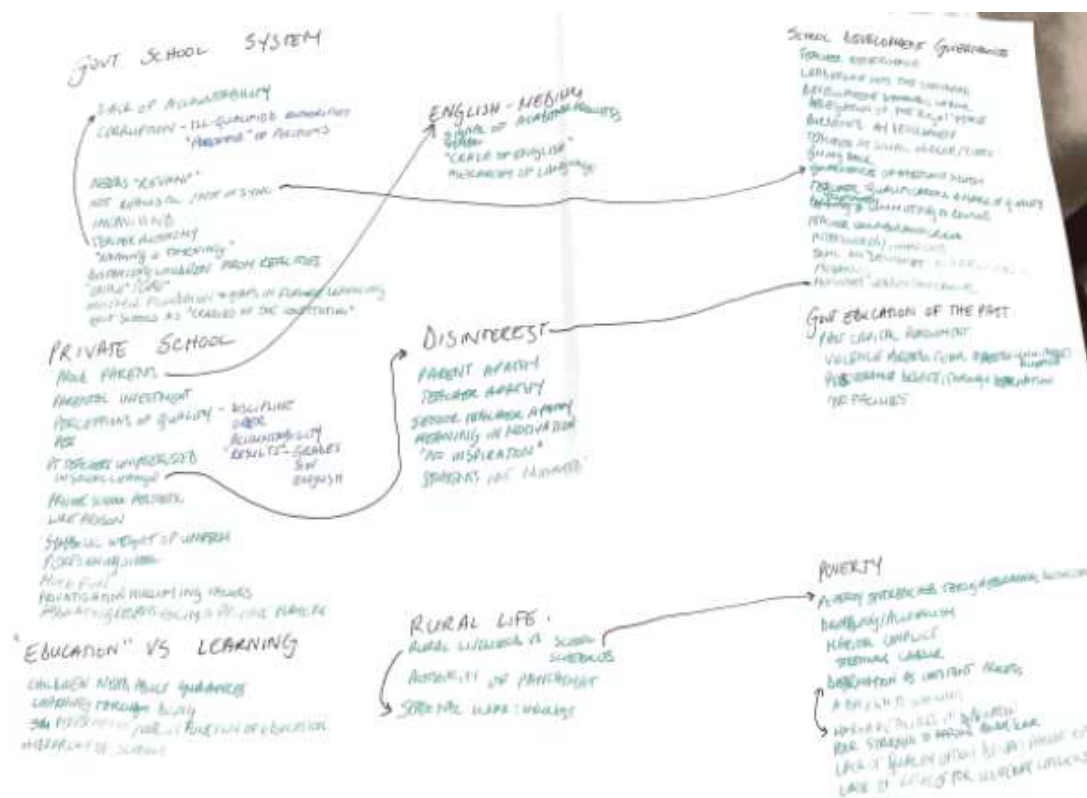
- Provisional Codes

Provisional codes refer to established pre-determined list of codes. For example, my observations and interview data in the first phase suggested to me that participants spent a lot of time and effort in school development. I referred to this as “work” as it was often unpaid (especially in the case of parents and children) or paid school staff were recorded as giving details of spending their own money and effort out of school. These codes emerged iteratively during the first phase of fieldwork largely from the interviews and observations and were developed as provisional codes in preparation for the second phase, as well as being applied to data collected in the second phase.

Provisional Code	Example
<b>Work</b>	When a parent, teacher, or student speaks of contributing out of their own resources (time, effort, money) or, losing out on opportunities (e.g. earning money) to participate in school development governance.
<b>Interest/Motivation</b>	When parents and teachers discuss children who are “interested” in their studies versus children who aren’t.
<b>Knowledge/Intelligence</b>	Who is considered intelligent/knowledgeable in a school?
<b>Private School Aesthetic</b>	What distinguishes private school from government school?
<b>Violence</b>	Where is violence noticed and normalised? An example would be a teacher speaking nostalgically of corporal punishment.
<b>Children as Social Actors</b>	How are children mobilised to track child rights abuses? In what ways are they perceived as contributing to their communities?
<b>Tensions in Children’s Rights</b>	Where do the stakeholders articulate tensions in pursuing children’s rights?



devised a 'mind map' and arranged the codes according to greater topics derived from invivo coding( e.g. the term “disinterest” was mentioned by several participants in several contexts) or deductive coding (e.g. school development governance). Lines in purple ink visualized the relationships between the codes. These mind maps are rough sketches of the more sophisticated visual maps I intended to create following deeper analysis and integration of all my interview codes.



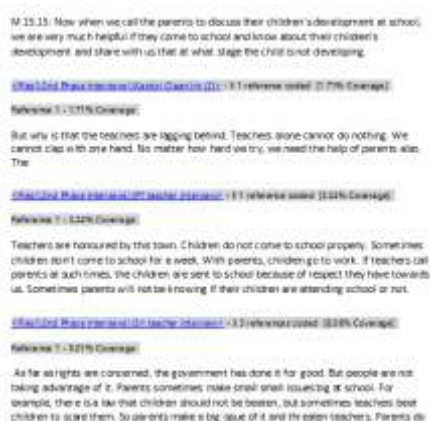
**Figure 11 Mind-Map**

### Nvivo Coding for Organisation/Category Development

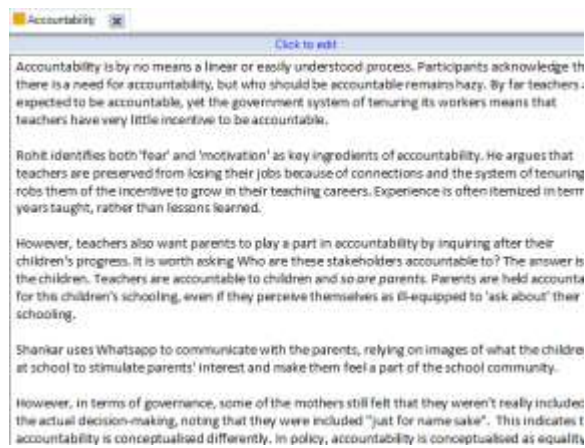
I then moved on to the software NVivo to facilitate coding. I used a combination of manual and digital coding to ensure rigour in the data analytical process. In my case, manual facilitated ‘brainstorming’ codes, while Nvivo helped in tidying up the extensive list of codes and organizing them preparatory to forming categories. Welsh (2002) supports using a combination of both methods with smaller datasets, writing, “in order to achieve the best results it is important that researchers do not reify either electronic or manual methods and instead combine the best features of each” (p. 8) Manual coding helped me gain an intimacy with my data; the physical sensation of paper between my fingers and the visual differentiations of differently-inked codes facilitated diving into the data multiple times. Had I vaulted straight into digital coding with Nvivo, I would have missed many connections that suggested themselves to me as I interrogated the transcripts

again and again. The complexity of my data, especially in terms of different groups of stakeholders and the overlapping conceptual clouds of school development governance and children's rights meant that I often 'lost' myself in the data and needed a tool to gain organisational purchase.

In Nvivo, the smaller space of the screen and the requirement to sort out my data into nodes helped condense my codes preparatory to forming categories. Nvivo also helped me navigate my data easily. I could cross-check codes across the digitized transcripts simultaneously and build a foundation where each code and subsequent memo formed analytical bricks. For example, I had coded the phrase "clapping with one hand" as an In Vivo code during the first cycle. Using the software, I eventually filed this code under the theme of "problems of accountability." During the second cycle of coding, I coded this phrase under "accountability" and "teacher-parent relationship." However, when I examined all the interview extracts under teacher-parent relationship (Fig 13) I had amassed in Nvivo, I realised that a greater theme of accountability was arising. This led to an analytical memo on accountability (Fig 14.) that



**Figure 12 Coding as Analysis**



**Figure 13 Screenshot of Accountability Memo**

was one of the supports for accountability as a key theme in the data. The following paragraphs trace my analytical circling through the data through screenshots of my Nvivo coding, and both digital and handwritten memos.















Name	Files	References	Created On
Casteism	3	6	10-03-2020 15:22
Children	4	8	10-03-2020 15:59
Children's Rights	5	13	10-03-2020 15:45
Democracy	1	7	11-03-2020 13:43
Education	1	1	11-03-2020 13:37
Education Legislation	1	5	11-03-2020 13:34
Education Policy	1	2	11-03-2020 13:39
English Medium	3	3	10-03-2020 15:58
Gender	2	2	10-03-2020 16:14
Governance	3	5	11-03-2020 13:42
Government School	1	2	10-03-2020 15:56
Identity	2	2	13-03-2020 14:44
Intelligence	0	0	14-03-2020 21:07
Labour of Development Governance	6	11	10-03-2020 15:30
Media	1	1	11-03-2020 14:03
Motivation for Schooling	0	0	10-03-2020 15:43
NGO Activism	3	9	11-03-2020 13:55
Political Corruption	2	4	10-03-2020 16:43
Poverty	5	9	10-03-2020 15:11
PPPs	1	1	10-03-2020 15:32
Private School	4	8	10-03-2020 15:08

**Figure 14 Using Nvivo to condense codes**

Categories were formed to support the generation of themes. For example, in my manual codes and resulting mind maps and analytical memos, I discerned a category I'd labelled, "Labour of Development Governance." When coding my transcripts in Nvivo, the number of references this code generated indicated it would form a major theme in the findings. Similarly, the number of references to the codes Children and Children's Rights, also suggested these as dominant themes. In the second cycle of coding, applying my research questions helped me hone in on what school development and children's rights governance meant as practice to my participants through this



Labour of Development Governance contains several codes, thus indicating its relevance as category status:

[-]  Labour of Development Governance	6	17	10-03-2020 15:30
 Bureaucracy of Governance	1	2	11-03-2020 16:33
 Community Response	2	2	10-03-2020 16:13
 Creative Labour	2	3	10-03-2020 16:00
 Financial Expense	2	2	10-03-2020 16:03
 Headteacher Support	3	4	10-03-2020 15:24
 Inspection	1	1	10-03-2020 16:19
 Mental Labour	1	3	11-03-2020 14:10
 Need for Coordination and Monitoring	2	4	11-03-2020 14:14
 Physical Labour	1	1	10-03-2020 16:40
 Relational labour	1	1	11-03-2020 15:13
 Sacrifice	2	2	11-03-2020 14:46
 SDMC	1	3	10-03-2020 16:42
 Teacher Initiative	2	4	10-03-2020 16:03

**Figure 15 Developing Categories in Nvivo**

In tandem with coding, I also developed analytical memos. After I coded every interview, both manually and digitally, I wrote an analytical memo, informed by Charmaz (2014)'s suggestions for developing analytical memoing. I wrote freely and dated my memos, noting key emerging concepts and themes. I also wrote memos by date, summarizing my thinking and processing of the data thus far and the themes and relationships I was discovering. Below is an extract for a memo from March 9, 2020:

In reviewing the data from the L-sagar mothers' survey, a few interesting themes stand out in the private versus government school debate. Three mothers out of the eight stress that in private schools, teachers are 'reliable' and come daily. Thus, the daily presence of teachers as a certainty is a powerful attraction to private schools. The term 'reliable' suggests that parents can trust private school teachers to 'do their job' and perform the responsibilities of the role of the teacher. Two other parents prefer private school, even if they are neutral or think it is expensive. The mother who believes private teachers teach well argues that 'government school lets children roam around' thereby promoting a mental image of disorder versus discipline and containment in private school. *Private school like a box? A mechanistic vision of education?* The fifth mother notes the tensions between the two when making school 'choice': government school provides 'facilities' i.e. free resources, while private school provides 'better education'.

Thus parents, constrained between free 'facilities' and 'better education' if they think they can afford it. One mother noted that private school gave lots of homework, citing that as a reason for why she thought private school is better. This is cross-referenced with Martin's interview where he said that private school teachers are judged by how much homework they pile on students. Poor parents appear to attach weight to symbols: e.g. homework, uniform, presence as their indicators of perceived quality. Consistent attendance, i.e. 'reliability' is paired with the 'attention' they give to the children, versus the lack of attention teachers reportedly give the children in government schools. Parents choose private schools because they believe these schools are 'facilitating learning', which they cannot guarantee in government schools. They perceive themselves as having more control in the private model, compared to the government model. Lack of accountability in government schools engenders a pervasive mistrust where parents would rather spend money on an education where they have to 'provide the facilities' rather than gamble on government education. Trust, quality, accountability, these are what poor parents seek from the schooling system and make their choices according to whether these requirements are met or not. Therefore, the governance model of enacting these requirements through the locus of community may be impaired in its functioning because of the power of the private as alternative.



**Figure 16 Memoing through MS Word**

The 'comments' function of Word is helpful in adding new thoughts to memos. These comments can help develop memos further, and each memo and comment built up the thematic scaffolding for analysis.

My memos were both digital and handwritten. I tended to freewrite memos after I'd coded my interviews, to jot down the themes and reflections provoked by the coding process.

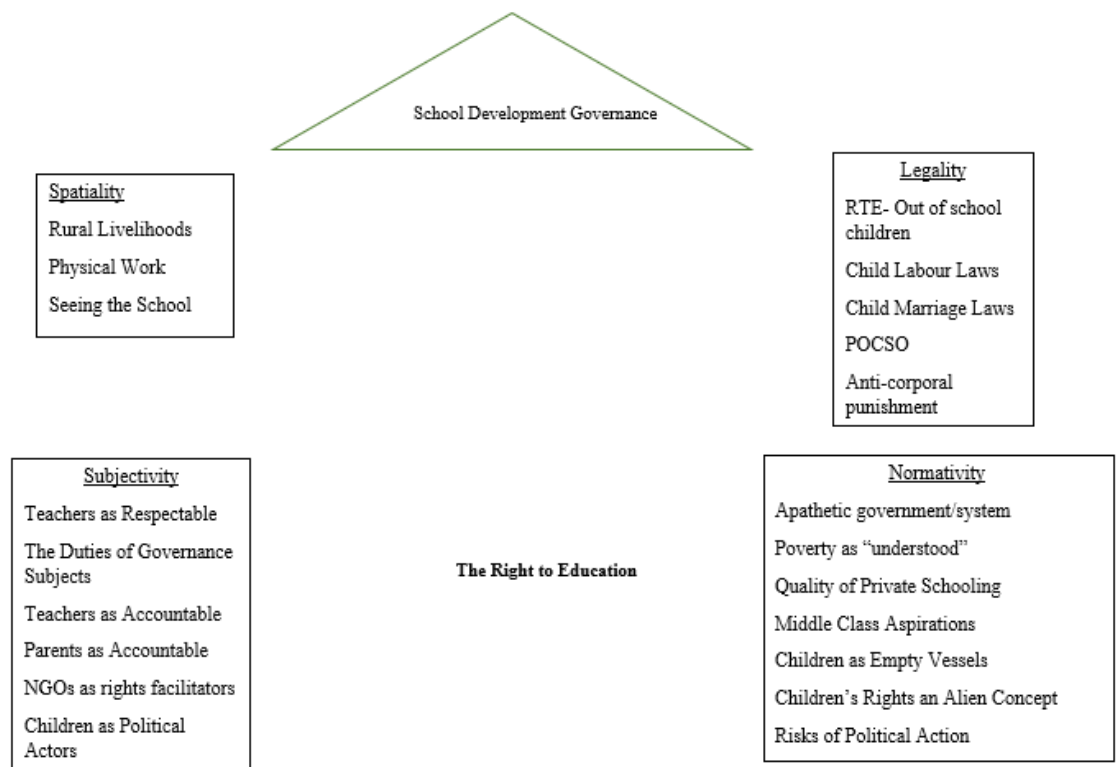


**Figure 17 Handwritten analytic memo of Vinod Professor's interview**

### **Second Cycle Coding Methods**

The second cycle involved integration of my analytic framework: canvassing the interview and field note data for the dimensions of spatiality, legality, subjectivity and normativity. These dimensions will constrict the codes into categories and coalesce them into patterns.





**Figure 18 Provisional integrated framework**

### **Integration: Analysis in the Light of Research Questions.**

Slotting in the emergent themes into the four key dimensions of child rights governance provided a sense of the subjectivities and normativities that intersected with the structures of spatiality and legality in the school. I then returned to my research questions and considered the themes under these dimensions against the questions. My major question at the heart of this thesis was:

How do north Karnatakans engage in the practice of school development and child rights governance and how do they reinterpret child rights discourses?

To help me answer this major question, I arranged the themes according to the sub-questions below.

- What are the tensions of ‘doing’ school development governance articulated by school staff, parents, students and activists?
- How do these various stakeholders perceive and respond to children’s rights in their governance practice?

- How do participants reach for the ‘middle ground’ of school development and children’s rights governance?

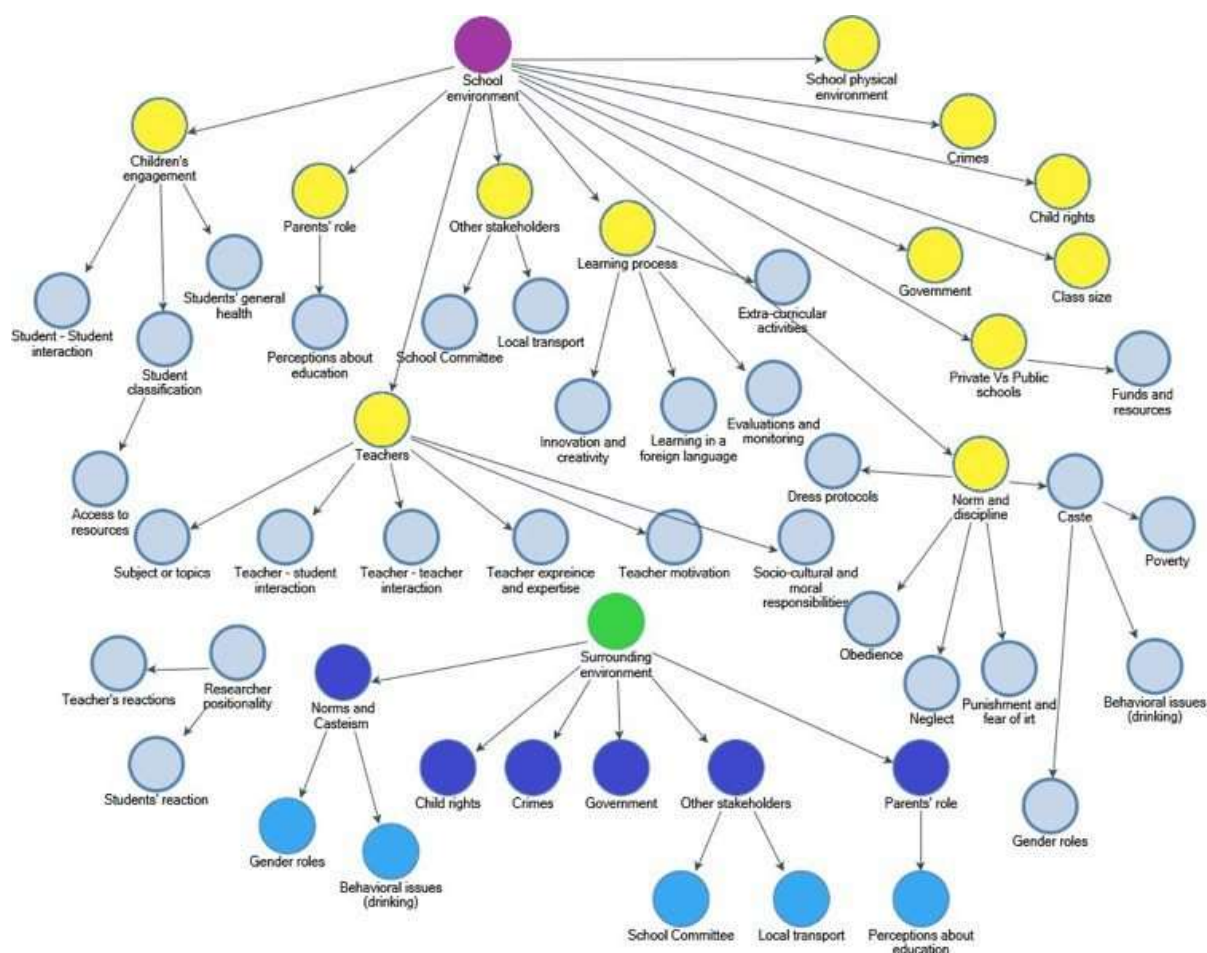
To sketch out the bones of the emerging analytical narrative, I noted how these themes alternately pointed to the promise and pitfalls of school development and child rights governance.

### **Checking and Discussing Analysis with a Co-Coder**

In order to check the validity of my codes and for further clarity, I enlisted the help of a fellow PhD student in co-coding. I provided him with extracts which contained the objectives for my study, the research questions, sample codes and a selection of interviews and fieldnotes from each stage.<sup>38</sup> In addition, I also included evaluation forms intended to help my colleague generate his own analytical musings for us to compare and discuss my analysis. I did not calculate inter-coder reliability (ICR). Although ICR can establish both rigour and confidence in analysis to other researchers (Joffe & Yardley, 2003; MacPhail *et al.*, 2016), Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that ICR contradicts interpretivist paradigms underlying qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (2004) further decry the inclusion of ICR as upholding positivist standards. Therefore, rather than relying on ICR, I attempted to report “transparent analytical procedures and thick description with plentiful samples of raw data” (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 9) as “alternative quality criteria” (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 9).

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<sup>38</sup> The extracts include 6 fieldnotes (3 from Isila, 3 from Midhol), 5 teacher interviews, 5 NGO interviews, 3 parents’ interviews, 3 children’s’ group interviews.



**Figure 19 My colleague's thematic codes visualized in Nvivo**

### Limitations of the Study

Apart from the linguistic barriers I have discussed before, this study contains other limitations. My data gathering was restricted to two schools in Kalaburagi district. This constrains the richness of the portrait of school development governance practice in this thesis, since each school's governance practice is unique and including more schools would have illuminated additional facets. Moreover, teachers and NGO workers are overrepresented in the data collection because they were the easiest for me to access and converse with. I also did not interview education officials such as block education officers or cluster resource persons, who might have provided other viewpoints of governance practice.

### Conclusion

In attempting to devise a methodology that captures the lived aspects of a third-wave study of governance, I am indebted to all my participants. I recognise the difficulties of allowing a stranger in and the emotional and mental labour involved in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. Students, school staff, parents, activists all gave their time to me and

each participant was instrumental in illuminating a little of the behemoth that is the Indian education system. In account of fieldwork, dimensions of rights and responsibilities pave the path for nuanced understandings of governance- how it is perceived, internalised, spun, both inwardly and outwardly. I position such spinning as strategies which allow individuals to navigate the tensions of school development and child rights governance in Karnataka.

## Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion on Practicing School Development Governance

### Introduction to Chapter



**Figure 20 Lambani (nomadic) students celebrating in Isila village**

This chapter develops the themes arising from the practice of school development governance. It focuses on participant narratives. Teachers, parents, students, and NGO workers approached governance from particular perspectives borne out of their roles, beliefs and experiences. These narratives were also influenced by participant experience in translating governance policy in daily practice. Accordingly, they used these experiences to make sense of and develop their stances towards SDG. Key tensions revolved around trying to align their efforts with RTE goals while balancing the lived constraints of resource-poverty and working amidst stereotypes and cultures of government school apathy. On one hand, SDMC participation (and governance practice in general) demanded extra resources and unpaid labour from my participants. On the other hand, the space and practice of governance afforded participants the chance to develop the school according to their visions. Encompassing these discussions of tensions and promise, was a discourse of care which the participants used to underscore their efforts and simultaneously distance themselves from governance failures. The findings are interpreted based on analysis of the data collected. I plot these themes along the axes of the customized child rights governance framework (Holzcheiter *et al.*, 2019) to visually represent the most salient themes. Finally, I wrap the findings in a discussion section by situating and anchoring them to the wider literature.

## Mediating between Governance and Livelihood Responsibilities

Participants narrated challenges in balancing the goals and targets of the Right to Education and school governance with their livelihoods and survival strategies. For resource-poor parents, membership and participation in the SDMC conflicted with their labour schedules (both rural and urban). For resource-poor children, school attendance (a primary target of the RTE) conflicted with their labour schedules and family responsibilities.

Radha, the headteacher of Midhol school ascribed parents' work as the reason for no SDMC at Midhol:

Radha: It is difficult to build relationships with parents. Maybe only 30 or 40 percent of parents are interested in the school. It's difficult to get basic cooperation from parents, so it's extremely difficult to call parents for an SDMC. Only mothers come to the school, but because they work every day, they only come for a little while on Saturdays to pick up their children's scholarship cheques.

According to Radha, it is difficult to build relationships or even achieve "basic cooperation" with parents in the neighbourhood because of their work schedules. Radha links this to a lack of 'interest' and notes that only mothers turn up on Saturdays to pick up their children's scholarship cheques (provision for SC children from the government). There appears to be strong gender norms prevalent here. Radha notes that only mothers visit the school. Even if these visits have a purpose (i.e. collecting scholarship disbursements), there is a stated lack of fathers' engagement. Childcare and children's school affairs appear to be a feminized responsibility. This social norm obstructs Midhol school staff from building links with both genders of parents. The consensus, however, was that both "sides" of the school-community divide had to work around parents' schedules.

Bina, SDMC trainer and social worker who lived in a village in one of the Kalaburagi's *talukhs*, explained the practical difficulties of engaging with busy parents, and the steps she and her team had to take to navigate parents' time constraints:

Bina: The parents have to be called and it's not very easy. Even if it is announced, in some places we had to take three days- we had to make three such announcements. Then also parents won't come. So, we have to also look for parents' timings. They have to go to the fields for work. In some places we conducted first formation of SDMC –that meeting- even at seven 'o' clock in the morning so that all parents could come and join. Because

school hours start by ten 'o' clock after the assembly- by that time all parents would have gone to the fields. So we had to take such things into consideration.

Bina and her team's attempts to find a time that worked with the parents' schedules were resolved by convening the first meeting of the SDMC at 7 AM. The effort both NGO workers and parents had to make to meet as an SDMC indicates an instance of what Essuman & Akeampong (2011) label "the personal cost of participation." This personal cost is often ignored or downplayed in the efficiency-promoting rhetoric of decentralized school governance (Abadzi, 2013).

In Isila school, Saraswati, the Grade 5 teacher, explained that rural rhythms conflicted with school schedules, leading to haphazard learning by the students:

Saraswati (80% of the children who come here are very poor. If we have to teach them something, they would have to come to school every day. But two to three days in a week they go to field to sow and reap. So, they are irregular to school. Thus, it is difficult for children to learn something. If they attend school regularly, they are able to learn. If they come to school only two days in a week it is difficult to teach them.

Here, Saraswati notes how school schedules are not adapted to the rhythms of rural livelihoods, with children subsequently falling behind because they miss classes. This sets teachers in a constant tension between attempting to follow the simplistic corrective of "bringing children back to school" and understanding that families cannot afford to spare their children from work:

Saraswati: All teachers have this problem. Parents say that, "If he doesn't go to work, our herd will not move." So, we are helpless to say anything to those parents who depend on their children's labour.

Saraswati highlights the "helplessness" teachers feel. As actors responsible for translating policy in the school, their understanding of family circumstances makes them aware of the high personal costs of participation. The details her counterpart Shoba, a physical education teacher at Kampur High school provide demonstrates her awareness of her students' constraints:

Shoba: Sometimes children will not be having money to pay school fees even though the government fee is less. This is because the mother and father of a very poor family are working for a daily wage and these wages are only sufficient for that day itself.

According to Shoba, despite the ‘facilities’<sup>39</sup> that government schools now provide for poor families, children often have to choose between attending school and helping ensure their family’s survival. The devaluing of daily labour is such that labourers are only paid enough to ensure their needs are met for the day. This compounds a vicious cycle where they cannot afford the ‘extra’ funds needed for health and education, even a state-sponsored education. A group discussion with high school students in Kampur town (close to Isila village) highlighted the tensions between attending school and working for survival:

Aradhya: The main problem of poverty is not letting them to go to school and some children have no parents. That means no father or mother. Therefore, children have to work.

Rebecca: Do you know anybody working who is not going to school?

Harpita: There are so many children in our hometown (Kampur) who go to work without going to school. Some children will come to school and go to work as soon as school time is over.

Niranjan: Some children go to work on Sundays when there was no school.

Rebecca: These kinds of children have to study and work elsewhere. Is this difficult?

Harpita: Yes, it is very difficult.

Aradhya: It is very difficult. Children do not have time to read.

Niranjan: They have to do this because the home situation is not good.

Here, the students acknowledge the difficulties their peers face in ‘balancing’ school and work. Some skip school entirely to go to work. Others attempt to slot paid work in their free hours after school. However, the students noted that this balancing was difficult and

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<sup>39</sup> When participants referred to government schools providing “facilities”, they were referring to the materials and resources provided at no cost, such as uniforms, books, and midday meals, as well as scholarships and incentives for marginalised children.



compromised learning because children “do not have time to read” and keep up with their studies.

### **Teachers’ Communication Responsibilities**

At Kampur, the Kannada teacher Guruprasad also reinforced the perception that when children miss school because they need to support their families, their learning is compromised:

Guruprasad: This is the big problem in the village. The children leave school and begin grazing cattle and sheep. Our main task is to identify such children and make them come to school.

Guruprasad sees his primary responsibility in governance as identifying out-of-school children and inducing them to return to school. This contributes to continuing experiences of tension on the part of teachers, who are responsibilised towards achieving an RTE goal despite their understanding that encouraging children to attend does not address lived contexts of resource-poverty.

Kasturi (Science and Math teacher in Isila school) continued looking tired and despondent. “I tell them to come to school, but they keep missing classes,” she says to me before we lead the SDMC children outside. “I go to their house so many times.”

This conversation, highlighted in a fieldnote, dated 22 November 2018, reveals the efforts Kasturi makes to address the ‘problem’ of out-of-school children. As a teacher, she is expected to ‘encourage’ children not to miss school. Despite her repeated visits to their homes, they continue to miss school, thus constituting an inability for this particular governance target to be met. Her duties as a teacher are not just confined to pedagogy. Through the RTE, they are enlarged to encompass development goals. Therefore, for teachers, the personal cost of participation may not figure as potentially lost wages (as with the parents), but also come as expenses of time and effort.

Sujata and Renuka, the Scheduled Caste mothers I interviewed in Isila village concurred that unlike in the past, teachers are expected to track their students’ attendance and call the parents in case of absence:

Sujata: Yes, we go to school and meet them. The teachers there wait for 2 days for children who are not attending school, and call their parents on the third day. If the children don't come to school, they will call. They never used to do this before.

Renuka: Before, it was not like this. For a couple of years now, if children haven't been to school we are informed. *It is a responsible job for teachers* (emphasis mine). After all, if the child does not go to school, they will call their father and mother to school. Then we have to go and bring the children to school.

As the parents note, teachers now bear the additional responsibility of monitoring student absence and calling upon parents to bring their children to school. Teachers are responsibilised to track and monitor student attendance and communicate with parents regarding truant students. Parents then have to fulfill their end of the bargain by delivering their children back to the institutional fold.

Guruprasad, the Kannada teacher at Kampur High School claimed that as a village school teacher, his job was already difficult because the children from the village had less-developed IQs, which made it difficult for teachers to bridge the gap. He sees the additional responsibilities of encouraging universal access as exacerbating difficulties.

Guruprasad: But the IQ level of the village school children is low, and as teachers we need to go to their level and teach. It's hard for kids to get to our level.

Rebecca: Why do you feel it's difficult for them to come to your level?

Guruprasad: It is difficult because in the village both mother and father of children will go for work and run their family. So, we ask the parents to come and meet us when their children's school attendance is irregular. But they are unable to come because they go for work. As teachers we need to convince parents. Thus, parents do not know the progress of their children's education.

Guruprasad appears to conflate a fixed (but contested) measure of intellectual capability with children's learning. I presume that he referred to children's current learning levels as low, but used the term IQ instead. Therefore, when I asked him as a follow-up question why he felt it was difficult for students to approach the teacher's 'level', he gave the example of children's irregular attendance, which coincides more with Saraswati's

statement that children's haphazard attendance undermines their learning. For Guruprasad, the responsibility (framed as the "need to convince parents") is undermined by the tension generated by the clash between school governance goals and resource-poor families' need to earn a living.

As featured in the preceding paragraphs, the Kampur high school students had pointed out the difficulties of balancing the work demanded by studies with the need to earn a living. Some skip school entirely to go to work. Others attempt to slot paid work in their free hours after school. However, the students noted that this balancing was difficult and compromised learning because children "do not have time to read" and keep up with their studies. The students identified poverty and lack of family resources as the main obstacles to school attendance. These factors can be categorized as "pull factors" (Singh & Mukherjee, 2018), causal factors that are external to the school environment and arise from students' socioeconomic contexts. Singh & Mukherjee's (2018) study looked at data from the Young Lives study which followed two cohorts of children across Peru, Ethiopia, Vietnam and India. They noted that pull factors were stated by their participants as the key reason for dropping out of school during adolescence. Dropping out at the transition from primary to secondary is evident from school attendance statistics in Karnataka (GoK, 2019). This supports scholarly statements that the RTE tends to focus on in-school factors (or push factors) which do not compensate for the force of pull factors.

### **The Difficulties of Governing the RTE**

A couple of the participants did criticise the RTE itself when accounting for the tensions marginalised families experienced in encounters with the education system. These participants had tertiary education and their critical stance also seemed borne out of their experiences of seeing the RTE enforced among the communities they worked for. Vinod, the professor who had worked with SDMCs in Karnataka for twenty years, opined that the demarcations of age in the RTE led to children being short-changed of a right which should theoretically encompass a longer swathe of childhood.

Vinod: RTE has major flaws, you know... In the sense that zero to fourteen which was given by the Supreme Court, got reduced to six to fourteen. Zero to six was completely outside the purview of fundamental right. So zero to six is not the fundamental right. See the reason is much more than what is a fundamental right to education. It also includes protection, health, nutrition and all. So you (the government) will need to invest more money. So that's why the entire judgment

was diluted and six to fourteen and if you look at that, it basically breaches the Indian constitution as well as the UNCRC because zero to six is kept outside- again fifteen to eighteen is kept outside. So you are doing something in between which is completely (chuckles)- we can't call it as a right because you're not preparing the children to enjoy this or not helping children to continue that (education).

Vinod notes that children's rights go beyond the "fundamental right to education." Rights are holistic and implicate each other. These rights- nutrition, protection, health- require more effort, more *labour* and *finances* on the part of the government. The RTE's partial framing of the right to education ignores the rights associated with education, the "education rights" I have discussed in Chapter 3. The RTE not only relies on a partial conceptualisation of rights, but also takes a partial approach to childhood. Vinod therefore perceives the RTE as flawed because it prioritizes one right over others and suspends this right for a short time frame: (between six to fourteen).

The partial provision of education in the RTE therefore ignores important swathes of children's trajectories: early childhood and late adolescence, both of which research regards as fundamental to children's overall futures and well-being. Indeed, India's National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Framework (2014) emphasizes family environment and "supportive parenting" over a right to education. However, the government does fund *anganwadi* centres, which provide children a fee-free education from three to six years of age, integrated with health and nutrition programmes. Studies indicate that families tend to view *anganwadis* as a place for children to receive free meals and health checks rather than an education (Kapoor, 2006; Alcott *et al.*, 2018, Sriprakash, *et al.*, 2020). The right to education is constricted around a certain age group which does not ensure a seamless vision for children's education rights.

Nivedita, who worked among labouring children in Karnataka, argued that mandating the RTE did not respond to the actual difficulties of resource-poor and working children. She saw the RTE as both distant from children's plights and distancing them from their realities:

Nivedita: The current education system is primarily designed on rote learning methodology, where children have to sit in class, memorise. Each of your (children's) learning styles are different, your education system is not catering to the different kind of learning systems that these children have. It is just- our education system currently has very, you know, ill-equipped teacher(s), infrastructure. So there are a lot of challenges within the education system itself.

Posing it as a solution, you're giving a defunct system, defunct solution to children. See, they're trying to survive now. They're trying for survival every single day. And you're forcing them by putting them into schools.

Nivedita itemizes push factors (causal factors arising from the school environment) when accounting for children's struggles in staying in school. These are the factors she hears from the children she works with, which leads her to conclude that the system is "defunct." For resource-poor children who are "trying for survival every single day", staying in school does not help their struggles, according to her. Like Vinod, she argues that the age demarcation of the RTE does not account for children's futures or their backgrounds. Nivedita characterises the welfare policies of the RTE as "knee-jerk approaches" and "knee-jerk solutions to push them into school." She uses strong language to inveigh against the incapacity of the system to deeply engage with children's struggles. She regards schemes such as midday meals as a "lure" and perceives the RTE as a tactic to "shove them into schools." From Nivedita's perspective, not only is the RTE myopic, but it is also a policy instrument that is bluntly used towards children's struggles.

See we are removing children from *everything* and then asking them- forcing them to go into school, then we have to understand that we are removing the child from a lot of realities- especially when you're talking about out-of-school children, working children. We are kind of distancing them from their realities, the challenges that they are facing every day and we are forcing them to go to school. We're saying, "All you have to do is sit in your school from nine to three, we don't care whether you pass, whether your education is helping you...But what about the child and the challenges they have to go through every day? The realities are different in different households, different for different children. Mandating the Right to Education act is not solving so many of the problems they have.

This myopic promotion of the Right to Education, she argues, trivialises children's realities and the struggles they face. Schooling is offered as the beginning and the end of the children's problems. According to her, the school system does not appreciate the challenges working children navigate on a daily basis. Saraswati echoed this line of thinking to me after her interview, arguing that rural schoolchildren were more 'real' compared to their 'artificial' urban counterparts, who spent all their time in school and did not understand the rigours of life. Rural schoolchildren, she felt, had a greater sense of

responsibility because of their duties to their families and the work they frequently undertook on their behalf.

All the participants: teachers, NGO activists, students themselves, noted the tension in upholding a right that excluded many of their realities. Children were at once doing the mental labour expected of them in the RTE and also performing other sorts of labour to earn money. For the sake of survival, they took an elastic approach to schooling, contrasted with the rigid structure of RTE-enforced schooling. This resultant tension, the teachers and activists noted, heightened experiences of inequality. Like Nivedita, Martin, who had worked in health education in villages in Kalaburagi for fifteen years, concurred that the education system did not really respond to the needs of the people.

Martin: I don't think the government education system really helps in the long run. Of course...Send the girl child to school because the girl child needs to go to school- that's a good slogan... But I think as I said, the thing has to be revamped according to the needs of society. So they're not doing it according to the needs of society, they're doing it because we need an education system in place.

Martin's view that government officials and policy creators devise rules and programs just to have a system in place spoke of a lack of belief in the actual care and concern government officials had for the needs of their constituents. The simplistic slogans of school development and children's rights were interpreted by participants as indicative of government apathy in truly engaging with resource-poor children's needs. Indeed, Rohit, the Hindi teacher at Midhol and former CRP (cluster resource person), expressed an opinion of government officials as corrupt, more interested in making money than actually engaging in school governance:

Rohit: You say that our Karnataka government's education policy is very good. It has been put together by well-skilled people, who have pondered everything. It does not come to fruition. (Someone will pay) 5 to 10 lakhs to become an education minister. He has to get it back: for that he does politics. He will go to any school to investigate daily, find out mistakes and take Rs 500 from them to cover up those mistakes.

According to Rohit, officials such as the education minister buy their positions and then recompense themselves through school investigations. Thus, while Rohit thinks that

Karnataka's education policy is good, monitoring school conditions is an excuse to extort, rather than a commitment to governance. These discourses of government apathy are important to keep in mind because not only do they emerge in parental choices for private school, but form a normalized narrative about civil servants and politicians in the governance hierarchy.

Additionally, resource-poor students' struggles while in school may be compounded by national free market economic practices and lack of support for transition to secondary and tertiary schooling. Sociological studies of marginalised students who have gained tertiary education in India have documented how education doesn't necessarily accrue the material resources needed to procure white-collar employment (Cross, 2009; Morarji, 2012). In this study, participant narratives highlighted how these challenges were felt by students at the primary level, even with the RTE's efforts to universalise schooling. Families who cannot hazard substantial personal resources on the inconclusive returns of schooling may perceive that their children are better off working. However, education continues to appear as an abstract good that distinguishes between classes and dispositions. Discussions with the high school students in Kampur highlighted they perceived the right to education as the superior option for children, despite the lack of guarantees that an education will earn them employment:

Rebecca: What kind of change do you want to bring in your society and in your hometown after your studies, and are you able to bring changes? What do you think?

Niranjan: We encourage children who go for work instead of coming to school to come back to school and we will take them to school with us.

Priyanka: We tell them to get well educated.

For these students, social change was perceived as 'encouraging' their peers to choose school over work, to "come back to school." While acknowledging that children in their school struggle with regular attendance and family/work responsibilities, Niranjan and Priyanka appear to follow an injunctive social norm that sets education over labour as the approved occupation for children. Psychologists Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren (1990) defined injunctive norms as specifying "what ought to be done" (p. 1015), which are often cited as standards for social behaviours. The students' valorisation of education over labour is reflected in the work of ethnographers who have noted the normative influence of policies such as the RTE and 'blanket bans' on child labour, stating that these aid in criminalising , working children's survival strategies (Balagopalan, 2011; Thangaraj, 2016). Thus, despite

the stated flaws of the RTE, it continues to influence both governance practice and social norms.

### **Communication and Creative Efforts of Teachers**

Teachers' roles had expanded from being responsible for students' learning to participating in government community development schemes and especially in monitoring and minimising school dropout. The socially and culturally respected occupation of teacher situates them as ambassadors for the right to education and school governance. Shoba, Kampur high school's Physical Education teacher, claimed that teachers' social standing in the community meant that they could prevail upon parents to send truant children to school:

Shoba: Teachers are honoured by this town. Children do not come to school properly. Sometimes children don't come to school for a week. The children often go to work with their parents. If teachers call parents at such times, the children are sent to school because of the respect they (the parents) have towards us. Sometimes, parents won't even know if their children are attending school or not.

As I have explored in Chapter 3, the cultural standing of teachers in Karnataka, and in India in general, has its roots in the concept of the *guru*, a figure who was seen as much as a spiritual and social mentor and guide as one that transmitted textual and theoretical knowledge. According to Shoba, this respect is a cultural currency she can use to persuade parents to comply with RTE legislation. The esteem that teachers command also places them in positions of responsibility, where by dint of their prestige, they appear expected to positively influence the community. Thus, higher authorities task them with additional responsibilities apart from teaching and monitoring:

Nimbenna: Yes, we have other responsibilities, madam. Soon after we left school, we went into society and built some toilets. The Department of Education itself told us to do this. If they bring in someone from outside (third-party), they won't listen. Teacher is a respectable occupation. Children will not listen to their parents, so the government gave us this responsibility (so) that the children would listen to the teachers.



Assumptions about teachers' respectability and the prestige they command in communities also position them as ideal (according to higher authorities) handmaidens for development projects. They translate policy into school development governance practice. The respect teachers command can be utilised to induce both children and their parents into compliance with development projects and agendas. Both Shoba and Nimbenna appear united in claiming teaching as a socially respectable role in general. Responsibility now follows in respectability's wake. Government school teachers are expected to demonstrate a commitment to development as well as teaching. For Kasturi, this development meant enhancing the extracurricular options and technological equipment in Isila school.

Kasturi: We also need to change. Nimbenna teacher in our school is very good. He puts in so much effort to develop the school. I made a suggestion to make a sports room. So, we can encourage children to play at the taluk and district level. Our school is trying to get a computer room so that children can have access to a computer and good internet. We have been thinking about tutoring over the internet...We are trying to get help from Ajit Premji organization...Our headmaster has also agreed to support this.

The narrative of a committed teacher whose efforts towards development prove his or her goodness is evident here. Kasturi praises Nimbenna's efforts to develop Isila, calling him a good teacher. She also highlights her ideas and contributions towards Isila's development, such as securing the headteacher's support and reaching out to private charities like the Ajit Premji Foundation. During my observation period at Isila, whenever I asked the reasons for teacher absence, the teachers present cited either *chooti* (leave), "election duty" or "exam duty." Government school teachers are not only tasked with the nuts and bolts of teaching but can be repurposed into civil servants, to undertake a wide range of social and school development duties. They are also expected to oversee physical improvement projects, observe election duties, and plan and implement informational campaigns for the village.

Nimbenna: The government told us that about 80% of the children in your school should have toilet facilities. So, you give them an understanding however you want. Like perform a drama about it, sing a song, make a speech if necessary, and make people aware about cleanliness. For that I have composed a drama I called "Clean

India”. It was dramatized in front of all the people of the village along with the students.

Just as Kasturi enumerates her personal and creative efforts in developing the school, Nimbenna gives an example of his unique method of fulfilling government mandate. Although SDG goals may be perceived as rigid, both Kasturi and Nimbenna are allowed creative license in striving for those goals. This creative license does come with the need to invest creative labour. Teachers at both Isila and Midhol were also observed in creating decorations for school festivals and in making posters for their classrooms.



**Figure 21 Teachers spent two days prior to the Science Festival on 12 December 2019 to make decorations and paper hats for the students**

What teachers do with their freedom conversely signals commitment. Nimbenna demonstrates his commitment by highlighting his contributions of passion (enthusiasm), time, and creative effort. Much of this effort, Rohit, the Hindi teacher at Midhol and former CRP (Cluster Resource Person) complains, goes unappreciated, and falls on the shoulders of those teachers such as himself:

Rohit: Now the gas cylinder in the school is empty but I take out my motorbike and bring a new one. See, if the gas cylinder is empty at home, we will arrange something else. Why not do the same here? Why should I do all this? Am I the school clerk? Why do I need to do all this? This is humanity. Who doesn't pay for it? I have done 180 children's scholarships out of 216 children. I take the students daily and made the relevant documents and the bank account in their name. Who will do all this here, you ask?

*Am I the school clerk?* The question reverberates across Rohit's diatribe. The responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the school, to keep the machinery of its infrastructure oiled, to deliver scholarships and open bank accounts for poor children and their families, these are some of the governance tasks he feels he is fulfilling on his own. In carrying out these tasks, teachers claim that "interest" (Nimbenna) and "inspiration" (Rohit) is necessary. Rohit argues that because he feels an element of "humanity", he is compelled to carry out these tasks, a compelling he implies is not equally shared by his colleagues. The scope and depth of development duties, while conferring creative license and additional responsibilities to teachers, also deepens their burdens. This sense of burden was also noticed by Miriam when we were discussing Midhol school after doing interviews there:

Miriam: Remember yesterday the teacher was telling us: Education department teachers are involved in too many items and they are documenting, documenting so many things. They don't get really time to be involved with the children. And we should appreciate that they are the best teachers because they are the ones who get admitted as teachers after writing all competitive exams.

Miriam asserted that the many responsibilities of SDG cause teachers to paradoxically sacrifice time with children and in teaching. In her opinion, governance duties could overwhelm teachers.

Miriam: Too many activities outside should be stopped or limited. Too many inputs make a person unreliable.

Teacher efforts and energy are diffused over a wide array of governance projects, Miriam argues, and thus make them seem 'unreliable', and perhaps indirectly contribute to their perceived unreliability by others. Raj also made this case for teacher absence, believing that apathy cannot be the sole reasons for frequent absences:

Raj: On one hand they get a bad rep, but on the other hand they're tasked with other extraneous things than teaching, so the system needs to be streamlined.

Although Rohit may present himself as the only teacher taking children out of the school to the bank, during my first phase of fieldwork, I noticed another teacher, Chitramoot, stringing five small children on his motorbike and driving out of the

school yard with them. When I asked the headmistress Radha what was going on, she explained to me that because the parents were working all day, they couldn't pick up their children's scholarship cheques. It thus fell to the teachers to take the children along with them to pick up their cheques. The parents, she implied, were more 'interested' in working than in cashing in on their children's scholarships. The teachers therefore had to utilise school time to ensure that the children were getting their government-issued cheques. Ironically, while development duties detract teacher from their pedagogic ones, their efforts towards development prove their commitment, even if, as Rohit felt, much of his labour was invisible and exacted at personal cost.

### **Stereotypes and Cultures of Apathy Associated with Government Schools**

The active role designated by governance responsibilities was contrasted with the stereotypically passive and apathetic portrait of government school teachers narrated to me by many participants in Kalaburagi. These narratives of teacher apathy are powerful on one level because they were used by parents to rationalize their choice of private school over government school. Riya, a mother in a low-income neighbourhood adjoining my translator Suvarna's neighbourhood claimed:

Riya: Government (school) isn't good. In private, teachers teach well and give good education. But private school is expensive. I haven't studied, but I know my children are happy at their school. But I haven't asked them their aspirations. Government school lets children roam around.

Riya's assertions were echoed in the assessments of some of her neighbours:

Malini (stay-at-home-mother (SAHM), BA pass): Even though private school is expensive, the teaching methods are different. The teachers come every day; they are reliable.

For Malini, this reliability of private school teachers contrasts favourably with the unreliability of government school teachers. As I have recently noted, duties to development actually heightens teachers' perceived unreliability. These parents indicated they measured reliability in teachers' commitment to teaching rather than development.

Payal (SAHM, completed education until Year 2 of pre-university): In private school there is good learning. Private schools give lots of homework and the teaching is better. Teachers sleep in government school. Not like private school where they pay attention to the students.

Hema, who sent her three children to government school because she couldn't afford private school, said she preferred private, even though she rated her experience with government schools as "medium" (neither good, nor bad).

Roshni (housewife): We aren't educated so we send our children to private school. The government school is too far. In my children's school, the teachers come every day. I'm happy and my children are happy too.

While Roshni presented a legitimate reason for choosing a private school based on geographical proximity, she nevertheless stressed that in her children's school the teachers arrived every day, which made both her and her children happy.

"Government school teachers are lazy," Sangeeta, a former private school teacher observed to me. "When I was in government school, we used to study in the morning and then play in the afternoons after eating (lunch). We used to ask the teachers if we could play, and they let us." Sangeeta used the English word *lazy* to describe government school teachers, a description which rose from her own observations as a primary school student. Most of my participants clung to the belief that government school teachers could not be relied on to teach consistently, and frequently used pejorative terms to underscore their apathetic behaviour, i.e., 'sleeping', and 'lazy.'

Bina, for instance, decried the practice of teachers teaching several classes together:

Bina: What used to happen was that whenever we (the activists) go, if the teachers are not there sometimes they (the other teachers) would teach all children together because they are lazy- all those kind of things. We get a hang of what is happening in the school altogether.

In addition to my participants' perspectives on teacher apathy, I also relied on my classroom observations to inform my understanding on this narrative of apathy and how it intersected with governance practice.

In my observations at both Isila and Midhol, I observed classes where the teacher was "sitting" and not engaging with the students but also classes where the teachers took

pains to engage the students. Some teachers would rely on rote memorisation and eliciting choral responses while others engaged their students with games and examples drawn from their lives. I have selected three extracts from my observations to give examples of some of the classroom experiences at Isila and Midhol.

Nali Kali class I- III

10.40 am

24 children 6 boys/ 18 girls

The students are arranged in groups along painted circles on the floor. There are posters on the walls and Nali Kali cards stacked in pockets on the floor. The teacher talks to the class about me and Suvarna, who introduces herself...The teacher walks among the class which has been at an excited murmur, and hits some of the children on the back with a cane. The class quietens down immediately. The teacher sits at a corner of the classroom in front of the yellow-painted cardboard with two of the eldest girls and takes out little bags of lentils and pulses...Most of the class is bent over their cards, copying out the words on the cards.. The teacher is busy arranging the bags of pulses and talking to the two girls around her.

One of the girls in the “smart group” calls the attention of the elder girls to the inattentive group of boys, and she gets up and walks over to them... The girl then picks up the cane lying by the teacher’s side and strolls about with it, lightly tapping the children in this group on the back, including even one girl who is bent over her work. The other older girl gets up, goes to a student absorbed in her work, exchanges a few words with her and then goes around the room, checking the progress of another girl, then hops back to her teacher. The teacher is now stapling the bags of grains to the posterboard. Two of the students have gravitated to her side, watching her actions with curiosity...The teacher’s poster-making has now attracted a crowd and with a sudden shout from her, they disperse...The second girl comes by and gives the truant boys gentle smacks with the cane. The boy who has been crying defiantly smacks her back and starts crying again. She kneels down to speak to him. The three boys continue to pay no attention and the girl passes the cane to an older boy who strides around, tapping children on the back, especially the three boys. “Silence!” the teacher yells and silence falls. She sits back and considers her handiwork after sending the two elder girls outside the classroom on an errand.

In these shortened extracts of my observation during a Nali Kali class at Midhol, the teacher did not engage the students in any ostensible pedagogic activity apart from leaving them with their picture cards. There was also corporal punishment and the use of the cane to keep order. In the next observational extract, however, her counterpart at Midhol, a Class 7 teacher named Devi, conducted a lesson where she used games and brought props to engage her students' interest:

Class starts with a game. Devi, the teacher, has brought some paper plates and snacks. Each student has to say a number, clapping at each fifth number. Those who are too slow or who freeze are 'out.' The students look excited and engaged and giggle whenever one of their classmates goes 'out'...

Devi appears to have a good relationship with her students, saying "Very good" and laughing and gesturing them to go to the front whenever they make a mistake. She then leads the whole class in chanting "Congratulations" for the three students who reach the first, second, and third places.

.... The first group brings their materials to Devi. They have a bucket of water and each student comes forward at a time and drops things in the bucket: chalk, empty crisps packet, and flowers, which Devi has provided. She refers these items back to them saying, "This (flowers) is what you use for pooja (prayers); you eat these crisps." Suvarna interjects at this point and she and Devi start talking about the Hindu god Ganapathy...I think this lesson is about cleaning because I hear the Hindi word "Swacch." (Clean).

The second group received paper plates with rangoli (coloured) powder. A young girl balancing a baby on her hip comes to the doorway of the classroom to watch. Devi squats on the floor and sticks a match to the paper plate with its little heap of powder. A sweet smell of smoke fills the air. The paper burns to black ash. The spectacle has gathered a little group of other students at the door who proffer their own answers when Devi asks questions. She talks about pollution and plastic and she also asks questions. The students are mostly listening and responding to her questions in a chorus. She also mentions carbon emissions from vehicles.

The third group has a plate of mud, to which Devi adds plastic wrapper, coloured powder and paper. She talks about how there is all this glass, paper, and plastic on the road and how we have to make the school (*shale*) beautiful (*saundarya*).

In this class, Devi engages her students in a lesson that revolved around care for the environment (especially the school environment) and demonstrates the importance of keeping the environment clean and beautiful. Not only does she use different objects to solicit student interest, she also uses games, group work, praise, and questions to engage with them. Her efforts at engagement are contrasted with the Nali Kali teacher's efforts, which conform more to the stereotype of the disinterested/apathetic teacher. In the final extract, I have selected an observation of Isila's Grade 5 Kannada class taught by Saraswati.

Saraswati starts dictation by starting a story which the students know by heart and all start chanting it in unison. Suvarna shows me the appropriate page in the textbook while Saraswati narrates the story... The students seem to enjoy chanting out the answers in an oral singsong. Many of them appear to know the answers already...Saraswati has to expend a lot of energy in her narrative: her voice lifts as she tells the story and the children either look at her or look in the distance. When she asks a question, they respond with vivacity...

Saraswati hasn't stopped talking since the lesson started, but some of the children seem captivated by her teaching style because she incorporates things that are familiar to them: Isila, Dussera, holidays. She then tells another story, the corresponding picture in the textbook depicting a man with a captive performing bear. Saraswati often uses her hands to illustrate and frequently punctuates the narrative with questions. One or two girls look disengaged and now it is the end of the class- they all leave, carrying their bags (10.57 am)<sup>40</sup>

These selected samples of my observations testify to the complexity of teacher's pedagogic practices in Isila and Midhol government schools. While I saw many instances of non-teaching, I also observed teachers making efforts. A key observation I made was that at no time during my three-week tenure of observations did I note every single teacher present at both schools. In addition, a teacher may engage with his or her students during one class, but not engage with them during another in the same day. I also noted both the headteachers of Isila and Midhol frequently substituting for absent teachers, although I cannot ascertain whether they taught these classes. The headteacher of Midhol was

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<sup>40</sup> Extract from fieldnotes at Isila school, 31 October, 2018



observed scrolling through her phone while the students were occupied with their books. During my fieldwork period of 2018, Isila did not have a science teacher, so Kasturi, who usually taught Maths, was acting as substitute. She did engage with the students and seemed to be following the science curriculum, although she told me that teaching two subjects was a “heavy load.”

There isn't a teacher for this lesson, so the students are busy with their Hindi textbooks. Kasturi arrives and the students put away their Hindi books and start their science lesson. Kasturi tells me the science post is vacant because nobody wants to come here (to Isila), so she has to take the science classes for Standards 6, 7 and 8, as well as teach Maths, which is a heavy load (extract from fieldnotes at Isila school, 5 November, 2018).

The difficulty in finding a science teacher for Isila school was explained to me by Kasturi as “nobody wanting to come here.” Village government schools can thus struggle to attract qualified teachers, many of whom reside in urban centres. Teachers such as Kasturi, who lived in Kalaburagi, faced a one-way commute of 1.5 hours to Isila through Kalaburagi's bus network (approximately three hours of the day in total).

Throughout my observations, I concluded that *inconsistency* seemed a key characteristic of teaching in both Isila and Midhol schools. The teachers I observed did not consistently demonstrate purely apathetic or purely active stances towards pedagogy. This inconsistency may account for the ‘reliability’ parents sought at private schools. Moreover, any instance of apathetic behaviour seemed to confirm participant beliefs and stereotypes as my discussion with Suvarna demonstrates. Suvarna took a more critical view of the teaching we'd observed in Isila. She'd completed two years of a B.Ed degree (before dropping out due to her family's inability to pay tuition fees) and her summary of her experiences affords a perspective from a more ‘local’ experience of both education and relative resource-poverty. I have included relevant snippets of our conversation.

Suvarna: ...look at that school! (Isila) Those teachers were always late. You remember the time we got late and came at 11? And Kasturi teacher came with us! Eleven o'clock?! School is supposed to start at 9.30! ....They make the students do work instead of teaching them. And tell the kids to wear their uniform properly...Those teachers, they are full of knowledge. But they don't give this knowledge to the children. It is not a school. It is a *hostel*.”

Suvarna: ... Once they (the teachers) get a job, their problems are over. Now (at Isila) they just come, eat government food, and leave. And that headmaster? ... If you want a good school, you need a strict headmaster. Someone who will follow the teachers and ask them why they are chatting with each other and tell them to chat after classes are over. You remember Kasturi teacher, how she left her class and followed us and talked with us? A strict headmaster would not allow this. This headmaster isn't a headmaster, he's just a watchman.

Suvarna's indictment *he is a watchman* presented another elaboration on this archetype. "Watchman" is a colloquial loanword from English which in India refers to the occupation of a security guard. Watchmen are usually hired to guard (watch over) properties, buildings, apartment colonies, and businesses. Invoking the figure of the watchman denoted passivity, opposed to the pedagogic activity that parents expected from teachers. From Suvarna's perspective, the teachers in Isila were merely conforming to their prescribed types in the enduring narrative of teacher apathy. She also utilized the English word *hostel* to drive home her point that the lack of teaching turned Isila school into a place where children were treated as passive boarders rather than learners. However, in later interviews with Isila teachers and in my observations of the labour of development governance, I found there to be nuances; that even teachers struggled against the stereotype and culture of apathy thrust on them.

### **Peer Resistance to SDG Efforts**

Some of my teacher participants wrestled with working in an atmosphere where apathy was condoned, but where they were also expected to demonstrate commitment to school development governance. For the teachers in Isila and Midhol, those who chose to demonstrate commitment set themselves apart from those who were content to remain watchmen. The teachers pointed out that not all of them were apathetic. However those of their colleagues who largely conformed to this archetype not only impeded development efforts, but continued to reify stereotypes of politicking and corruption.

Rohit: It is now our job to follow orders from the Department of Education. We should say nothing to teachers because they are government employees who have no fear. Even the Department of Education is not so strict about teachers. Most importantly, the headmaster of the school must be very strict. It is not right for the

headmaster to give all the privileges to teachers who are not behaving properly. They too should come to school at the right time. If the headmaster acts like this, the school will be spoiled. Now, according to school rules, the teachers must come inside the school at 9:45 a.m., but the teachers come here at 10 a.m. If we take action against such teachers, they will call through the politicians. Politics is everywhere now. Nobody can complain if teachers simply sit in the school. Teachers will be simply sitting on a chair without teaching anything, but no one can question them.

Rohit notices how the lack of accountability not only undermines the system, it ‘spoils’ the school. This culture of apathy, he argues requires reserves of courage and energy to fight. Speaking up against teacher abuse can place one in danger from retribution by powerful politicians. Thus, despite the increased burdens and demands of SDG, the lack of accountability in the school system allows teachers to control their level (or lack of) commitment.

Rohit: Teachers get all kinds of facilities from the government. Salaries and other benefits are available from the government. This is disruptive in our education system. No one decides how to tighten this system. There are some senior and experienced teachers who have no desire to teach children. They just come to school. Now a doctor should be motivated, then only there is a meaning of his employment, but these teachers have no motivation. They put their children in English medium or big private schools. Their children must do MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery), but these children must stay here. They don't do anything because there is no fear, they are not afraid of anyone. They have everything. But they have no fear.

Rohit believes that without structures or incentives to accountability, teachers have “no fear.” Rohit perceives that this lack of accountability, the lack of ‘fear’ leaches teachers of their motivation to actually teach. The job of government school teacher is coveted precisely because once it is obtained, “all their problems are over” as Suvarna noted. This apathy, engendered by lack of accountability, affects each participant in the school, from the headteacher to the students. For teachers such as Rohit, attempting to fulfil school development in this atmosphere requires both courage and effort. He expresses the

frustration that despite his attempts, apathetic colleagues complicate school development efforts and continue to fuel the narrative of government school inefficacy.

The ‘doing’ of school development governance is therefore pitted against the ‘not doing’ of the apathetic teacher in the system, a system whose looseness with regard to teacher duties aggravates perceptions of their reliability. Rohit notes soberly that this apathy has serious consequences in entrenching poverty. Government school teachers demonstrate their lack of faith in their own institutions by sending their own children to private schools to pursue prestigious degrees. However, the children they are responsible for teaching do not receive the consistent instruction necessary for transition through an extremely competitive secondary and tertiary system.

Kasturi also highlighted the importance of bringing her colleagues on board with school development, narrating the conditions in Isila schools when she first started teaching.

Kasturi: Earlier, teaching was not prioritized. When I joined here, children always used to play. Children were sent out for small tasks. Their studies were of little importance. We were very embarrassed at that time. Because, they were interested only in activities like dance and music without paying attention to studying... Sometimes the teachers would sit in the same classroom for about two hours. If we ask them to interact with the class, they used to refuse. When we first joined this school, it was reckless.

Kasturi attributes peer resistance to senior teachers who had been trained in rote learning and teacher-centred pedagogies which they insisted on upholding despite the shift to child-centred pedagogies.

Kasturi: We could not say anything to them. There was such an environment created that they didn't even give us a chance to teach... These early teachers did not know what to teach and how to teach our children. I was embarrassed to see this kind of environment.

Then after a while those teachers had to retire. Then came the teachers who had passed CET and TET. We had discussions with new teachers and shared the classroom and topics. We told the new teachers we should teach every class. Earlier, the school bell never rang after the first subject class... There was no discipline in children before. There was so much casteism in the children. Low

caste students lack wisdom and high caste children are full of wisdom- that was the prejudice in the school. Not only parents, teachers also treat students as intelligent and dull on the basis of their caste.

Several themes are at play here. Kasturi presents the previous generation of teachers in Isila as apathetic and enforcing a “reckless” environment in the school. This recklessness was characterised by a lack of routine, a lack of actual teaching (making children read from their books) and casteist discrimination. Such an environment reinforced narratives of government schools as places where not only learning did not happen, but casteism proliferated. There is thus a moral element to teaching, a modernized remnant from the historical conceptualisation of the *guru*. Not only did the lack of accountability in the system allow some teachers to get away with their apathetic behaviour, it also frustrated the efforts of those who wanted to teach. Kasturi draws links to change by relying on two circumstances: the retirement of resistant teachers and the influx of teachers with credentials. Change was possible by setting standards for this new cohort.

The allegation that not all teachers are ‘interested’ in putting in the effort (i.e labour) required for school development governance, was echoed by her colleague Nimbenna. Kasturi had narrated a history of a school in shambles, and her role in restoring it to what it should be. Nimbenna focused on a narrative of the current struggle to develop the school despite facing resistance from his colleagues:

Nimbenna: We want some electrical devices like projectors and all. I have just started teaching lessons from computers. Now I am teaching poems and lessons from computers. And our science teacher (Kasturi) is also very good. She does very good experiments. The headmaster provides us with everything we need. We were given Rs 5000 worth of materials and chemicals to be used. All this requires a good dedication. I'm telling you not to tell this to anyone. There is a mentality of some teachers that good deeds should not happen in this school. And they will ask me, “why do you do all this? We will have to suffer if higher authority comes and they will take action on us only.”

Here Nimbenna reintroduces the moral dimension of teaching duties in the light of SDG goals. School development requires “dedication,” an attitude that directly contrasts with apathy. Nimbenna notes that this dedication is optional: teachers can choose to commit school development governance or not. He identifies with the headmaster’s vision of

transforming Isila into a 'model school' and so invests in a great deal of creative and relational labour to that end. Thus, he deplores resistance from colleagues who worry that higher education authorities will take them to task. However, Nimbenna dismisses their fears, claiming that these merely cloak apathetic attitudes towards "good" deeds:

Nimbenna: We have more trouble with the co-workers who work here than with the authorities. Some teachers in our school do not cooperate with me. They tell me to do nothing good. This is why higher authority people will come in 20 times a month for inspection. Their aim is to grow more and more and more. No officer has bothered us so far...All come and praise us. The problem with these teachers is that they ask us why we are doing this. Their main problem is that all their children go to nearby private schools. Teachers should come to school regularly if this school is to do well... But we don't have it that way. Don't miss our school...If we were in a different school, we would be comfortable. Not all but only one and two teachers are thinking like that. Others are very cooperative with me.

He notes that despite resistance from a couple of his colleagues, in contrast, the higher authorities appear satisfied with Isila school's progress and even praise the teachers for their efforts. Like Rohit, Nimbenna paints a portrait of resistant teachers as individualistic and self-centred. Since their own children attend private schools, they are presented as not showing concern for students of government schools. The teachers who allied themselves to the project of school development governance denounced their peers who display unwillingness to improve the school.

The commitment in enacting school governance and development is thus presented as an antidote to the culture of apathy associated with government schooling. This commitment, the unpaid labour and sacrifice it denotes, is positioned in direct contrast to those teachers who are content to remain passive in outlook and action. For committed teachers, apathetic peers and politicians who condone apathy, are cited as the major barriers in school governance practice, more so than the conditions of resource-poverty. Rather than lacking support from educational authorities, teachers labouring in school development governance experience peer resistance as an ongoing tension in their enactment of governance. Compared to the major tension discussed previously, which dealt with socioeconomic systemic tensions, this tension is derived from current cultural aspects of the education system itself.

Although these participants had previously explained that poverty was a barrier, it was the lack of accountability in government schools that appeared to rankle the most. This lack of accountability had multiple and pervasive effects. Not only did it hinder the efforts of teachers committed to SDG, it prejudiced parents in favour of private schools. This favour, participants stressed, was reflected in the ongoing political and social support for private schools. Therefore, despite the numerous pro-poor and pro-government school educational policies and programs, my participants argued that educational segregation would continue unless both political and social upper classes committed to the government school system.

### **Lack of Social Support for Educational Equality**

A popular complaint made by some of the teachers and educational activists was the lack of buy-in to government system by the very ones working in it:

Rohit: Because the system of teaching here is not right. They enrol their children to private schools by paying Rs. 20000 to 1lakh.

Saraswati : Everyone says government schools should be strengthened. If so, why the children of government workers are not in government schools? The command should be made by government, which says all government officials' children must learn in a government school. This is why government schools don't thrive...We are saying that we need to develop government schools, but there is a different feeling in the depths of our minds. In order to develop the government schools our mindset needs to be changed. Where do you see the politicians, the police, doctor's children in the government school? Now, there are children in government schools who are good for nothing (poor). Those who have good financial situations enrol their children in private school. The government here adds those who are unable to send their children to private schools.

Saraswati, the Grade 5 teacher in Isila, noted that government schools are associated with resource-poor clientele. Financially well-off families distance themselves from poor students by enrolling their own children in private schools, which she believes undermines policy efforts to develop government schools. According to her, the entire cultural “mindset” needs to change for government schools to thrive.

At Kampur High school, Shoba concurred that government school teachers have to deal with largely with children who experience poverty, a phenomenon private school teachers do not experience. However, she viewed her experience with students' poverty as an experiential advantage that private school teachers apparently do not possess and are hence not prepared to teach resource-poor students:

Shoba: We are ready to teach our children the best way, but they (private school teachers) are not prepared because of the poverty of children. The children come from 22 *tanda* (nomadic settlements) around. Our school has children from 32 villages.

Rohit agreed that the lack of class mixing in government schools is a prime example of the lack of faith in the government school system and ultimately continues disenfranchising the poor:

Rohit: Now the children of the poor remain poor. To be prosperous education is a must, but where is education happening? You tell me. Are there any children from education department officials studying in government schools?

This rhetorical question was echoed by various other teachers such as Kasturi and Saraswati. If the architects of school development policy send their children to private schools, it undermined the reformist agenda of the RTE. For the teachers, educational staff and officials must show *commitment through example* rather than policies which ostensibly benefit the poor.

As an educational activist and academic, Vinod supported the frustrations these teachers expressed on the double standards imposed by the state:

Vinod: One of the biggest threats for government school- (is that) the strength is coming down. That is basically because you (the government) are giving permission to private schools. And now education is treated as a business... now all these entire low-budget private schools are completely looting the parents. In fact, such a pathetic thing. A poor parent who is earning hundred rupees is almost spending forty to fifty rupees on education. If the same fifty rupees, if there is a state-funded education, the same fifty rupees would have been spent on health and housing. That is really very pathetic in India. And why do we call it as democracy?



The popularity of private schools, coupled with the permissiveness of the government towards them, not only takes advantage of poor parents (Vinod used the term “looting”), but also undermines the very notion of democracy. Vinod argued that the practice of legalising private education, leads to legalised ‘looting’, raking in cash from poor parents that they can ill afford to spend. A robust state education system, Vinod implies, would allow poor parents to invest in other needs such as health. He notes that support for increased privatization of education contains grave implications for how we see society and the values both Indian and global citizens, as result, imbibe:

I think basically now even if you look at the way debates are happening at the global level, education is some trillion-dollar big business. See, the very understanding, the normative framework of education- education should be seen as a social good and it is the prime obligation of the state. We don’t oppose participation of private players. But privatisation of education and commodification of education is very, very unacceptable. I’ll tell you one simple example. What is happening in rural Karnataka today? We don’t get doctors for our primary health centre(s). You know why? Because they’re paying crores for their education and they say, “I am not interested to serve any rural masses.”

Like Rohit, Vinod brings up doctors to illustrate the lack of commitment engendered by encouraging education as a business. Because medical students have to invest crores (hundreds of thousands) of rupees into their education, they want to reap profits or break even on their investment rather than “serve any rural masses. To Vinod, selfishness rather than sacrifice is a consequence of allowing privatisation of education to spread unchecked. Indeed, earlier Rohit had questioned the existence of meaning in doctors’ care if they weren’t working “from their hearts.” Not only does privatisation jeopardize social justice, he notes, it also inculcates a self-serving, individualistic mindset in graduates that can undermine collective service and cohesion.

Both Vinod and Rohit appear to regard commitment as an internal state which manifests in how doctors and teachers use their education for marginalised groups.

Vinod: If you treat education as a social good and if you give them some subsidies, things would have been completely different. So making children to pay for their education- that itself will change the entire way we look at the service sector.

Vinod argues that how education is framed, as a commodity or as a social good, contains major implications for Karnatakan (and by extension, Indian) society. As a commodity, it entrenches class divides and encourages individualistic pursuits of career goals. As a commodity, it leads poor parents into making dubious investments into their children's education, without assurance that they will reap any dividends. As a commodity, it contributes to crystallisation of class distinctions. And perhaps most saliently for our preoccupation with school development governance, it exacerbates the tensions for stakeholders attempting to govern in a deeply unequal environment. Shoba argues that when the government does invest in school quality, poor parents won't spend their money on private schools:

Shoba: If we look at this, in Delhi, Kejriwal (Chief Minister of Delhi) has built good schools from his government, where nobody wants to go to private school. There nobody likes to go to private schools. Parents lined up there to enrol in a government school. But we have come to the point of closing down all government schools in India.

Shoba's bleak outlook conveyed a sense of defeat, where she felt her personal or other teachers' personal efforts in SDG could not achieve what higher political will could (as in the apparent case of Delhi's government schools). In Isila, Saraswati inveighs against higher official support of private schools, arguing that this places teachers and parents in the position of expending personal resources while the state (and society) continue to favour private schooling. Without the support of influential political and social actors, their commitment cannot solve the "wicked problems" of development.

Saraswati: Why do we need these many schools in this small village? If we had the privilege like them, we would have also done good. We too have teachers who passed all exams. But why is that the teachers are lagging behind? Teachers alone cannot do everything. *We cannot clap with one hand.* No matter how hard we try, we need the help of parents also. The children stay with us for just 6 hours. Parents should take responsibility for teaching children when they go home. If reputed families' children come to our school, the school will also be uplifted. According to the current government policy, if your children are able to learn in a private school, then you will get 25% to 30% off in one school and you will get a discount on the

money. RTE has done the policy in this way. When the government itself is paying for private schools, what will happen to government schools? They will perish.

Like Shoba, Saraswati displays a pessimistic outlook on the future of government schools, conceding that the efforts of teachers alone will not trigger real change. Although acknowledging that parents had responsibilities too, she reserved her greatest criticism for government officials and policies such as the RTE, which she felt actually encouraged private school growth. If parents from higher social classes send their children to government schools, she feels, these schools' reputation will benefit rather than suffer. To highlight the entangling of power and personal interest in private schooling, Vinod disclosed that his campaigning against government support for private schools triggered death threats sent to his Whatsapp account:

Vinod: So I opposed this entire idea of providing 25% reservation to private school. I said nothing doing. See, the moment you say twenty-five percent reservation in private school it means you're accepting your school is not functioning (indistinct) So you're doing a foolish thing... So they (politicians) were spending on private schools. I said, "In your own government schools, no drinking water, no toilet, why (starts laughing) ... so they started the threatening. "Oh, don't talk about Right to Education. You will be killed." All types of messages through my WhatsApp.

Thus, political and cultural support of private schools over the expense of government schools undermines the visions and goals of SDG, imbuing stakeholders such as teachers with emotions of frustration and fatalism as they labour towards achieving RTE goals. As Saraswati eloquently puts it, they "cannot clap with one hand." Without support from influential social and political actors, as well as support from colleagues and across local governance networks, children's right to education may be achieved, but not necessarily a right to quality education, which seeks to destabilise class imbalances.

So far, these findings have established two major forms of tensions for SDG participants. The first arises from the difficulty of aligning the RTE and its governance objectives with resource-poor family needs. The second emerges from the lack of accountability of teachers and government officials, which results in uneven implementations by committed individuals. Some of my participants felt that the lack of buy-in from school actors across social and political boundaries jeopardised their efforts and cemented educational inequality. It is against the backdrop of these tensions that I shall

analyse SDMC participation through the narratives of those participants involved in SDMCs in Karnataka.

### **Promises of Participatory Governance in SDMCs**

In the following sections, I will focus exclusively on participants who have engaged with/in SDMCs in Karnataka. As legally mandated governance spaces in the RTE and in Karnataka's education policy, SDMCs are sites where resource-poor parents, teachers, and other local actors such as *panchayat* members and *angwanwadi* (government nursery) workers meet to improve and manage the government school. A key thesis of Corbridge *et al's* (2005) seminal work on governance and governmentality in India is that participation in governance can yield positive results for marginalised communities, even when it places additional burdens and responsibilities on them. Although SDMCs in Karnataka do not possess the 'hard' accountability of sanctions, they afford a form of answerability not previously possible between parents and teachers. Additionally, according to Vinod, who was influential in working with SDMCs in Karnataka for twenty years, they present opportunities for communities and parents marginalized by their caste and gender to achieve social change. The pathways for change are sewn into the membership criteria of SDMCs themselves. He identifies representation as the first crucial step towards a more active participation:

Rebecca: I'm interested in how caste and gender play a role in SDMC formation.

Vinod: I think this is very important and it is very difficult to get rid of in the beginning, particularly in a society like India. Because it's a very caste-based and caste-ridden society. So that's why in the executive order, in the bylaws, we started giving proportional representation to the parents. Suppose your school general council got representations from all communities: scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward class. So we have said that at least out of nine members three should be from scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and minorities, and three should be general and other three should be from all others. That kind of representation itself was more democratic.

Ensuring that democratic representation was actually present off paper was often difficult, according to Bina, who was involved in training SDMCs in rural north Karnataka. She

identified caste-based discrimination, and struggles between teachers and parents over the handling of the SDMC budget as the major drivers of conflict:

Bina: There were issues that were very specific to caste. There were also issues specific to the teachers and the headmaster in that particular school. Some of them wanted to challenge the school headmaster for handling funds. The higher caste wanted to take over all positions even though there are specific guidelines for what percentage of women should be there, what percentage different caste combinations.

For Vinod, however, these conflicts over representation were seen as stepping stones to procuring democratic participation amongst SDMC parents. He acknowledged that though the representation of SCs and minority groups can be symbolic, he believed representation starts at the symbolic level.

Vinod: See though in the initial stage it looks like a symbolic kind of representation, gradually they start articulating. It's always you know kind of an accessibility- and opportunity is to begin there. We can't just make them activists in the beginning. But gradually, in the course of meetings and discussions they start... So whether I'm there or not, they're doing wonders. I think that is something as a social movement we need to do. Of course, now they have grown. They are asking very difficult questions.

Vinod sees the SDMC as a space where members can learn governance by doing. Mindful of the historical and enduring legacies of casteist and gender discrimination, he understands the importance of accessibility, where symbolic representation is a diving-off point for deeper engagement in governance. Bina's narrative corresponds with his portrait of parents learning governance through doing. For parents, being physically present in the school and actively monitoring the school day led to them feeling included and able to make changes in the school.

Bina: One of our guidelines was that SDMC members, in turn, every afternoon they have to come and taste the food which is being served. So lot of improvement took place in schools. Children also developed a kind of rapport with the SDMC members. They were free to go and report to them that "today's food was not good," and "there was no salt" or "vegetables were not put." SDMC members, when they are trained on health and nutrition, they see that the government spends

on each child, that time it used to be every child, six rupees I think. So- and this much money you get other than the rice which is provided. Rice and dahl is provided to them and after that, for vegetables they are getting this much money. So this vegetable money will come to the HM's account, and you need to ensure that every day, for afternoon meals, that vegetables come to the school.

Bina highlights the importance of the rapport that students developed with SDMC members, for she notes that children felt comfortable in having alternate adult presences to whom they could report. She and the other activists helped guide the parents into an understanding that they too could contribute to school governance:

Bina: We said, “even if none of you are educated, you can actually measure the quality of education in the schools.

Bina and the other NGOs developed a system of visual cards (red, yellow, green) to aid SDMCs in the daily activities of school governance. Through participation in the SDMC, they appeared to overcome seeing their lack of formal schooling as an impediment to participation.

Bina: The assembly whether they attend, one of the SDMC members should attend the assembly every day. They take turns. So these were some of the things introduced. When the teachers take assembly, do they read newspapers? Children, do they read? Most of the SDMC members are not educated, but still they get a hang of it. Then, they also check whether the physical training (PT) is done. And whether all teachers are present. What type of instruction they give to the children. Usually most of the schools, the children conduct morning assembly by themselves and the teachers arrive later. Some of them (parents) know how to read and write, not that they have not studied. So such people used to assist children's reading capacities.

Bina and her team of NGO workers were integral in helping SDMC members overcome culturally-ingrained deficit models of themselves. Bina notes that the lack of education on the part of the parents does not necessarily impede their functioning as SDMC members. Vinod argued that the stigma of illiteracy upheld by educated groups in society undermined the intended democratic functioning of SDMCs:

Vinod: the democratic process should start right from constitution of the committee. In most of the schools what happens- the headteacher will decide. And he sabotages the entire process of democratic constitution because he wants a person to say yes to his decision because SDMC is given now the financial power. (But) you aren't just a puppet. I think somehow that kind of- changing the mindset- see that is not happening in case of the higher elected bodies. You're very submissive, you even go and touch their feet. But when it comes to the local: "What this illiterate fellow... ah he's just kind of wearing Bermuda (shorts)," you know like that...

Similarly to Bina, Vinod does not suppose a lack of education disqualifies parents from participating in SDMCs. He notes, however, that there is need to be a "mindset" change. SDMC members should be regarded as elected members of a local governance body and accorded the same respect that is accorded with higher elected bodies. He believes that "one great thing about the Right to Education," is that "now SDMCs have been constitutionally recognised as a legal entity". This legal affordance recognises members' decision-making powers and attempts at answerability. Importantly, he acknowledges that participation in a governance body such as the SDMC is something that needs to be learned, especially by members who are not accustomed to "articulate" socially or politically.

Vinod uses the word "articulations" to refer to the process of gaining voice, a sort of conscientization as described by Paulo Freire (1970). The symbolic representation of SDMC structure he views as foundational for gaining further confidence and expressing their voice. He notes that activists aren't born, they are made- specifically through the course of meeting and discussing in SDMCs. Learning on the job is a cornerstone of SDG, on which Vinod and Bina note, can make activists out of parents previously rendered passive through paternalistic development policies.

### **SDMCs in Action: Isila and Midhol**

Both Isila and Midhol schools had different experiences with SDMCs, which points to the importance of social and communal context for SDMC formation. Midhol school did not have an SDMC because, according to the teachers and the headteacher, some of the parents had sparked conflict amongst themselves when trying to decide who would be SDMC president.

There was a conflict between the SDMC members, according to Sunil (Maths teacher), which is why there is no SDMC. The parents were apparently squabbling over roles and did not want to contribute anything substantial in solving problems, according to him-*Fieldnotes from Midhol school, 29 November, 2018*

When I asked Radha, Sri, and Devi (teachers) why there was no SDMC at Midhol, they told me that the parents had fought for the top position and so there was no SDMC. I asked Radha if the District Education Office had done anything about it. “Oh, they know our situation and they understand,” was Radha’s response-  
*Fieldnotes from discussion with teachers, 8 December 2018*

Despite Midhol school lacking an SDMC, the teaching staff had not attempted to form one after one attempt. The teachers at Midhol told me that parents were “not interested” because they were usually working low-paid jobs such as “coolies” (luggage porters”, housecleaners, and daily-wage construction labourers. Their assertion appeared supported by some of the mothers whom I’d interviewed.

They (Radha, Rohit and Miriam) were discussing the SDMC (most of the mothers hadn’t heard of it or what it was) and asking the mothers if they would be interested in helping develop the school. The answer I heard most frequently was, “We are coolies and we are working all the time, so how can we help develop the school?” *Fieldnotes extracts 4 January 2019*

When I asked Priyanka (Midhol school mother, housewife, husband works as a daily-wage construction worker) what she thinks of the SDMC, Radha answered for her, saying, “She doesn’t know what an SDMC is, and these people are too busy working to join the SDMC. They are all gone to work, how can they come? And they are coolies, they are not interested.” *Fieldnotes extracts 4 January 2019*

Gayathri (mother of 2 Midhol school students) and Durgamma (grandmother of a Midhol school student) did not know what an SDMC was. When I explained and asked them if they would be interested in improving the school, Durgamma responded, “The government is giving us everything so why should we improve (the school)?” *Fieldnotes extracts 4 January 2019*



In Midhol school, neither the teachers I interviewed, nor the parents, appeared interested in forming or participating in an SDMC. Given that Midhol school was located by an urban informal settlement, with the students coming from SC families who lived in the settlement, it is worth considering how experiences of urban poverty affect families' perception of participation. Their lack of interest appeared reflected in higher levels as well, for Radha told me that apart from one government training for SDMCs, there had been no other training or initiative from the district government office to invest in SDMC formation and retention at Midhol. Although the teachers claimed the parents were disinterested, Rohit displayed a sceptical attitude towards the capabilities of SDMCs:

Rohit: The SDMC itself is not right. That's all for the name. There is politics in it. They (parents) want to be given a share of the school's grants. Otherwise, they get drunk and fight. SDMC is not good. Its original purpose was that political people didn't have any work to do, so they introduced it. Some days ago, one school member of a SDMC raped a teacher. See, I read about it in the newspapers. And the higher authorities dismissed him.

Rohit does not see any promise in SDMCs. He believes that the policy was drafted by policymakers who "didn't have any work to do," and argues that "it's all for the name." According to him, it's a policy which looks good on paper and furnishes policymakers with an occupation. He also cites drunkenness and conflicts among parents as the key reason for SDMC failure and cites a media story of an SDMC member raping a teacher to prove his lack of faith in SDMCs. His evidence was culled from the popular (and powerful) narrative of political apathy and a news story rather than experience of participating in an SDMC.

In Midhol, narratives around a lack of interest thus sanctioned the lack of SDMC in the school. Isila school, on the other hand, could be taken as almost an opposite case to Midhol school. Not only did Isila possess an SDMC, but in 2018, it was voted the best SDMC in the *taluk*. Here we not only have an example of a functional SDMC, but one considered a success. The next section delves into the interviews with Isila SDMC actors. The findings illustrate that while Isila's SDMC made promising inroads, it also has yet to fulfil its promise of truly democratic participation of its more marginalised constituents.

## **Isila School SDMC: The “Middle Ground” of Local School Development Governance**

Different participants gave different representations about the work of and their inclusion in the SDMC, which indicates a mixed picture of the SDMC being able to realise its policy aims of democratic participation by all its members. Participant narratives presented instead a portrait that, while deviating in some ways from policy aims, revolved around parent and teacher understandings of ‘development.’ When asked about her father’s participation in the SDMC, Standard 7 student Shenaz remembered the physical work that went towards improving Isila’s school’s infrastructure:

Shenaz: My father has been in the SDMC for one year. The changes I know the SDMC did are providing water by installing a pipeline. They also grew flowers in the garden and erected a dance stage for festivals.

Akash, Isila’s SDMC president in 2018, highlighted this aspect of labour when discussing the SDMC’s contributions to the school:

Akash: This current SDMC has been going on for three years. We have improved the gardens and installed a pipeline for water. We also bought mats and painted the building walls.

When asked about SDMC contributions to school improvement, Shenaz and Akash point to the visible aspects of school infrastructure. These examples are reinforced by SDMC studies in India where members primarily focused on improving school infrastructure (see Chapter 3). It was rather more difficult for me to ascertain whether parents felt they had a voice in discussions. An extract from my field notes on 22 November 2018 at Isila discusses the dynamics between school staff and the SDMC president:

The current SDMC has been going on for 3 years. They have improved the gardens, bought mats, painted walls, and installed water. They’ve had training twice. At first the headteacher said all the 18 members came, but upon further questioning, (all eighteen members always come to meetings?), he retracted to say 70%. According to Akash, being on the SDMC is nice and everyone helps. For those who repeatedly don’t turn up, they are voted out in the next elections- training has dried up. Akash believes the SDMC has brought them (the parents) closer with the school. Stresses

“all cooperation”. Here Nimbenna interjects and says that the SDMC members have a good relationship with the school staff and answers the questions I direct to Akash.

In this group conversation, Akash, the SDMC president did not always answer the questions I put to him because the headteacher and Nimbenna often answered for him. Nimbenna and Saraswati were also present when I interviewed Aarti and Bhagashree, two of the mothers in the SDMC committee, and often interjected with the purpose of explaining what they had said to me. When Aarti told me that the SDMC had raised funds for old school members, Nimbenna said to me, “She means alumni.” A plausible reason for their interjections and interruptions could be their attempts at helping me overcome language barriers (although we all spoke in Hindi, with Nimbenna sometimes speaking in English). This atmosphere made it very difficult for me, however, to calibrate parents’ sense of ownership in the SDMC.

The focus on physical improvements was corroborated by Divya the *anganwadi* (early childhood careworker) at Isila school. In her interview, she pointed to the development of the garden and the flowers as a key achievement of the SDMC. The *anganwadi* is a permanent member of the SDMC, but she gave us slightly confusing information: saying at first that she hasn’t attended any meeting recently, but explaining, upon further questioning, that she had attended meetings around five or six times. When asked to describe meetings she had attended, she noted that they had “discussed out-of-school children and how to bring them back. Also, parents push the teachers to follow up more thoroughly with the children.” This seems to suggest that in addition to making physical improvements and responding to the policy goal of targeting out-of-school children, Isila’s parents do appear to have some power of answerability. Aarti and Bhagashree implied that in addition to contributing to monitoring duties as SDMC members, they had evolved a deeper understanding of their potential capabilities:

Aarti: The school environment is good and the food is well-made. If someone does something wrong in the school, we ask about it. We raised funds for celebrating the school’s Annual Day and for scholarships for old students (alumni).

Bhagashree: We need training to develop the school. We want to install a 10<sup>th</sup> standard here and receive training so that we can better understand the methods of teaching and learning.

Aarti claimed that SDMC members seek answerability when something goes wrong in the school. She noted this in addition to the more visible changes the SDMC had wrought which included the Annual Day celebration and alumni scholarships. Bhagashree indicated she would prefer more training. She referred to a desire to extend Isila's educational provision till the 10<sup>th</sup> standard. Currently, educational provision in Isila school is capped at the 8<sup>th</sup> standard, with the nearest high school located in the town of Kampur (3 km away). This means that Isila's schoolchildren would have to commute if they want to continue on to secondary education.

Both Aarti and Bhagashree narrated communicating with school staff and developing desires for better understanding of pedagogies and school improvement possibilities. Their stories suggest that the proximity to school staff and decision-making power of SDMC membership allows parents to seek answerability and develop their social identities as governance participants. Pooja, a non-SDMC parent whose daughter went to Isila primary school, also thought that SDMC membership could improve communication between parents and teachers:

Pooja: I think parents in the SDMC can talk to the teachers and monitor children's learning.

However, conversations with Mahadevi and Sujata, two Scheduled Caste SDMC mothers in Isila village at the home of Lakamma (another working mother in Isila), suggested that not every SDMC member could express their voice.

Rebecca: Do you feel that being a SDMC member has changed your ideas?

Mahadevi: There will be other teachers there. They all make their own decisions. Just for name sake they took us. But all decisions are made by the school principal.

Sujata: They are just like you. Very intelligent. They make their own decision. If they ask us to bring our children, we will bring them. We will not understand anything.

Mahadevi: They only tell us. We've gone a couple of times. We agree with whatever they say. We will not understand anything.

Rebecca: So they don't explain to you?

Mahadevi: They say that the school is running well. And also, they will inform us whether children will come to school or not. If there are stones in the rice, we bring this up. They (the teachers) discuss with the children and discuss the matter.

Sujata: We don't talk much. They only say everything. No one is as knowledgeable to talk.

In this excerpt of the group interview<sup>41</sup> I conducted with four parents in Isila village, it seemed that Mahadevi and Sujata viewed their participation in the SDMC as tokenistic: (“just for namesake they took us.” They also noted the presence of more powerful caste members in the SDMC:

Mahadevi: In that (the SDMC) some of them are Lingayat people, and some of them are of our caste. There are also Brahmin caste people in that.

As I have noted in the literature review, although the Lingayat caste is separate from the Brahmin caste in the ascribed caste hierarchy, in Karnataka, the Lingayat caste group wields considerable social and economic influence. My question prior to Mahadevi's statement had been to inquire about their contact and communication with other SDMC parents, not specifically about caste composition. However, Mahadevi noted that Isila's SDMC has a variety of caste representations, some of which are also powerful caste groups. The tokenistic inclusion of Mahadevi and Sujata produced passive social roles and responses in their SDMC participation. For example, they highlighted how school decisions appeared already a foregone deal and that the school teachers, and especially school principal, had made decisions without including their opinions. Both Sujata and Mahadevi appear to believe their lack of knowledge prevents them from actively participating in decisions. For instance, both of them reiterate, “We will not understand anything” and point out that the school staff are “very intelligent.” They appear to associate intelligence with the teaching position, and level of formal education, since they equated my intelligence with that of the teachers. As for themselves, they stressed their inability to read or write, despite possessing some experience of schooling.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview at Isila village, Lakamma's house, with Lakamma, Renuka, Mahadevi and Sujata participating, Rohan as interpreter.

Rebecca: What about your experience (of schooling) Sujata?

Sujata: I have not studied much. I can hardly write and read.

Earlier, Mahadevi confirmed that she too had not been able to learn reading and writing through her schooling.

Mahadevi: I attended school until Standard Four. But now I do not remember anything. Now I don't know how to write and read. I learned there and left it there.

For Sujata and Mahadevi, their schooling did not result in transferable skills. Indeed, Mahadevi speaks of school as a place where she left all her learning, i.e, she could not take anything she had learned with her as she grew into an adult. Thus in the SDMC, these women's participation appears restricted to agreeing to decisions already made by the school staff, bringing their children to school, and checking the quality of the food (i.e. the rice for Midday meals). If the aims of the SDMC are to encourage marginalized participants to feel empowered through taking active roles in school management and decision-making, they are not realised in Sujata and Mahadevi's case. For Sujata and Mahadevi, SDMC participation continues to reinforce their states as passive social actors. Their narratives complicate the promises of Isila's SDMC. While there were visible improvements to the school infrastructure that school and community members could point to, there was also the more invisible (and apparently more intractable) challenges, such as encouraging active, non-tokenistic participation of SC members like Sujata and Mahadevi.



**Figure 22 Flowers planted to improve the garden of Isila School**

Different members of the SDMC can also harbor differing perceptions of their capabilities and activities in the SDMC. For example, in an interview with Akash<sup>42</sup>, SDMC president in 2018, he emphasized SDMC contributions via physical improvements and attempts at holding teachers answerable to their duties:

Akash: Now we make sure that the teachers are coming on time and discipline the students. We ask the teachers to watch over the children's studies. We have also made a garden around the school and planted more trees as well as improving the toilet facilities.

Akash emphasized a more active role which chimed with Aarti and Bhagashree's accounts of physical improvements and increased communication/ answerability of teachers. He also mused that being SDMC president had given him a new idea of his capabilities for school development.

Akash: Before (becoming SDMC president) I was not so interested in school development. Now I am more interested. Now, because I have helped and done something in the SDMC, other parents want to join. Before, I would have told my daughter (Isila Standard 5 student), that whatever she wants to do she can do. But now I would be happy if she wants to work in social development.

It is important to note that Akash identified himself as coming from the Lingayat caste and that his occupation was a farmer who owned land. These attributes suggest a measure of social power that Mahadevi and Sujata did not have. The differing perspectives contributed by the various SDMC participants and community members speak to how contextually-embedded social relations can also impact participation in practice.

Although Isila's SDMC could be considered a local school governance success story because of its contributions and award, the narratives of Mahadevi and Sujata indicated that they did not feel they could contribute to decision-making. Rather, Isila's SDMC affords us a portrait of governance in action in a community comprising heterogeneous socioeconomic relations. It appears to fit the premise of a middle-ground governance advocated by Corbridge *et al* (2005), where the promises of growth (visible improvements, and a shift in parent-teacher relationships) co-exist with the 'perils' of participation (tokenistic inclusion, enduring passivity of marginalised members).

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<sup>42</sup> (Recorded) interview at Akash's house in Isila village, Miriam as interpreter, 27 November 2018.

## **Mimicking Private School Appearances: Isila Community's Project of Aesthetic School Development**

A unique finding that emerged from Isila school was the community's efforts at responding to the social narrative of education quality. As I have explored earlier in the chapter, the social narrative of private schools providing quality education was one which contained real-world impacts for Isila's community. Opting for private schooling continued to disenfranchise government school students according to some of the teachers. Nimbenna echoes the frustration of his colleagues Saraswati and Kasturi at the popularity of private schools:

Nimbenna: Our mission here is to make our school as a model (government) school. Everybody should recognise that there is such a kind of school in the Kalaburagi taluk. They need to stop pouring money into private schools. They are just going to private schools and pouring their money. But nothing is thriving.

Nimbenna echoes the tenor of Vinod's statements against private schools, which he describes as 'looting' parents. According to Nimbenna, parents "pouring" their money into private schools stunts the possibility of the public school system thriving, echoing Shoba's and Saraswati's pessimistic predictions over the future of government schools. Isila's headteacher had also told me his mission was to turn Isila school into a 'model' school. When I asked Nimbenna after the interview to explain what he meant by a model school, he referred to government schools which are designated as good quality, thus "model" schools.

During the first phase of my fieldwork, I noticed that the neatly-tended grounds and beautiful gardens of Isila school, were credited to the efforts of teachers and SDMC parents. The teachers, students, and parents took pride in Isila school's grounds and building. The garden and the flowers had been planted at the behest of the SDMC. When I commented on the beauty of the grounds to Saraswati, she nodded proudly and said in English, "Just like private school." The school's beauty in her understanding served a greater purpose: that of image making. For the students, however, the aesthetic qualities of their school were linked to play and fostering interpersonal relationships. Saroja, one of the children interviewed, chose to foreground her school as an important place to her, by specifically focusing on its garden:





Figure 23 Saroja's drawing

Saroja: Why I like my school. Here there are children learning the basics and here are the flowers and our school garden. I like it here because everyone comes and plays in the garden. I also especially like my teachers and I want to be like them.

For Saroja, the garden figured prominently in the school landscape, primarily as a place to play. School was a place where children “learned the basics” but where they also interacted with each other socially and looked up to their teachers as role models.

Aesthetics appeared to play an important role in image-work.<sup>43</sup> Interviews with Isila teachers in the second phase revealed that the pressure for mimicking the appearance and aesthetic attractions of private schools had come largely from the village community.

Nimbenna: Many students from this village go to private school. They wear a different colour uniform. Some of our students wanted to wear the colours of the private school uniform and they shared their feelings with us. Our children, seeing them (the private school students), told us, "Sir, "Sir, they go to school so well-dressed." We (teachers) are ready to give everything we know, games, cultural activities, science. We are willing to give everything to children, but parents have the idea that wearing good uniforms is good for our children. That's why we made this uniform. Having this in mind gives children the feeling of going to private school.

<sup>43</sup> Image work can be one way of subtly marking class distinctions. Fernandes and Heller (2006) examine beautification projects by urban middle-class civic groups in Bangalore, arguing that civil society groups attempt to “spatially cleanse” their neighbourhoods of hawkers. Through this example, they demonstrate another instance of middle and upper classes harnessing the discourse and practice of aesthetics to promote their class tastes and preferences.

Several important points are at play here. Class exclusion through private schooling is a central mechanism for the middle classes to preserve their cultural assets. This exclusivity is visually reproduced through separate uniforms, buildings, and grounds. The students in Isila government school desire “the feeling of going to private school,” and so make their desires known to parents and teachers. Parents and teachers respond by providing uniforms that resemble private school uniforms. By making Isila school *look* like a private school, students and families *feel* that they are attending a private school. However, Kasturi dismissed the pretensions of private schools of signalling quality through the use of aesthetic and symbolic markers:

Kasturi: The surrounding private schools in this area attract large numbers of children by renting large plots, building large buildings, sending their school vehicles to villages, and providing school uniforms. But the teachers who teach there are only B.A and P.U.C (pre-university credentialled). Not TET, CET like us. (Parents are) just fascinated by the way these schools look.

The Common Entrance Test (CET) and Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) are assessments required when applying for teaching in government schools, and these assessments are also regarded by Kasturi as hallmarks of quality. She argues that the aesthetics of private schools: large buildings, school buses, and uniforms merely gloss over the teachers’ lack of specialised qualifications.

Kasturi: There is only superficial beauty in private schools. Making a big big building. Giving a tie and belt to children. Seeing all this, we wrote to the government asking for the children, to give them shoes and socks. This is one of the reasons why we have fewer children. We, too, have done it like private schools. ... For that, we took Rs 500 from each one of us (teachers) and purchased a red uniform for children to wear on Wednesday. We did everything we could do like private school.

Perceiving that the government school is losing students to private schools, the teachers of Isila and the parents attempt to make Isila look like a private school. Private schools leverage aesthetics not only to impart indications of quality learning, but also hold out

aesthetics as symbols of desire and differentiation. Attending a private school confers a sort of distinction that attending a government school does not.

In Isila, students and parents try to attain this sense of distinction by requesting their own uniforms and mimicking a private school aesthetic by transforming the school grounds, renovating buildings, and fashioning uniforms. This mimicry requires both labour and financial expenditure. The teachers spend their own money to provide these uniforms for the children. Such efforts to palliate student migration to private schools testify to claim that parents desire what they perceive as quality schooling over ostensible school development criteria.

### **Accountability for Purchase via Private Schools**

Almost every discussion of government schooling with parents, teachers, and activists, ignited commentary on the popularity and spread of private schools. Private schooling was largely perceived by parents as “quality” schooling, where teachers were ultimately responsible for their children’s academic progress. In private schooling, parents did not need to balance livelihood and governance commitments or worry over educational development targets. Private school fees were exchanged for the assurance that their children’s educational needs would be met by teachers. A major attraction of private schools was that accountability could be purchased: a ‘hard’ accountability, compared to the ‘soft’ accountability present in government schools.

However, certain participants remained skeptical of the actual quality of learning in private schools. Their skepticism revolved primarily around the mode of instruction (teacher-centred, rote memorisation), and the transactional nature of education in a privatised context. Kasturi compares private schools to prisons:

Kasturi: In private schools, it's more like a prison for the children, because they shall be assembled in a room. In order to learn something, the child's mind must be free to perceive the subject. But in a private school, the room is crowded and there is no freedom. In private schools, children are restricted to what is taught.

Martin concurs on this image of the rigidity of private education by noting that:

Martin: They (private schools) don’t look at what the child wants. They have a curriculum and they just go with that. Anything out of the box and “I’m sorry, I can’t help you.”

Sangeeta, who used to teach in a private school, stressed that private schools in her experience, were fundamentally concerned about student assessment results:

Sangeeta: In my private school, we have evaluations once a week and every fifteen days a test. The headmaster will see who is weak and who is bright. And he would ask us to coach the weak students and give them extra classes. He would put pressure on us: “You didn’t teach well, that is why the child is weak.”

As Sangeeta notes, private school teachers are held accountable for students’ academic performances. She remembered having to coach students who were struggling and devoting extra attention to them. This accountability is attractive to parents who need assurance that teachers will maximise efforts towards their children’s learning.

However, Anita, another private school teacher in Kalaburagi city, countered these negative views of private school teaching, by noting that at her school, the teachers relied on ‘fun’ and visual methods to engage the children:

Anita: We have a different syllabus here that teachers cover- along with that students learn in a fun way- besides the lecture we use different methods of teaching, formal and informal methods (such as) class activities, using visual aids in classroom in a fun way so the children pay more attention using these visual aids makes it more interesting. Children from the (care) home who used to go to government school before coming to us say that government school doesn’t use these methods- here it’s more fun.

Raj believes the popularity of private schools is an indication of the powerlessness parents feel in the government school system.

Raj: I suppose people send their children to private school because they have a voice and can get management to respond- at the government schools they feel that the teachers don’t care.

Martin delves deeper into the expectations parents hold for teachers, by noting that parents rely on visual and symbolic markers to judge education quality. He argues that illiterate

parents who invest in private education expect to see physical indicators of learning, measured by the amount of homework their child receives. In private school, children are positioned as workers and teachers as taskmasters who must push the child to excel academically in a highly competitive landscape:

Martin: The expectation of parents – for the private (schools), you’re spending a lot of money. The levels of grades are going higher and higher- 98 per cent. If you want admission in a good college if you don’t have more than eighty-five per cent in your tenth standard, you may as well not apply. You’d get a third-grade college.

...

Rebecca: Do you think this applies to poor children as well?

Martin: It applies to everyone. Especially to poor children. See, I’ll give you a very good example. Most of the parents, especially in rural areas, are illiterate. And because they’re illiterate, they don’t understand anything...my wife and I both went to the teacher one day and we told her,” If my daughter has not completed her homework, that’s okay....

And she (the teacher) said, “In all my years of teaching over here in Gulbarga, you’re the first parent to come and tell me that. Parents judge and grade the teacher by the amount of homework they give. So more the homework, the better the teacher.” She says, “If I don’t give around fifteen to sixteen pages of homework- there’s a phrase in Hindi over here- the parents would say, ‘Are you a *hazham* or are you a teacher?’ *Hazham* means a barber. It’s a degrading word... We have to give into it because parents want that. She says, “I understand they’re illiterate and they don’t understand. But ...they want to see the child studying continuously” (laughs).

Martin’s reported exchange with this private school teacher highlights the expectations parents hold of teachers. He contributes to a social perception of illiterate parents as lacking in knowledge: “They don’t understand anything.” Specifically, they do not truly understand *academic* knowledge and how to assess academic learning. They thus rely on their children’s grades and volumes of homework to form an understanding of their children’s academic progress/prowess. His disclosure that teachers who do not ‘fill’ their students with homework and textual knowledge are labeled *hazhams* testify to the derogatory associations of non-academic occupations. Moreover, barbering was

traditionally considered a low-caste occupation. An educated person is culturally esteemed, while an uneducated person is categorized as backward. And if teachers fail to give students lots of homework, they might as well not be teachers. Thus, for parents, a teacher's professional identity and performance is linked to visual markers such as volumes of homework and students' grades.

Martin reflected that his decision to sponsor children in a leprosy 'colony' to attend private school made an impression on their parents who apparently had not been interested in their children's education before:

Martin: we noticed that the children were going to the government schools...And many of them didn't pass the SSC(Secondary School Certificate)...Also it made no change to their life at all. It made absolutely no change to their life at all. And then we decided we would put them in an English medium school in private school... some of the schools which were sympathetic to what we did.

Martin narrated his decision as a social experiment. Feeling that the children were not learning in government schools, he placed them in an English-medium private school. He was careful to note that apart from the headteacher, none of the school staff or students had an inkling of the children's social circumstances.

Martin: We never told everybody- one of the things is that with the exception of the principal or the owner of the school, nobody knew where the children came from, not even the teachers...Otherwise there's this stigma so we didn't want that to happen. (Then) we found that the parents started feeling very proud that their children could speak in English after a year or two. Initially the parents weren't very (interested)- "Oh this is just another experiment that you are doing- is it going to work?"

Martin indicated that this strategy followed an initial unsuccessful attempt to place them in a private day school. However, he argued that because parents couldn't help their children with their homework, this tactic was unsuccessful.

Martin: ...we put them in residential schools and when they used to come home for holidays, we found that the parents used to feel very proud. They would actually be

strutting around the place, you know, showing off their children to others: “He speaks English!” They would feel very proud if the children would speak to me in English: “Okay, he can relate”. Over the years we found a shift in the mindset of the parents because their children were studying in an English medium school. So they realised the importance of the education and they slowly changed. Now they send their children to the private schools instead of government school...

Martin’s experience resonates with research that emphasizes the symbolic importance of English to parents (LaDousa, 2014; Bhattacharyea & Jiang, 2018). Importantly, the parents felt their children could ‘relate’ to Martin through speaking English. The ‘passion’ for English may also testify to how ‘quality’ education is anchored in a middle-class, English-speaking citizen, and how English is perceived to be a hallmark characteristic of an educated subject.

Commenting on parent preference for private schooling, like Martin, Nimbenna believes that English is a key attraction.

Nimbenna: Nowadays, parents are more passionate about English medium school. Parents send their children to English medium school. They are thinking that those who go to English medium school- they are smart.

According to Nimbenna, ‘smartness’, i.e., educational capability, is alloyed with mastery of the English language in the collective imagination. The parents in Martin’s narrative revealingly are also excited because with English, their children can also now *relate* to an English-educated, middle-class degree-holder such as Martin. English can also be perceived as a way to bridge (or reinforce) class divides.

Anita corroborates the expectations parents form of private school teachers, noting that in her case, she is tasked with the responsibility for ensuring her students are learning:

Anita: In each and every class there are 40 to 50 students. The parents are often very busy- they don’t come to pick up students- parents here in Gulbarga don’t care much about their children. I feel sad- they think “Now my child is in private school, it’s the teacher’s job to make them good. Even when we have open house they say,

“why is my child getting 70%, make them get 80%.” It’s the parent’s duty to ask the child what they learned.

Anita expressed her sorrow that parents appear not to care about their children by not picking them up from school or sitting with them to help them with their homework. She later reflected that because most of the mothers are housewives without much schooling, even if they did sit with their children, it would probably not help. Like Saraswati, Anita noted that teachers couldn’t bear all the responsibility for students’ academic progress, that both the school and the home mediate learning. Teachers express the understanding that both school and the home mediate learning.

Annette Lareau (2003) famously investigated parental influence amongst different types of families in the US separated according to income. The middle and upper-class parents, she noticed, engaged in *concerted cultivation*, enrolling their children in extra-curricular activities, enquiring about and structuring their homework, ‘soft’ training them in how to engage with medical professionals and navigate social interactions. Middle and upper-class children rarely appeared to have time that wasn’t sectioned into ‘activities’. Lower-income families, tended to have a more relaxed approach- parents allowed their children greater freedom and time to play and expected them to figure out the academic system and life in general, on their own. Parental love and concern were expressed primarily in the form of provision, rather than constant hovering. This, Lareau argues, tended to mean that middle to upper-class children were more prepared for the white-collar world of work than the lower-income children, despite the supposedly equitable institution of the school.

In Karnataka, parents seem to expect teacher effort to paper over any home disadvantage. Private schools appear attractive to them not only because they can purchase teacher accountability, but also because they can access a culturally valued form of education. The participant narratives of their experiences in the private school- government school debate highlight that not only is teacher accountability important to resource-poor parents with low levels of education, but also that their conceptualisation of formal education appears tied up in notions of class and cultural capital. These understandings of education differ from those espoused in the RTE, which largely promotes a social development understanding of education. While the parents in Isila’s SDMC appeared to fulfil their responsibilities as set down by policy, they also materialise their visions of school development through making Isila government school look like a private school. Their explicit intention to mimic the physical characteristics of private schools is an



important finding when considering the study and practice of school development governance. In this decentered account of governance practice, community motivations and desires around education do not simply revolve around policy goals of encouraging representative democracy or necessarily solving the ‘wicked’ problems of development. They seem, rather, to be based on desires to appropriate a middle-class, English-medium, private education. The disconnect between parental desires and SDG policy agendas impacts the means by which governance is practiced in local communities.

### **Care as a Key Practice in SDG**

The themes of tensions and disconnect between governance policy, socioeconomic structural constraints, and differing cultural valuations of education also brought into relief how participants perceived and presented their practice of school governance. Many of the participants highlighted their commitment and itemized individual efforts when navigating the school governance landscape. Nel Noddings (1984) argues that care stands at the heart of the relationship between teacher and student. Certainly, studies in Western contexts indicate that altruism and relationality form major reasons for teachers pursuing the profession: “there is a genuine care, concern, and enthusiasm around working with students and seeing them learn and grow” (Marston, 2010 p. 445). However, these themes of care and relationality have yet to cross over to the literature on school development and governance in the global South.

In my interviews, I noticed how care and sacrifice cleaved to the personal- it stood at the heart of participants’ avowed commitment to SDG and children’s rights. They perceived themselves at the vanguard of social change, even if it was difficult, less glamorous and comprised a huge investment of personal resources. It appeared to me that this moral discourse of care is not only important in understanding how participants in school development governance conceptualise their practice, but also in understanding how they produce governance subjectivities. The subjectivity of the ‘dedicated’ participant revolved around ‘care’ and ‘sacrifice’, iterating how participants demonstrated their commitment to development through the expenditure of personal resources. Participants appeared to be leveraging a sort of relational morality in their practice of governance. In his study of government school teachers in New York, James Head (2018) defines relational morality as “not merely a cherished ideological virtue or moral stance, but their embodied sense of being in the world” (p. 217). I extend this definition to document how relational morality and care are leveraged not only for participants to justify their

participation, but also to exclude themselves from responsibility for greater structural inequalities. They present their efforts as the best they can do in a “second-best” world (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005). This subjectivity reconciles engaging with the various tensions of practicing governance and compensates for the burden of attempting to alleviate structural inequality through personal means. After arguing that the government school’s greatest flaw is its lack of accountability (which he links to the state’s lack of accountability to its citizens), Rohit imagines himself as a lone figure toiling in the day-to-day details of school governance for the sake of the children:

Rohit: There is no inspiration. I come early every day and open the school locks. There are no helpers here. If I was on leave, I would give the locks to another. I'm at school at 9.30am, and then the rest of the teachers come. At 9.45 am, we will do prayer. Some of the teachers don't come on time. They ask me, “Why did you come?” But I told them, “This is my job.”

Rohit presents himself as a teacher who not only arrives at school earlier than necessary, but also someone who spends his personal time ensuring the smooth running of the school by procuring necessities. This requires time and effort, which he contrasts with other (unspecified) teachers’ *lack* of commitment. Parents are also implicated in this, for as Radha, the headmistress had said, it was the parents’ responsibility to ensure their children had the proper paperwork for receiving their scholarships and that they were often too busy ‘making money’ (working) to do so. Rohit’s narrative is instructive in showing how a personal sense of commitment (and care) is used to accomplish several things. First of all, commitment is displayed through teachers’ fulfilling their basic responsibilities in school. When some of his colleagues question his arriving early, he replies that this is his “job.” Fulfilling the duties of his job demonstrates his commitment.

Given the temptations triggered by a lack of hard accountability, in the government school system, doing one’s job is a sign of commitment. At the same time, this demonstration sets him apart from those colleagues who arrive late (and therefore display a lack of commitment). Moreover, a commitment to teaching and governance responsibilities, is seen by him as expressly personal. Earlier, he had enumerated all the things he did to keep the school running. However, the sense of being the “lone ranger” amongst more apathetic colleagues frustrated him. The lack of peer consensus and involvement in school affairs subsequently impedes school development.

At Isila, Nimbenna noted how commitment to SDG could make unexpected demands on teachers. Nimbenna appeared to take a more positive view of his commitment when he discussed the teachers at Isila spending their own money to compensate for unsatisfactory school uniforms.

Nimbenna: First, we took money from parents, but the size (of the uniforms) did not fit. So, we brought different sizes by spending our own money. And we are happy to do that.

However, his statement, “we are happy to do that” suggests he accepts spending his money on behalf of the students and their parents. His colleague Kasturi adds to this emotive, embodied instance of care by talking of the *attitude* a teacher must demonstrate:

Kasturi: Teachers have to help, but their attitude is different from one to one. They will say, “Why we should spend our earned money on them?” (the students). They say, “Let's do it when the government provides.” Not everyone has the same attitude.

Here Kasturi holds up the example of reported conversations with other teachers, who protest at spending “our earned money” on the students. From this conversation, it does not seem that the other teachers are acting out of purely selfish motives, but are devolving responsibility back onto the state. They wish for the government to provide and cannot see why they must spend out of their pocket to provide for students’ school supplies. However, Kasturi sees this attitude as contrary to the subjectivity of the caring teacher. Caring teachers should not only supplement government provisions, but should also focus on the needs and concerns of the ones cared-for. Caring can thus lead to instances where school development targets and rules are dealt with creatively in order to accommodate resource-poor students.

Kasturi: A student in our class named Shankar, his father passed away. So he took up construction work. If he works, then he will only get a day's pay. His mother goes to work on the farm. He has one younger brother and one younger sister. If he did not go to work that day his family members would not get their daily food. He comes to school when he can, and we register his attendance because we know his situation and he is a local student. Even if he will not pay the exam fee, we will pay it.

Despite the ostensible RTE target of monitoring and minimising out-of school children, Kasturi describes making concessions to a student whose attendance is irregular because he has become a family breadwinner upon his father's death. She demonstrates Noddings' conceptualisation of care as that which "calls for human judgment across a wide range of fact and feeling," and one that "allows for situations and conditions in which judgment (in the impersonal, logical sense) may be put aside in favour of faith and commitment" (1984, p. 25). Here Kasturi demonstrates understanding that students' poverty constrains their attendance, and mentions paying his exam fees. She followed this story by explaining that she and other teachers pay for other students who cannot afford exam fees:

Kasturi: We have 34 students and we take 50 or 60 rupees from each student. With this money we have to take care of exam papers, Xerox, DTP and other expenses. They can't afford to give too much. Out of these 34 students, only 24 students pay, and we pay the rest... the money we spent for students will never come back to us. But they will come and write exams which is enough for us. That's what we want on their part.

Kasturi signals the purity of her commitment by demonstrating her understanding that the students will not be able to repay her. Whether her efforts are merely to procure student attendance at exams or whether she wants to provide as smooth a schooling experience as possible for resource-poor students is hard to determine from her interview. However, she does appear committed to improving and developing Isila school and providing better learning experiences for the students:

The participants enumerations of their efforts suggested to me that talking about commitment and care was an important facet of their governance practice. If we rely on Potter and Wetherell's (1987, p. 33) argument that talk constructs the world and alters how people's actions are perceived, then participant talk of care and commitment constructed their actions in governance. It was care which rationalized their actions and drove their commitment, care towards resource-poor children and families. Nimbenna, for example, viewed children as an integral part of the collective who should not be excluded from education. He also spoke of taking the initiative to reach out creatively to the parents in Isila, form relationships, and spark interest in their children's educational progress:

Nimbenna: Children are not apart from us. They are a part of us. They are just a part of our body. We're here only because of the students. Every child should be educated. Children should not be excluded from education. I made a WhatsApp

Group for the sake of the children. In that group all parents of the children are participants. If the children come to school irregularly, I will notify parents in the group, and I will keep them informed about their children's growth and development. I also post photos of children's activities so parents can know what their children are doing. The children will have some special talents, and the parents are attracted by seeing these group updates.

Nimbenna uses a personal metaphor (“they are part of our body”) to explain his stance on inclusivity in education. However, he also appears to draw links to this caring, personal view of children to the extra efforts he makes to build relationships with the parents. He uses technology to establish communicative links with parents. Not only can he now communicate faster with parents regarding their children’s irregular school attendance, but he can also heighten parents’ interest in their children’s school lives through sharing photographs and updates online.

Rohit at Midhol school notes that the demographic of the students, with most of them coming from the neighbouring urban-poor settlement not only raises his awareness of their circumstances, but inspires him to take the initiative in going beyond the pedagogic duties of a teacher by supporting them from his own finances.

Now I find the poor children who come to our school and help them. Knowing their problem first. Why don't they come to school? Knowing what their parents are like, I provide them with all the books, clothes and money they need. At some point those children will not have lunch, I know their pain. Lunch in the afternoon is a must. At such times I arrange food for them with my own money. Some children do not have parents. I give them money on my own to buy a book and a pen. I wrote down the name of the children who took the money on a sheet. But even if they don't return the money, that is fine.

Rohit iterates these instances of care because he believes that their lack of school attendance and family life necessitate caring and provision on his part. He empathises with their struggles: “I know their pain.” His caring is presented as going beyond governing school attendance to trying to compensate for the roots of the problem, ultimately motivated by his empathy and compassion. Nimbenna contrasts the efforts government school teachers have to make when teaching resource-poor children with the attitudes of

private school teachers, who he believes to not be motivated by actual concern for children beyond their learning:

Nimbenna: Private school teachers will not work from the bottom of their hearts. Instead, they will work to impress school founder and admin manger. In private schools they will take more money from parents and they pressurise the teachers to teach strictly. Their desire is not to change anything.

This excerpt is noteworthy for it illustrates Nimbenna's perception of the dangers of commoditized education. Although private schools provide parents with their desired teacher accountability, they are not motivated by care or desires for social change. In Kampur High school, Shoba also attached personal motives to her job, noting that her own experience of rural poverty had helped her understand her students' contexts. She had previously informed us in her interview that she had come from "a poor family in the village" and had first been a private school teacher before completing her certifications and obtaining a government school post. According to her, private school teachers cannot sufficiently respond to the constraints of poverty on children's experiences of schooling because "they are not prepared" to consider this. She also notes that she helps those students who cannot afford school supplies.

Shoba: Some children will not be able buy the books and pens which are needed for school. We find such children and will help them. Also, we tell them it's okay to not come to school regularly, but come when you can

These teachers drew a distinction between private school teachers who were, in their view, not motivated by desires to help resource-poor children and themselves. They represented themselves as responding to their students' constraints with caring behaviours that tried to balance between SDG policy mandates and students' lived experiences of poverty. For example, Shoba states that she has accepted that some students may not be able to attend school regularly, but she still encourages them to come as much as possible.

Sri, the Kannada teacher at Midhol school, explained working towards securing children's rights was filled with nuance and challenges for teachers. She highlighted how teachers lacked authority to stop child marriages once their students had left the school space.

Sri: In some cases, we all teachers prevented marriages where the parents forced to girls to get married even if their education was not completed. But such marriages cannot be prevented after the girls have completed their education. That time there will be no rights for children from our school side.

Here Sri is referring to completion of primary school. As Midhol school only had provision till Standard 7, she noted that she cannot work to secure children their rights once they have graduated from her school. Her involvement in the governance of children's rights is limited to the actual space of the school. However, she noted the pleasure and pride she and her colleagues felt upon seeing students graduate and move on with their lives. Certain students also reciprocated these caring bonds by requesting Sri to take special care of their daughters during their time in school:

Sri: Now, we are very happy if the children learn from us and move on. We are also very proud when they came here to say that they received a good education from us. Similarly, some parents of girls have given me the responsibility of their daughters. They tell us that first we teachers can educate them and then they (the parents) will marry them.

Sri feels that her efforts in caring for her students and trying to raise awareness for their rights has led to certain changes in families asking her to take care of their daughters' education and that some families seem to wish their daughters to have a primary education first before their marriages. These findings indicate that not only do teachers command respectable social positions, but their roles in bridging the school-community interface, as well as their stated personal care and motivation, allow them to build and sustain relationships with resource-poor families where they acknowledge structural constraints but also possess some influence. Such relationships help them discern the creep of social change amidst enduring structural and cultural constraints.

To illustrate this finding further, I now focus on an extended extract of Kasturi's interview, where she describes her efforts at the forefront of casteism in Isila. While acknowledging that casteism is less overt at present when compared to the past, she argues that casteist practice continues in Isilan social life, and that teachers continue to perpetrate casteism in their practices outside the schoolroom. These statements are important because they serve two purposes. One, they present Kasturi as a teacher who has internalised anti-caste policy and identifies personally with it. Another, they highlight how behaviour

*outside* the classroom is also subject to judgement in demonstrating the ‘true’ caring ethos of participants.

Kasturi:... They used to say, “he is from the Gowda (high caste) family and so we should not say anything to him.” The upper caste children used to tell the lower caste children to wash their lunch boxes, take out the trash... The son of a barber who learned at our school is now doing a good job in Bangalore. One student is doing good work in Mysore and another in Bangalore. There need not be any casteism, but the knowledge that the children have is important. I give equal importance to all children.

Kasturi talks of casteist practices in the past, where upper-caste children had lower-caste children perform tasks that highlighted the notion of impurity and uncleanness. She argues that children all deserve to be treated with equal importance, and cites examples of lower-caste children whose parents worked in culturally denigrated occupations such as barbers, studying ‘well’ and obtaining jobs in Bangalore.

For Kasturi, morality is bound up in people’s actions both in the school and community. Their willingness to transgress social taboos around caste demonstrates the extent to which casteist practices have been eradicated (or not).

Kasturi: There is no caste (discrimination) now in our school. But in the village, it's still there. All of us are invited to a housewarming, baby shower, program in their homes in the village. Some teachers do not go. I only go to everyone's house for lunch. I will go not because I don't have food, but because of love I will go to their programs. If somebody from our school who is a Lingayat or Gowda invites us for lunch, then everyone goes. If the Muslim, Lambani, and minorities invite, nobody will go. A lower-caste boy from this town built a good house... There was a program at his house, nobody went to his house for dinner. When he finished the program, he came back to school and said, “You (the teachers) did not come for dinner. At least come and see my house.” Our headmaster is very good so me and our headmaster went to see his house along with him. Only me and our headmaster had dessert in his home. The rest of them did not eat.

Kasturi’s enumeration of socially marginalised groups transcends caste (she identifies minority religious groups and nomadic people groups such as the Lambani in her narrative. Here she explicitly links her actions of visiting socially stigmatized homes with “love.” She also expresses a moral judgement: ‘our headmaster is very good’, therefore viewing



these actions as evidence of care. She underscores this by furthering the narrative. Even though the teachers were invited to a “lower-class” alumnus’s house, only she and the headmaster proved their anti-caste stance by eating dessert in his house. Notions of ritual purity dictate that upper-castes are polluted by sharing food and vessels with lower castes. In this manner, Kasturi demonstrates how her love and care are wrapped up in anti-caste sentiments that transcend policy prescriptions. Although caste discrimination is ostensibly outlawed, it persists in social practice. She points out that development and governance policy can be easy to talk about, but harder to apply.

These narratives told me that while development and governance policies were useful to participants in giving them the legal and official justification for their practice, they themselves often went *beyond* policy prescriptions, citing them as flawed, incompatible with structural realities, and easy to comply with outwardly. What set these governance actors apart was the purity of their love and care for marginalised children and communities. Care thus protected them from charges of apathy, corruption, and personal interest. Care helped participants navigate school governance. Combining love with morality, it allowed participants to emphasize the purity and sacrifice of their commitment while also affording them the means to explain apathy, absence, and corruption. Participants strove to work out developmental targets and frequently quoted either national rights such as the RTE or children’s rights as their guide and benchmark. However, they also emphasized that their attempts to bring children to school, develop existing infrastructure, and to pay for supplies did not derive from policy prescription alone. They saw their efforts as springing from a personal well of love, a relational morality that distanced them from the apathy engendered by a lack of hard accountability.

Not only did they use this discourse to rationalise their efforts, they also viewed other players in the school arena through the same lens. Teachers and parents were judged according to criteria of care, which they could only prove through ‘commitment’ to development. Parental apathy was ‘understood’ in one sense (since they needed to work to survive), but also framed as almost neglect of their children’s educational development:

Guruprasad: It is difficult for parents to participate in child development. Even though we say to parents that their children are not attending school, parents do not take any notice of that matter. We have to call parents, yet they never come and know about their children's development. Some children are too behind for learning without attending school, in such cases parents need to know about that themselves

and send their children to school. We as a teacher also need to convince parents.

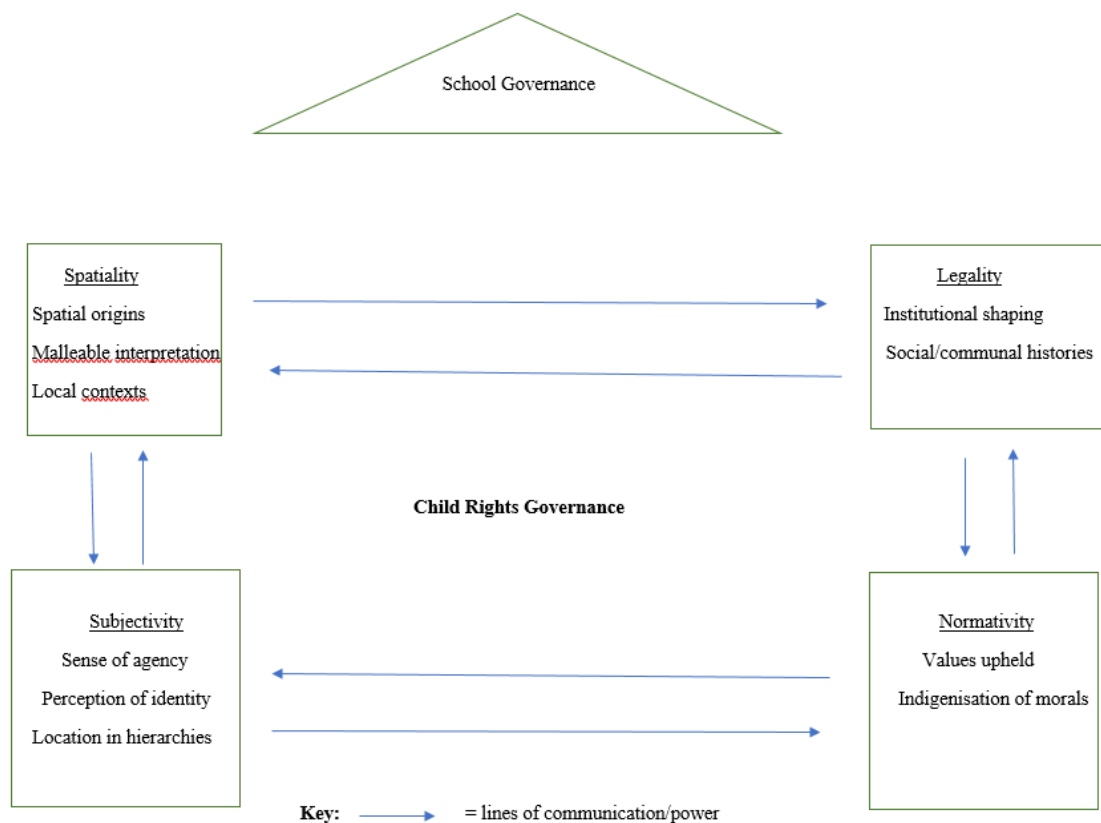
Parents who were ‘motivated’ and ‘interested’ were the ones who formed relationships with school staff and joined the SDMC, providing physical labour and supplies for construction work and celebrations, and enforcing their children’s regular attendance at school. Through these actions they became not only ‘development-minded’ but also demonstrated their care for their children. Teachers who did not join in or who questioned the efforts of their colleagues were perceived as apathetic. They didn’t really care, they had no ‘fear’, and they sealed the nails on the coffin of indifference by sending their own children to private schools. Care thus emerged as a key discourse and practice in the day-to-day efforts to develop the school and its associated communities.

### **Discussion of Major Themes in the Practice of School Development Governance**

This section will elaborate upon the findings and in the context of the wider literature on education, governance, and school development. I will first summarise the major themes from the findings according to the analytical framework proposed by Holzcheiter *et al* (2019) and then unpack their implications and contributions to the evolving study of school governance and development in India. I will expand upon care as the primary motivator and driver in participant governance practice.

#### **Summary of Major Themes in the Findings**

To summarise the findings, major themes can be discerned under the four main dimensions of the analytical model I have constructed.



Key themes arising under spatiality from the findings are:

- i) the clash of rural resource-poor livelihoods with a government school system more aligned to urban middle-class livelihoods. Children and their parents find it difficult to balance rigid school schedules with agricultural cycles. Teachers express a mix of frustration/understanding when children miss school to help their parents in the field or when parents miss SDMC meetings because of work. Policy mandates enforcing daily school attendance are not structured with rural livelihoods in mind. However, the case of Midhol school illustrated that *urban poor livelihoods also* constrain parents from participating in SDMCs. These findings demonstrate the impact of local contexts on policy implementation.
- ii) School design and infrastructure play an important role in imparting messages of school quality. The desires and efforts of families to improve the aesthetics of the government school so that it looks like a private school demonstrate a wish to spatially appropriate middle-class/ elite school spaces. This indicates a *malleable interpretation* of school development governance goals.

- iii) Malleable interpretation was also demonstrated through the ethic of care. Teachers especially admitted to not strictly enforcing the ‘rules’ of governance in order to respond sensitively to their students’ struggles.

These are the key subjectivities arising from the findings

- i) Teachers as accountable for consistent teaching and commitment to school development goals. Commitment is not only characterised through regular school attendance and teaching, but also spending one’s time, creative and relational efforts, to working towards school development goals.
- ii) Parents and children as responsible for persisting with schooling despite their lived constraints of illiteracy and low-paid livelihoods. Together with acknowledgement that poverty challenged their schooling was the expectation by teachers and some students that children still had the responsibility for attending school and parents had the responsibility for encouraging and facilitating their schooling. Parents and children who did not attend school, dropped out, or who did not participate in the SDMC were spoken of as not showing ‘interest.’
- iii) SDMC members as potential change-makers in the school-community nexus. Participants from Isila’s SDMC pointed to not only the physical transformations they had achieved, but also took the ownership afforded by the SDMC to weave in their own desires and re-construct themselves as actors with an interest in school management and development.

These subjectivities arise mainly from *perceptions of identity and location in hierarchies*. Their SDG practice appears driven by their perceptions of themselves as caring individuals. As teachers are located higher in the social hierarchy as well as in the hierarchy of accountability, they are key SDG actors. Their paternalism is demonstrated through ‘care’ levelled for children, while their participation is recorded working towards vivifying campaigns and school-community programs.

However, participants’ *sense of agency* complicated their practices in school development governance. Their sense of agency was also informed by their location in hierarchies. Specifically, in the hierarchy of accountability, the agency of parents and children to hold teachers accountable (‘hard accountability’) is constrained by power residing at higher levels, which also accounts for tokenistic participation (demonstrated by the SC mothers I interviewed) and parent preference for private schools. This lack of accountability ultimately complicates the efforts of committed teachers as well.

Other child rights issues such as child marriage and child labour were also discussed in association to the RTE, cementing the image of education *with* rights or education rights. The RTE was utilised as a blueprint for school development governance practice and structured the activities and boundaries of school development.

- i) The RTE set the government school apart as an institution that encouraged development as well as education. This is an instance of *institutional shaping*. Unlike private schools, which my participants argued were devoted solely to the business of education, government schools were expected to address the barriers of resource-poor students by providing meals and scholarships combined with child-centred pedagogies and parent-school partnerships in SDMCs. In practice, it seemed that the RTE mandate against out-of-school children was the most difficult to comply with, since the mandate did not deal in a nuanced or holistic manner with resource-poor family contexts.

In this chapter, several normativities cropped up in the findings. These revolved around:

- i) The commitment to the well-being of children, a commitment that was ‘proven’ in practice. This commitment was underscored by balancing working towards the goals of school and children’s rights governance with trying to ease the twin burdens of poverty and schooling for resource-poor students. This commitment was framed as an ethics of care and an instance of *values upheld* when navigating the governance landscape.
- ii) An apathetic state/school system with apathy a fixed feature of the educational and political landscapes. SDG efforts and parent choice of private schooling were cited as different ways to counter systemic apathy.
- iii) Private, English-medium education as quality education. This norm appeared upheld by participants citing the growing and enduring popularity of private schools, despite their contribution to India’s crisis of educational inequality.

From this chapter, these are the salient themes of school development governance in practice. These themes inform participant navigation of the governance landscape and contribute to their experiences of tensions in school development governance.



Spatiality

Rural-poor  
Livelihoods  
Urban-poor  
livelihoods  
School Aesthetics

Legality

RTE- Out of school  
children  
Child marriages

Subjectivity

Teachers as Accountable  
for Consistent Teaching  
Parents and Children as  
Accountable for “interest”  
in learning.  
SDMC members as  
potential change-makers

Normativity

Apathetic  
government/system  
Quality of Private Schooling  
Commitment (care)  
demonstrated through  
personal effort

These findings must not be read as representative of SDG practice. However, as Bevir and Rhodes (2011) note in *The Stateless State*, the aim of a decentered study of governance is not to generate “a list of general features or essential properties that are supposed to characterise governance in every instance” (p. 205). Rather, it is to grow aware of diverse practices composed of multiple individuals acting on changing webs of beliefs rooted in overlapping traditions” (p. 205). Focusing on a diverse tapestry of participant ‘groups’ reveals these competing and varied perspectives, and gives us as scholars of education an understanding of the challenges participants face in reinterpreting and moulding school development policy through their actions. From the themes emerging from participant narratives, it appears that the threads which hold this diversity of practices and experiences together are spun from the discourse and practice of an ethics of care.

### **The Meanings and Functions of Accountability in School Development Governance Practice**

One of the promises of participation in SDG is increased accountability of school staff and the state educational apparatus to resource-poor communities. However, the findings indicate that teaching staff and education officials can continue to evade being held accountable. Indeed, there appears almost disproportionate focus on achieving RTE targets such as ensuring all children are in school. Teachers and parents thus grapple with increased responsibilities in addition to their existing work demands. In addition, the accountability parents and the greater community can demand through SDMCs is a ‘soft’ accountability achieved with greater monitoring and inclusion of marginalized parents. Moreover, the data suggested that “what counts” as accountability depended on how participants conceptualised accountability (Fox, 2007, p. 664). Although the view that accountability as the ability to demand answers, i.e., answerability (Schedler, 1999) has been condemned by Teo & Osborne (2014) as overly simplistic, given that SDMC participation didn’t ensure “hard” accountability, it seemed that the answerability afforded by it was not necessarily potent. Moreover, accountability was imagined less along lines of development and more along expectations of professionalism. These differing understandings of accountability challenged its coherence as a practice. For example, parents and non-teaching participants imagined teacher professional accountability as consistent presence and dedication to children’s learning. Although this accountability may also tie into expectations of quality learning, which correlates students’ test performance with teacher quality (Sockett, 1976), the emphasis appeared to be less on student performance than consistent teacher presence and effort.

This desire for consistence and dedication to their duties didn't only arise from parent participants. Certain teacher participants such as Rohit, Kasturi and Nimbenna also mentioned the importance of teachers arriving to school on time and not taking frequent leaves-of-absence. They believed their efforts at governing school development were hampered by their less dedicated peers. Additionally, they also expected institutional and personal accountability from social and political elites. They thus sought accountability across the entire collective of governance actors. They argued that officials and upper-class elites failed to hold themselves accountable to their own policy visions for educational equality by sending their children to private schools. Moreover, the quota reserved for marginalised students to attend private schools was seen by some such as Vinod and Saraswati as tacit permission from elites for private school growth.

The findings from this research support findings from research on school governance in other LMIC countries such as Uganda- namely, that lack of hard accountability mechanisms do little to mitigate conditions of education inequality (Suzuki, 2002). This lack of perceived institutional and professional accountability may account for parent preference for private schooling. Hirschman's (1970) notions of exit, where participants display their dissatisfaction with a service by leaving, theoretically reflects the observations that many participants made on the popularity and growth of private schooling. However, this exit (by all save the poorest socioeconomic classes) was perceived by participants to ultimately damage educational provision for the poor. Considering the significance of social norms in childhood adds in another revealing element: Pink and Leszczensky (2015) argue that segregation in children's school social networks reflects the prevailing social stance on class integration.

Accountability appeared strongly associated with responsibility more than transparency, which is reinforced by literature that stresses correlations between notions of accountability and moral responsibility (Fearon, 1999). Indeed, Cornwall *et al.* (2000)'s concept of accountability rests on ideas of both responsibility and responsiveness. Hence participants enumerated all that they had done to respond to SDG policy. A major critique of participatory governance in LMICs is the extra (unpaid) labour that resource-poor communities are expected to expend for their own development. The data my participants provided did in some ways support this critique. What seemed apparent was not merely a decentralisation of authority, but rather a decentralisation of *responsibility* where "community management represented a radical decentralisation of responsibility from paid experts of unpaid amateurs" (Chowns, 2015, p. 35).



In the communities of Isila and Midhol, authority continued to be seen as resting in the hands of social and political elites. In Midhol school, the parents expressed their dissatisfaction through their exit of governance participation. However, this meant that there were no parent perspectives and influence in governing Midhol school. No SDMC meant no participation at all. Meanwhile, Isila, whose SDMC had received an award for the best SDMC in the *taluk*, exemplified the complexity of applying democratic governance policies in hopes of addressing social hierarchies. A couple of the SC participants explained to me that their participation was tokenistic and that they followed the plans of the school staff. Mansuri and Rao's (2013) distinction between *emergent participation* and *induced participation* is helpful here. For these SC participants, the induced participation of the SDMC did not challenge existing social hierarchies or lead these participants to feel they could meaningfully contribute (empowerment).

However, for some other participants and the SDMC president (who was of a dominant caste), their induced participation had led them to evolve understandings of their capabilities for school change. Their understanding of social change rested less on destabilising social hierarchies and more on using their governance powers to materially visualise their dream school. Therefore, although McCourt (2013) was referring to the political aspect of decentralisation in that it becomes "all things to all people", in the case of Isila's SDMC, community members appeared to combine personal desires and understandings of quality education together with the ostensibly political and social goals of the RTE. Their actions also illustrate the prismatic nature of unpaid labour. Building on the critiques of scholars who question the justice of imposing additional responsibilities on marginalised groups, the case of Isila suggests that certain community members appear willing to exert this labour to achieve a certain vision. Their attempts to make Isila government school look like a private school so that the students can have 'the feeling' of attending private school points to appropriating their governance powers to resist class-based practices of educational distinction.

If education, as Jeffrey *et al.* (2004) argue is "a form of achieved social identity" then the form of schooling that Isila's governance actors sought to mimic conveys an understanding of the social identity they internalise as desirable. Their actions also indicate that Foucault's notion of governmentality is not as absolute if governmentality is associated with internalising the RTE's developmental goals. Rather, Bourdieu's (1989) argument that disadvantaged social actors invest in education to obtain cultural capital appears a stronger inducement here, with the type of schooling (i.e. private) strongly

associated with cultural capital. Together with the voices of the other participants, my findings demonstrated personal motivations and care were integral to SDG practice.

### **Linking Care and Education**

The major research question I posed in this thesis asked how participants navigated the governance landscape. It was a fairly broad question that sought to understand the underlying motivations, discourse, and practice of participants grappling with fusing governance policy mandates to their beliefs, perceptions, and practices of schooling. Given the diverse social backgrounds of my participants, I anticipated different responses. However, by importing a focus on children as key social actors from Childhood Studies, I discerned participants' emphasis on relationality and care. For my participants, the discourse and practice of governance extended beyond technical difficulties and structural constraints to encompass a personal-moral-relational perspective of their actions. Their stance not only allowed them to make meaning, and reconcile the tensions and challenges of practicing governance, but also allowed them to critique the actions of other stakeholders in education.

At the turn of the twentieth century, educator John Dewey was instrumental in advocating a philosophy that instrumentalised education's ends for social change. Dewey (1923, p. 99) envisioned education as one "which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes." Education was therefore imbued with the discourse of emotions and relationships. In Dewey's progressive vision of education, students' learning could potentially be parlayed into social change on behalf of the oppressed. Dewey's legacy is evident in the field of critical pedagogy, which "is fundamentally committed to the development and evolvment of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students" (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003).

However, Dewey's contribution also impacted the way *teaching* and stakeholder involvement in education was perceived (Head, 2018). Although altruism takes precedence over extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for students pursuing a teaching profession in global North countries such as Canada and the US (Stielgelbauer, 1992; Hayes, 1990), Bastick (2000) noted that in global South countries, teaching was regarded as a secure form of employment. His surveys and interviews with teacher trainees across Jamaica revealed that while altruistic, extrinsic, and intrinsic motivations were given by the trainees, extrinsic motivation emerged as the most important. He concluded that in Northern economies, teaching was viewed as a comparably lesser-paid profession than

others, hence teachers' altruistic motivations, while in Southern countries, teaching, especially government teaching, was a profession seen as both socially respectable and secure. In addition, in Olashinde's early (1972) study of teacher motivations in Nigeria, he attributed "mercenary" (extrinsic) reasons, but also highlighted how teaching was seen as service to the nation.

More recent studies of teacher motivation in Turkey and Myanmar suggest that while extrinsic motivation remain a dominant force, it is difficult to generalise based on the closeness of the data between the three main motivation types ( Yuce *et al*, 2012; Htang, 2019). In the global South, care may therefore be expressed differently and co-exist with these aforementioned beliefs and motivations. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss motivation, save to contextualize my discussion on care. Many empirical studies on teacher motivation focus on pre-service teachers (Struyven *et al.*, 2013; Yuce *et al.*, 2012; Suryani, 2020), limiting the field of knowledge to motivations outside of the day-to-day practice of teaching. However, studies analysing teacher life-histories (McLeod, 2017) show care for students as a motivating factor in teacher effort and self-improvement. In my participant narratives, care appeared foundational both in their governance practice and in the personal ways they related with children.

### **Functions of Care in School Development Governance**

The stories that participants told me of their efforts in practicing governance suggested to me that care was fundamental in helping them navigate their governance responsibilities in an unequal landscape. A large part of this care stemmed from identifying personally with children. As one of the mothers told me, "I am happy if my children are happy." These avowals of care, instances of 'covering' (such as Kasturi's registering of absent labouring students) (Luttrell, 2020, p. 204) and the many efforts participants enumerated to me, encompassed more than discussions of the technical aspects of school governance. As I have demonstrated in my review of the literature, much empirical work on schooling in India has revolved around the 'wicked' problems of development: of assessing rural student achievement, calculating teacher absence, and investigating the effects of the RTE. Complementing quantitative studies are the sociological studies which have drawn attention to the ways in which casteist and classist inequalities endure despite the advance of rights-based education policy reform. What my data also brought to light was how care and its intersection with school development governance in India had not received sufficient scholarly attention.

I chose a qualitative approach to better understand how participants in Kalaburagi understood and practiced governance. This methodological approach follows an understanding of governance as a social practice that is constructed and sustained through networks of relationships and interaction (Crossley, 2010). The emphasis here is on the processual nature of social phenomena (Abbott, 2020). For my participants, governance knowledge and practice are intertwined with past experiences, future hopes, and ways of perceiving identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Care therefore appeared instrumental in navigating the complex landscape of governance, which could perpetuate both empowering and paternalistic views of the resource-poor.

Participants distinguished the care they engaged in as more relational and responsive than the rule-based approach of the RTE. While they gave importance to children's right to education, they also used care to establish moral authenticity in their governance practice. As Noddings (1984) writes "We want to be *moral* in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring." (p. 26) Moreover, they stressed the relational aspect of care over one favoured "by law and principle" to further differentiate their practice from the rule-based character of the RTE. The law-and-principle approach Noddings characterises as "the detached one, of the father" (p. 25) and contrasts it with "the receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness" of "the approach of the mother" (p. 25). In using gendered terms, Noddings is not making a reductionist statement so much as promoting a paradigm that employs understanding affect and emotions, which she sees just as important to care as "law and principle." Through the difficulties of practicing governance, participants relied more on the affective personal iteration of care than the law of the RTE.

Emphasizing care also helps exonerate participants from governance failures. This supports Taylor's (1992) theorisation of fostering a "culture of authenticity" when embarking on relationships of responsibility. Participants can be 'true to themselves' while also referring to external points of reference such as the RTE. Using care to prove their authenticity simultaneously questions the authenticity of government officials, teachers, and parents who do not 'care' about the resource-poor enough to commit to the project of educational inequality. However, invoking others' lack of care did not only absolve the participants, it also supported their assertion that people across the collective (regardless of direct involvement in school governance) should work together in a framework of care to address structural divisions.

What my participants appeared to desire was what Reyes (2020, p. 13) has designated as "integrated networks of care": a framework she offers which "can mobilize multiple

people... to work across divisions and collectively care for students at an institutional level.” This “communal care at a structural level” appears to be what participants are reaching for when they discuss their difficulties in reconciling poverty, apathy and governance duties. Although Reyes (2020) is specifically referring to marginalized Latinx students in her research, her assertion encompasses the intersection of schooling and poverty more generally. She writes that, “in order for care for historically marginalized students whose personal and academic needs overflow traditional classroom boundaries, and who face injustice and stigma in their everyday lives, it takes an integrated practice from multiple bodies, spaces, and communities (inside and outside of school) (p. 13).”

The themes in this chapter invoke the need for an integrated practice of SDG, articulated by my participants in their censuring of commoditized education and their cataloguing of personal acts of care, which alone can never seem enough. In the next chapter, I extend my focus to how participants navigate the governance of children’s rights in resource-poor communities. I will incorporate visual-arts based data from students in Isila and Midhol to shed light on their perspectives on school and community. Although the data collected is mostly ‘adult-centric’; through including children’s voices, I hope to take children seriously as witnesses to their experiences, no matter where they ‘fit’ into child development discourses (Luttrell, 2020, p. 24.) Therefore, although my students did not necessarily engage in discussions about governance itself, their contributions impact my presentation and understanding of the practice of SDG.

## Chapter 6 Children's Rights and Governance Practice in Karnataka

The previous chapter enumerated the findings and discussed them in the context of school development governance practice. Each major theme pointed to care as the heart of SDG practice. Care was also useful in navigating the tensions of SDG, a chief source of tension which revolved around governing education as a single right rather than an assortment of rights. Participants also wrestle with governing a policy which does not necessarily align with resource-poor family realities. Moreover, the dual nature of governance exacerbates participants' sense of dissonance. Neoliberal expansions of school development such as encouraging private players stands at odds with policy goals of empowerment.

This chapter extends the thematic focus from SDG to children's rights governance. It examines participant narratives to further develop the importance of care in their governance practice. As a point of reference, it relies on a typology of children's rights which are divided into rights of protection and provision and rights of participation (voice). This typology of rights is drawn from Reynaert *et al's* (2015) breakdown of the types of children's rights in the UNCRC<sup>44</sup>. I have previously alluded to this typology in Chapter 3. For the sake of this thesis, I have simplified this typology by combining rights of protection with rights of provision to contrast with rights of participation. My decision is also informed by close reading of the RTE, whose child-centered agenda emphasises children's right to be protected from abuse and neglect along with the provision of quality schooling.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, the findings from the previous chapter suggests that in governance policies, protection rights are prioritized over children's rights of participation. This brings us to the purpose of children's rights, which Eugene Verhellen, in his (1994) review of the UNCRC divides into three. He argues that the CRC's suite of educational rights can viewed as the right *to* education, rights *in* education and rights *through* education. The right *to* education should guarantee educational equality and work towards educational equity. Children's rights *in* education are experienced through enabling freedom of participation and expression and promoting a schooling experience free of violence and

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<sup>44</sup> This breakdown is also followed by Alderson *et al.* (2008) in their book *Young Children's Rights: Exploring Beliefs, Principles, and Practice*.

<sup>45</sup> The 39 Sections of the RTE deal with either protection (such as prohibition of corporal punishment) or provision (such as curriculum and training resources) but do not mention children's rights of participation.

abuse (Covell *et al.*, 2017). And finally, *through* their education, they can understand and practice their rights.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will use Verhellen's division to chart participant responses and understanding of the purposes of rights. In this chapter, I will also focus especially on NGO workers/activists, who inhabit the "third space" (Maclure, 2016) of children's rights governance. Their interviews disclose two themes which I shall examine in parallel. One is the work of children's rights facilitation: the roles that activists inhabit when attempting to bridge conceptual and experiential bridges between participatory governance and communities. As facilitators, activists tread a cautious ground in guiding children towards greater political action and within the parameters of the participatory systems set in place. They balance a social tightrope when communicating with various officials of the state, some of whom actively oppose their attempts to stimulate the political participation of resource-poor groups. Activist participants cite examples of the tension between upholding children's rights and understanding that many disadvantaged families act in opposition to these rights out of a need for survival. Importantly, these activists emphasized the need for their roles as guides and facilitators of children's rights governance. Facilitation is crucial to affording a zone of proximal development for disadvantaged families and their children to learn and grow in political expression.

In the protectionist/ provisionist reading of rights which largely prevailed, children were perceived as empty vessels or vulnerable entities to be nurtured/cared for rather than political actors that function as social 'consciences.' However, the activists highlight the centrality of participatory school governance bodies such as SDMCs and children's rights governance bodies such as children's parliaments to children's political and social mobilisation. The second theme explores how children can function as social consciences. While children use the RTE to demand rights *in* education as well as rights *to* education (Bajaj, 2014), some children also use these spaces to address development 'problems' in their communities. They derive confidence and knowledge in approaching higher authorities and in demanding accountability (as answerability). Children's political mobilisation blended with their affective power makes them key players in demanding accountability. Both these narratives underscore the theme of disadvantaged children and families as *learners* in participatory development governance. Moreover, what Tomasevski (2001) refers to as the four A's of a holistic right to education (availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability) is helpful in understanding the current limits of government schooling in Karnataka, where the focus remains on securing availability and accessibility over acceptability and adaptability).



**Figure 24 Types of and spaces for children's rights governance in Karnataka referred to by participants**

The following sections examine how interviews with children's rights activists furnish another viewpoint from which to examine the playing out of children's rights in school development governance. Unlike the teachers and parents interviewed, these activists further a conceptualisation of children as social and political actors who are nonetheless vulnerable because of current power asymmetries. They discuss how legislation around children's unions, children's parliaments, and SDMCs help fashion platforms for children to develop their social and political 'voices.' On the flip side, they argue that children continue to remain vulnerable in the face of personal and systemic abuse, and advocate for adults to act as 'helpers' or 'friends' in the child's trajectory as a social actor. Their experiences in labouring as facilitators of governance reveal the personal cost, strategic positioning, and relational understanding they highlight as essential to these roles. On the one hand, they argue, the flourishing of children's rights represents a positive avenue for children to grow as political actors and report on abuses. On the other hand, these opportunities also jeopardise children's personal safety, and come at a cost to children and their communities.

The latter half of the chapter examines contributions made by children in arts-based group interviews at Isila and Midhol. These interviews had been conducted in the first phase of fieldwork and were meant to capture children's stated views on their community and school. These interactions with the students countered the 'deficit' discourses surrounding resource-poor communities and lifestyles. The children revealed a deep appreciation for green spaces and aesthetics, choosing to focus on the positive and



celebratory aspects of their daily lives. This environmental appreciation extended also to students from Midhol, despite their habitation in an informal settlement with little access to green space. The students made connections between personal and psychosocial well-being and nature. Such discussions often tend to be missing in the empirical literature on children from the Global South, which often elicits painful narratives of living with disadvantage. Here I wish to go beyond narratives of precarity and pain. While I do not intend to depreciate painful narratives, foregrounding children's validation of their contexts advances a political agenda that asks us to consider their communities not merely as projects to be improved and developed.

This chapter thus advances empirical food for thought in showing how the output-focused practice of RTE governance both simplifies and masks the complexity of resource-poor children's lives. On the other hand, participatory governance embedded in the government school system affords children and families a chance to hold powerful actors accountable. I conclude that tensions are further exacerbated due to the complex interplay of norms and subjectivities discussed in the previous chapter. Rights can empower, but they can also *disempower*. Rights can stigmatize families, but they can also be used by families to spark change.

### **Right as Rules**

Both teachers and activists cited textual sources as foundational to their actions and identity vis-à-vis children's rights. The teachers tended to rely on textual material from educational institutions, while activists cited legal/ international institutional policies and rights codes. Not only did textual sources justify their actions and positions regarding children and children's rights, but they also helped credentialise teachers and activists' work with children. Some participants, however, did not see the need for specific learning or training in children's rights. Nimbenna argued that even though he didn't have formal training in children's rights, his university degree and status as a teacher sufficed:

Nimbenna: I have been in this school for three years. I have not got any training. Others have got training about children's rights. But not me. As a teacher we know the children's rights. As a teacher I know the rights of children like, how is the level of intelligence of children? Having studied psychology, I am aware about their behaviour and am able to understand the children.

Nimbenna reifies the subjectivity of teachers as experts, who, thanks to their education and subsequent credentials, have acquired knowledge about children. His educational

credentials and learning enable him to “understand children.” However, rather than children’s rights, he appears to rely on a view imported from developmental psychology and conflates children’s intelligence levels with their rights. Despite the contested ground of rating intelligence quotients and whether they actually predict academic and future success, notions of innate intelligence continue to exercise a powerful hold on the social imagination. Nimbenna’s mention of children’s intelligence levels rather than their rights parallels studies on Indian teachers who categorize their students as “bright” or “dull” on the basis of their academic performance (Paik, 2009; Sucharita, 2014; Bose, 2020). It also underscores the anxieties of Childhood scholars who have pointed to how developmental psychology and positivist attitudes towards intelligence and academic assessments can distort children’s capabilities.

Nimbenna’s colleague Kasturi also claimed rights training as unnecessary. She felt that she had familiarised herself though the rights texts that were present in the school, inscribed on the backs of textbooks and enshrined in the constitution:

Kasturi: There is no need for training on child rights Madam. There is a lesson in our social science book called “Rights”. From the time we learn, there is the subject of children's rights. It also comes in the Constitution... And behind every single book, along with the national anthem, children’s rights are also written. They include the right to live freely for children, the right to educate children. No one has the right to abuse the children. The government has set free education for children from ages 6-14. All rights were written in the back of the book.

Kasturi makes the case against further training, arguing that the texts serve as training enough. In confronting rights texts on a daily basis (at the back of school books), she feels that she has gained enough familiarity with them and can enumerate a number of them. Thus, she appears to view training as the acquisition of more textual information. She underscores the entangling of education and children’s rights, noting that “from the time we start learning, there is the subject of children’s rights.”

Both Nimbenna and Kasturi reinforced a perception of knowledge as primarily textual, acquired through written texts, and certified by degrees. Therefore, they discount the idea of further training on children’s rights, claiming that their knowledge of rights texts suffices. Alderson (2008) suggests that a deep engagement with rights is borne out of relationships founded on evolving knowledge and engagement; however these teachers perceived knowledge as fixed and acquired through formal schooling and texts.

Sri in Midhol school claimed that her exposure and understanding of children's rights stemmed from orders from the government and from the books they provided.

Sri: We only have orders from the government. I have not taken training. They give us books on rights and tell us to read (them). There may be training from the government, but I have not participated.

Sri's experience appears to support the experience of Nimbenna and Kasturi in Isila, where the focus is on the rules of rights and the associated informational content rather than on reaching an understanding of rights as processes or co-construction. For these participants, rights are introduced as rules. Viewing rights as not just rules, but also as structures, processes, and relationships (Galant & Parlevliet, 2005) can help participants to understand the rights as social constructions while developing responses pertinent to local contexts (Morrow & Pells, 2012).

These teachers' conflation of knowledge as text-based is worth considering from a policy perspective. Widening perspectives on knowledge (that it can take other forms such as relational and practical) can propel possibilities of change and inclusion. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, parents can feel that they do not possess knowledge if they are illiterate. Extending the definition of knowledge beyond one that is textual and acquired through formal schooling schooling can therefore scaffold inclusion of parental knowledge and encourage their contributions to school development governance practice.

Other teachers also displayed discursive confusion when discussing children's rights. For example, Guruprasad tied children's rights to opportunities and material goods provided by the government.

Guruprasad: Children's rights means the facilities they receive from the government, such as clothes and lunch from the government. Similarly, the right to educate children systematically.

Here Guruprasad sees children's rights in the light of providing for children (rights of provision), itemizing the material goods they receive from the government and focusing on the right *to* education. He also sees the school as the site of learning about the rules of rights, noting that his school has erected a board listing the various rights and that they have received training from education officials and activists.

We have put a board to educate on the rights of the children in the school. People from the Children's Rights Commission come to conduct programs on children's rights. We recently did two programs on children's rights at our school. Officers from the NGO and the Education Department came to conduct the program.

Thus, for these teachers, this 'textual knowledge' suffices in their practice of governing children's rights. They conceived of rights as rules to be memorised like other forms of textual knowledge. Rights of provision remained largely unquestioned. What was acknowledged was that rights re-structured the relationship between teachers and students that (certainly at the policy level). This re-structuring of authority and the emphasis on children's rights leads teachers such as Shoba to perceive that *teacher's rights* are now under threat.

Rebecca: What do you understand about children rights and what do you know about children's rights?

Shoba: Granting rights to children is a good thing, but some rights are against us. One of them is that we shouldn't hit the students. And we shouldn't even glare at them. If we do like this, that is not good. Totally, we should not punish them.

Shoba perceives rights in a sort of transactional sense: greater emphasis on children's rights and freedoms paradoxically infringes upon teacher's rights 'to punish' the children. Doing away with corporal punishment dilutes teacher's perceived range of power and challenges pre-established conceptions of authority. For Shoba, the rights of protection that outlawed physical punishment deprived her of some of *her* (perceived) rights as a teacher. Rights reconfigure care into an explicitly 'softer', more 'loving' mode, as Shoba notes. For her 'fear' is an appropriate psychic state for children in the student-teacher relationship. This fear is perceived as a precursor to the respect and seriousness they must display towards their teachers and studies:

Shoba: There is no fear of teachers in today's children. Because the government has done that. Children should not be beaten. Children will have fear if the teachers have the stick to beat them. In this school, the children will be afraid only of me and another teacher as well. If we did not have sticks with us, children would not fear.

She perceives the lack of fear in ‘today’s children’ as a direct result of government insistence on children’s rights and thus stresses a view of children as delinquent beings who need to be disciplined into right ways. However, she views discipline as an act of love and reflects that with the changes in government policy, the teacher balances between enacting the role of stern disciplinarian and friend:

We have to be friends with children, but sometimes we have to be tough also. They share their problems with us because they feel we are like their friends. We will be like how we should be inside the classroom, but outside the classroom we are free with them. So, they come and share the problems of their home.

Although Shoba appears to mourn the diminishing of teacher authority by children’s rights, she believes that teachers must reconcile the ‘tough’ demeanour of a disciplinarian with that of a confidante or friend. She responds to the dilemma by constructing spatial boundaries within the school to enact these roles. For Massey (2005) space is defined less through material criteria and more through interactions and relationships- what goes on, around, and through a space. Burnett (2014) reinforces this perspective by commenting on the fluidity and hybridity of classrooms and how relationships and classroom practices configure its space. The classroom is the space where Shoba asserts her authority, while outside class, she can be approached as a friend. This approach appears to suit both her students and herself, since she can hold on to her authority and also provide an alternative adult presence if her students need a safe confidante.

### **Rights Texts as Justification for Activist Stance & Labour**

Textual sources of knowledge about rights also played an important role in modifying participant’s attitudes towards children’s rights governance. Activists such as Pramila and Vinod cited textual sources in reorienting their thinking around children and children’s rights. Pramila indeed drew personal ‘inspiration’ from the UNCRC, confessing her admiration for it and using it to explain her stance of ‘love’ towards children:

When it comes to children, we don't let go, but society doesn't support us. My organization is the inspiration for me. I have a child studying in 8th grade. My husband is also working. I love children very much from the beginning. If something happens to the children, the first thing that comes to my mind is to

protect them. I am so attached to children. I have studied the Children's Right Covenant (UNCRC), which I like very much. The first barrier to children's rights is from the family, not from any institution. For that we need to look at children's rights as a family. That is to see if the child is going to school or not in our neighbourhood family.

Pramila frames the link between children and adults as one of attachment. This attachment anchors children into the collective. Like Nimbenna's metaphor of seeing children as 'part of us', she invokes the image of a family to express how her work is infused with both moral and personal meaning. Looking at children as part of her family allows her to step outside the role of an outsider and conveys the authority and responsibility usually held by a family member.

For Vinod, children's rights of participation in the UNCRC served as one of the inspirations for him to advocate for the inclusion of child members in Karnataka's SDMCs:

Vinod: In the beginning, when the government asked us to conceptualise SDMCs, we thought about what should be the constitution?... Because for ten to fifteen schools there was only one committee. So when we started dialogue with the committee and all, everyone felt it's good to have representation for children because children also need a forum. And this is also because one of the core principles of UNCRC is child participation. And ... it's an opportunity for children to tell what they think about their school. And what kind of food they want to eat as part of the midday meal. Or what kind of teacher they want. All these things...some kind of sharing their thoughts...

For Vinod, the UNCRC's promotion of children's rights to participate led to him and his NGO advocating for child representation in SDMCs. While he noted that dialogue with committee members was also responsible for the inclusion of children, he stressed that the 'core' principle of participation in the UNCRC was also influential. In addition, children's rights appeared to responsabilize its adherents to care. Pramila noted that studying children's rights had stirred her sense of personal responsibility and situates this responsibility as present and ongoing, rather than deferred. For her, rights must be activated in the present. She traced how rights have influenced how children are viewed,

from a sense that they are citizens of the future to an understanding that they are citizens *now*.<sup>46</sup>

Pramila: When we study children's rights and human rights, we feel that it is our responsibility. First there was a proverb "Today's children are tomorrow's citizens", but now it has changed to "Today's children are citizens of this time". From this point of view, we need to care about children. So do today's work today itself instead of tomorrow. Similarly, the child should get what he needs at this time. Because of all this there is concern for children. Then there will be peace of mind - mainly the mind. You can work comfortably for a salary, but not peace of mind.

Rather than thinking of children as citizens in a political sense (i.e. as actors), she ascribes a vulnerable status to them and states her duty of providing both material assistance and concern. Thus, children's rights can offer children chances to participate politically, but they can also reinforce conceptualisations of childhood as a fragile state that must be protected and provided for. This may explain why some participants (Pramila, Nimbenna, Kasturi, Saraswati, Sri) focused on children's rights which protected and provided for children over those which promoted their political and social participation.

Among my participants, Vinod, Nivedita, and Bina were the only ones who discussed children's rights to participation. This reflects the broader governance dilemma between encouraging participation from marginalised groups and reproducing paternalistic attitudes. Pramila raises another important impact children's rights has in her work. Rights stoke her efforts to work on behalf of her children; they remind her that it is her "responsibility." By working to secure children their rights, she can obtain "peace of mind", which she rates higher than a salary. Her trials and efforts are rewarded with this peace. For Pramila textual forms of rights thus not only inform, they also exert a powerful accountability over her inner consciousness.

### **Seeing Children and their Rights: Empty Vessels Vs. Social Actors**

Reverting to social conceptualisations of childhood prepares the ground to examine how children's rights, specifically the right to education, are navigated by families and teachers. Nivedita, a child rights' activist in Bangalore, perceives the 'empty vessels' metaphor as salient to social conceptualisations of childhood in Karnataka. When I asked

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<sup>46</sup> Sriprakash (2013) discusses how education reforms in India construct the rural child as the "ideal citizen of the future" (p. 325). Pramila, on the other hand, sees children as citizens today, reinforcing the idea that children do not have to wait till adulthood to act as citizen subjects.

her how she thought children were viewed in Karnataka, she gave this answer:

Nivedita: From the age of zero to three, kids don't know anything, they need to be taught, they need to be educated, they need to be disciplined, they need to be nurtured, they need to be cared for. That's a natural role that the adults have to play when children are growing up.

Nivedita argues that children are generally viewed both precious yet in need of knowledge and guidance from adult figures. It therefore seems entirely 'natural' for adults to both nurture and discipline the child, who is on his or her way to 'becoming' an active member of society. As a children's activist who has pondered through children's rights in her work, Nivedita personally harboured a different view.

But this notion of, your child does not know anything and your child needs to be educated, be taught, be disciplined - that becomes a problem. Because children have their own personalities, their own knowledge within themselves because they're seeing every day, they're learning every day, they live in your larger ecosystem, which means they're interacting with you, they're interacting with their friends, they're interacting with so many things which means they're seeing and learning every day which means they have- they do understand *something*. And our education system completely, it dishonours all that.

Nivedita regards children up as social actors who possess the capability of making meaningful contributions. She cites actions she links to 'learning': of 'seeing' and 'interacting' with adults and their larger 'ecosystem', which points to the capabilities and stores of knowledge that children already possess. She criticises the Indian education system for 'dishonouring' children's knowledge, which thus makes it ill-equipped to respond to children's realities.

Not everyone perceived the 'empty vessel' conception as negative or inhibiting. Shaping a child was regarded as a caring and responsible task according to the teachers I interviewed.

Anita: Teaching in a private school is not easy – you have to work hard- teaching someone; virtually moulding a child for the future makes me happy- at the end of the day we feel “I have trained someone.”



Isila school teacher Nimbenna interpreted the relationship between adults and children along familial lines, using an anatomical metaphor to describe the relationship between children and adults:

Nimbenna: Children are not apart from us. They are the part of us. They are just a part of our body. We're here because of the students only. Every child should be educated. Children should not be excluded from that education.

Nimbenna further highlighted the symbiotic relationship between teachers and students when he said later in the interview, "We're here because of the students only." He revealed an understanding that this livelihood depended on children's education. But the sentence can also be understood sentimentally: the teachers care for the children, that is why they are there. Nimbenna offers a different child image (Reynaert *et al.*, 2015) that is different from the one envisioned by childhood studies scholars. This integration, of the child and the adult as one body, is meant to promote an attitude of care (which Nimbenna sees as protective/providing) rather than promoting children's social and political participation. As Pramila's interview demonstrates, sentiments of love and care are strongly bound up in protective/provisionist discourses of children's rights and among participants involved in SDG. It is why, as we shall explore later on, officials who disregard children's petitions and rights are positioned as *uncaring* and apathetic.

### **Prioritizing Protective Rights**

If children are seen as beings that need to be protected/provided for, education may thus figure as the more moral choice over work. When I asked students at Kampur a question about the kinds of changes they wanted to bring in their community, they focused on encouraging their working peers to attend school (see Chapter 6). These responses revealed that these students believed that getting an education preferred over working. For instance, when I asked them which children's rights they were familiar with, they cited the following rights:

Samira: Child labour practices. Children under the age of 14 should not be put to work.

Priyanka: Child marriage. Children should not marry before the age of 18.

R 8.55: Do you know any other rights?

Niranjan: Human rights and the right against exploitation.

Aradhya: Education is what children need.

Rebecca: Don't worry how much you know, I'm just interested in what you know.  
Where did you learn about rights?

Niranjan: We learned about them in school.

These students demonstrated familiarity with some rights, specifically those revolving around education, labour and exploitation, and child marriage. These rights focus on protecting children from exploitation and providing them with material access to schooling. For Aradhya, the right to education was conceptualised as something children need. In this discussion, rights were seen as responding to children's needs through protection and provision. Prior to these responses, they had discussed how many children found it difficult to attend school because they had lost their parents or had been placed in charge of their families' livelihoods. Yet, the only 'solution' to these challenges was 'going to school.' Even if this was the 'right answer' they thought to give me, it was telling. It suggested that the governance of education had yet to extend its focus beyond accessibility and availability to acceptability and adaptability.

Bundling these rights together rather than focusing on the RTE as a separate entity, requires more effort, more *labour* and *finances* on the part of the government. Vinod perceived the RTE as flawed because it prioritizes one right over others and suspends this right for a short time frame: (between six to fourteen). Despite government provision of early childhood care centres in the form of *anganwadis* and a national discourse of "school readiness", he perceives the education system as fragmentary and insufficient. Nivedita echoed this assessment, arguing that prioritizing the right to education over other rights produces a myopic understanding of children's rights and a disregard for children's experiences. Schooling is offered as the beginning and the end of the children's problems. Yet, school is seen as actually distant from children's realities and *distancing* them from realities. Legal and systematic enforcement of the RTE could paradoxically disempower children involved in various other immediate survival strategies.

All the participants: teachers, NGO activists, students themselves, demonstrated the tension in upholding a right that excluded many of the experiences engendered by socioeconomic poverty. Indeed, as I will explore in the next section, a major tension arose through the conceptualisation and enactment of care itself. When resource-poor families send their children to work or opt for early marriage, they may feel these are caring decisions because of their economic and cultural constraints. However, these decisions also run counter children's rights, which places participant governance actors in difficult

positions.

### **Cultural Expressions of Care**

If parents and children perceive that schooling will not serve their needs for stability in this current economic climate, they will calculate their own aspirations and capacities based on immediate survival and understandings of how the government school can help. These calculations embrace a wider framing of school, work, and marriage. Thus, child marriages, while outlawed, continue to take place because families perceive marriage as securing social stability. This perception appears to arise partly from traditional values of purity and honour, where families prefer to have their daughters marry early rather than risk social censure. In Midhol, Sri explained that early marriage arose out of both social conditioning and economic circumstances:

Sri: Three or five students have gone on to further education since I started working here. They sometimes come to us for advice. Their financial circumstances are not so good, yet they continue to study hard. Only the boys have gone ahead. The girls are married.

Rebecca: Why do you think this is? That further education is difficult for girls?

Sri: Because their environment is like that. They have been told in advance that they will not be given much education. They will not pursue education knowing that marriage is a happy thing for them. Also, they are not even the legal age to get married. Some of these marriages are stopped here. After the 7th grade, they get married. We've had some of these married girls visit us.

In Sri's experience, her students accepted early marriages because they have been told by their families that marriage is a more plausible and happier option than the indeterminate returns of further education. The urban-poor parents of Midhol perceived that they could not financially support their daughters' secondary or tertiary education and settled on marriage as the most realistic route to social stability. Even the male students who have transitioned to further education, in Sri's experience, continue to struggle financially despite their efforts in studying. Unlike in Amy Stambach's (2002) work amongst Tanzanian girls, education is not perceived by marginalised students as an alternative or substitute for marriage because it does not provide a way out of financial precarity. The

pragmatic response of resource-poor families to their constrained circumstances thus opposes children's rights which forbid marriage before eighteen. Nivedita supported the finding that families perceive child marriage as a route to social stability despite its criminalisation by law.

Nivedita: In most cases children consent to child marriages and adults think child marriage is the best option for them. They actually think that's the best option for them- their child, because their child is protected, their child is safe, they don't have the responsibility of taking care of their child. They now think that, "Okay my child is married, she's now taken care of- now she's their responsibility." Her husband has to take care of her... So they see it as an option. Because the access to education becomes very less as the girls grow older.

Rather than being perceived as a criminal act, Nivedita notes that families regard child marriage as an act of *care*. In an uncertain economic market, which privileges a tertiary education that only the middle to elite classes can afford, parents believe child marriage is a securer option to ensure that their daughters will be taken care of. While there are patriarchal elements to this thinking, these decisions also arise from an assessment of the educational and socioeconomic landscape. While children's rights seek to protect children *from* marriage, resource-poor parents perceive marriage as *protective*. Such contrasting perceptions of protection thus trigger paradoxical experiences for families when governance actors intervene to prevent child marriage.

Nivedita: Actually, our activists had faced several challenges while preventing these marriages. Many of these marriages take place in secret... It's very embarrassing when we prevent these child marriages when they're about to happen ...the food is prepared, the arrangements are set and the girl is just about to marry the boy and then we go with the officials and the child marriage is prevented. So the wrath that they face is very bad... I personally had the chance to interact with some of the children and parents- children whose marriages had been prevented. And I could see how furious they were, how upset they were and how disappointed they were about the marriages getting prevented

Not only do the activists face the anger of the community when they try to prevent child marriages, but Nivedita notes that both children and parents are upset and disappointed.

Laws against child marriage deny parents the opportunity to care for and protect their children. Not only is this a dissonant experience for families, but engenders tensions for the activists who try to intervene. As governance actors, activists and teachers thus carry responsibilities in proactively responding to children's rights infractions. In Chapter 5, Sri noted that her attempts to govern rights were spatially bound. Since school development governance legitimates teacher intervention in children's rights abuses, once her students leave the school, she feels that she cannot intervene anymore. However, not all teachers resort to intervention in their governance practice. Another response to child marriages, according to Bina, is to accept them even when teachers know that they impugn rights.

Bina: In one of the schools it became a big issue because a child in fourth standard was coming with her thali- the wedding necklace<sup>47</sup> and they (the teachers) said, 'Although her wedding is over, she is coming to the school. She is not sent to the husband.' ... I said (it) is their (the teachers') responsibility in convincing the child. And one child in the seventh standard when she got married, these teachers went and attended the wedding. Actually (because of that) they can be put behind bars. According to the law they can be. So when we raise these issues they are not happy.

In Karnataka, child marriages often follow a trajectory where there is a ritual celebration, but the bride stays in her natal home usually until she has attained puberty. Marriage usually only formally begins after the *gauna*, or consummation, where the bride moves in with her husband. Thus, in Bina's narrative, it seems as if the teachers were expecting the student to move to her husband's home even if this went against the custom of waiting until the child's attainment of puberty. Governing children's rights means that actors have to straddle policy conceptualisations of care with the knowledge that resource-poor communities see care differently. However, the legal and social might attached to rights legitimises intervention and prevention. Governance actors such as teachers may choose to placate families rather than risk their disappointment and ire. Nevertheless, even implicitly sanctioning child marriage can carry legal consequences for teachers. It is with these legal consequences in mind that Nivedita tries to tread a middle ground in persuading families to comply with child rights legislation. She acknowledges that families will be disappointed

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<sup>47</sup> The *thali* is a necklace which the groom knots around the bride during the wedding ceremony. It confers married status upon a woman, and is referred to as *mangal-sutra* in north India.

and angry, but considers their disappointment a small price to pay for evading felony charges. This disappointment, in Pramila's experience, was not always expressed benignly:

Pramila: When we went to prevent a child marriage, the people of the village tied us up together. These are the difficulties. When it comes to children, we don't let go, but society doesn't support us.

Differential understandings of care plunged governance actors into a paradoxical experiences that contained repercussions for whichever navigational strategy they sought. Direct intervention may be aligned to policy goals, but risked emotionally distancing and angering communities. Implicit sanctioning of child rights infractions could lead to legal consequences.

### **Mediating Between Rights and Welfare**

These tensions between governing children's rights and being sensitive to families' lifeworlds is mirrored in participant experience of governing the RTE. Teachers understand that insisting on consistent attendance burdens some of their students. They may be tasked with ensuring all children in the village attend school regardless of their circumstances, but they find ways to placate policy directives as well as resource-poor children's needs. This 'understanding' extends to relationships between teachers and parents. Saraswati notes that in practice she prefers to use persuasion rather than legal action to get parents and children to comply with the dictates of the right to education:

Saraswati: Certainly, every child needs education, whether it is a child from a poor or low-caste background. Prevention of violence against a child, which means without willingness of child to send the child to someone else's house for work and to work as a labourer. Parental pressure on the child doing anything that the child does not like is a cruelty. We will help our children to get the right to escape these difficulties.

Rebecca: Do you do this in the school?

Saraswati: Yes, we do on the school side. We make a program to tell everyone about the rights of children. Sometimes they will only come to us for advice.

Rebecca: Did this ever happen; did you call the police and inform them about child problem?

Saraswati: No, we have not done anything like that way. We let parents know about it. Because it's not right. We haven't filed a case for these kinds of problems.

Saraswati demonstrates that she uses flexible ways of ensuring compliance. She acts as a guide to the 'right' ways of being, by conducting 'programs' and discoursing with parents. Teachers leverage their social status in teaching families the ways of rights. But they are also the civil servants whom the families can directly contact for 'advice'.

These particular responses to local experiences of poverty were expressed by Shoba as a tension she was constantly navigating:

Shoba: The problem is, at home the parents tell them to work without letting them go to school. The parents say, "Come work with us.". If they work, they get 150 rupees. In our school, some children get up early in the morning and take their cattle to the pasture, then tie them in a barn and then come to school. They come to school around 10 or 10.30 a.m. Be late to school, there is no problem, but we tell them not to miss school. We don't hit them because we know their situations. Some children will not be able buy the books and pens which are needed for school. We find such children and will help them. Also, we tell them it's okay to not come to school properly, but come when you can.

Children who have to work for the family's survival are treated with greater leniency, allowed to arrive late and forfeit punishment as long as they can demonstrate that they are attending school. Shoba and her colleagues encouraging the students to "come when they can" indicates their willingness to have a 'second-best' compliance with RTE rather than no compliance at all. Her observations reinforce Saraswati's disclosures that the generalised model of schooling is not tailored for rural livelihoods. Like Kasturi in Isila, Shoba is caught in a bind between acting as enforcer of the RTE and demonstrating compassion for the students' situations. She attempts to balance the two by verbal encouragement, refraining from corporal punishment and buying them the educational paraphernalia they need.

Kasturi, Saraswati, and Shoba employ the term 'know' to demonstrate their understanding of their students' 'situations' and their caring responses. They have an

experiential knowledge of their students' difficulties and stage a delicate dance between complying with RTE mandates and offering practical concessions that shoulder a little of the burden of the students. Notably, they also see their efforts as instances of their care. This care circumscribes unilateral adherence to RTE goals, opting for merging official mandates with localized responses. Such commitment discharges two functions. First, it is comprehended as a practical response to the challenges engendered by their students' financial stresses. Second, it serves as proof of participant sincerity and commitment. Commitment to children's wellbeing can engender actions that seem contra development targets or rights mandates.

The privileging of the right to education as an answer to children's needs privileges a myopic view of deprivation that often exacerbates it. As Saraswati noted, rural schoolchildren acquire a number of skills when working with their families and obtain an early understanding of the hardships of life. Even in urban settings, resource-poor children encounter difficulties and barriers unexperienced by their privileged peers. Nivedita highlights how labour, often posed as the adversary of universal primary education, offers scope for learning that isn't necessarily measured by written assessments:

See one is we have to understand the educational aspect that work has to it. Work can also teach. Work can teach a lot of things that- because you're learning hands on- you're seeing hands-on, you're experiencing it hands-on... In schools there are no teachers, there is no toilet, there are no running this, no running water in the toilet, there is no water. The education system is trying to lure children into school- by offering them the midday meal program. But the midday meal program has so many problems. Children are every day complaining about the quality of food they get in schools... This system itself is so skewed and you're offering it as a solution to children, to their daily problems. And after fourteen? What happens to these children? Question mark.

The problem with the RTE, Nivedita argues, is that it offers a 'defunct' solution to the children's problems. She uses strong language to describe the school system, by arguing that it attempts to 'lure' children in via free meals. But the poor quality of the midday meal scheme reveals its defects, according to her. Her argument is that half-hearted official attempts to follow through with the ambitious RTE program 'dishonours' the children both by denying them the opportunity to work and by expecting them to be satisfied with broken infrastructure and poor-quality meals. In her eyes, school development governance



therefore is overly concerned with upholding this ‘skewed’ system, to the detriment of the child’s actual welfare. In the end, Nivedita notes, the only future such a system can offer the resource-poor child is a question mark.

Despite the inclusivity of the notion of universal primary education, the exclusive promotion of it as a right over children’s right of voice place participants in a continuous quandary. The way it is deployed in the RTE underscores tensions in governance practice. So far, the focus has been on widening access, hence the stress of accounting for out-of-school children. However, as the interviews and observations testify, without attention to the acceptability and adaptability of education, rather than focusing primarily on availability and accessibility, the practice of school development and children’s rights governance appears merely to emphasize tensions and place greater burdens on already-stretched families. Moreover, without soliciting the voices and experiences of resource-poor children and families to better understand how government schools could be more adaptable to the needs of these families, governance actors may continue to wrestle with these tensions in their practice.

### **Children’s Rights of Voice: An “Alien” Concept in Karnataka?**

As I have explored in the preceding sections, children’s right to political and social participation is often muted in favour of rights of protection and provision. Nivedita argues that in her experience, the concept of rights is “alien” to the communities and children she works with, but in her interview appears to be focusing on the right to voice as that which is most unfamiliar:

Nivedita: Okay, the concept of rights is very alien and very, you know, they can’t even begin to remotely understand the fundamental concept of a right- the communities we are working with, the children we are working with. When it comes to children’s rights, when the entire ecosystem that they have lived in, that they have grown up in does not understand the concept of rights, it is very challenging for children to understand the concept of rights in the first place. So when we begin working with these children and when we start giving them the space to think, to reflect, to participate, to discuss, that is when they start to experience the experience of having to exercise their rights.

Nivedita points out that the ‘entire ecosystem’ surrounding the children ‘does not understand’ or practice privileging children’s voice. Unlike the teachers who discussed

rights along largely protectionist and provisional lines, conceptualising them as rules to be memorised and internalised, Nivedita focused on the lack of space and cultural understanding afforded for children's social participation:

We have not seen examples of children's voices being heard. We have not seen examples of children's voices being counted their opinions counted, their opinions valued. It doesn't start from their homes itself. It is a very rare thing to see it in school or in the community, forget about governance.

From her interview, I had the impression that it was not necessarily the protective/nurturing aspect of children's rights that is so alien as the foundational concept of children being social and political actors. Earlier, Nivedita had argued that adults such as parents and teachers uphold the notion of a child as an 'empty vessel' to be filled with the proper academic and moral knowledge, with relations between adults and children primarily didactic and caring. This conceptualisation of childhood as a stage to be nurtured, corresponds more with rights intended to protect and provide for children. However, the *participatory* aspect to rights appears to cause social dissonance. In her experience, children's political opinions or capacities are largely discounted, especially in powerful institutions of learning such as schools.

She notes how children find it difficult to express their opinions unless they are given the tools and space to do so. NGO activists like Nivedita therefore labour to facilitate this *experiential learning of the right to voice*. As governance contains both paternalistic and participatory aspects, so do children's rights. According to Nivedita, the former is easier for communities to engage with than the latter. As Corbridge *et al.* (2005) point out, participatory modes demand commitment and the taking of risks, for nebulous dividends. However, there were also seeds of promise. From the accounts of my activist participants, children's participation and demands for accountability from powerful governance actors such as teachers and education officials were governance practices that had to be learned, but which also contained possibilities for social change.

### **Children Practicing Rights of Voice**

The activists viewed themselves as teachers/ facilitators of this second mode of children's rights. Given that children often internalise their social/institutional role as 'empty vessels,' and resource-poor families perceive themselves as ill-equipped to assume political participation, activists step in to help them 'learn' social mobilisation. If teachers

see their tasks primarily to uphold the protective power of rights, some of the activist participants focus on rights which prioritize children's voice and political expression.

Nivedita: Recently we have interacted with a bunch of children in remote villages in B- district. These are working children and we have helped them form the Bhima Sangha which is the union of working children...And we help them put together these issues and help them also- we give them the tools and methodologies to present this in front of the local panchayat. So during this exercise, we realised the importance of helping children realise they're rights holders. *Hahn*. When you do not understand the concept of rights in the first place, you will not think about exercising it.

Here, participation can take several modes. For Nivedita, children's political participation materialises through children organising themselves into political bodies and working to hold their local panchayats and districts accountable. Nivedita's organisation approaches children from the position that children are capable political actors- they merely lack the 'tools and methodologies' to experientially live out their rights. This experience and living out is perceived as fundamental to children's understanding that they are rights' holders. Without such experience, these children may not perceive rights as anything other than a set of rules they may have learned in school- a 'textbook' knowledge. However, Nivedita's organisation specifically engages with child labourers. Therefore, her experience is restricted to a certain demographic rather than children in Karnataka in general.

Pramila, on the other hand, had been tasked with encouraging children to participate in government schools across Kalaburagi district:

Pramila: (Rights education) is very advantageous. The children are competing in each event as we educate them about the rights of children. We receive a letter from the District Collector during the election, in which our organization's children go and take disabled voters to the polling place. Each of the children will go home and be educated about voting. This is the change among the children. Another important change is that they educate the child labourers and school dropouts by interacting with them. If someone interrupts such children's schooling, they will call 1098 and inform the concerned authorities. These calls come mainly from children.

Pramila, whose organization is contracted by the government to educate schoolchildren on their rights, recounts a participation that furthers protectionist and providing aspects of rights. Children here are perceived as mobilizers and movers, helping disabled voters access polling stations, disseminating information amongst their peers, and calling authorities if they witness rights abuses. However, children's actions here appear to centre round facilitating democratic inclusion of special-needs voters and infractions of school attendance. In Pramila's account, children appear deployed more as apolitical governance actors in non-institutional zones such as homes and among their peers. Here, children's contributions may be regarded more in the guise of "community service" rather than "civic engagement" (Rampal, 2011) This is not to imply that such contributions are unnecessary. Through their actions in learning about voting and rights, children learn the workings of the voting infrastructure and are empowered to report on rights abuses.

Another form of child participation is investment in designated governance spaces of SDMCs. Bina noted that when she and the other activists were present, child representatives would be active in SDMC meetings:

Bina: In SDMC there is also child representative. (The) child representative is probably a very studious student: one girl and one boy.

Rebecca: Do they actually attend the meetings?

Bina: They attend. They come in- wherever we were there we used to ensure that children also come. Children say that 'our portions (of the syllabus to be covered) were not over.' So from children's side also they can present certain things.

### **Children as Political and Social Actors: Accountability and Affect**

In a *political participatory* mode of child rights governance, however, children can utilise their social image as beings needing care to hold the state accountable. I call this *affective weight*. Unlike adults who can be (and often are) ignored by various government officials, the vulnerability and innocence accorded to children in Karnataka gives them an advantage in holding officials accountable. Bina, contracted by the state government to train SDMCs and teach sex education in government schools, cites an example of children mobilising against the corruption and 'moral decay' in their school in a manner that was impossible to ignore:

Bina: One case in the school- I think it was pertaining to –ah school compound wall- unfinished. So much of money has gone. The children presented this case.

Rebecca : Oh really? So the children took initiative-

Bina: Children sitting in SDMCs. What had happened was- ah! And also, school compound is becoming- for everything- all bad things happening there. People come and drink and they bring women in the night. So those type of things. The (school) compounds are not protected. So the policemen, the local circle inspector was there – this BRP (block resource person) for the taluk was also there. So children when they give their complaint or issues, they have to answer, the concerned department. The BRPs, surely they were all sweating.

In Bina's narrative, the children who were part of the SDMCs in A talukh, mobilised to request a response from police officers and BRPs. They brought two cases which threatened their schooling and safety. One was a case of corruption, where funds devoted to building the school wall were siphoned away. Another involved the school grounds being used for drinking and prostitution. Since children are supposed to be protected and nurtured as part of the larger collective body, they function as effective social consciences. These children thus used this image of childhood to plead their cause in a participatory exercise of their right to voice. In this narrative, the inclusion of child members in the SDMCs garnered a quick response (short-route accountability) from powerful officials. Because SDMCs are responsibilised towards school development, which pivots on children's rights, when children themselves mobilise in the SDMCs, government bodies are then required to respond. Unlike their adult counterparts, whose supplications can be more or less ignored, the figure of the child, especially one that leverages a space mandated for his/her school development, cannot be so easily thrust away. Children may possess little social and political power, but it is paradoxically this vulnerability, the sociocultural discourse of nurture and care, which makes their political expression potent.

An instance of this potency was narrated by Nivedita. In Karnataka, Nivedita explained that the *makkala panchayats*, children's parliaments, are legally mandated to occur once a year, an occurrence that has fostered and fomented the formation and growth of children as political actors. She argues that Karnataka is exceptional because of the legal heft it provides to children's participation:

Nivedita: I've heard about *makkala panchayat* models and children's panchayats in Kerala and in north India somewhere- but they are not part of the law. There's no policy mandating it. But in Karnataka, with the passage of the Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj Act, *makkala gram sabhas* have to be mandatorily conducted once in a year... So mandatorily, every panchayat *has* to hold a children's *gram sabha* in the month of November.

Nivedita sees children's political participation in makkala panchayats as revolutionary, for the panchayats provide a space for children to participate in governance. She refers to a seminal case of children mobilising to demand change from their local panchayat:

In 2002, in a remote panchayat known as Keradi in Kundapur taluk in Udupi district, more than five hundred children came together to raise issues on illegal sale of alcohol.

Rebecca : I remember reading about that.

Nivedita: So they had very smartly used information to help put up a case with the panchayat...Shops that were selling illegal alcohol had to be shut down...they (the children)started counting the liquor packets and they finally came up with the figure that about 11 lakhs 88 thousand rupees was being spent just on alcohol, just in that one shop and just in that one year. And that too was illegally being sold. The figures were really alarming for the panchayat and they had to take strong steps to affirmatively solve the issue and they actually passed a decision to shut down that shop.

In this narrative, children mobilised together and carried out research to strengthen their case against the illegal sales of alcohol prevailing in that district. On one hand, this may be another instance of raising attention to communal issues rather than wider systemic issues. However, Nivedita's narrative implied that the panchayat may have turned a blind eye towards what seemed to be an open secret. This apathy or *uncaring* was foiled by the numbers the children revealed, spurred the panchayat to shut down the shop. Nivedita noted that this mobilisation helped instigate the institutionalisation of children's panchayats, where children would have a formal, government-sanctioned space to demand accountability from their local governance councils.

Like Nivedita, Bina sees the potential of children's participation in governance bodies. She argues that working with local governance systems designed for change

maximises effectiveness, especially when children themselves reveal corruption or concealment by adult governance councils:

Bina: And we (were) never considered as someone who imposed things on them. We always worked through the systems, that's why we targeted the SDMCs, we targeted the Grama Panchayat. For example, in one particular school, there were forty-five dropouts. Dropouts is the SDMC concern... But SDMC and the teachers will always say there are no dropouts...we had formed the children into children's parliaments in the villages. So these children had actually surveyed all their streets and they would say that 'in this place, such and such child is bonded labour- he is has come from Bidar and is working there- they have given twelve thousand rupees.'

So we get lot of information from children. Based on that this survey was done by the children themselves and they said "The teacher will give attendance, but this particular child has not come to the school for the past six months'. Such children's visit was formed...we had children's parliaments outside the school, and they were also the same children from the school. And children's parliament representatives went to the Grama Panchayat. We didn't speak. We only facilitated the process. In Grama Panchayat they (the children) said, 'In our village we have got forty-five dropouts, what are you doing?' When the children are saying, 'these many children have not come to the school' they have to take action. Then they will call the SDMC. The Grama Panchayat will call the SDMC and ask...

If one governance body such as the SDMC is suspected of fabricating attendance records to paper over school dropouts, a children's governance body can expose such an action. Thus, children's parliaments can effectively reveal 'the true situation' by mobilising children to conduct surveys amongst themselves and their peers and report back to higher governing bodies such as the village gram panchayat, which is responsible for regulating and overseeing SDMCs. Both Nivedita and Bina see the promise of a participatory governance network composed of different bodies: the SDMC, the *panchayat*, children's parliaments. Bina notes that these different bodies can act as checks on each other, which lends support to her argument of working within the system.

Children can therefore serve as surveillance agents, forming another arm of accountability. Their affective weight makes them harder to ignore and can be turned into political capital to secure accountability from actors who have the power to materially

address their issues. As I have noted before, this exercising of the right to voice is one that participants such as Nivedita perceive as one that has to be learned partly because it seems alien to the institutional and cultural fabric of government schools in Karnataka. It is also important to note that Bina emphasised how she and her fellow activists “didn’t speak. We only facilitated the process.” Her facilitation consisted in making space for children’s voices rather than speaking for them. For resource-poor communities, political participation in governance bodies such as SDMCs challenges the paternalistic landscape traditionally prevalent and, in the case of the children, can dispossess the teacher’s authority as absolute:

Vinod: We got representation, at least we started with Class Five. And Class 7 and Class Ten. The recommendation was from Class Five but somehow the state felt Class Five was too early... Representation- that is not an end in itself...so we brought all children together, who were representatives of the SDMC. We started training them. What kind of questions that you (the children) have to raise...the way the classroom transactions are... not complaining....what really (are) the problems faced by children in terms of basic facilities

Vinod perceived representation of children as important because he avowed that children also needed a space to discuss their opinions and desires regarding school development and management. Like Nivedita’s organisation, his also facilitated the pedagogic work of ‘training’ children to articulate their opinions and the kinds of issues they could raise. He is careful to distinguish the difference between “complaining” and assessment. He trains children to understand the kinds of questions they can ask regarding classroom interactions and to evaluate school processes. He also trains them in monitoring basic school facilities. Thus, despite an institutional climate which renders children as passive recipients of instruction, participatory governance spaces afford them the opportunity to learn social and political expression/action.

Pramila mused that in her experience of working with children, they have become emboldened to report development problems to her or the village panchayat.

Pramila: Sometimes it is impossible to speak to them directly so they write it on a paper sheet or inform us by phone. If drinking water is a problem in the village, the children take the application and go to the panchayat to complain. Children have this kind of understanding.



She also noted that children demanding accountability is a fairly recent phenomenon and pointed to the children's parliament as a prime space for raising complaints, especially over school conditions:

(At) first, children are afraid to confess their problems to teachers. But now the children are saying their problems freely, saying that, "we don't have a toilet, no plate, etc." Last time in the Grama Sabha, the children spoke directly about their school problems like there was no toilet in our school and no facilities were available.

She traced a trajectory of children's learning how to advocate for themselves and draw attention to development gaps in their school. The 'fear' that children felt on speaking out about their school experiences testifies to the social perception of children as largely passive and powerless. However, children learn how to speak up, and to gain confidence that they can (through the right to voice) be listened to. The right to voice endows them with a language and a space to address development gaps.

### **The Middle Ground of Children's Participation in Rights Governance: Challenges and Possibilities**

Nevertheless, exercising this right to voice does not always bring about the desired transformation. Children can leverage their affective weight to demand accountability, but this participation may not pay off in results. In her interview, Pramila mentions the presence of bureaucratic and social barriers that delay a direct response from the state to children's demands.

Pramila: It may take time for all these facilities to be available from the government, but the children speak directly. We are not getting the benefits from the government right away. We make children understand that. And when we put children's problems before the government, we do get little help, but the government does not know about children's problems first-hand.

Understanding that even children's requests may not result in instant transformations, Pramila assists children in accepting delayed responses from the government. Not only do the children learn the arts and performance of political negotiation, they also learn about the realities of government functioning and to manage their expectations accordingly.

Delay is one possible response to children's exercising of voice. Local governments can also reject their demands. Nivedita notes that in her experience, even with children's collective mobilisation, government bodies such as the panchayat still subject their requests to internal assessments of feasibility.

Nivedita: It's not really a cake walk for the children, it's not that everything the children say the panchayat will respond to. Because these are real life issues and these are issues connected to real responsibilities the panchayat has to be doing, the local government has to be doing, the state government has to be doing and the central government has to be doing. So they will become defensive in some cases.

Their experiences had taught these activists that children's political participation was best handled pragmatically. Pramila had talked of educating children into the workings of government bureaucracy and teaching them delayed gratification. Here, Nivedita enumerates the different governance bodies which interact in a networked hierarchy, each with different officials of varying ideologies and interests. The children are not merely exercising their right to voice, they are also learning how to navigate a complex political landscape. The legal and experiential knowledge and care of activists such as Vinod, Nivedita, Pramila and Bina, create a set of relational affordances that aid children in learning the ropes of political activism. Exercising their right to voice goes beyond destabilising fixed concepts of childhood as vulnerable. Nivedita argues that doing so allows children to feel listened to and that their opinions matter. She sees this as important in fostering an expression of voice and promoting children's participation in school governance:

Nivedita: They're actually very thrilled that they are being heard in the first place. "Oh you know, adults listen to us! They also assured us that our problems will be solved!" That very gesture is a very big thing for the children who have not had a chance to open up about their issues. See the first time when we are interacting with children, when we ask them, "What your issues are?" they are actually blank... given that right nudge to say, "Oh, what are the issues that you're facing in school, what are the issues that you're facing in your workplace- it can be anything," and then-

Rebecca: You give them examples?

Nivedita: We make sure not to give them any leading examples so that it kind of shapes their thoughts. We want to hear more from them, so we design our processes in such a way that we get to hear more from the children and see, it's a part of facilitation. That we give them the right examples, give them the right nudge, at the right juncture, to make sure that we have the right balance of helping them brainstorm and come out with the information.

Being listened to affords children the opportunity to exercise their right to voice. With rights of protectionist and provision, children are positioned as passive recipients, but the right to voice confers an active role and subsequent responsibilities. This role does not come naturally and must be learned. Activists such as Binu and Nivedita work to create a 'zone of proximal development' by instilling trust and taking a deliberate pedagogic stance that tries to calibrate teaching (providing information and examples) with learner freedom (allowing them space, trying not to 'shape' their thoughts). Learning this active role and participating politically spills over to change children's own conceptualisations of themselves, according to Nivedita.

Nivedita: Now for example, the Bhima Sangha becomes a very important identity for them. When they wear that headband, and when they go with that flag, when they go as a *sangha*, they're recognised. And they're saying, "Oh, Bhima Sangha is coming to us with issues, " and "Oh, we have to talk to them." And everybody in the community is very active now. "Oh, she's a Bhima Sangha member."

The accoutrements of membership: the headband and the flag, appear to work symbolically in much the same way as the school uniforms of Isila mentioned in the previous chapter. The wearing of a certain type of uniform confers the distinction of private school on government school students; the bearing of a flag confers the distinction of political identity on Bhima Sangha members. The *active* state of exercising voice can further enable children to demand protection or provision, which may not always be present due to negligence by state and local officials. For example, Pramila noted that she and the other activists were often blamed by local civil servants for their role in developing children's political identities: officials would grumble that now they were forced to "do their jobs." Nivedita also notes that despite the difficulties of navigating tenuous and shadowy political

terrain, governance and government bodies were ironically pressured to accountability through the very measures participatory governance policies have created:

Nivedita: Now the panchayat president and the members of the panchayat are saying, “Oh, you know, these children see us every day. They’re walking in front of us and saying, “Oh, what happened to that issue? When are you going to solve it?” And sometimes you’re (panchayat members) so forced to solve their issue that they have now understood the aspect of holding the local governments accountable.

Embracing their rights as democratic subjects allows children to display confidence in confronting social hierarchies and demanding restitution. However, like the unpaid labour and commitment in governing school development, children’s rights governance also requires effort and persistence. The active role of exercising the right to voice demands children’s time and effort, in amassing together, in conducting research and surveys of their peers, in monitoring the daily workings of their classrooms. Possessing affective weight is still negligible political capital, especially as resource-poor children cannot combine it with social or economic capital. Bina strikes a cautionary note by opining that speaking up can bear negative consequences for children.

Bina: But after that, these children can be targeted, there are lot of issues. So, if you are not able to monitor- you cannot just conduct a public hearing and run away. Since we were there, we ensured that child is not targeted.

Although she remains vague as to *who* could target the children, she draws attention to the possible consequences of demanding accountability. Children may learn political and social participation, but they still require adult protection and support. Ultimately the activists’ conceptualisation of care enfolded protection, provision, and space. They saw themselves as trusted adult figures who supported children in exercising both types of rights, and as mediators between the heterogenous communities interlinked in governance.

Bina: How the (governance) systems work – the local panchayat, grama panchayat systems. These all you have to connect together.

In addition, the role of adult as a trusted friend affords an avenue where children can both express their voice and access their rights of protection and provision. Shoba had already mentioned serving as a ‘friend’ to her students. In Nivedita’s organisation, an adult whom

children trust is referred to as a *makkala vitra* (children's friend) and serves a practical purpose in helping children secure their rights.

Nivedita: We also have the people from community who are working very closely with children in the community. They are known as *makkala vitra* or children's friend'. So this person happens to be a close friend of a child, an adult who'll represent children in forums where they have to interact with adults basically. These *makkala vitras*- several panchayats actually came together to give kind of requisition to the ACP (additional commissioner of police) of Kundapur taluk to say this action has to be taken on this person (perpetrator)...So they can facilitate their participation in different forums or where children need the support of adults. Now, for example, they (the children) have to go to a meeting in a distant panchayat or in the city and they need an adult to come with them. So they can ask this person.

Here the *makkala vitra* not only facilitates children's participation but is also a protective figure who can care for children needing to travel long distances or represent them at local political fora.

The penultimate section of this chapter includes themes from children's interviews. I use these findings to refine my theme that child rights and school governance policy discourses present a narrow frame of children's needs. This frame reinforces a deficit framing of resource-poor children and confines them to a class-based discourse where well-being is understood primarily in terms of 'basic' resources. None of the children interviewed in Isila and Midhol schools said they had participated local governance bodies such as children's parliaments or SDMCs. Therefore, it was difficult to triangulate their experiences with those of the activists. However, this finding suggests an uneven application of children's participation rights, which supports the wider theme of participatory rights as less familiar and practiced than rights of protection and provision.

### **The Importance of Nature and Aesthetics to Resource-Poor Children in Isila and Midhol**

This section of the chapter presents findings from research with children in Isila and Midhol schools. Conducted during the first phase of fieldwork, I wanted to hear the students' articulations of what was important to them. I asked them to draw pictures and choose cards based on what they liked about their community or school and the kind of

people they wanted to be. Hitherto, in my interviews with teachers and activists, there was less of a sense of what children genuinely *enjoyed* and how they perceived their world. Contrary to the ‘deficit’ view of rural life so often touted by policy documents and state officials, the students largely celebrated their surroundings and focused on the pleasure and restoration their natural environment afforded them. Policy documents, programs, and research in development, often focuses on immediate relief or crossing off health and education targets. There has been little crossover between research on children’s play and surrounding environment and school development in Karnataka. I use student’s art and discussion here as an initiation into this crossover.

### **Home and School: Learning to Play and Aspire**

Most of the children emphasized the greenery and space (in this case, expanse) of their surroundings, commenting on the lushness and quality of the countryside. Rather than displaying a preference for the urban sphere, they praised their village for its location among trees and fields and the hills. Nature for them was not only a place of work, i.e. helping their parents in the fields, but also a place to learn, play, and explore. Sangmesh explained that his favourite place to play was the mountains, saying in English, “Old is best.” Old things, he continued in Kannada, endured. He also enjoyed the opportunities for play afforded by trees and mountains, and declared his intention of being a farmer because to him that was the best occupation. This belief stands in contrast to the rather disparaging remarks made to me by the teachers concerning farmers and farming occupations. Whether the teachers truly believed farming was a deadbeat profession is debatable. Nevertheless, they framed farming as a regressive occupation in contrast to the other urban professional jobs the children could aspire to.

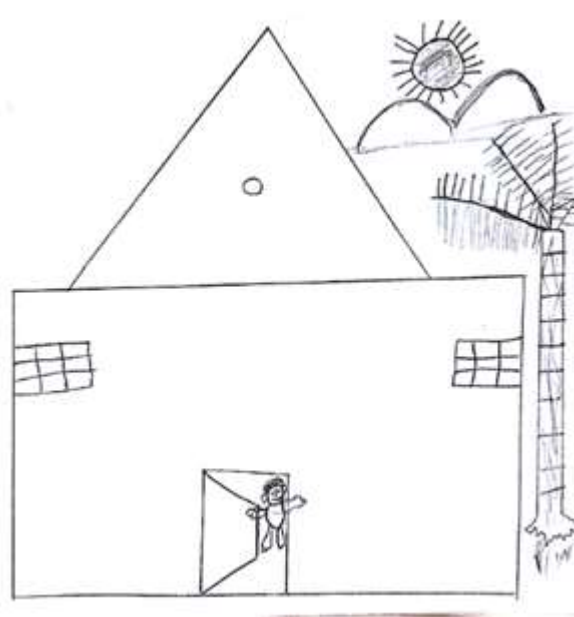


Fig.1 Sangmesh's drawing

This preference for home and natural spaces constituted the general trend amongst the children interviewed. Irfana drew her home, a tree, and birds, saying that she liked playing amongst the trees and birds in the village. While she aspired to be a doctor, she noted that it would be hard for her to achieve this dream because she did not have the resources to become one. Her parents verbally encouraged her, she said, but they couldn't do more than that.

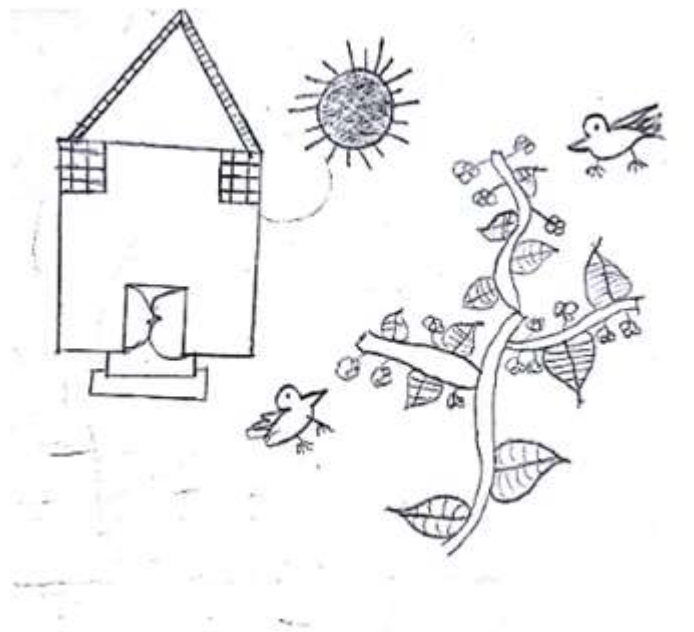


Fig.2 Irfana's drawing

Next to home and natural spaces where play could occur, school also featured as an important place for some of the children. Ashwini cited school as her favourite place,

saying that her experience there inspired her to migrate to the city to try to be a government school teacher in the future.



Fig 4. Ashwini's drawing of the school gate.

Shenaz (Class VII) of the SDMC group chose her school as a place important to her. Interestingly, she focused on the school's garden as an especially attractive place, where everyone could come and play. She especially liked her teachers and wanted to be more like them. Her focus on the green space of the school can be extended to the children's appreciation of the green spaces surrounding them, a theme they dwelt upon at some length.



Fig.5 Shenaz's drawing of Isila school, where children "learn the basics and can play in the garden."



## Nature as Important for Children's Sense of Well-Being

The children emphasized the beauty of their school and their appreciation for natural spaces, a theme that resonated with them. Jeevika chose the card below because she liked the diversity of plants in the fields and “the scarecrow is there to scare off the birds and wild pigs from getting into the field.”



**Figure 25 Jeevika's card**

Payal had chosen her card because she said the water and the boat made her feel “refreshed, calm and “cool. A nice place gives me a new feeling.” The words ‘new feeling’ were translated back to me by Suvarna in English. The image appealed to Payal for the emotions it roused.



**Fig.7 Payal's card**

Pallavi chose her card to illustrate that for her, flowers were not just an integral part of the landscape, they were also beautiful and useful. She explained, “God gives us flowers to pluck and put them in our hair. They look beautiful in our homes, fields, everywhere. They brighten our lives.” Pallavi saw nature through religious and instrumental lenses, and appreciated flowers for brightening life.



Fig.8 Pallavi's card

Her appreciation for nature was echoed by Shivani who perceived beautiful places as instrumental in relieving the stresses and pressures of life. She explained her choice of card thus:

I think a beautiful place is necessary to forget your tension and feel a sense of freedom- escaping from troubles at school and at home. I want to live in a beautiful place in the future.



Figure 26 Shivani's card

The children's appreciation of their surroundings and constant reference to how it was an integral part of their lives thus formed the dominant theme of the interviews<sup>48</sup>. Given that both national and state education policy tends to collapse both the rural and the urban together in its vision for education reform, the particular features of rural life are often ignored or considered unimportant. However, for the students, rural life *was* important. They expressed gratitude for their school, but they also expressed unabashed enthusiasm for rural life, for the ability to play in the fields, appreciation of the beauty of their surroundings and finding renewal through nature. For them, there was no shame or

<sup>48</sup> Suvama, who was translating and facilitating this interview, was also surprised by the children's focus on nature, whispering to me as we waited for them to finish, "They're all drawing only trees." (Fieldnotes, 20 November 2018).

stigma attached to being rural schoolchildren, despite the views of the town-bred teachers. Almost none of them expressed a desire for city life save Jeevika who wanted to be a private school teacher in the city. Her reason for this was connections: she had an uncle in the city and thought this would make it easier for her to find a job. However, she too reiterated that “the village is a good place to stay.” Even those students who had chosen jobs allied to an urban cosmopolitan image such as engineer, like Abishek, talked about the importance of the trees and the spaces to play. For the students, the surrounding green areas were an invaluable attraction the country held over the ‘town’ and made it an ideal place to live.

Contrary to this assumption that there was ‘nothing’ in the villages, the rural schoolchildren made a persuasive case for the particular advantages of living in the countryside: the space and freedom to play, the renewal and refreshing of one’s physical self through nature. These sentiments have been recorded by ethnographers in other global South countries, but often as part of a middle-class cosmopolitan discourse. Anna Tsing (2004) in her interviews and participant observations with hiking and nature clubs in Indonesian universities, writes of how relatively privileged undergraduate students would often expend a great deal of money and time to trek through ‘unspoiled’ and ‘natural’ regions of the country, citing physical and spiritual refreshment in nature. Rarely have studies featured these sentiments from resource-poor rural communities, and especially from children.

Appreciation and connection to aesthetics was also folded into occupational aspirations for the future. Abishek chose his card which he described as a boy making beautiful things from the sky, saying that he wanted to make beautiful things in his future.



Fig. 9 Abishek’s card

Aesthetics is also rarely mentioned in development discourse or research. Empirical work on the appreciation and expression of aesthetics predominantly features middle and elite

groups, unconsciously reinforcing the bareness and squalor associated with poverty and disadvantage. Yet in Nimbenna's illustration of the students requesting uniforms that looked like private school uniforms, in SDMC parents investing a great deal of physical labour in landscaping the school grounds, and in the stated preference of children for beauty and neatness, aesthetics assumed an instrumental role in well-being and self-concept.

The students in Isila saw their school as a space where they could both learn and play and develop socially. They pointed out the attractive features of their school: grounds, peers, teachers. They highlighted the positives of both and cited the school and the natural environment as affordances that helped them develop both academically and personally. Sangmesh, for instance, noted that he couldn't afford to pay for books even though he liked them, but he could read books from the school library.

### **Midhol: The Importance of Nature and Aesthetics to Children from Informal Settlements**

The argument can be made that Isila students gravitated towards a focus on the environment because they were surrounded by green spaces and their families derived employment from the fields. However, in conducting the same group interview with Midhol students, who lived in an urban informal settlement with very little 'green space', most of the children mentioned trees, flowers, or the environment.



**Figure 27** Midhol children's drawings of trees and their environment (Devaraj and Harpita)

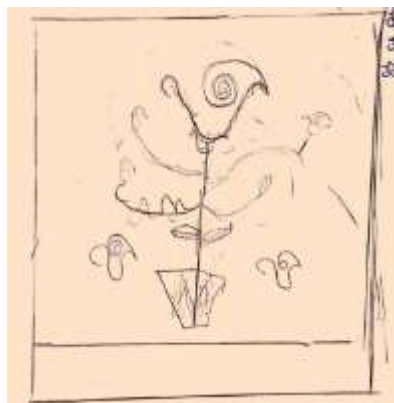
Harpita chose the same scarecrow card as Jeevika had, noting that "farmers' work is important now and also in the future." Harpita's statement counters deficit views of farming livelihoods, underscoring their importance.

Bhagesh also reiterated the instrumental importance of the environment when discussing his card:



The man is trying to cut the trees. We must stop people from cutting trees, which are important for life on earth.

Abishek drew a rose and when asked to describe his drawing said, “God gives us flowers like roses, which women wear in their hair, and which we can use for weddings and for many other things.”



Here again, a student focused on both beauty and utility as concepts. Like Pallavi in Isila, Abishek views flowers through religious and instrumental lenses. Even though these students occupied different contexts of resource-poverty, such themes resonated across both sets of interviews. Like Payal, Nagavini appeared struck by the emotions her card roused. She explained her choice by saying that the man looked peaceful and the place looked quiet- she wanted to live somewhere like that.



**Figure 28 Nagavini's card**

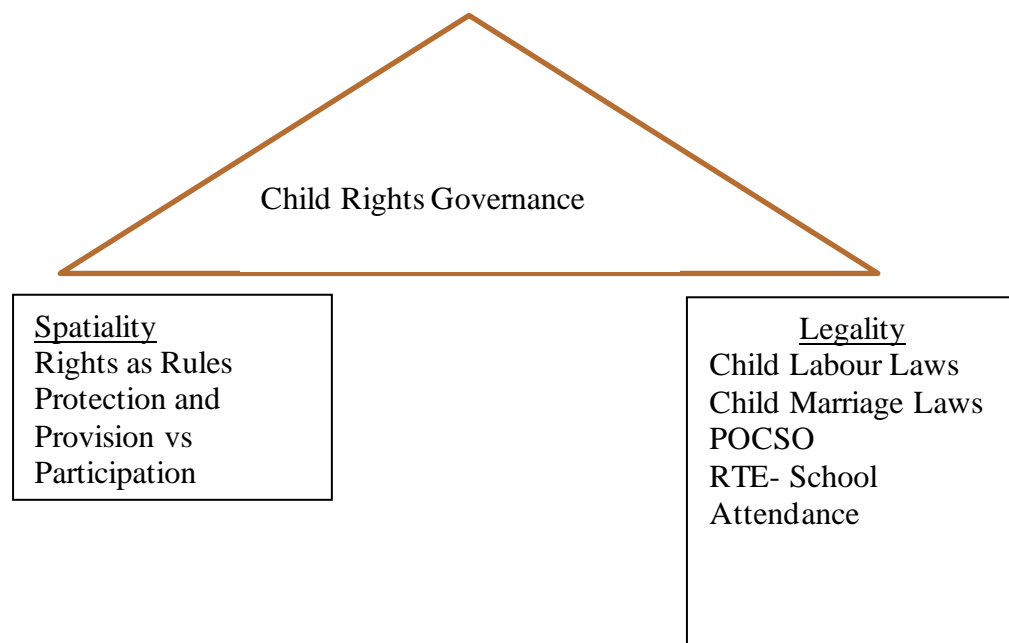
The interviews with 3 separate groups of children (2 groups in Isila and 1 in Midhol) all tended to focus on the importance of aesthetics and the natural environment for personal well-being. Given that much development discourse and research focuses on a 'deficit' view of children in resource-poor groups, studies foregrounding what children esteem as positive and important are few and far between. While these studies do serve an important function in displaying participant experiences of navigating structural realities, many of them can unconsciously reinforce the grimness of disadvantage. This is not to advocate for a romantic view of poverty that insists on highlighting the positives. Rather, my point is to engage with what my child participants saw as important to *them* and to note that disadvantaged children are rarely associated with discussions of aesthetics and environmentalism, discussions that often have their basis in social class. To extend this argument further, research on children in the global South often revolves around their problems and a discourse of deprivation.

However, the data contributed by the children revealed the positive associations, memories, and joys of their lives. Remarking on these contributions are not meant to downplay the difficulties of resource-poverty, but also to reveal the complexity of these children's lives. In her participatory, arts-based research with children living council estates in England, Helen Lomax (2012) noted how children took pictures of the spaces and things in their communities which brought them joy, such as places to play. Without the input of her child participants, she writes that discourses of deprivation can render life in council estates one-dimensional and cement stigmatization. In much the same way, the students of Isila and Midhol shared aspects of their lives such as an appreciation for their natural environment and school communities. Such data can help in fostering positive and more hope-filled governance approaches.

## Discussion

The following discussion will reflect on the findings and unpack them in light of the academic literature introduced in the previous chapter's discussion section. While children's rights can criminalize families' expressions of care and their reliance on children as breadwinners, they can also provide opportunities for marginalised children to participate in local governance, demand accountability, and embrace subjectivities as rights bearers. Despite children's rights conveying a sense of universal consensus (Donnelly, 2003), the findings indicate that rights are contextually understood and navigated by participants. This understanding and navigation also rests on how rights are constructed in policy. The fragmentary conceptualisation of rights in the RTE, and the focus on accessibility and availability over adaptability also shape participant understanding of rights. In addition, policy constructions may further account for how the majority of the participants indicated a greater familiarity with protective and provisory children's rights than their rights of participation.

Applying the child rights governance framework proposed by Holzcheiter *et al* (2019) to the findings, I mapped how rights were deployed in the spaces of Isila and Midhol schools and the resource-poor communities where the activists worked.



<u>Subjectivity</u>	<u>Normativity</u>
Teachers as Authority/Friend NGOs as rights facilitators/guides Children as Political Actors	Children's Rights to Voice an Alien Concept Risks and Labour of Political Representation Children as Beings to be Cared For

Key themes arising under spatiality from the findings are:

- i) The participants conceptualising rights as rules to be understood primarily through rights texts. These lead to *malleable interpretations* of children's rights, where my participants were more familiar with trying to govern rights that protected and provided for children. They stated facing more difficulties with implementing children's participation rights.

These are the key subjectivities arising from the findings:

- i) Teachers perceived that they could no longer operate within a traditional hierarchical model where they commanded absolute authority. Instead, they tried to compromise between demonstrating authority and acting compassionately to palliate the burden RTE emphasis on regular attendance laid on their students. Shoba proffered the label *friend*, while Nimbenna, Sri, and Kasturi all provided instances of responding uniquely to their students' struggles.
- ii) NGO workers position themselves as children's rights facilitators in governance practice. They function as guides, scaffolding the learning of children and communities, and often intervening in cases of rights abuses and exploitation. The activists I interviewed appeared to reconcile both types of rights (protection and representation) in their discussions of their practice. The term *makkala vitra* (children's friend) was used by Nivedita to illustrate an adult role that was both safe for the children and could provide material support in assisting children to secure accountability from various other governance councils and actors.
- iii) Vinod, Bina, Pramila and Nivedita narrated stories where children appeared to follow a trajectory of learning about their rights to voice and exercising that right to bring attention to the issues they faced personally and in their schools



and communities. These activists stressed that children learned about the limits and possibilities of their participation through enacting the right to voice.

These findings document changing *perceptions of identity* through rising awareness and practicing children's rights governance.

In this chapter, certain normativities were gleaned from my participant interviews:

- i) Children's rights to voice were stressed by certain participants as more challenging for communities to practice than rights to protection and provision. Rights to protection and provision were also more normalised than rights to voice.
- ii) Exercising political participation was presented as both demanding and potentially risky by my participants. While they acknowledged that children appeared to secure accountability when they did address higher authorities, they also pointed out that children had to learn that their voices could be heard. In addition, children's political participation did not always secure instant responses, and Bina warned that children who drew attention to rights abuses could be targeted.
- iii) Children were seen as beings to be cared for, with participants enumerating a variety of ways in which care could be demonstrated. They ascribed their efforts and the investments of unpaid labour, finances, time, and effort into governance as operating from a standpoint of care. The dominant *value* appeared to be one of care, demonstrated through various acts of commitment through governance practice. Whether it was Pramila who risked the ire of apathetic officials by enabling children to bring injustices to light or Rohit who loaned money to families in Midhol without hope it seeing it returned, these actions were presented as coming from within them, emanating from a source deeper than school development and rights policies.

If, as Crewe and Harrison (1998, p. 69) argue that "the notion of governance reflects both a concern for human rights and a belief that democratic pluralism is the most appropriate and just method of social and political organisation," it is important to discover whether participants share this view in their day-to-day practice of governance. The findings from my thematic analysis of participant narratives suggest that in a governance of children's rights, democratic participatory rights are muted in favour of rights of protection and provision. With the exception of a minority of participants (Bina, Nivedita,

and Vinod), the rest of my participants appeared more familiar with protective and provisory children's rights. Their narratives espoused these rights as they corresponded with the prevalent child image in the RTE as a being to be cared for. My analysis of participant tensions in their accounts suggests that the RTE promoted a schooling that was more consonant with predominantly middle-class children than those experiencing resource-poverty (Hopkins & Sriprakash, 2015).

However, although participants acknowledged that governing the RTE was challenging, they strove to tender the students in their care as much protection and provision as possible. In critically discussing the Child Labour Act of 2016, Nivedita explained that she and her organisation did not disagree with "the spirit of the Act," suggesting that she did not challenge (as most of the other participants did not challenge), the protective ethos of children's rights-based policies. Indeed, in their accounts of policy compliance and resistance, they looked beyond rights to explain their actions. As Holy and Stuchlik (1983, p. 82) argue, "the basic question is not whether the action is norm conforming or norm breaking, but which norms, ideas, and reasons were invoked by the actors for the performance of the action." Thus, when Pramila invokes the right to protect resource-poor children from child marriages and exploitation, she gives the reason of "love for children" to justify her efforts. This love inspires the practice of care which I have discussed in Chapter 5. The following paragraphs will centre the discussion around three major themes pertaining to child rights governance specifically: the uneven application of rights, the middle ground of child rights governance, and the endurance of care embedded in participants' governance practice.

### **Uneven Application of Children's Rights**

With the exception of activists such as Bina, Nivedita, and Vinod, most of my participants dwelt on the protective and provisory aspects of children's rights. However, since the Right to Education focuses on rights of provision and protection over rights of participation, this may not be a surprise, given its importance in the lives of teachers, students, and parents. Indeed, this finding is reflective of the greater confusion enacted by the UNCRC itself, which promotes participation while taking a strong protective stance. It is also consistent with the confusion engendered by what participation actually entails, and whether it is "a legal right or simply an (unenforceable) principle of good governance" (Couzens, 2017, p. 516). This confusion therefore highlights the "discursive character" of rights and their malleability in diverse participant hands (Reynaert & Roose, 2012, p. 47; Sanghera, 2016).

However, certain activist participants also stressed the importance of including the voices of resource-poor children and their families, and how this inclusion/participation could transform their hitherto passive subjectivities into active ones. Such views explained the efforts these activists made to mediate between children, schools, resource-poor communities, and local government bodies. Nivedita noted the importance of experiential learning, where she'd observed that children who'd been initially unfamiliar with being listened to and having their opinions taken seriously, grew in confidence through participation to remind local panchayat members of the issues they'd raised. Nivedita's narrative reflects Ginwright and James's (2002) view of participation as an experiential learning process that contributes to evolution of youth collective empowerment. Bina echoed this narrative in her examples of children and parents lobbying for change through SDMCs. Similarly, Vinod too described that in his efforts of mediation over twenty years between SDMCs in rural Karnataka and the state government, he'd witnessed the slow transformation in member self-concept from illiterate rural workers to social actors who bring changes. Although he acknowledged that this transformation is fraught with persisting class discourses, his experiences bolstered his conviction that over time, actors' experiences of participation spark social movements.

The activists' work of mediation, bridging child groups with outside audiences, reinforces Mahoney *et al.*'s (2010) claim that mediation allows children to engage in participation in public spaces. While the prevalent child image among the teachers seemed to be the child as a vulnerable being in need of protection and love, activists such as Bina, Nivedita, and Vinod also perceived them as social actors who could usher in communal change. Their approach seemed more aligned to a critical realist worldview, where they acknowledged that how children experienced the governance of schooling and their rights was also shaped by their larger social world. For instance, the *makkala vitras* (children's friends) in Nivedita's organisation, also acted as protective figures for children, as well as their guides. Bina, Vinod, and Pramila perceived *integration* of children in local governance systems such as SDMCs as the most sustainable option for children. Therefore, although protectionist children's rights appeared to hold more social currency than rights of participation, even those participants advocating participatory rights positioned them against a scaffolding of adult mentorship and guidance.

This view departs in some ways from those espoused by early proponents of the new sociology of childhood, which emphasises children's perspectives without acknowledging that these perspectives are also formed and shaped by children's communities (Marshall, 2016). Nevertheless, the lack of concrete measures to ensure that government schooling is

both acceptable and adaptable (Tomasevski, 2001) to resource-poor communities, ultimately underscores educational inequalities. These supports Sanghera's (2016) and Balagopalan's (2019) assertions that without state commitment to educational equality beyond accessibility and availability, marginalised children will continue to be disenfranchised.

### **Middle Ground of CRG**

The findings appeared to support the central contention of Corbridge *et al's* (2005) thesis on governance that this new form of relations between the state and its citizenry contains both promise and peril. Specifically, the ways in which participants speak of experiencing rights supports Sanghera's (2016, p. 3) argument that in India, "the politics of children's rights refers to rights as sites of power; that is, rights have been used 'against' and 'for' the powerless" (p. 204-5). The participants most aligned to the values of inclusion and representation (Bina, Nivedita, and Vinod) constructed narratives of marginalised children acquiring knowledge (i.e. learning) through their practice of governance. Bina drew attention to how powerful local officials were called to account by children in SDMCs. Vinod saw the inclusion of children as not only important, but that they could also function as eyes within the school premises, reporting on lessons and quality of midday meals. Nivedita emphasized their capabilities to discern injustice, learn through work, and undertake research to local inequalities. However, these were specific and isolated instances these participants drew on to represent iconic participation. They were emblematic of children's capabilities to mobilise and participate in the governance of their schooling and their rights, oppositional to the "iconography of victimhood (Thangaraj, 2019, p. 97) that often surfaced in protective attitudes towards children. Nivedita noted that this protective attitude, which resulted in 'raid and rescue' operations on the purported behalf of child labourers could create traumatic experiences for children, thus cautioning against seeing children solely as victims.

Nevertheless, the activists trod the middle ground of pragmatism by noting that these narratives of promise should not be seen as silver bullets. Nivedita explained that it was hardly "a cake walk" for the children, and Bina cautioned that children who participated and exposed social inequalities could become targets. In addition, legalised governance spaces such as SDMCs and children's parliaments did not necessarily engender a democratic participation. Indeed, child rights studies authors have often focused on how participation can be co-opted from its political potential to merely enhance service delivery in governance (Wyness, 2009; Couzens, 2017). Sevasti-Nolas (2015) for instance,

questions whether the institutionalised form of child participation in governance in the Global South focuses more on “fundable issues” rather than “emergent collective action” (p. 161). Pramila’s examples of children assisting special-needs voters in elections or reporting instances of interrupted schooling seem to bear this contention out.

However, Couzens (2017) makes the point that enhancing service delivery is also a legitimate form of participation, which indicates children’s acceptance of the local governance infrastructure. Although none of my participants narrated instances of what Couzens (2017) labels “high-end participation” (i.e., children’s involvement in policy-making), their narratives recounted a diversity of participatory activities: consultation, gathering information and conducting research, peer support and referring children to available support services, as well as weighing in on educational service delivery. Theis’ view that “starting low is acceptable as long as there is movement,” (Theis, 2010, p. 352) is not necessarily permission to be complacent, but to seek possibilities in these narratives of transformation through participation.

Indeed, from the narratives of my participants, it appeared that children and families participated in improving the service delivery of schools because this was important to them. From the parents who dwelt on the importance of consistent teacher presence, accountability and aesthetic appearance of school (such as in the case of Isila) to the NGO narratives of children investigating corrupt social practices and bringing attention to misuse of their school property, it appears that enhanced service delivery matters to resource-poor families. When labouring children complain to Nivedita about the condition and quality of the free education that is their right, they are making political statements about state provision. Demanding accountability and an acceptable and adaptable form of schooling *is* a politicised action. Thus, rather than reject children’s rights-based governance approaches outright, as Sevasti-Nolas (2015) seems to suggest because of their association, in her view, with “corporate managerial practices”, it seems, from the perspectives of my activist participants’ that children and communities have used these spaces to negotiate for changes they wished to see in their schools and communities.

### **Rights in Choreographies of Care**

The propensity for state policy and governance actors to focus on protectionist rights promoted a state vision of care that fell short of the complexity of caring narrated by my participants. The focus on accessibility and availability of rights rather than their acceptability and adaptability criminalised forms of care enacted by families. Nivedita and Sri noted how child marriage was regarded by families as a way of protecting and caring

for their daughters and the tensions both they as governance actors and the families had to face when they intervened against child marriage. Through enacting care, participants stressed the importance of a relationality that as Noddings argued (1984, p. 2) centres around “receptivity,” “relatedness,” and “responsiveness”. These three characteristics appeared absent from governance discourse and guidelines but seemed to steer practice in participants’ daily lived experience. When Bina wondered how to connect the local systems of governance or Vinod talked of the need for a coordination forum for SDMCs, they expressed a need for governance to go beyond its partial iteration in policy. Given that care appears to operationalise governance in practice, framing governance as an “integrated network of care” (Reyes, 2020) may hold promise for current school governance challenges, one which attempts dialogue with both local expressions of care and those advanced by rights-based approaches. Care is thus not only a useful mode for practitioners of governance, but can contribute to reaching towards a more adaptive, holistic and integrated practice of SDG.

In Chapter 5, I described how teachers would “cover” for students by filling in their attendance, and paying for their exam fees, visiting families and trying to resolve disputes relationally. Luttrell (2020) notes that covering *uncovers* “the contours and values of care” (p. 205). This finding fits in with the work of anthropologists pointing out the additional labour of governance participation (Li, 2007; Phillips, 2012). Covering is also a caring act used to explain care. The participants understood that early marriage was seen as a caring rather than an exploitative act, while children’s work was framed as a way for children to care for their families. Additionally, care could also threaten participant well-being and safety. Nivedita talked of facing communal ire, Vinod mentioned receiving death threats through Whatsapp, and Pramila narrated being tied up by villagers when she and her team tried to prevent an early marriage. There appeared an element of danger to care which adds another dimension to the understanding, as Luttrell phrases it, that “care is work” (p. 205).

The previous chapter initiated participants’ deploying of time, personal resources and effort to practice governance, i.e., practice care. In trying to ensure children’s rights (whether protective/provisory and participatory) participants also invested considerable effort while attempting to cater to the complexity and interdependency of the social relations and structural constraints that nested children’s worlds. As Luttrell (2020) argues, choreographies of care don’t spring out of a void. They are coordinated by different actors and networks from the “demands of family life, workplaces, schools, and a constellation of both private and public resources” (p. 206).

By relying on participant interviews and their narratives of their experiences, my aim has not been to treat the data they shared as holistic or accurate reflections of practicing governance. Rather, I sifted their words for the meanings they constructed, understanding governance as socially mediated and constructed by participants' beliefs, assumptions, and experiences. While I tried to access diverse participants, it was easier to access certain groups (i.e. teachers) over others (parents). However, relying on the understanding that all methods offer only a partial understanding of any experience (Slife and Williams, 1995), I aimed to uncover dimensions of governance by both a variety of participants and a variety of methods. Through this analytic project, the participants' focus on care, which appeared to endure through the tensions and confusions of practicing a governance that only partially addressed socioeconomic inequalities, remained a dominant theme. Thus, the focus on children's rights governance in this chapter serves to complement the findings of school development governance in the previous chapter, emphasizing the importance of care to participant practice of school development and children's rights governance.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### Overview of chapter

The research findings I have presented in this dissertation illuminate the various dilemmas and practices actors in the school and community nexus narrate from a bottom-up perspective. Decentering governance from a preoccupation with formal networks and policy roles affords us deeper insights into the dilemmas, motivations, and actions of teachers, parents, social workers and children navigating governance institutions and policies. Studying mandated participatory governance structures such as the SDMC allows us deeper understanding of the tensions which arise, and how teachers and parents engage with the greater project of governance.



Figure 29 Isila School's Motto

I commence the chapter by revisiting the research questions I posed at the introduction to the study. Through highlighting the major findings of the thesis, I contextualise the study by referring back to the theoretical and methodological literature on governance and childhood studies. I then discuss the study's limitations and offer recommendations on research avenues that follow up these participant lived trajectories in education governance. I conclude with personal reflections on education governance and government schooling in Kalaburagi in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which spread through India three months after I'd left the field.

### Research summary

Engaging with my participants demonstrated Woodiwiss's (2005) assertion that children's rights were bound up in social lives along with devolutions of power. Resource-poor families were responsibilised within the rights-based policy framework of the RTE



and their participation was encouraged to align with RTE goals. The ‘soft’ accountability of parent participation and monitoring in SDMCs did not necessarily ensure consistent teacher presence, which was a key reason stated by parents for favouring the ‘hard’ accountability they could gain from private schools. However, my participants also narrated successful instances of parent and children mobilisation in local governance bodies such as SDMCs and children’s parliaments, where they were able to seek redress from higher authorities for their communal issues. Moreover, I discovered that participants interpreted discourses of rights along personal understandings of care and histories of experience. The findings from the fieldwork undertaken for this dissertation generated data from participants on the ground, which can contribute towards progress in both governance policy and practice (Craig and Porter, 2006). The fieldwork sought to probe the “rights scape” (Bajaj, 2014) and understand the themes arising from the expression of “new forms of citizenship” (Bajaj, 2014, p. 56) through school development governance. Kalaburagi in northern Karnataka, India, was considered an ideal field site to study how communities engaged with school governance structures and children’s rights governance in a district held as developmentally ‘backward’ (Kalaburagi Human Development Report, 2014). The major research question I posed was:

How do north Karnatakans engage in the practice of school development and child rights governance and how do they reinterpret child rights discourses?

I had additionally posed sub-questions to illuminate various facets of the findings:

- What are the tensions of ‘doing’ school development governance articulated by school staff, parents, students and activists?
- How do these various stakeholders perceive and respond to children’s rights in their governance practice?
- How do participants reach for the ‘middle ground’ of school development and children’s rights governance?

To answer these questions, I relied on a qualitative methodology, living in Kalaburagi for three months in 2018- 2019 and two weeks at the end of 2019. Inhabiting the field site for a brief period introduced me to the complexities of the lived experiences of marginalised communities in Kalaburagi. I initially engaged in observations in Isila and Midhol schools, and conducted group and individual interviews with school staff, children, parents, and NGO workers. Additionally, I engaged children in arts-based group interviews and conducted short qualitative interviews in my translators’ neighbourhood in urban

Kalaburagi to elicit more parent responses. In 2019, I returned to Kalaburagi to conduct more interviews, most of them individual interviews. I also did interviews with some teachers and students at Kampur High school, the secondary public school closest to Isila village. The data gathering tool that proved most fruitful in answering my research questions overall was the semi-structured individual interview.

The schools of Isila and Midhol also illuminated specific and contingent responses to policies of decentralised education governance. The two differing cases, with one school not possessing a functioning SDMC while the other's SDMC had received an award for the best SDMC in the *talukh*, illustrates Ball, Maguire, and Braun's (2012) contention that schools are not homogenous institutions or communities. This study attempts to 're-materialise' policy, as opposed to studies which 'de-materialize policy' (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012, p. 5). Not only have I attempted this rematerialisation through a focus on the sense-making of my various participants, but also spent time observing classrooms and conducting interviews in the schools and fields of Kalaburagi. The paint of the walls in Midhol classroom may be peeling and the wooden tops of the desks falling apart, but it also had received funds to take some of the students on a field trip for a few days to Mysore and surrounding environs. Isila may have a science lab stocked with beakers and test-tubes, but some teachers also spoke of the need to raise funds for sports equipment and computers. These conversations and observations communicated to me the ways in which complex and shifting governance boundaries shaped the possibilities and limits of my participants' actions.

### **A Summary of the Findings**

Overall, the empirical data aligned with Corbridge *et al's*. (2005) and Couzens' (2017) assertion that governance held both perils and possibilities for participant groups. Involvement in governance goals appeared to demand a great deal of personal effort from my participants. On the other hand, participants also shared narratives of change: whether it was change in caste relations at the school level or children raising attention to deviant practices by adults in their school grounds or working children mobilising in unions. The narratives also suggested that governance structures and groups could be knit together tighter into a more 'networked' governance. This inference could be partly because of the different types of participants I interviewed, with each 'group' bearing a unique perspective due to their own personal paradigms and experiences. However, school staff, parents, and students seemed to treat their schools as cases in isolation, referring to meagre official training in rights or insubstantive longitudinal efforts at coordinating with other

SDMCs and other local governance bodies to strengthen the network. Opportunities for coordination with other SDMCs in the district and NGOs to share lessons learned and expertise could strengthen governance bodies, as well as securing support from the government that go beyond financial disbursement of scholarships or material provisions.

The second main finding emphasized the importance of finding the middle ground in children's rights governance, and documented how participation in civic structures and governance bodies could promote children as social and political actors and strengthen ties between children and local authorities. The NGO worker participants provided narratives of their experience in child rights governance that governance bodies such as SDMCs and children's parliaments had provided spaces for children in rural Karnataka to mobilise and seek accountability from local authorities for social issues that affected their lives. These participants treaded a middle ground that acknowledged the children's changing views of themselves with cautions that child participation did not always result in fairy-tale endings of instant resolution. Additionally, the participants were careful to stress that child participation should be scaffolded by interaction with 'safe' adults whom children trusted and who could help children practically either by representing their concerns or helping them gain an audience with local authorities.

These participants worked to strengthen existing governance structures and saw themselves as inhabiting a 'facilitating' role, mentoring and providing practical help to communities who participated in governance. They noted that this facilitation carried a cost- in mediating between different communities with different interests and balances of power, they had faced opposition and social dissonance from different groups. Some of that opposition emerged from resource-poor communities for whom the legal injunctions against child marriage went against their understanding of the child's best interests. At other times, opposition emerged from more politically and socially powerful groups for whom the political participation of the poor challenged ingrained structural hierarchies. However, narratives of child participation in governance were restricted to NGO workers' experiences; neither in Isila or Midhol or Kampur school did the students indicate that they had engaged in governance bodies. This finding suggests that mainstreaming child participation in governance is still a work in progress.

Finally, a personal stance of care towards children underpinned participant narratives of navigating the middle ground of school governance. This avowal of care appeared to allow them to (i) reconcile the dissonant aspects of practicing governance, (ii) distance themselves from governance 'failures', and (iii) present them as ultimately committed to children's wellbeing. This stance of care could harbour both a view of

children as vulnerable and precious as well as a view that acknowledged the structural and social realities that sent children out of school. Therefore, while most of my participants affirmed the Right to Education, they pointed out the flaws in its drafting and implementation and the lack of concerted and coordinated political will to commit to implementing school quality.

What appeared to rankle the most for some participants was both the political and social embrace of private schooling, which they argued underscored class segregation and contributed to continuing inequality. This stance of apathy, and uncaring was contrasted with their own efforts (work, emotional, relational and financial expenditure) which were narrated as indicators of their stance of care. They chose to highlight “the concrete and the personal” (Noddings, 1984, p. 45) side of their contributions as a response to the difficulties of applying the rules of the RTE and right-based governance to an unequal social landscape. As Nel Noddings (1984) notes, an ethic of care “allows for situations and conditions in which judgment (in the impersonal, logical sense) may be put aside in favour of faith and commitment.” (p. 36).

Thus, care and commitment to children was used by participants to respond to their immediate context, rather than necessarily the RTE. The contextually-embedded dimensions of practicing school development governance meant that care for children and children’s best interests were differently interpreted, but were also used as credit for participants’ various actions and perceptions of governance policies and practice. Although the RTE and children’s rights could sometimes serve as inspirations for participants’ motivations and actions, they used care as an inter/personal ethic that transcended policy flaws and governance ‘failures,’ as well as the ethic that inspired them to persevere through their challenges.

### **Theoretical Insights**

This thesis puts into focus the middle ground of governance, revealing how a diverse set of participants navigates the perils and possibilities afforded them by school governance regulations and structures. It contributes to calls for studies of the “third wave” of governance, studies which aim to situate research of governance from the ground-up (Bevir and Rhodes, 2011). Rather than focusing on formal networks of governance, this study treats governance as a lived-experience attendant with conflicts of competing traditions, discourses and beliefs. It situates the participant in an education landscape where governance has shifted from ostensibly paternalistic to ostensibly participatory

(Maithreyi & Sriprakash, 2018) and charts the efforts of the participants to adapt to participatory governance practices.

The intersection of school governance with children's rights, specifically the right to education, meant I had to adopt theoretical frameworks across disciplines to understand what school governance entailed for local stakeholders in Karnataka. I therefore paired a theoretical stance towards a decentred governance; governance from the "bottom-up" with an additional framework borrowed and adapted from the initial scholarly call for studying children's rights governance. Emerging from the discipline of Childhood studies, which attempts to probe discourses and practices surrounding children and the study of childhood, the child rights governance framework proposed by Holzcheiter *et al.* (2019) rendered salient the tensions and promise of governance in practice. The framework centred tensions of governance as anchored in continued class-based discourses and practices of school choice as well as participants' attempts to mediate between the exigencies of resource-poverty and systematic school attendance required by the Right to Education. The promise of governance emerged from participants expressing change in the self-concept of resource-poor communities towards more active social roles. However, given that the framework was initially proposed for application towards the study of NGOs concerned with children's rights governance, I suggest that a model more flexible and inclusive of the various local governance bodies would be appropriate for a more wholistic study of children's rights governance.

### **Methodological Contributions**

This study used a variety of qualitative data-gathering tools among several participant groups in Karnataka. I pursued a qualitative methodology because I was interested in gleaning understanding of governance from "the bottom-up" (Bevir & Rhodes, 2011). Qualitative tools are ideal for research projects that seek to understand participants' expressed experiences and to infer locally-constructed narratives and actions revolving around a topic (Yahalom, 2016). Qualitative tools can also shed light on different interpretations of governance, which may not be revealed through quantitative tools which often rely on closed questions or a pre-set menu of options such as a survey. Although quantitative methodologies can generate helpful statistics, they cannot provide the in-depth details that qualitative methodologies can. Moreover, I incorporated arts-based group interviews into my repertoire to make the research process more accessible for the student participants. In my case, I discovered that open-ended interviews appeared challenging and time-consuming for participants from resource-poor backgrounds.

Additionally, individual interviews tended to flow more smoothly than group interviews, where my participants seemed uncomfortable at times in speaking before an audience. I used classroom observations and various interviews (both group and individual) with various participants to triangulate the methods of data collection. The diversity of participant groups also helped illuminate some of the data gathered or explain gaps. For example, while the Isila schoolteachers assured me that there was “full participation” at SDMC meetings, the Isila *anganwadi* Divya (government village nursery worker), told me that she did not often attend meetings because they were held at an inconvenient time. Moreover, during a group interview with SC mothers in Isila village, two of them mentioned that their participation consisted of agreeing to what the school staff had said. The triangulation of participants thus helped illustrate the varying conceptualizations of participation in Isila’s SDMC.

### **Limitations**

This was a qualitative study done on school and children’s rights governance in Kalaburagi, Karnataka. The views and experiences of my participants elicited during data gathering can be considered as subjective, and not necessarily generalizable to other parts of India. Moreover, as a research instrument myself, my positionality played an important role in the data I gathered. Age, gender, class, nationality- these affected how my participants responded to me, their internal calibrations of trust and the data they opted to divulge. Therefore, researchers of different ages or gender may elicit different responses even when canvassing the same participants.

However, the data in this thesis may be useful to scholars who wish to build on and refine on community-based school management and lived experiences of governance. A major barrier for me was language. Without knowledge of Kannada, I not only have missed linguistic nuances which may give additional insights into how my participants interpret governance, but it was a major barrier in building rapport, as I had to interact with my participants through an interpreter. As an outsider, there were several gaps in my religious and cultural knowledge which were heightened through lack of Kannada. Furthermore, I recommend that additional studies on childhood and children in Karnataka investigate the importance of religious beliefs and traditional customs which give Karnataka its unique place among India’s southern states.

Another limitation is that there are no interviews with state education officials. Although I had some interaction with state officials (in obtaining government approval and accompanying NGO workers) I did not solicit any of them for interviews. I chose to focus

on the participants with lesser political power to emphasize their perspectives. However, perspectives from political elites could have added another layer on how governance plays out in education in Karnataka. Furthermore, extending my research activities to other villages in Kalaburagi district may have afforded insights in how different SDMCs operated under their own contingent set of circumstances.

The data was also gathered at specific points in time, and the current Covid-19 pandemic (which began in India three months after I left from my second fieldwork visit) will doubtless have dramatically affected how school and children's rights governance is navigated. The first wave of the 2020 ASER survey, conducted through phones, revealed that there was a small shift from private schooling to government schooling, which the authors theories may have arisen from the closure of many private schools during the pandemic. In addition, a particularly large proportion of children in Karnataka between 6 to 7 years of age are waiting to gain enrolment in school. However, the survey also noted that families in general tried their best to help children with their learning through digital means and securing government resources (ASER, 2020). The authors conclude that more data analysis will be needed to sketch an understanding of children's learning and adaptation during the pandemic. In a news article which captures the promise of school governance, SDMCs in several districts in Karnataka (though not reported in Kalaburagi) had campaigned for the reopening of their government schools, despite continued state closure of schools (Shreyas, 2020). The efforts of these SDMCs in opening schools, practicing safe distancing in classrooms, and soliciting teachers to return, demonstrates the possibilities of school governance bodies.<sup>49</sup>

### **Final Reflections**

The narratives my participants shared highlighted the importance of care in how they participated in and navigated school development and children's rights governance. Recent publications that focus on the productive possibilities of care, as well as its exclusion, links to gendered roles and the invisible labour that is its partner, set the stage for deeper analyses of care and school governance amongst resource-poor communities (Reyes, 2020; Luttrell, 2020). The work of eminent educationalists such as John Dewey and Nel Noddings have limited care to pedagogy and teacher education. Although their

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<sup>49</sup> The entire news article can be accessed at: Shreyas, HS. (17 December, 2020). "Karnataka: SDMCs defy govt, get students back on campuses for games, lessons." *Times of India*. Retrieved from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>

contributions are important, there has been little work that has carried over a focus on care in the study of school governance. Given the emphasis of sustainable development goals and international educational campaigns on participatory governance, a deeper sociological focus on care in school governance could help illuminate what it means for people to participate. Moreover, care and care work in Western institutions has been associated with low pay and traditional gender roles. Teaching itself is often assumed to be a feminized profession, partly because care is associated as key to the teaching practice (Head, 2018). There are also questions of whose care is validated and whose care carries the most weight. In this thesis, children's rights were upheld as instruments that had the best interests of the child at heart. However, parents and children could perceive them as frustrating their own attempts to reach for stability and survival. There are also questions of how far care can compensate for structural inequality, questions about the emotional tolls of care, and how burnout is navigated by governance actors. An ethnographic focus on care and how parents, teachers, NGO workers, and students understand and practice care in the context of school development and child rights governance can add to the literature on the evolution of school governance and possibly provide pathways that allow school governance in India to truly serve its intended beneficiaries.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1 University of Glasgow Ethical Approval

Dear Rebecca Ipe,  
**College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Project Title:** A Child-Focused Ethnographic Enquiry on School Management Committee Children in Rural Karnataka.

**Application No: 400170147**

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 01/09/2018\_\_\_\_\_
- Project end date: \_30/10/2020\_\_\_\_\_
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: ([https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_490311\\_en.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)) (Unless there is an agreed exemption to this, noted here).
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:  
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Muir Houston  
College Ethics Officer

## Appendix 2 Phase 1 Interview Schedules



College of Social  
Sciences

### Interview Schedule

#### Interview Questions for Children

1. What do you think about your school? What do you like and don't like about your school?
2. What changes would you like to see in your school?
3. Why are you going to this particular school?
4. What would you like to do when you finish your school?
5. What kinds of jobs do you want to do?
6. Do you think it will be easy for you to find jobs after school?
7. Do your parents help you with your schoolwork? What do your parents say to you about school?
8. What do you think about your parents' experience in the School Management Committee?
9. What do you think about your community?
10. What changes would you like to see in your community?
11. Do you think you can help with these changes? Do you think your parents can help with these changes?
12. What challenges do you think your family goes through?
13. What is your role in the family?
14. Describe to me your dream school.
15. Describe to me your dream community.

#### Interview Questions for SDMC Parents

1. What do you think about your children's school?
2. What are your thoughts about your children's futures?
3. What are the challenges you face in sending your children to school?
4. What is your role on the School Management Committee?

5. Tell me about your experience with the School Management Committee so far.
6. What are some challenges of working with the School Management Committee?
7. What would you like to see change in your school?
8. In your words, what would be the ideal school?
9. How do you think the community could get involved in the school?
10. What are some of the challenges facing your community?
11. What would you like to see change in your community?
12. What have your children told you about their aspirations for the future?
13. How do you monitor your children's academic performance?
14. What would be your ideal school?
15. What would be your ideal community?

#### Interview Questions for Teachers/Principal

1. How long have you been working at this school?
2. What lead you to choose to work at this school?
3. Why did you become a teacher?
4. What is your experience so far of working at this school?
5. What are some of the challenges of your job?
6. What are some of the challenges at this school?
7. What would you like to see changed at the school?
8. What do you think of current education policy in Karnataka?
9. What would you recommend to improve education quality in government schools?
10. What is your experience with the School Management Committee?
11. Tell me about your experience with the School Management Committee so far.
12. What are some challenges of working with the School Management Committee?
13. How do you think the community could get involved in the school?
14. What are some of the challenges facing your community?
15. What would you like to see change in your community?
16. What have the children told you about their aspirations for the future?

17. What does an ideal teacher look like?

#### Questions for non SDMC parents

1. Who do you think is a role model in your community?
2. What is your level of schooling?
3. What were the barriers which prevented you from further schooling?
4. What are the barriers to further schooling for your children?

### Visual Arts-Based Research

#### Present and Imagined Communities

- As the children to draw a picture/map of their present school and/or community They must then take the researcher on a 'tour', explaining which parts of their lived space they like/ don't like



- Next, ask the children to draw a picture/map of their future imagined school and/or community. What are the salient features of this community?



### Appendix 3 Kalaburagi Deputy Director of Public Instruction Approval Letter



(ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ)

#### ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಇಲಾಖೆ ಉಪನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರ ಕಾರ್ಯಾಲಯ ಕಲಬುರಗಿ

ಪ.ಸಂ.: ಆ1/ಆಡಳಿತ/ಶಾಲೆ/ಸಂದರ್ಶನ/ಅನುಮತಿ/2018-19

ದಿನಾಂಕ:26-10-2018

:-ಜ್ಞಾಪನ:-

ವಿಷಯ: ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಯ ಸರಕಾರಿ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ, ಓಕಳ, ಕಮಲಾಪೂರ, ಅಂಬಲಗಾ, ಕಲಮೂಡ್, ಸ್ಪೇಷನ್ ಬಜಾರ್, ಅವರಾದ, ಬಗವಾನ ತಾಂಡಾ ಶಾಲೆಯ ಎಸ್.ಡಿ.ಎಮ್.ಸಿ ಕಾರ್ಯ ವೈಖರಿ ಕುರಿತಂತೆ ಶಿಕ್ಷಕರು, ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿ ಹಾಗೂ ಪಾಲಕರ ಸಂದರ್ಶನ ಕುರಿತು.

ಉಲ್ಲೇಖ: ಕು|| ರೆಬೆಕ್ಕಾ ಐಫ್, ಸಂಶೋಧನಾ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿನಿ ಗ್ಲಾಸ್ಕೊ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯ ಯು.ಎಸ್.ಎ

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ಮೇಲ್ಕಂಡ ವಿಷಯಕ್ಕೆ ಸಂಬಂಧಿಸಿದಂತೆ, ಕು|| ರೆಬೆಕ್ಕಾ ಐಫ್ ಗ್ಲಾಸ್ಕೊ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯ ಸಂಶೋಧನಾ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿನಿಯು ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಯ ಮೇಲಿನ ವಿಷಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಹೇಳಲಾದ ಗ್ರಾಮಾಂತರ ಸರಕಾರಿ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಸಂದರ್ಶನ ನೀಡಿ ಅಲ್ಲಿನ ಎಸ್.ಡಿ.ಎಮ್.ಸಿ ಕಾರ್ಯ ವೈಖರಿ, ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ, ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕರ ಭಾಗವಹಿಸುವಿಕೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಇನ್ನಿತರ ಶೈಕ್ಷಣಿಕ ವಿಷಯಗಳ ಕುರಿತು ಚರ್ಚಿಸಿ ಮಾಹಿತಿ ಪಡೆಯಲು ಇಚ್ಛಿಸಿರುತ್ತಾರೆ.

ಪ್ರಯುಕ್ತ ಇವರಿಗೆ ಶಾಲಾ ಬೋಧನೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಗಳಿಗೆ ತೊಂದರೆಯಾಗದಂತೆ ಮತ್ತು ಸದರಿ ಪ್ರಕ್ರಿಯೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅಂಕಿ ಅಂಶಗಳನ್ನು ಇಲಾಖಾ ಪೂರ್ವಾನುಮತಿಯಿಲ್ಲದೆ ಬಳಸುವಂತಿಲ್ಲ ಎಂಬ ಷರತ್ತಿಗೆ ಒಳಪಡಿಸಿ ಅನುಮತಿ ನೀಡಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಸದರಿಯವರು ತಮ್ಮ ತಮ್ಮ ಶಾಲೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಭೇಟಿ ನೀಡಿದಾಗ ಅವರಿಗೆ ಅಗತ್ಯ ಮಾಹಿತಿ ನೀಡಿ ಸಹಕರಿಸಲು ತಿಳಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಉಪನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರು  
ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಇಲಾಖೆ ಕಲಬುರಗಿ

ಇವರಿಗೆ,

- 1) ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಶಿಕ್ಷಣಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳು ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಉತ್ತರವಲಯ ರವರಿಗೆ
- 2) ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಶಿಕ್ಷಣಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳು ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ದಕ್ಷಿಣವಲಯ
- 3) ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಶಿಕ್ಷಣಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳು ಆಳಂದ
- 4) ಮುಖ್ಯಗುರುಗಳು ಸರಕಾರಿ ಹಿರಿಯ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ ಓಕಳ ತಾ|| ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಉತ್ತರವಲಯ
- 5) ಮುಖ್ಯಗುರುಗಳು ಸರಕಾರಿ ಹಿರಿಯ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ ಕಮಲಾಪೂರ ತಾ|| ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಉತ್ತರವಲಯ
- 6) ಮುಖ್ಯಗುರುಗಳು ಸರಕಾರಿ ಹಿರಿಯ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ ಕಲಮೂಡ್ ತಾ|| ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಉತ್ತರವಲಯ
- 7) ಮುಖ್ಯಗುರುಗಳು ಸರಕಾರಿ ಹಿರಿಯ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ ಸ್ಪೇಷನ್ ಬಜಾರ್ ತಾ|| ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ದಕ್ಷಿಣವಲಯ
- 8) ಮುಖ್ಯಗುರುಗಳು ಸರಕಾರಿ ಹಿರಿಯ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ ಅವರಾದ ತಾ|| ಕಲಬುರಗಿ ಉತ್ತರವಲಯ
- 9) ಮುಖ್ಯಗುರುಗಳು ಸರಕಾರಿ ಹಿರಿಯ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಶಾಲೆ ಬಗವಾನ ತಾಂಡಾ
- 10) ಕು|| ರೆಬೆಕ್ಕಾ ಐಫ್, ಸಂಶೋಧನಾ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿನಿ ಗ್ಲಾಸ್ಕೊ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯ



## Appendix 4 Observation Guide

### Semi-structured observation guide: Classroom Observation

**Background:** Observing classes to document student participation and probe the nature of children's engagement with their learning. What sort of participation do they engage in and how does this differ/converge with Indian government educational policy expectations?

Additionally, how do teachers encourage participation? Observations can pinpoint the many strategies teachers employ in translating policy aims into classroom practice.

**Purpose:** How is participation in class constructed by both teachers and pupils? How does this shape learning?

#### For the physical space

- How is the classroom arranged? Seating arrangements? Pictures/ posters/ visual aids on walls? Gender segregation?
- Are there separate bathrooms for both boys and girls?
- Are there spaces to play in recess/ break times?
- What are the 'rules' for behaving in these spaces, i.e. corridors, and how do students engage with these rules?

#### Routines

- What is the purported routine of the school? Where does this routine/timetable stay (e.g. in principal's office, on the walls, etc.)
- What is the actual routine of classes? Are there late/early starts and stops? How much time is devoted to introducing new activities, periods of transition, disciplining?

#### For a learning activity

- What information is given to students about:
- how, when, with whom, to do the activity etc?
- the educational aims, objectives and expected learning outcomes of the activity?
- how the activity is expected to help their learning for the course which it forms a part?
- how and from whom they can get help if they need it?
- what learning resources they can use to help them do the activity and where/how they can get access to them?
- how the activity fits into any assessment for the course, and if it is assessed, the marking criteria?
- the relevance of the learning beyond meeting the assessment requirements, e.g. in future life, practice etc.?

- How is the activity implemented? e.g.
- who is taking part?
- number of participants
- nature of the activity and teaching approach
- timing and location of the activity
- how the activity is organised
- how time is used during the activity
- roles and responsibilities of participants
- decisions being made by whom and for whom
- resources made available to students e.g. special equipment, learning resources, software, virtual learning environments etc
- help available to students

#### Participant Behaviour

- How are the participants behaving? e.g.
- How are they undertaking the activity?
- How are students using help and resources?
- How are students interacting with the learning environment?
- Do students appear more motivated, engaged, or better prepared?
- How are the participants interacting? E.g. Is there dialogue?
- Group work? Do they ask teachers for help or peers or both?
- Is the dialogue constructive for learning?
- Who is talking/listening?
- What is their body language/non-verbal information?
- Is there evidence in the dialogue that students are learning?
- How are students learning from the dialogue? (e.g. staff-student, peer-peer discussion, group inquiry....etc)
- Is there evidence in the dialogue that academic staff/support staff are responding to students' learning needs?
- How is feedback being given to students?

#### For assessments

- How are children assessed: daily, weekly, monthly? What are the 'big' assessments?
- How are assessments explained and planned for?
- Is homework assigned? Checked? Returned with feedback?

#### For possible outcomes

- What is the evidence that students have achieved expected learning outcomes, e.g.
- from their completion of activities, assessment?
- from their behaviour and dialogue?
- from their level of achievement?

## Appendix 5 Plain Language Statements & Consent Forms



### Participant Information Sheet - children

#### Title of project and researcher details

A Child-Focused Ethnographic Enquiry on School Management Committee Children in Rural Karnataka

Researcher: Ms. Rebecca Ipe

Supervisor: Dr Michele Schweisfurth/ Dr. Srabani Maitra

Course: PhD. in Education.

You are being invited to take part in a research project about what you think about school, community, learning and family. A research project is a way to learn more about something. You are being asked to take part because your parents are on the School Management Committee in your school.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others in the class and your parent/carer if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.



**What will happen if you take part**

This is a study of children in their communities and schools in rural Karnataka. I am trying to find out about children's everyday lives: the things you ~~see~~ and say, the important people, places, and things in your life and how these affect how you think and feel. I will be following and making notes on everything I see. You can see any notes I make and ask me questions. I will be visiting classrooms and those homes to which I am invited, as well as community and village events. Bits of what you say, write, and draw will be used in my report to my teachers and school and may also be used in reports that might be useful to local and national governments when planning services for schoolchildren in the future. You are free to refuse participating at any time and if there is something you say/write/draw/do that you do not want to be used in the study, you can inform me and I will not use it.

**Keeping information confidential (private)**

I will keep the information from the group discussion and from my notes about your learning in a locked cabinet or in a locked file on my computer. When I have finished writing my study I will destroy all the information.

When I write about what I have found out, your name will not be mentioned. If you like you can choose another name for me to use when I am writing about what you said. No-one else will know which name you have chosen. Only the others in the focus groups/ arts research groups will know what you said.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you might be in danger of harm, I might have to tell other people who need to know about this.

**The results of this study**

When I have gathered all of the information from everyone who is taking part I will write about what I have learned in a dissertation, which is a long essay, which I have to complete for the course I am studying on. This will be read and marked by my teachers at university. I will tell you and the other children who have taken part what I have found out about what you think about collaborative learning. I will also tell other teachers in the school. I will destroy all of my notes and recordings when the project is finished.

### Consent Form

I would like to hear what you think about your school and your community.

- You do not have to answer any questions you do not like.
- You can stop talking to me at any time.

Do you want to talk to me about your thoughts and experience of school in your daily life?

Please put a circle around your answer.



Can I record our chat?

Please put a circle around your answer.



Can I tell other people what you think? I will not tell them your name.

Please put a circle around your answer.



Would you like to make drawings in response to some of the questions I have asked you?



Please write your name in the box below.

End of Form.

### Visual Images for Explanation of Research Process with Child Participants



I will be making notes of what is happening in your classroom and your daily routines.



I will sometimes ask you to draw or write. You do not have to do this if you do not want to. I will include some of your drawings/writing in my report.



I am interested in what is important to you. You can show me around and tell me about what you find interesting.

## Appendix 6 Phase 2 Interview Schedules and Forms



University  
of Glasgow

College of Social  
Sciences

Faculty of Education  
St. Andrews Building  
11 Eldon Street, Glasgow  
G3 6NH  
Email: [r.ape.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.ape.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

Dear Participant,

December, 2019

Thank you very much for taking part in my study. You have helped me understand more about the landscape of education and children's rights in Karnataka, India. I greatly appreciate the time you have spent in assisting me. Your contributions are an invaluable asset to the growing field of knowledge we have on this topic.

If you have any further queries or observations arising from this study, please feel free to write to me by email or post.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Ipe (*Doctoral Research Candidate*)



**Phase 2 Interview Schedule (Parents' Interviews)**

Name:

Age:

Neighbourhood &amp; Hometown/ Caste Background:

Languages Spoken:

**SECTION ONE (PERSONAL/FAMILY)**

- I. What do you know about children's rights? What is your opinion on children's rights?
- II. Where do you hear information about children's rights?
- III. How have parenting practices changed from when you were young to now?
- IV. In your opinion, what is the relationship between children and adults in Karnataka?  
How are children supposed to behave?
- V. What are some of the responsibilities of children? When you were a child, what were your responsibilities?
- VI. What do you remember of your childhood? How have things changed since then?
- VII. What are some of your dreams for your children?

**SECTION TWO (SCHOOL)**

- I. How often do you visit the school? Why do you go?
- II. Do you participate in school events? When does the school call you and why?
- III. What kind of programs have you participated in? What do you like about the school?
- IV. What are some changes you have seen in the school? E.g, programs, SDMC, reading camps.
- V. Do you think it is easy or difficult to work and participate in school events? Would you like to join the SDMC?

Hindi Translation

1. आप बच्चों के अधिकारों के बारे में क्या जानते हैं? aap bachchon ke adhikaaron ke baare mein kya jaanate hain? बच्चों के अधिकारों पर आपकी क्या राय है? bachchon ke adhikaaron par aapakee kya raay hai? *Aap kya kya kehna hai*
2. आप बच्चों के अधिकारों के बारे में जानकारी कहाँ सुनते हैं? aap bachchon ke adhikaaron ke baare mein jaanakaaree kahaan sunate hain? *akhar mein - in newspapers ap ko kaha se jaankara mili?*
3. जब आप अभी युवा थे, तब से पालन-पोषण की प्रथाएं कैसे बदल गई हैं? jab aap abhee yuva the, tab se *parvaash* paalan-poshan kee prathaen kaise badal gae hain? जब आप छोटे थे, तो क्या माता-पिता ने बच्चों की परवरिश अलग तरह से की थी? *Ek clo bahar mein baitha baitha ho?* jab aap chhote the, to kya maata-pita ne bachchon kee paravarish alag tarah se kee thee?
4. आपकी राय में, बच्चों और वयस्कों के बीच क्या संबंध *rohta* है? aapakee raay mein, bachchon aur *bachhon* vayasakon ke beech kya sambandh hai.  
बच्चों के साथ कैसा व्यवहार करना चाहिए *hona chaahie* bachchon ke saath kaisa vyavahaar karana chaahie
5. बच्चों की कुछ जिम्मेदारियां क्या हैं  
bachchon kee kuchh jimmedaariyaan kya hain *kyu*  
जब आप एक बच्चे थे, तो आपकी क्या जिम्मेदारियाँ थीं?  
jab aap ek bachche the, to aapakee kya zimmedaariyaan theen?

## Phase 2 Interview Schedule (Activist Employees)

Name:

Age:

Years of Experience in this position:

Neighbourhood & Hometown/ Caste Background:

Languages Spoken:

### SECTION ONE (Legislation and Social Change)

I. Please tell me a little bit about your job/position and your daily responsibilities?

II. What is your understanding/perception of children's rights?

III. What are some important legal measures in India concerning children's rights?

I. How does the RTE 2009 and Sarva/Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan help uphold children's rights?

IV. What are some important children's rights in education and how do schools address them? I.e., in your opinion, how is the school expected to care for students' welfare?

V. What kind of child rights abuses do you see most often here in Karnataka? How do you think schools can get involved?

VI. What are some government school programs that address the welfare of the children?

How else can they care for marginalised children and uphold their rights?

VII. What do you think about parents' attitudes to children's rights? Specifically, marginalised parents?

I. How are children traditionally perceived here in Karnataka? What expectations do parents and teachers have for them, according to your opinion?

VIII. How have legislation and attitudes around children's rights changed from when you were young to now?

### SECTION TWO (Personal)

I. What motivated you to pursue this job/position?



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